

Questions to Ask Your Parents About Their Life

120 questions for your mom or dad, grouped by theme

Before you start

- Say why you are asking. Curiosity is the best invitation.
- Keep each conversation to thirty or forty-five minutes and stop while it still feels good.
- Ask for one moment at a time, not a whole decade.
- Your parent can skip any question, and private things stay private.

Childhood and home

- ☐ 1. What is your earliest memory?
- ☐ 2. Describe the home you grew up in, starting at the front door.
- ☐ 3. What did a school morning look like in your house?
- ☐ 4. What was your bedroom like, and who did you share it with?
- ☐ 5. What were you like as a little kid?
- ☐ 6. Who made you feel safe when you were young?
- ☐ 7. What games or hobbies filled your free time?
- ☐ 8. What was your neighborhood like, and who lived next door?
- ☐ 9. What smells or sounds remind you of being a child?
- ☐ 10. Did you have a pet? What happened to it?
- ☐ 11. What were you afraid of as a child, and what made you laugh?
- ☐ 12. What was a typical Sunday in your family?

Their parents and our family history

- ☐ 13. What were your parents like when you were growing up?
- ☐ 14. What did each of your parents do for work?
- ☐ 15. How would you describe your relationship with your mother? With your father?
- ☐ 16. What did you learn from each of them, good or hard?
- ☐ 17. What do you know about your grandparents and where they came from?
- ☐ 18. What family stories did you hear as a child?
- ☐ 19. Were there family members you were especially close to?

- ☐ 20. What family traditions came from your side of the family?
- ☐ 21. Is there anyone in our family history you wish you had asked more questions?
- ☐ 22. Who else should I talk to about our family's past?

Teenage years and school

- ☐ 23. What kind of teenager were you?
- ☐ 24. Who were your friends in high school, and what did you do together?
- ☐ 25. What did you do on a Friday or Saturday night?
- ☐ 26. Which teacher or coach made a difference to you?
- ☐ 27. What music did you love, and where did you listen to it?
- ☐ 28. What was your first job, and what did you spend the money on?
- ☐ 29. Did you ever get in serious trouble? What happened?
- ☐ 30. Who was your first crush?
- ☐ 31. What did your parents worry about most when you were a teenager?
- ☐ 32. What did you dream of doing after school?

Leaving home and early adulthood

- ☐ 33. When did you leave home, and where did you go?
- ☐ 34. What was your first apartment or place of your own like?
- ☐ 35. Did you go to college, train for a trade or start working? How did you decide?
- ☐ 36. What was the hardest part of being on your own for the first time?
- ☐ 37. Who helped you in those first years?
- ☐ 38. What did you spend too much money on when you were young?
- ☐ 39. Was there a moment you realized you were an adult?
- ☐ 40. What risk did you take in your twenties?
- ☐ 41. What did you think your life would look like at forty?
- ☐ 42. What would you tell your twenty-year-old self?

Work and purpose

- ☐ 43. How did you choose your line of work, or how did it choose you?
- ☐ 44. What did an ordinary day at work look like?
- ☐ 45. What were you best at in your job?
- ☐ 46. What was the hardest job you ever had?
- ☐ 47. Who at work influenced you most?

- ☐ 48. Was there a time you stood up for something at work?
- ☐ 49. Did you ever lose a job or change direction? What happened next?
- ☐ 50. How did you balance work and family, and what did it cost you?
- ☐ 51. What are you proudest of from your working life?
- ☐ 52. If you could have done any job at all, what would it have been?

Love and relationships

- ☐ 53. How did you meet Mom or Dad?
- ☐ 54. What did you notice about them first?
- ☐ 55. What was your wedding day like, or the day you decided to build a life together?
- ☐ 56. What did you argue about in the early years, and how did you make up?
- ☐ 57. What has made your relationship last, or what did you learn when it did not?
- ☐ 58. Who were the great friends of your life?
- ☐ 59. Was there a love before our family that mattered to you?
- ☐ 60. What do you think makes a good partner?
- ☐ 61. What do you most want me to understand about your relationships?
- ☐ 62. Is there a letter, song or place that belongs to your love story?

Becoming a parent, and raising me

- ☐ 63. How did you feel when you found out you were going to be a parent?
- ☐ 64. What do you remember about the day I was born?
- ☐ 65. How did you choose my name?
- ☐ 66. What was I like as a baby and a toddler?
- ☐ 67. What did I do as a child that made you laugh?
- ☐ 68. What was the hardest part of raising children?
- ☐ 69. Was there a moment you felt you had failed as a parent? What happened?
- ☐ 70. What were you proudest of me for when I was growing up?
- ☐ 71. What did you want for me that you did not have yourself?
- ☐ 72. What do you think I misunderstood about you when I was a teenager?
- ☐ 73. What was our family's best year, in your eyes?
- ☐ 74. What do you hope I carry on from how you raised me?

Everyday life and small pleasures

- ☐ 75. What is your favorite meal, and who cooked it best?

- ☐ 76. What does a perfect ordinary day look like for you?
- ☐ 77. What song always lifts your mood?
- ☐ 78. What is the best book you have read or the best film you have seen?
- ☐ 79. Which holiday do you love most, and why?
- ☐ 80. What hobby have you kept the longest?
- ☐ 81. What is something you are still curious about?
- ☐ 82. What makes you laugh the hardest?

Hard times

- ☐ 83. What was the most difficult period of your life?
- ☐ 84. How did you get through it, and who helped?
- ☐ 85. Was there a time you were truly afraid?
- ☐ 86. What loss has stayed with you the most?
- ☐ 87. Is there a decision you have wrestled with for years?
- ☐ 88. How have you changed because of difficult times?
- ☐ 89. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed?
- ☐ 90. What would you want me to know if I face something similar?

Beliefs, values and lessons

- ☐ 91. What values did you try hardest to pass on?
- ☐ 92. What do you believe about how people should treat each other?
- ☐ 93. Has your faith or outlook on life changed over the years?
- ☐ 94. What is the best advice you ever received, and who gave it?
- ☐ 95. What mistake taught you the most?
- ☐ 96. What do you think makes a person truly successful?
- ☐ 97. What are you still learning?
- ☐ 98. What do you think our family does well?
- ☐ 99. What do you wish more people understood?
- ☐ 100. What have you forgiven, and what are you still working on?

Looking back and looking ahead

- ☐ 101. What are you most proud of in your life?
- ☐ 102. What would you do differently if you could?
- ☐ 103. What do you want your grandchildren to know about you?

- ☐ 104. Is there something you have always wanted to do and still hope to?
- ☐ 105. What part of your life would you like to relive for a day?
- ☐ 106. How would you like to be remembered?
- ☐ 107. What are you still looking forward to?
- ☐ 108. Which of your habits or sayings do you hope we keep?
- ☐ 109. What do you think you got right about life that most people get wrong?
- ☐ 110. If you wrote one page for your great-grandchildren, what would it say?

Questions to ask while there is time

- ☐ 111. Is there a story you would like me to know that you have never told?
- ☐ 112. Who should I thank or remember on your behalf?
- ☐ 113. What do you want the family to keep, and what can we let go?
- ☐ 114. Is there anything you would like to say to me, or hear from me?
- ☐ 115. What gives you comfort now?
- ☐ 116. Which photos or letters should we make sure to keep, and what are the stories behind them?
- ☐ 117. Is there a recipe, song or tradition you want to make sure we learn from you?
- ☐ 118. Who are the people in old photos that only you can still name?
- ☐ 119. What would you like us to do together while we can?
- ☐ 120. Is there anything you are worried about that I can help with?

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