Widgit Symbols
Family Schema Update

Why?

The Widgit Symbols for family relationships are some of the oldest symbols in the set and have not been reviewed as a whole for many years. The family relationship symbols are part of our core vocabulary, and we want to make sure that they stay relevant and appropriate for all of our users.

We have also created new symbols for family relationships and gender variations that had not been represented in the symbol set previously.

At the same time as making schema changes, we have made sure that all of our family symbols have been tidied, removing inconsistencies that had formed over the many years since the first symbols were drawn.

Please note that not all new symbols are included in this document, these are just examples of each of the schema changes.

Note on Skin Tones

InPrint, Widgit Online and SymWriter have a 'Varied Skin Tones' option to change any symbol that contains more than one person to display a variety of skin tones. After many consultations with users and practitioners, it was decided to keep the default skin tone within the 'family' symbols (so each family member has the same skin tone), so not all the symbols skin tones will change. There is still an option to change the skin colour of individual people using the symbol Edit Colour tool.

Edit Colour tool:
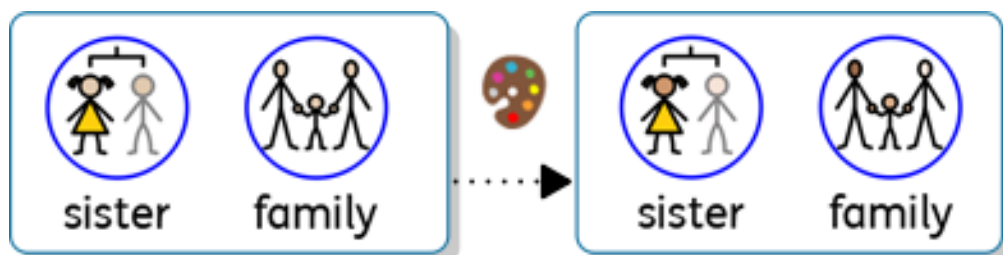
Schema Changes

Blue Circle

The blue circle element in symbols indicates belonging. For example, a house in a blue circle represents home. All the family symbols used a blue circle to indicate belonging, but the main subject wasn't always inside the circle. For clarity and consistency, we decided that all members of the family should be inside the blue circle.
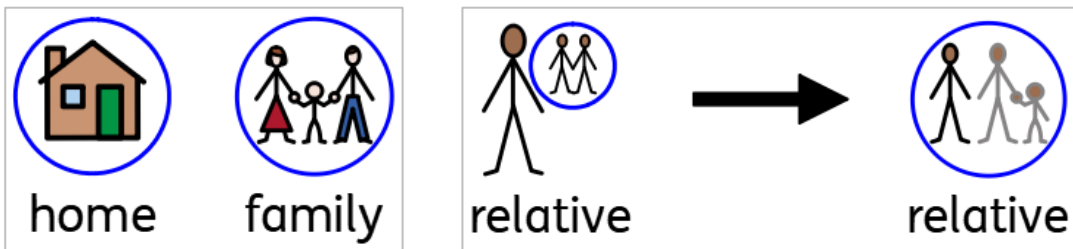
There are different blue circles to denote different family relationships.
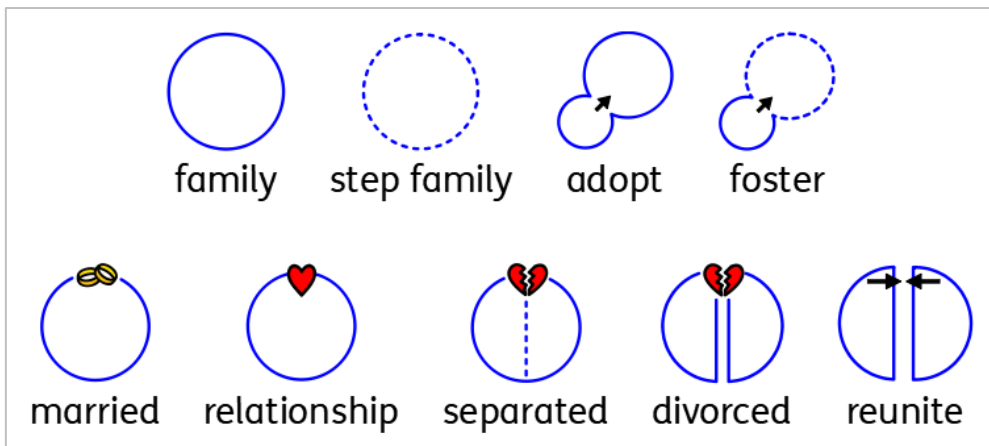
Greyed-out Relative

The original symbols for mother and father were a woman or man in a blue circle, representing woman in the family or man in the family. This symbol didn't indicate a relationship with a child and didn't work without context; for example, when referencing mothers or fathers in general.

We wanted to draw a new set of symbols for parents that included a child. To make it clear which person a symbol represents, the other people are greyed-out.

The addition of greyed-out people reinforces the relationship: the parent has a greyed-out child, the child has a greyed-out parent. The subject of the symbol is in full colour and the reinforcing element is greyed-out.

Holding Hands

People in the original symbols for families and relationships did not consistently hold (or not hold) hands. We've fixed this inconsistency and now holding hands has a specific meaning. Symbols for relatives in a descending family branch (e.g., parent > child) or a direct relationship (e.g., lovers) now show those people holding hands to reinforce the nature of their relationship within the context of the whole family tree.
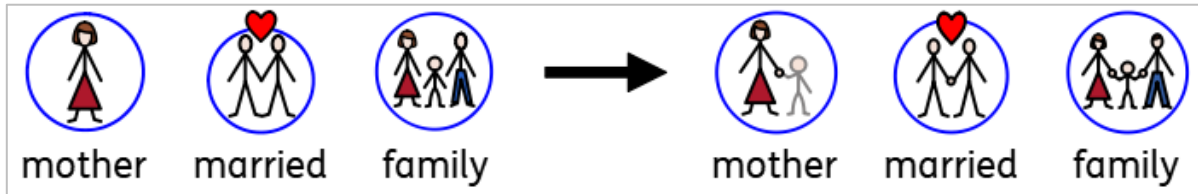
Where a relationship is not a partner or parent relationship the family members are not holding hands.

Generation Marker

A generation marker, similar to the lines in a family tree diagram, has been added to indicate people belonging to the same generation in symbols such as sister, brother and sibling. This new element makes the relationships in the symbol clearer.
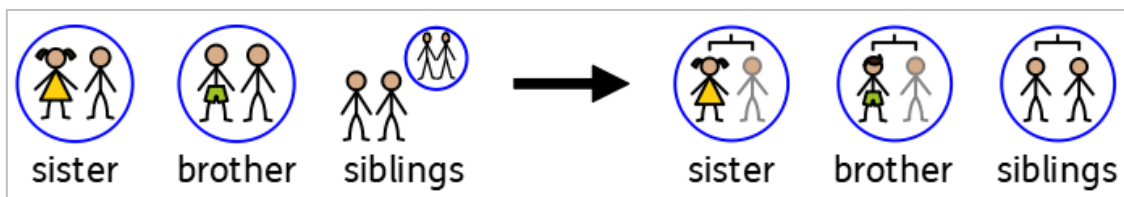
The generation marker has also been used to distinguish between ages; for example, older sister and younger sister.

It can also be used to help teach more complex relationships such as aunt = my parent's sister.
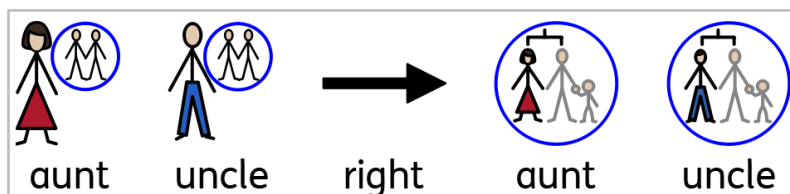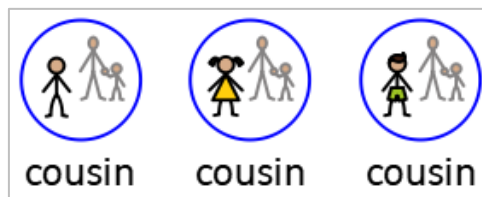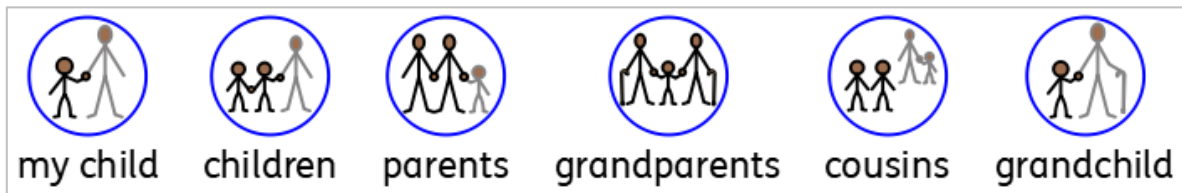
Gender and Gender-neutral

We wanted to make sure that gender variations of family members are covered in the symbol set, including newer terms such as pibling (gender-neutral for aunt/uncle) and nibling (gender-neutral for niece/nephew).

For words that are gender-neutral (for example, cousin), we wanted to make sure the concept could be represented as gender-neutral and/or male/female.

Where there were gaps in the symbol set, we have drawn the gender-neutral versions of all family members; for example, children, parents and grandparents.


Family Gender

Our original, default symbol for family showed a man, a woman and a child. We wanted to make sure that our symbols are inclusive, so we now have variations of family with:

- Gender-neutral parents
- Man and woman parents
- Woman and woman parents
- Man and man parents

The symbol for family is used as an element in other symbols. We found that it would be too complex to offer every variation and decided that gender-neutral was the most appropriate.
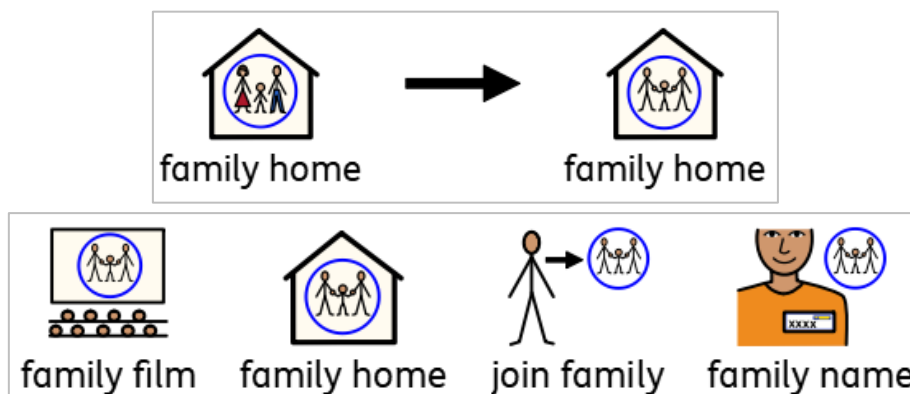
Family Size

We also wanted to recognise that families come in different sizes, so we decided to create a range of alternative symbols for family.

- **Small family** – e.g., a couple (2 people)
- **Family** – e.g., parents with children (3 people)
- **Adult family** – e.g. a multi-generational family of adults with no children (4 people)
- **Large family** – e.g. a multi-generational family with children (5 people)
- **Grandfamily** – e.g. grandparents with grandchildren (3 people).

## Cousins, Where the Schema Becomes Too Complex

When redesigning the schema, we tried to show the full relationships between the family members so that these concepts could be more easily learned.

- **Parent** - the child's directly related adult
- **Child** (son/daughter) - the adult's directly related child
- **Nibling** (aunt/uncle) - the child's parent's sibling
- **Cousin** - the child's parent's sibling's child.

When it came to cousin, the symbols became too complex:
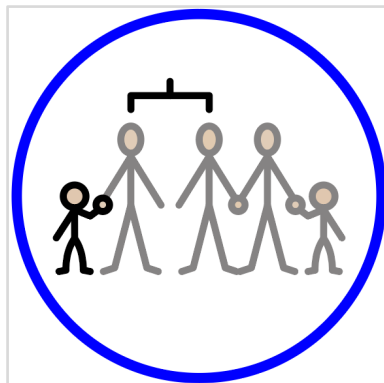
We have therefore simplified this to just include a small family element, so this symbol means child in the family.
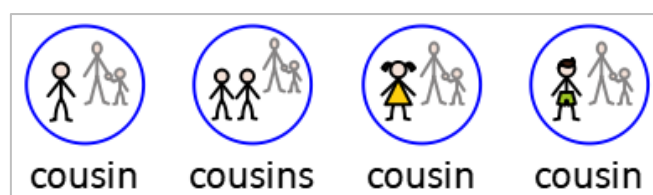
Adopt / Foster Symbols

We did not have adequate symbols to cover adoption and fostering relationships, so new schema elements (variations on the blue circle) have been designed showing the merging/joining together of two family units. There is a difference to show whether there is a temporary/initial or permanent/legal change in guardianship.


foster   adopt
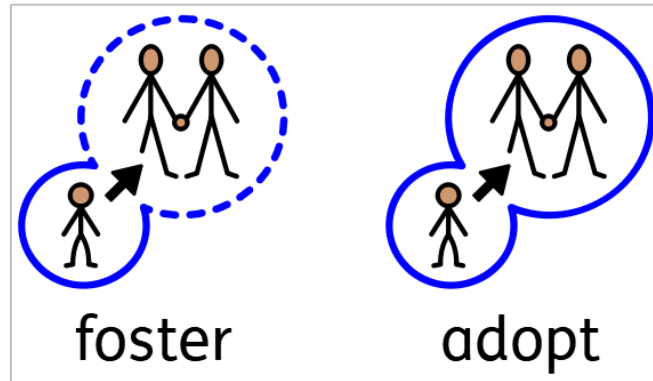
Marriage

The original symbols for marriage used a heart to represent a partner relationship. We wanted to be able to show the difference between couples that have been legally married and those in a long-term or committed relationship. We have done this by creating alternative versions with wedding rings instead of a heart.

married   married   married   married

relationship   relationship   relationship   relationship
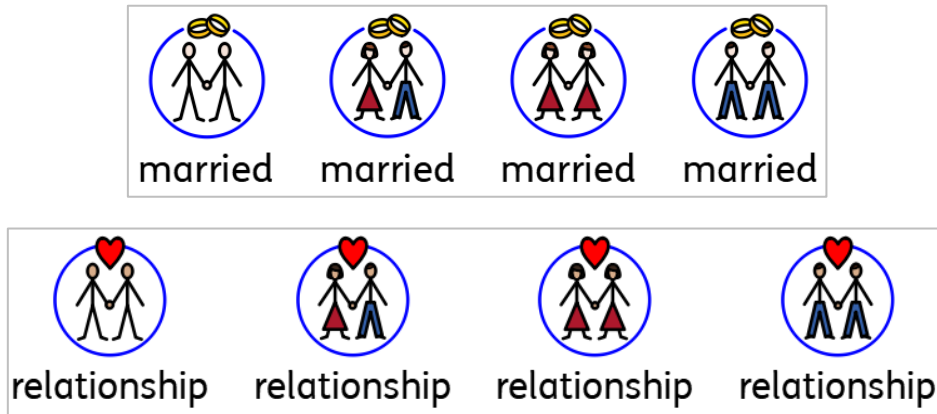
Schema Changes by Element

Parent/Parents

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | contextual relative (child) |

parent   mother   father   parents   parents
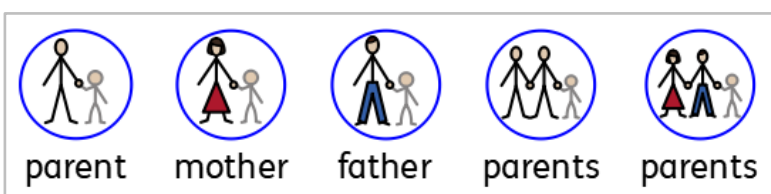
Child/Children

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | contextual relative |

All the child symbols have the greyed-out adult relative added and are holding hands to reinforce the specific relationship. We have also added gender-neutral versions as well as plural versions for multiple children.
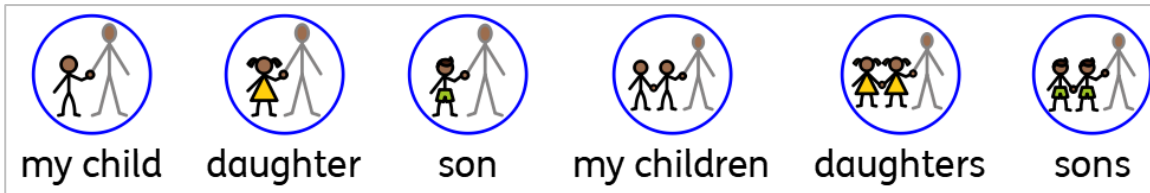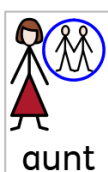

Siblings

Changes: | added plurals| generation marker | greyed-out | inside blue circle |

Pibling, Aunt, Uncle

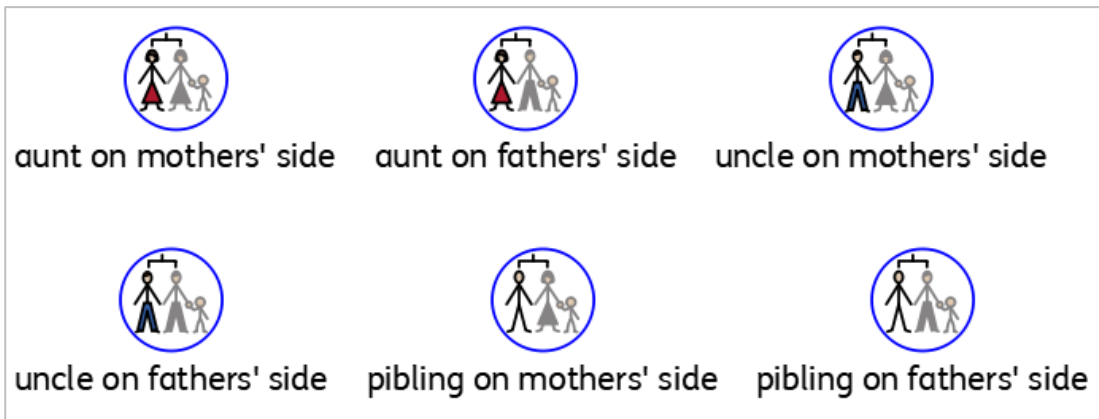**Changes:** | contextual relative | greyed-out | inside blue circle | generation marker |

The original symbols for aunt and uncle did indicate a contextual relationship with another member of the family. The new symbols are meant to represent my parent's sister.

Aunt/Uncle Relationship to Parents

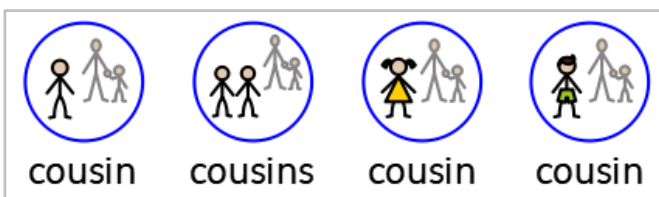**Changes:** | contextual relatives | greyed-out | hands | generation marker |

aunt on mothers' side — aunt on fathers' side — uncle on mothers' side

uncle on fathers' side — pibling on mothers' side — pibling on fathers' side

Niece/Nephew/Nibling Symbols

Changes: | generation marker | greyed-out | inside blue circle | contextual relative |

niece — nephew — nibling

Cousins

Changes: | family element | greyed-out | inside blue circle |

cousin — cousins — cousin — cousin

Grandparent

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | contextual relative |

grandparent — grandmother — grandfather

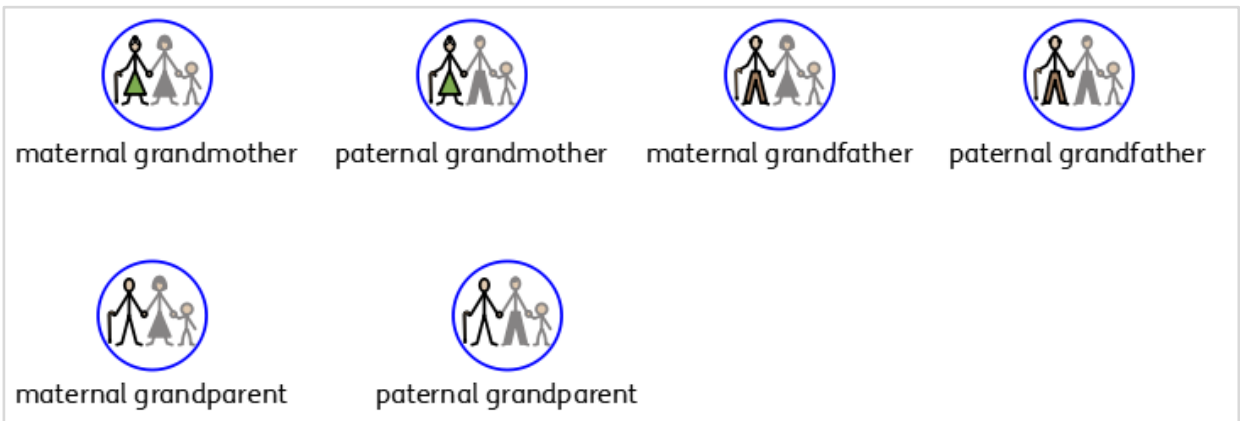## Grandparents

**Changes:** | hands | contextual relative |

grandparents   grandparents
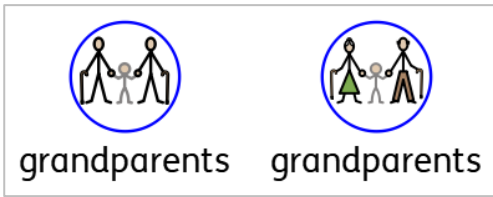
Grandparent's Relationship to Parents

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | inside blue circle | contextual relative |

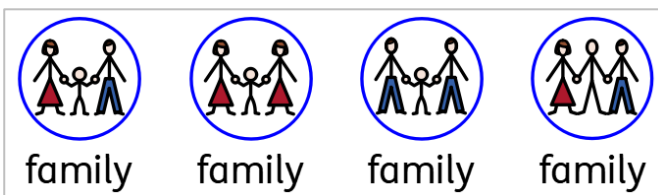maternal grandmother   paternal grandmother   maternal grandfather   paternal grandfather

maternal grandparent   paternal grandparent

Grandchildren

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | inside blue circle | contextual relative |

grandchild   grandchildren   grandaughter   grandson
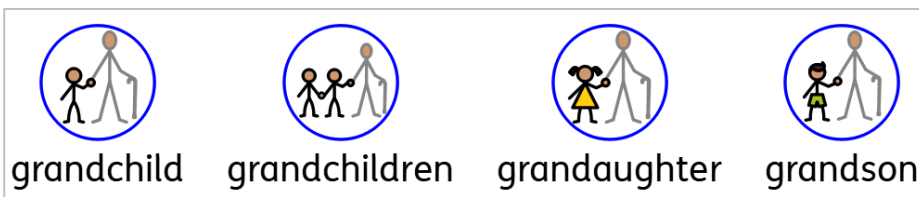
Family Symbols Gendered

Changes: | hands |

family   family   family   family

Family Symbols Gender-neutral

Changes: | hands | family sizes |

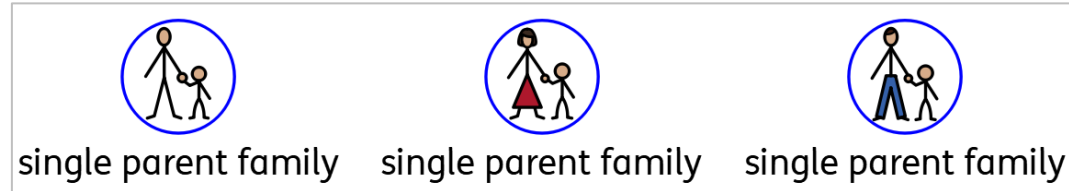family   family   family   family   family grandparents
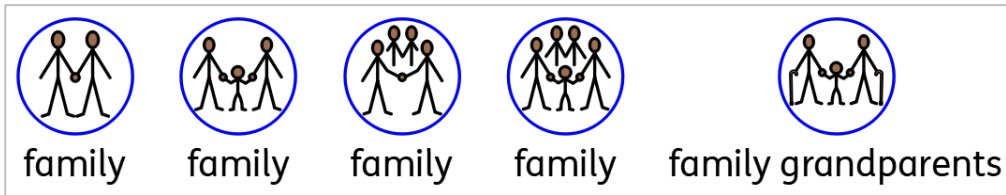
Single Parents

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | number |

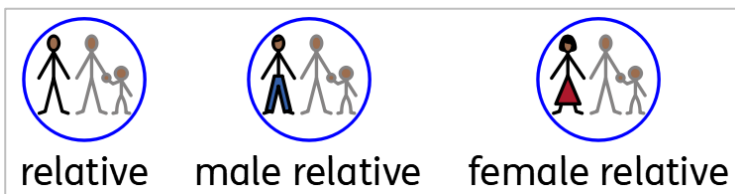The addition of a number has been used to distinguish between mother and single mother.
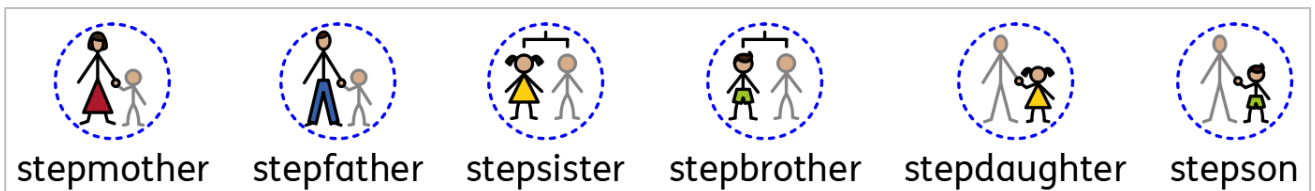

single parent   single mother   single father

Single Parent Families

Changes: | hands |

single parent family   single parent family   single parent family

Relative

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | inside blue circle |

relative   male relative   female relative

Stepfamily

Changes: | smaller dotted line| greyed-out | hands | contextual relative |

stepmother   stepfather   stepsister   stepbrother   stepdaughter   stepson

Adopt / Foster Symbols

Changes: | dotted line | greyed-out | hands | joining circles |

adopt   adopted child   adopted children   adoptive parents

foster   foster home   foster carer   foster carers
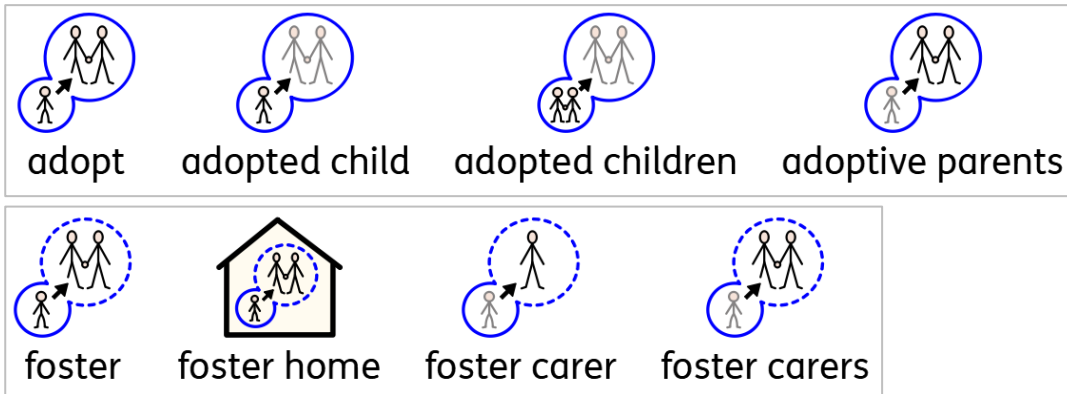
Generations

Changes: | gender-neutral |

parent's generation   great grandchild   great great grandchild

great grandparent   great great grandparent   great great great grandparent
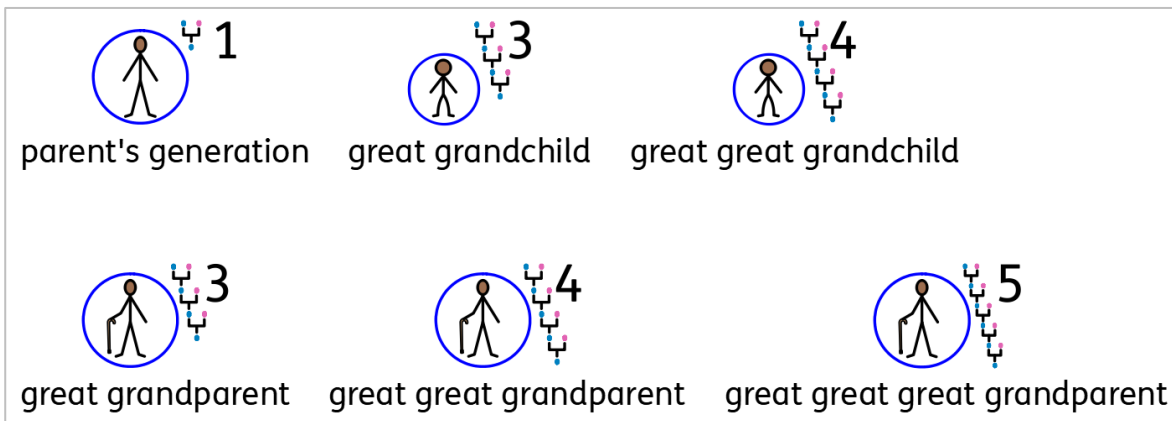
Spouse

Changes: | gender-neutral | wedding rings |

spouse   spouse   wife   husband
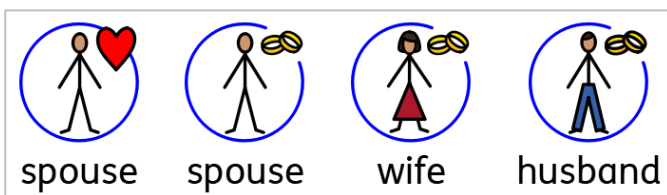
Married

Changes: | gender-neutral | wedding rings |

married   married   married   married
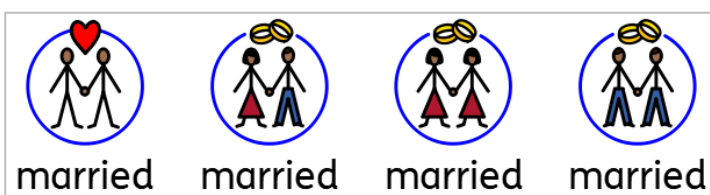
In-laws

Changes: | greyed-out | hands | inside blue circle | wedding rings | contextual relative |

son in law   daughter in law   child in law   mother in law   father in law   in law
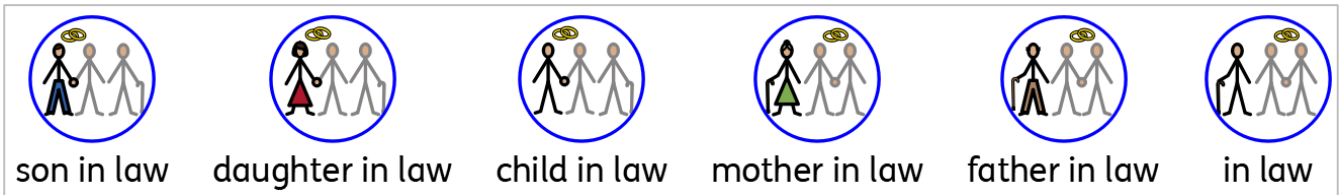
Separated

Changes: | broken heart | dotted line |

separated   separated   separated   separated   separated
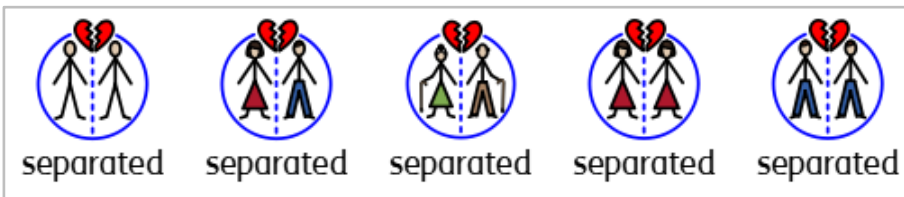
Divorced

Changes: | broken heart |

divorced   divorced   divorced   divorced   divorced

Family Element in Symbols

Changes: | gender-neutral | hands |

family name   family home   family film   family adviser   family visit
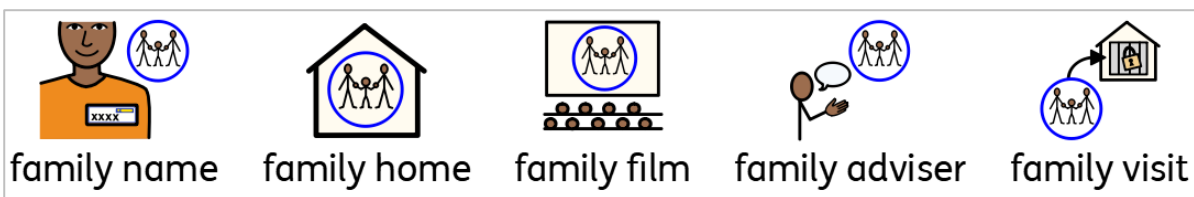
Feedback

We hope that you will like the improvements we have made. We are planning more changes and would value your feedback.

Please send your comments to symbols@widgit.com