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A FREE PRINTABLE FROM LOVED EVER AFTER

40 questions to ask them

Questions that help someone tell their life story, in their own words. Drawn from fifty years of life-review research and written for the kitchen table.

Hear them tell it.

Loved Ever After

HOW TO USE THESE QUESTIONS

One cup of tea, one chapter

Go slowly

One chapter per visit. Five questions is plenty. The best stories come out sideways, so let them wander.

Follow the story, not the list

Your two best questions: “What happened next?” and “What was that like?”

Bring something to hold

An old photo, a recipe card or a song from the right year. Objects and senses unlock memories.

Ask before you record

A phone on the table is enough. Ask first. Stop if they’d rather you didn’t. Their stories, their choice.

Any question can be skipped

Some touch on loss or hard times, mostly in chapter 5. Let them choose what to answer.

Write a line, not an essay

Jot a few words under each question: names, places, the phrase they used. You’ll be glad later.

The eight chapters

01 Where you began

02 Growing up

03 Love and family

04 Work and making a life

05 Turning points

06 Who you are

07 The small things

08 For the people who come after

A note on hard memories

Looking back is usually a pleasure, and research links it with feeling more settled and less low. It can also stir up sadness. That’s normal. If distress doesn’t pass, a GP, doctor or counsellor can help. These questions are for sharing stories. They are not therapy.

01 Where you began

Drawn from Haight (childhood); Duke, Lazarus & Fivush (family origins)

1 *What is the very first thing you remember?*

2 *Tell me about the house you grew up in. What did it smell like?*

3 *What were your parents like when you were small? What did they do all day?*

4 *Where did our family come from, and how did they end up where you were born?*

5 *What got you into trouble as a child?*

02 Growing up

Drawn from Haight (adolescence); McAdams (key scenes)

6 *Who was your best friend at fourteen, and what did you two get up to?*

7 *Which teacher or grown-up saw something in you?*

8 *What did you want to be, and what happened to that dream?*

9 *What music, dances or films felt like yours?*

10 *What was your first job, and what did you do with your first pay?*

03 Love and family

Drawn from Haight (family, adulthood); McAdams (high points)

11 *How did you two meet? Tell it the way you always tell it.*

12 *When did you know?*

13 *What was the day you married, or made it official, really like?*

14 *What do you remember about becoming a parent, or about the children who mattered most to you?*

15 *What did you hope our family would be like?*

04 Work and making a life

Drawn from Birren (work, money, branching points)

16 *What work are you proudest of, and why?*

17 *Tell me about a time money was tight. How did you manage?*

18 *Who gave you a chance when you needed one?*

19 *What was the biggest decision you ever made?*

20 *Of all the places you've lived, which felt most like home?*

05 Turning points

Drawn from McAdams (turning and low points); Haight (hardships)

21 *What was the hardest time you lived through, and what got you through it?*

22 *What is something you changed your mind about?*

23 *Is there a day you would gladly live again?*

24 *Which big events in the world do you remember, and where were you when you heard?*

25 *Who do you still think about? Tell me about them.*

06 Who you are

Drawn from Chochinov (dignity therapy); Birren (beliefs)

26 *When did you feel most alive?*

27 *What makes you laugh, every time?*

28 *What do people get wrong about you?*

29 *What are you quietly proud of that nobody gave you credit for?*

30 *What do you believe in, and has that changed?*

07 The small things

Drawn from Duke, Lazarus & Fivush (family stories); reminiscence practice

31 *What is a recipe you make from memory? Talk me through it.*

32 *What sayings did your parents use that you still hear yourself say?*

33 *Which family story always gets told at gatherings? Tell me your version.*

34 *Which object in this house has a story?*

35 *What traditions did you start, and why?*

08 For the people who come after

Drawn from Chochinov (legacy questions)

36 *What do you want your grandchildren to know about you?*

37 *What have you learned about life that you would want to pass on?*

38 *What would you tell me on a hard day?*

39 *What are your hopes for the people you love?*

40 *Is there something you've never been asked that you would like to tell?*

WHERE THEY COME FROM

Fifty years of asking people about their lives

In 1963 the psychiatrist Robert Butler argued that looking back on one's life is a natural, healthy part of growing older, not idle "living in the past". He called it *life review*. Researchers have since built structured ways to guide it. We drew on four:

- **Haight's Life Review and Experiencing Form** walks through life in order: childhood, adolescence, family and home, adulthood, then a look back over the whole.
- **Birren's guided autobiography** uses themes such as major turning points, work, money, family and beliefs.
- **McAdams' Life Story Interview** asks for key scenes: a high point, a low point and a turning point.
- **Chochinov's dignity therapy** ends with what someone wants their family to know, starting from "When did you feel most alive?".

What the evidence says, and doesn't

A meta-analysis of 128 controlled studies (8,404 people) found that guided reminiscence improved a sense of meaning and integrity ($g = 0.64$) and reduced depressive symptoms ($g = 0.57$). The effects were largest in structured programmes run by trained people, and a printable is not the same thing. Separately, children and teenagers who know more family stories tend to report higher self-esteem and better family functioning. That's a correlation, not proof that the stories cause it.

Sources

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Hear them tell it.

Loved Ever After records these conversations with a trained interviewer, in a few easy sessions. Later, the family will be able to talk with them about almost anything, in a recreation of their voice. The storyteller approves everything. The original recordings are kept too, laugh and all.

Only the storyteller can say yes, and only while they're living.

Join the free founding waitlist at lovedeverafter.com

Notes

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The questions are our own wording, adapted from the published research listed on page 7. The authors of that research are not connected with Loved Ever After and have not endorsed it.

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