

# How to Explain Family Science to Anyone

## Create Your Family Science Elevator Pitch

When someone asks you "What is Family Science?" how can you answer effectively? Use an **elevator pitch** — the idea of persuasively introducing a concept during a short elevator ride.

### Follow These Steps:

- 1 Define It.** Open with a basic description of Family Science. The definition is great to draw from. Mentioning that it's a *social science* can help.
- 2 Develop It.** In 1–2 sentences, expand on how Family Science is *unique* and *important*.
- 3 Illustrate It.** Give a real-life example of how Family Science addresses a need or solves a problem. Use your work or something your audience cares about.
- 4 Contrast It.** Address how other disciplines approach your example. Consider what your audience already knows about other areas as a reference point.
- 5 Affirm It.** Make one more big-picture point about why Family Science matters. You could address why it's important to *focus specifically on families*.

**Family Science is...  
the scientific study of families  
& close interpersonal relationships**

### Your Elevator Pitch Should Be...

- **Easy to understand**
- **Concise** — 90 seconds or 200 words at most
- **Conversational**
- **Interesting & memorable**
- **Targeted** to your audience's interests

### Short On Time? Define & Illustrate

If you've got 30 seconds or less, focus on steps 1 and 3. Give a brief description and real-world example.

Read on for **examples**,  
a **template** for your own pitch, &  
an **FAQ** to give you more ideas

### Tips for a Successful Pitch

- **Tailor to each audience.** You want *them* on board.
- **Your illustration is key.** People are **22 times more likely** to remember facts told in a story.
- **Adapt to fit your major/identity.** If your major is HDFS, you can add a human development element to this core Family Science information.
- **Don't worry about a perfect first draft** — you can edit it down.
- **Practice!** But avoid a robotic speaking style.

### 1. Define It

Family Science is the study of families. It's a social science.

### 2. Develop It

Family Science focuses on understanding relationships and interactions among family members, in all types of families. Knowing how to have healthy family relationships can help families to function better.

### 3. Illustrate It

**Example A: Referencing your future career:** For instance, I'm interested in a career providing parenting education, working with parents to increase their parenting knowledge and skills.

One thing Family Science helps us understand is how conflicts affect relationships between parents and children, and how to handle those conflicts effectively. Imagine your teenager misses their curfew. Yelling at them without hearing their thoughts could make the conflict worse or create difficulties in your family. But if you can listen to each other without interrupting as you talk about why they were late, it could help you become closer.

**Example B: Explaining your research topic:** For example, my research focuses on the impact of having an open or closed adoption, meaning whether the family knows or is in contact with the birth parent(s).

I look at the interactions among family members — among the parent(s) and child, child and birth parent(s), parents and birth parents — and how those relationships affect the family as a whole. Research findings can be used in adoption education materials for adoptive parents and birth parents, so they understand more about how to interact and communicate in a healthy way.

### 4. Contrast It

Other social sciences might study how an *individual* deals with a conflict, or how *society* influences conflict resolution. But Family Science looks specifically *within families* at the crucial element of relationships among family members.

### 5. Affirm It

Our families often have a bigger influence on our lives than anyone else. That's why Family Science is so important.

### Shortened for Time:

Family Science is the study of families. It helps us understand the unique interactions and relationships family members have.

For example, I research the impact of having an open or closed adoption. I look at the interactions among family members and how their relationships affect the whole family. We can use these findings in adoption education materials to help adoptive parents and birth parents.

Find material  
online at  
[ncfr.org](https://ncfr.org) >>>



*1. Define It*

*2. Develop It*

*3. Illustrate It*

*4. Contrast It*

*5. Affirm It*

*Shortened for Time:*

You've given your initial pitch, and now your listener wants to know more about Family Science. Here are some **frequently asked questions** and ideas for how to respond:

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### **"I still don't understand how Family Science is unique."**

The main thing that sets Family Science apart is that it focuses on **relationships and interactions among family members**, and the positive and negative effects those relationships and interactions can have within families.

Family Science also focuses on a couple of other concepts that make it unique:

- **Prevention.** Family Science often focuses on preventing problems before they occur, versus intervention where a problem already exists. Even if you are working with families and a problem already exists, it's still important to understand how to put measures in place to prevent the existing problem from happening again after it's resolved.
  - **Strengths.** Family Science tries to look at the strengths families already have and how to build on those strengths, whereas other fields might focus more on identifying and fixing problems.
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### **"How is Family Science different from..."**

- **Sociology?** Sociology looks at how the broader society impacts groups of people (families being one example), and [how people interact in society](#). Family Science looks at *relationships and interactions among family members*, specifically.
  - **Psychology?** Psychology focuses on [individuals' minds and behaviors](#), while Family Science is about relationships and interactions, specifically among family members.
  - **Social work?** Social work often focuses on working with people to [address problems that already exist](#), whereas Family Science often focuses on preventing problems in families before they occur and on building on the strengths a family already has, rather than on "fixing" families.
  - **Family and consumer science?** Family and consumer science [focuses on living and working well](#). Family Science originated in part from family and consumer science, but Family Science became its own discipline focused on families rather than the consumer pieces like nutrition or apparel.
  - **Human development?** Human development focuses on how people develop over their lives. Aspects of human development can be important to understand family relationships, though development alone does not explain family relationships and interactions.
  - **Marriage and family therapy?** [Therapists practicing marriage and family therapy](#) often have a Family Science background or training. Marriage and family therapy is one profession rooted in Family Science knowledge.
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### **"What do you call someone working in Family Science?"**

'Family Scientist' is a universal term, often used by people working as researchers or university faculty. People with a Family Science background can work in many different careers with various job titles, so they often use their specific job title.

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### ***"What kinds of jobs do people in Family Science have?"***

People with Family Science backgrounds can work in many types of jobs:

- **Professional practitioner jobs working directly with families** — for example, parent educator, marriage and family therapist, case manager with a social service organization, and many more.
- **Research** to better understand families
- **Teaching about families**, either in the community or at a college or university
- **Policy jobs** that shape policies affecting families

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### ***"What makes 'Family Science' a science?"***

People who conduct research in Family Science use the scientific method, just like other sciences. They ask a research question, collect and analyze the data, and look at the results to find the answer.

Findings from Family Scientists' research can often be used to directly benefit families. For example, if researchers find that certain techniques work for handling conflicts between a parent and child, a professional practitioner can work with families to use those techniques.

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### ***"What is a social science?"***

Social sciences study [why and how individuals or groups behave the way they do](#). Some examples of social sciences other than Family Science are communication, psychology, and economics.

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### ***"What is a family?"***

There are different ways of being a family and thinking about what a family is, and there is no one definition of family. Different groups define family for their purposes, but those definitions can exclude people and don't always match how people view who their family is. Family Science aims to understand and strengthen all families. A few NCFR articles about this:

- "[The Definition of Family Is Changing, and It Matters to Our Work](#)" — Dylan L. Galos, Ph.D.; Eugene Hall, Ph.D.; and Jenifer K. McGuire, Ph.D.
- "[What Is a Family?](#)" — Paul R. Amato, Ph.D.
- "[Defining Family in Policy](#)" — Tami James Moore, Ph.D., CFLE

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### ***"Why is studying families important?"***

- Our family often has a bigger influence on us than any other group. It's important to understand that influence so we learn how families can function at their best.
- There are characteristics unique to families that you don't find in other groups of people.
- Families are the building blocks of society, so healthy families help create a healthy society.

*Sometimes your audience doesn't know Family Science, but they work in a different academic discipline or helping profession — meaning they have a head start to understand Family Science and your area of work or study.*

*Here are ideas for talking about Family Science with **other academic or professional audiences**:*

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### **Academic Audiences** (e.g., faculty or advanced students in other disciplines)

- Family Science often uses families as the unit of analysis, or it looks at individuals in the context of families.
  - Families have unique characteristics that almost no other group has. Family Scientists analyze families by considering those unique characteristics that families possess. For instance, families have a greater range of influence on one's life over time than most other groups.
  - Family Science focuses on family systems. Family systems theory [uses systems thinking](#) to describe the complex relationships and interactions within family units.
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### **Helping Professionals From Other Backgrounds** (e.g., social worker, counselor, public health professional)

- Family Science often focuses on a preventive approach rather than an intervention approach.
- Family Science often takes a strengths-based approach rather than using a deficit model.
- Family Science focuses on family systems. Family systems theory [uses systems thinking](#) to describe the complex relationships and interactions within family units.

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## Different Approaches to the Elevator Pitch

Over time, you might need elevator pitches for different purposes — for instance, pitching yourself and/or your work during a networking event or job interview.

Many sources provide advice for approaching an elevator pitch in different ways. Here are just a few:

- American Psychological Association: "[The Elevator Pitch](#)" (*crafting a 5-minute research pitch*)
- Kennedy Pharmacy Innovation Center: "[How to Give an Elevator Pitch](#)" (*pitching yourself professionally*)
- Forbes: "[The Perfect Elevator Pitch to Land a Job](#)"
- MindTools: "[Crafting an Elevator Pitch](#)" (*introducing a company*)

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## More Family Science Information From NCFR

- '[We Are Family Science](#)' website — a simple website for lay audiences
- [About Family Science](#) — a more detailed introduction to Family Science
- [The History & Name of Family Science](#)
- [Glossary: Key Terms of Family Science Identity](#)
- [Bibliography: Family Science as a Discipline](#)
- [Degree Programs in Family Science guide](#)
- [Exploring Careers in Family Science](#)

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## More Ways to Promote Family Science to the Public

Want to proactively promote Family Science or findings from Family Science research?

Learn how you can share Family Science knowledge to create greater impact and benefit the public, from the 2021 *Family Relations* journal article "Emerging Ideas. Advancing Family Science Through Public Scholarship: Foster Community Relationships and Engaging in Broader Impacts," written by J. Kale Monk, Tashel C. Bordere, and Jacquelyn J. Benson:

Monk, J. K., Bordere, T. C., & Benson, J. J. (2021). Emerging ideas. Advancing family science through public scholarship: Fostering community relationships and engaging in broader impacts. *Family Relations*, 70(5), 1612–1625. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12545>

