

COMPANION RESOURCE

25 QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING WHILE YOU CAN

You Don't Have to Ask Them All. Just Ask One.

We often think we know the people we love.

And we do.

But knowing someone is not the same as knowing all of their stories.

You may know where your mother grew up without knowing what she did after school. You may know what your grandfather did for a living without knowing whether he actually liked his job. You may know how your parents met without knowing what they thought of each other the first time they did.

Don't make this an interview. Pick a question. Let the conversation wander.

The best question may simply be the one that leads to another.

1. What is one of your earliest memories?
2. What was an ordinary day like in your house when you were growing up?
3. Who had the biggest influence on the person you became - and why?
4. What did your family do for fun when you were young?
5. What is something your mother, father or grandparent used to do that you wish you had asked more about?
6. What did you think your life would look like when you were young?
7. What decision changed the direction of your life?
8. What happened to you almost entirely by accident but ended up mattering?
9. Was there ever an opportunity you almost didn't take?
10. What was one of the hardest periods of your life, and what helped you through it?
11. What accomplishment are you proud of that might not sound impressive on a résumé?
12. Who showed up for you when you really needed someone?
13. What is one kindness someone showed you that you have never forgotten?
14. Who could make you laugh harder than anyone else?
15. What story about our family gets told over and over - and is it completely true?
16. What family tradition do you hope never disappears?
17. What do people tease you about?
18. What are you surprisingly particular about?
19. What is something small - a food, song, smell, place, object or routine - that immediately brings back a memory?
20. What do you own that would mean almost nothing to a stranger but means something important to you?
21. What would surprise people who think they know you well?
22. What do you understand now that you wish you had understood when you were younger?
23. If you could have one more conversation with someone who is no longer here, who would it be - and what would you ask?
24. What are you still hoping to do, learn, change or experience?
25. What is a story about you that you hope someone remembers to tell?

DON'T STOP AT THE FIRST ANSWER

When something interesting comes up, stay there. Try:

- “What happened next?”
- “How old were you?”
- “Who else was there?”
- “What did you think at the time?”
- “Did anyone know?”
- “What happened to them?”
- “Do you have a picture?”
- “Why have I never heard this before?”

And perhaps the most useful follow-up of all: “Tell me more about that.”

You don't need a special occasion to ask these questions.

You don't need to sit someone down for a formal interview. Ask one over dinner. Ask another in the car. Ask while you're looking through old photographs. Ask during a holiday when someone mentions a name you've heard a hundred times but know almost nothing about.

And don't assume you'll remember the answer.

Write it down.

The opportunity to ask the question will not always be there.

The story can be.