

## 2. Families and households

### INTRODUCTION

As you have probably guessed, this chapter deals with family life in all its many forms, and the main aim of this opening section is to explore 'different conceptions of the relationships of the family to the social structure, with particular reference to the economy and to state policies'. To do this successfully we need to:

- outline different perspectives on family life
- examine how these perspectives see the role of the family in society
- explore how economic and social policies impact on family structures and relationships.

## Defining the family group



### Preparing the ground

The first thing we need to do is define 'a family' given that, in order to relate the family to social structure and social policy, it would be useful to know what it involves.

#### WARM UP: FAMILY DEFINITIONS

To get you started, in small groups, think about and discuss among the group what a family means to you. Make a note of the kinds of things you believe it involves.

Once you have done this, as a class, compare your notes and identify the common features (if any) of a family.

At a guess, I'd say your definition of a family will probably involve two basic ideas, considered in terms of family.

- **Characteristics:** You will have identified certain features of a family (such as different generations sharing a common residence) that make it different to other social groups.
- **Relationships:** This involves the idea families share particular social relationships (for example, that someone is a mother or grandfather to a child) that clearly mark them out as a distinctive group in society.

As I am sure you have discovered, however, defining a family is not quite as easy as you might have first thought, for a couple of reasons.

- Is there such an institution as 'the family' in any society? In other words, is there only one family type or is it possible to talk about many different types?
- If there are a variety of types, are they