

Illness is culturally constructed; an individual's culture influences how a sickness is perceived, labeled, and explained. Culture also influences the meaning assigned to the illness, the role the individual with the sickness adopts, and the response of the family and community to the sickness.

Tension may arise when the perception of the illness and disease varies widely among the patient, family, and health care team. Failure of health care providers to recognize these disparities may be partially to blame in cases of noncompliance, delivery of inadequate care, and patient or family dissatisfaction. To begin addressing these issues, it is important for nurses to understand the various domains of health care in which individuals operate in American society, including professional (health care providers and institutions), popular (family, community, and lay literature), and folk (nonprofessional healers). Each domain possesses a method for defining and explaining the sickness and what should be done to address it. The challenges for nurses and other health care providers are to address this disconnect with families and develop mutually agreed-on goals. Nurses are in a prime position to bring the various parties together because understanding the human response to disease is central to their role. In addition, collaboration with the child and family is central to the role of the pediatric nurse.

One method to address this disconnect with families and begin collaboration is by understanding the family's explanatory model of illness. Nurses can use these questions to discern areas of discrepancy for further dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration. This discussion, when conducted with a genuine interest in the family and child's perspective, is a significant step in building trusting relationships, promoting adherence and equity, decreasing disparities, and increasing health care satisfaction.

NCLEX Review Questions

1. What does Duvall's Developmental Stages of the Family include? Select all that apply.
 - a. Stages an individual progresses through in their moral and spiritual development
 - b. Stages families progress through in adulthood