

The nine questions that everyone should ask their parents before it's too late.

Brilliant questions to use as a starting point for discovering your family stories, memories and identity.



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KEEPERS

The Story Keepers

Dear friend,

I set up the Story Keepers to help families capture and preserve their stories. I do this by working with families to create Life Story films, books and audio memoirs.

Storytellers regularly tell me how enjoyable it is to share their stories and to feel that their memories and reflections are important and cherished by their family.

I hope that my nine questions can now help you to start listening to and maybe even collecting stories.

Of course, each storyteller is unique, so the questions will need to be tailored accordingly. You will know your storyteller, so please adapt these questions to suit your situation.

If you would like to discuss a particular project then please do contact me alice@thestorykeepers.co.uk or visit my website www.thestorykeepers.co.uk

Alice

The Story Keepers
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A few points to consider before your begin.

Take your time

Even if you have limited time try not to rush, if needs be, ask a few questions at a time over a few days maybe.

Listen

Really listen, show your storyteller you are listening and that you are interested.

Don't push it

Use these questions to encourage your storyteller to share their story, but make sure they know that they don't have to answer any specific question if they are not comfortable doing so.

Permissions

If you would like to record your storyteller's answers, first confirm that they are happy to be recorded, discuss how you will use, share and store the recordings and confirm that they are willing to give their consent.

Follow up questions

These nine questions can be used alone or in conjunction with follow-up questions. Follow up a question with another to find out more, and to show your storyteller that you are listening and interested. I have given you a few ideas, but don't let these limit you!

Happy listening!

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1. What is your earliest memory?

Now, this is really just your starter question. It is open and specific and usually a fairly safe place to start. It takes your storyteller back to the beginning of their story, or at least to where they would like to begin. You are really hoping to get a nice little story and to create a safe space for you and your storyteller.

Follow up questions

Can you describe where you were living at this point in your life? Who were you living with?

2. Can you tell me about your mum and dad?

This question can take you anywhere. Your storyteller might start by talking about their parents' work, where they came from, what they were like as people or as parents. This can go anywhere and let it!

Encourage your storyteller to expand as much as you can. Take note of who they are talking about, and if needed gently guide them back to the question to make sure you can gather as full an answer as possible, if they speak a lot about their dad, for example, ask about their mum too.

Follow up questions

Did you know any of your grandparents, your uncles or aunts and if so can you tell me about them? Where did they come from? What did they do?



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3. How would you have described yourself when you were 10 years old?

I love this question as it gets straight to the person and who they really are. It is also very relatable, and sometimes helps to identify family traits!

It is also a great starting point for finding out more about your storyteller's childhood and what their life was like.

Follow up questions

What were you like at school? Tell me about your friends and your siblings. What did you most enjoy doing?

4. What were your dreams or ambitions when you were growing up?

Do you know if your parents had particular ambitions when they were younger, did they fulfil them? If so, were they all that they hoped, if not, how do they feel about it now, with hindsight?

Follow up questions

Do you think you would have had different ambitions if you had been born at a different time, say 30 or even 50 years later?



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5. Tell me about leaving home

The point at which we leave home is a big moment. Asking this question is a great opener to the next few important, and often life-defining years as a young adult. This question often leads to reflections on choices (or lack of) and of parental, or other influences.

Follow up questions

Did your storyteller do what was expected of them or not? Did they have many options, at this point? Find out why they made the choices that they did, and how they feel about them now.

6. What first drew you to my mum/dad (or to your partner)?

This can be a lovely way to encourage your storyteller to reflect on positive experiences and to reflect on the role others have played in their story.

Even if the relationship didn't work out, this question can still help the storyteller recall hopeful and happy memories past as well as saying something more about themselves.

Follow up question

How did you find being a parent?



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7. When and where were you happiest?

Do we ever find out what our parents really enjoyed now and in the past? When were the times in their life that they felt content? In fact, I think this is something we should ask of each other much more.

Follow up question

Ask what they most enjoy doing now

8. What was the most challenging time in your life?

Not such a fluffy question, but it's really interesting to reflect back and look at the challenges that have been overcome as much as all the good times.

It is important when telling our story, to be honest. This doesn't mean your storyteller has to share everything, some things really are best left unsaid. But no one's life is a bed of roses. For children or grandchildren to know that their parents and grandparents overcame challenges can be really inspiring.

9. What are you proudest of?

If you only ask one question, this is the one and when they tell you the answer ask your storyteller to tell you more, to explain further.



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