

Questions to Ask Your Grandparents

122 story-starting questions, grouped by theme

Before you start

- Choose five to eight questions for one visit and let your grandparent pick where to start.
- Ask before you record, and say who will hear the recording or read the notes.
- Follow the story, not the list: “What happened next?” is the most useful question here.
- Write names as they spell them and mark anything uncertain with a question mark.

Childhood and the home they grew up in

- ☐ 1. What was the first home you remember, and what did you see when you walked in the door?
- ☐ 2. Which room did your family spend the most time in, and what happened there on an ordinary evening?
- ☐ 3. What did your street or road sound like early in the morning?
- ☐ 4. What chores were yours as a child, and which one did you try hardest to avoid?
- ☐ 5. What did you eat for breakfast on a school day?
- ☐ 6. Who looked after you when your parents were busy?
- ☐ 7. What games did you play, and where did you play them?
- ☐ 8. Did you have a favorite hiding place, a tree or a corner that felt like yours?
- ☐ 9. What was the first thing you remember buying with your own money?
- ☐ 10. What did you do on a hot summer day, or a snowy one?
- ☐ 11. Was there a neighbor or shopkeeper everyone knew? What were they like?
- ☐ 12. What were you afraid of when you were small?

Their parents, grandparents and family history

- ☐ 13. What were your parents' full names, and where did they grow up?
- ☐ 14. What did your father and mother do for work?
- ☐ 15. What is one thing your mother used to say that you still remember?
- ☐ 16. What is one thing your father did that you only understood later?
- ☐ 17. Did you know your own grandparents? What do you remember about them?
- ☐ 18. Where did our family come from before that, as far as you know?
- ☐ 19. Did anyone in the family move to a new town or a new country? Why did they go?

- ☐ 20. Were there family stories told again and again at gatherings? Tell me one.
- ☐ 21. Who in the family were you most like, and who were you least like?
- ☐ 22. Are there family names, recipes or objects that have been passed down? Where did they come from?
- ☐ 23. Was there a relative people did not talk about much? Would you like to tell me anything about them?
- ☐ 24. Is there anyone else in the family I should ask about these stories?

School and growing up

- ☐ 25. How did you get to school, and how long did it take?
- ☐ 26. Which teacher do you still remember, and why?
- ☐ 27. What subject came easily to you, and which one never did?
- ☐ 28. Who was your best friend at school, and what did the two of you do together?
- ☐ 29. Did you ever get into trouble at school? What happened?
- ☐ 30. What did you want to be when you grew up?
- ☐ 31. What did teenagers do for fun in your town?
- ☐ 32. What music, radio programs or films mattered to you then?
- ☐ 33. What was the first job you had while you were still young?
- ☐ 34. When did you first feel grown up?

Work and making a living

- ☐ 35. What was your first full-time job, and how did you get it?
- ☐ 36. Walk me through a typical workday in the job you did longest.
- ☐ 37. Who taught you the skills you needed?
- ☐ 38. What part of your work were you proudest of?
- ☐ 39. Was there a mistake at work that taught you something?
- ☐ 40. How much did you earn at first, and what could that buy?
- ☐ 41. Did you ever change careers or start over? What led to that?
- ☐ 42. Who was the best boss or colleague you ever had?
- ☐ 43. Were there times when money was tight? How did the family manage?
- ☐ 44. What skill do you have that younger people rarely learn now?
- ☐ 45. If you could have tried a different kind of work, what would it have been?
- ☐ 46. How did you feel when you retired, and what did you do with the first free week?

Love, marriage and friendship

- ☐ 47. How did you meet Grandma or Grandpa, or the person who mattered most to you?
- ☐ 48. What was your first impression of them?
- ☐ 49. What did you do on your first date, or the first time you spent a day together?
- ☐ 50. How did you know this was someone you wanted to share a life with?
- ☐ 51. What was your wedding day like, or the day you set up a home together?
- ☐ 52. What was your first home together like?
- ☐ 53. What made your marriage or partnership work, and what was hard?
- ☐ 54. Who has been your closest friend over the years?
- ☐ 55. Is there a friendship you wish you had kept?
- ☐ 56. What have you learned about love that you would want me to know?

Raising a family, and my parent as a child

- ☐ 57. What was it like to become a parent for the first time?
- ☐ 58. What was my mom or dad like as a baby?
- ☐ 59. What was my parent like as a child? Were they easy or a handful?
- ☐ 60. Is there a story about my parent growing up that they might not tell me themselves?
- ☐ 61. What did your children love to do together?
- ☐ 62. What family rules did you have, and which ones did your children break?
- ☐ 63. What was a typical weekend like when your children were young?
- ☐ 64. What worried you most as a parent?
- ☐ 65. What do you think you did well as a parent, and what would you do differently?
- ☐ 66. When did you first see me, and what do you remember about that day?

Places, moves and journeys

- ☐ 67. What is the farthest you have ever traveled, and how did you get there?
- ☐ 68. Which move changed your life the most?
- ☐ 69. What did it feel like to arrive somewhere new? What did you notice first?
- ☐ 70. Is there a place you still dream about going back to?
- ☐ 71. What was your favorite family holiday or trip?
- ☐ 72. Which town, house or apartment felt most like home, and why?
- ☐ 73. Did you ever get lost, stranded or have a trip go wrong? What happened?
- ☐ 74. If you could spend one more day anywhere from your past, where would it be?

History they lived through

- ☐ 75. What world or national event do you remember most clearly? Where were you when you heard about it?
- ☐ 76. How did the news reach your home when you were young?
- ☐ 77. What new invention changed your daily life the most?
- ☐ 78. What did your family own that you felt lucky to have?
- ☐ 79. How have prices, work or neighborhoods changed since you were young?
- ☐ 80. Did you or someone close to you serve in the military? What would you like people to remember about that time?
- ☐ 81. Was there a time when your town or community pulled together?
- ☐ 82. What did people argue about when you were young that seems different now?
- ☐ 83. What change in the world surprised you most?
- ☐ 84. What do you think younger people misunderstand about the years you grew up in?

Traditions, food and faith

- ☐ 85. What did a holiday look like in your home when you were a child?
- ☐ 86. Which family recipe matters most to you, and who taught you to make it?
- ☐ 87. What smell takes you straight back to your childhood?
- ☐ 88. What songs did your family sing or listen to together?
- ☐ 89. What role did faith or spiritual life play in your family?
- ☐ 90. Are there customs from your family's background that you still keep?
- ☐ 91. What was a birthday like when you were young?
- ☐ 92. Which tradition did you start yourself?
- ☐ 93. What family gathering do you remember best, and who was there?
- ☐ 94. Is there a tradition you hope the family will carry on?

Hard times and what helped

- ☐ 95. What was the hardest period of your life, if you are willing to talk about it?
- ☐ 96. Who helped you through it?
- ☐ 97. What did you learn about yourself during that time?
- ☐ 98. Was there a time you had to be braver than you felt?
- ☐ 99. How did you keep going when things were uncertain?
- ☐ 100. Is there a loss you would like us to remember with you?
- ☐ 101. What small things gave you comfort when life was difficult?

☐ 102. What would you tell someone going through something similar now?

Values, advice and looking back

☐ 103. What are you most proud of?

☐ 104. What is the best advice you were ever given?

☐ 105. What do you know now that you wish you had known at twenty?

☐ 106. What do you think matters most in a good life?

☐ 107. What decision are you most glad you made?

☐ 108. Is there anything you would do over if you could?

☐ 109. How would you like the grandchildren to remember you?

☐ 110. What do you hope for our family in the years ahead?

☐ 111. What makes you laugh every time you think about it?

☐ 112. Is there a story you have never told that you would like someone to know?

Easy questions for younger grandchildren

☐ 113. What was your favorite toy when you were my age?

☐ 114. What did you eat for your school lunch?

☐ 115. Did you have a pet? What was its name?

☐ 116. What games did you play with your friends?

☐ 117. What was the naughtiest thing you ever did as a kid?

☐ 118. What was your favorite song when you were young?

☐ 119. What did your bedroom look like?

☐ 120. What did you want to be when you grew up?

☐ 121. What is something that did not exist when you were little?

☐ 122. What is your favorite memory of me?

Free to print and share for personal and family use. Guide and follow-up questions: memoirwell.com/guide/questions-to-ask-your-grandparents