



there's a genetic link between the two) or *affinity* (relationships created through custom – such as two adults living together – or relationships created by law, marriage being an obvious example here).

Weiss ('Family support and education programs', 1988) uses this concept to define the family group as, 'A small kinship structured group with the key function of . . . socialisation of the newborn'. Giddens (*Sociology*, 1993) suggests family groups can be defined as, 'A group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for the children.'

However we decide to define a family, it is clear we need to distinguish this group from a concept used with increasing frequency, namely a **household**. This, at its most basic, involves a single person or group living together in the same location (such as friends sharing accommodation). In this respect, we can note most families are households, but not all households are families.



Digging deeper

So far we have seen that defining a family is not unproblematic (that is, there are arguments over how best to define it), which should alert us to a key characteristic of family life in our society, namely its *diversity* (considered in terms of both different family structures and relationships). We will develop these ideas in a moment, but for now we can note we have identified a distinction between two types of definition:

- **Exclusive** definitions (such as that produced by Murdock) where the focus is on the specific characteristics of a family that make it different to other social groups (such as a household or a school class). This type has the advantage of being clear about what is – and is not – a family group but, as we have seen, it is perhaps difficult to produce a definition that applies to all possible types of family.
- **Inclusive** definitions (such as those of Weiss or Giddens) where the focus is on defining a family group in terms of the general relationships (such as kinship or



Growing it yourself: families or households?

Using the following table as a template (and working individually, in small groups or as a class) what advantages and disadvantages can you identify to the use of concepts like families and households?

Families		Households	
Advantages of this concept	Disadvantages of this concept	Advantages of this concept	Disadvantages of this concept
Identifies kinship as significant	Difficult to define	Includes all groups who live together	A household can be different to a family
Further advantages and disadvantages?			