

The functions of the family

Functionalism is a special type of Sociology suggested by a man named Talcott Parsons who tried to understand the jobs that various organisations do for society. Talcott Parsons said that the **function** of anything is the job that it does. He said we need families in all societies because they do a special job for society.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY?

a. To ensure that new babies actually survive to become adult members of that society.

Babies are the most immature animals born. Many animals can help themselves survive within hours or weeks of birth; they can run or hide. Even helpless kittens can leave home at six weeks old.

At what age can children do the following things?

Walk?	
Go to the toilet?	
Keep themselves clean?	
Live on their own?	

Human children are not socially mature till many years later because the rules for society are so complicated. This is shown by the fact that people are still being trained to do certain jobs until they are in their twenties.

b. To regulate sexual activity.

It is usually expected that sexual relations between men and women take place inside some kind of marriage relationship or pairing and that they are regulated by some social rules. Families exist to control sexual behaviour so that the new offspring are as healthy as is possible.

Can you think of a special rule about sex that most people believe in Britain?

c. To ensure that children are satisfactorily socialised into the norms and values of society.

Children are born **egocentric**. They actually believe themselves to be the centre of everything that takes place around them and have to be taught the rules of their society and their place within it. The process of learning the rules about how to behave is called socialisation and it lasts for all of our lives.

In our society, the rules are so complicated that people are still considered children who have to be protected till they are eighteen years of age. There are people who are specially trained and fairly well-paid to do this job of training children, but the most important trainers are the family members.

This would be a good point to revise your core module on People and Society.
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Think of three rules that are designed to protect children from harm in our society. (Think about alcohol, education and sex)

a.	
b.	
c.	

d. To provide economic support for other family members.

This can take many forms in all societies. In hunting societies, women forage for most of the food and men hunt to provide extra protein foods. In farming societies, all the family members work to help produce food.

Think of ways in which people in families help each other in Britain.

e. To satisfy our emotional needs for love and security.

People need to feel loved and wanted by other people, particularly when they are very young. They can survive without, but for most people, their family is their strongest emotional bond.

Children who are abused and loathed by their parents, often still love them even if their feelings are horribly confused by the treatment that they have received.

It had been found by some psychologists who study human development that children find it difficult to learn how to love other people if they have never been taught how to love by someone else who has loved them.

Think of ways in which you could show your family and people around you care for them.

f. To provide us with a sense of place and position in our society

When people meet for the first time, they often ask each other questions about who they are and where they come from.

In a town like Barry, many people have known each other and their families for years. Often a stranger will turn out to know family members. This gives people a sense of place and belonging to each other.



In what ways are families good for society?

Wordframe

Introduction	<i>What is a family?</i>
Helping children to survive?	<i>Why is it important to look after children?</i>
To control sex?	<i>Why is it important to control sexual activity?</i>
Socialisation?	<i>Why is it important to train children to behave?</i>
Economic support?	<i>How do people help each other?</i>
Emotional needs?	<i>Why do we need to show people that we care?</i>
Security and position?	<i>Do we need to know who we are?</i>
Conclusion	<i>Why do we need families?</i>