

Genealogy Activities for Children and Families
What is your family narrative?

By Alex Luken

19th century writer Elbert Hubbard said, “All history is gossip well told.” One of the best ways to foster a love for history is to understand our place – and our previous family member’s place – and the times in which they lived. Family stories become the stuff of family legends, retold and shared from generation to generation, creating cohesiveness in families.

Research conducted by psychologists at Emory University in Atlanta, GA in 2008 found that children who have a strong sense of “family narrative” had a better sense of control over their lives, higher self-esteem, and a better understanding of how their family functioned. Family stories give children a sense of “intergenerational self” and their place in the continuity of time.

Children need to hear all the family stories – the successes, the negatives, the funny stories, the sad stories – to understand that families are resilient.



Family conducting research

20 Questions Every Child Should Know About Their Family

1. Do you know how your parents met?
2. Do you know where your mother grew up?
3. Do you know where your father grew up?
4. Do you know where some of your grandparents grew up?
5. Do you know where some of your grandparents met?
6. Do you know where your parents were married?
7. Do you know what went on when you were being born?
8. Do you know the source of your name?
9. Do you know some things about what happened when your brothers or sisters were being born?
10. Do you know which person in your family you look most like?
11. Do you know which person in the family you act most like?
12. Do you know some of the illnesses and injuries that your parents experienced when they were younger?
13. Do you know some of the lessons that your parents learned from good or bad experiences?

14. Do you know some things that happened to your mom or dad when they were in school?
15. Do you know the national background of your family (such as English, German, Russian, etc.)?
16. Do you know some of the jobs that your parents had when they were young?
17. Do you know some awards that your parents received when they were young?
18. Do you know the names of the schools that your mom went to?
19. Do you know the names of the schools that your dad went to?
20. Do you know about a relative whose face “froze” in a grumpy position because he or she did not smile enough?

Not all stories that are passed along are necessarily true; some are passed along to teach a lesson (like the story in the last question.) And families will have disagreements about the accuracy of the story, because different family members will remember different details. These questions make good storytelling prompts for Facetime calls with children of all ages. Likewise, mailing children pictures of ancestors with stories about their lives will give children a connection to both the past and to you. Even with adult children, texting or emailing a photo of an ancestor with a bit of family history passes on stories and creates continuity.

Our challenging times with COVID-19 will become the stories our children and grandchildren will pass on to future generations - the stories of dad having to relearn math in order to help with assignments, of having virtual classes, of mom giving the dog a funny haircut because the dog groomer wasn't open, not being able to get together with family and friends, of having to learn to overcome boredom without being entertained.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-stories-our-lives/201611/the-do-you-know-20-questions-about-family-stories>

<https://www.iris.xyz/solutions/life-transitions/20-questions-children-should-be-able-to-answer-about-their-families/>

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-stories-that-bind-us- b_2918975