

Capturing a Lifetime of Memories: A Guide to Interviewing Your Parents

Presented by McCarthy and Cox

Getting started

It doesn't take much to start recording meaningful conversations with your parents—just a notepad, an audio recorder, or a video camera. While you could write down all the answers, it might be easier and more fun to record them for future generations to hear or, better yet, see! Other than that, simply tell your folks the truth: that you'd like to know more about them. While it might feel a bit forced at first, you will be surprised at how easy the conversation flows once you get started.

Keep in mind that most people won't be able to get through all of these questions in one sitting. This is a conversation that can happen over a couple of get-togethers, or you can ask a few questions each time you see each other over the coming months or even years. You and your parents can decide at what pace you want to address these questions, as well as any others that might come to mind.

Wisdom questions

In your eyes, what values are most important for me to exhibit and to pass on to my kids?

- How have these values helped you in your life?
- How did you learn these values?
- What's a good way to teach them to my kids?
- Who are your heroes? Why?
- What do you admire about your children?

What do you look for in a good friend?

What has helped you most throughout your life?

- Books
- Family, friends, mentors
- Skills, knowledge, behaviors
- Organizations
- Other

What are some of the best financial decisions you've ever made?

- How about your best financial habits or practices?
- Where did you learn about money? What are some of the lessons that you picked up?

Questions about their life

What are you most proud of in your life?

What might you change if you could do it over again?

What would you like people to think when they think about you?

What can you tell me about our family history?

What special things or memories do you have from your mom or dad?

What was your favorite job?

Can you tell me some of your stories? Think about when you were . . .

- Falling in love
- Raising me (us)
- Visiting or living in interesting places
- Growing up
- Going through moments of joy/sadness/struggle/success
- Taught a valuable lesson
- Proudest of each child

Questions about their future

What do you hope you'll be able to do or see that you haven't yet done or seen? What would you like to do or see again?

What are you most proud of about our family?

- What steps can we take as a family to do more of that?

If you woke up at 2:00 A.M., what might keep you awake these days?

What is most important to you about where you live?

- If you wanted or had to move from your house, what should we consider when looking at options?

What plans do you have in place for your medical care if something were to happen?

- Do you have a durable power of attorney in place?
- Does it clearly state what your wishes are?

Are you happy with your will?

- Is it up to date, signed, and in a safe place?
- What should I be thinking about when I create mine? What was tricky?

Is there anything I can do to help you? Or is there anything I should start helping with so I can learn more about it?

Final thoughts

This conversation never has to be “closed”; you can always learn more about your parents, the life they have led, and their plans for the future. The key is to open the lines of communication about what they believe is most important, both in terms of their future safety, care, and happiness and in terms of their memories and experiences. As those who have had this conversation have found, it’s well worth the effort—a gift for parents and children alike.

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