

and well-being ([American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003](#)). Consequently, nurses must be aware of the functions of the family, various types of family structures, and theories that provide a foundation for understanding the changes within a family and for directing family-oriented interventions.

## Family Theories

A family theory can be used to describe families and how the family unit responds to events both within and outside the family. Each family theory makes assumptions about the family and has inherent strengths and limitations ([Kaakinen, Gedaly-Duff, and Hanson, 2009](#)). Most nurses use a combination of theories in their work with children and families. Commonly used theories are family systems theory, family stress theory, and developmental theory ([Table 2-1](#)).

**TABLE 2-1**  
**Summary of Family Theories and Application**

Assumptions	Strengths	Limitations	Applications
<b>Family Systems Theory</b>			
<p>A change in any one part of a family system affects all other parts of the family system (circular causality). Family systems are characterized by periods of rapid growth and change and periods of relative stability. Both too little change and too much change are dysfunctional for the family system; therefore, a balance between morphogenesis (change) and morphostasis (no change) is necessary. Family systems can initiate change, as well as react to it.</p>	<p>Applicable for family in normal everyday life, as well as for family dysfunction and pathology. Useful for families of varying structure and various stages of life cycle.</p>	<p>More difficult to determine cause-and-effect relationships because of circular causality.</p>	<p>Mate selection, courtship processes, family communication, boundary maintenance, power and control within family, parent-child relationships, adolescent pregnancy and parenthood.</p>