

Australian Families in Transition

This independent learning activity examines one of the articles from the Australian Institute of Family Studies' journal, *Family Matters*, which was published in its Spring/Summer 2001 retrospective of the Australian family since federation:

Weston R, Stanton D, Qu L & Soriano G 2001, 'Australian Families in Transition: Some Socio-demographic Trends 1901–2001'.

The article is available as a PDF from the Institute's website at: www.aifs.org.au/institute/pubs/fm2001/fm60/rw.pdf

The opening page of the article explains its focus:

'The concern generated by family change sometimes causes great angst. But it can also be a sign of healthy vigilance about the direction society is heading – its ability to adapt and evolve. This article traces key transitions in family life since Federation, some of their causes, and how we might best understand their implications.'

- 1 Read the article carefully ... take your time.
- 2 As you read, have a pen handy to take down some notes. Write two headings and list relevant points under these headings as you come across them:

Heading 1: Social trends and other factors that have affected families

Heading 2: What this means for today's Australian family

Link the factors under Heading 1 with the meanings under Heading 2. For example, if you list 'Introduction of contraceptive pill' under Heading 1, it could have arrows linking it to 'fewer shotgun weddings', 'fewer adoptions', 'increased numbers living together without marrying', 'fewer children', 'more women able to enter and stay in workforce', 'increased age of first-time mothers'.

- 3 Using this information, plus any other information/knowledge you may have about Australia's social attitudes, compare contemporary Australia with Australia of 50 years ago. Mark each of the following family types or structures as 'common' or 'uncommon', for both now and the past:

Family type	Then	Now
Couple families with children/ nuclear families		
Couple families without children		
Blended/Step-families		
Sole parent families		
Extended families		
Foster families/adopted families		
Gay parent families		

- 4 Write two separate extended response case studies – one on a family of today and one on a family from 1950s Australia. Describe each family, give the family members names, and explain the way they live, their aspirations, joys and difficulties. Include anything relevant to your research and knowledge about the Australian family.