



Having  
the  
Talk of a  
Lifetime®

A guide to help you have meaningful conversations with your loved ones about life and the things that matter most.

# Have the **Talk** of a Lifetime<sup>®</sup>

How well do you know the people who matter most to you?

Chances are you know many things about them simply because there are memories you share with them – those moments in life you experienced together – and the family stories that are recounted over and over.

However, that's often just the surface.

You may know what happened on the day you graduated from high school – you could see your parents beaming proudly in the crowd. But have you ever asked your dad what he was feeling that day?


You have heard the family stories about your parents' wedding – the minister mispronouncing your mom's name and the funny song your uncle sang at the reception. But have you ever asked your mom what she was thinking the moment before she started walking down the aisle?

Although we may know about some of the significant people, places and events that have shaped the lives of our loved ones, we don't know everything.

Sitting down with loved ones to talk about their lives can be rich and satisfying. Learning about memorable events, people, places, values and lessons they have learned can help bring you closer to people you care about most.

Sharing stories with loved ones can help you get to know them in new and different ways and can deepen and strengthen your relationship with them. Talking can help you (and them) better understand the life they lead – and give both of you a new appreciation for their unique life story.

Finding a way to start talking with a loved one may be the most difficult part; you might find, however, that once the conversation starts, it may be hard to stop.



“Keep all special thoughts and memories for lifetimes to come. Share these keepsakes with others to inspire hope and build from the past, which can bridge to the future.”

**Mattie Stepanek**

# Having a Meaningful Conversation

There are no rules for how to have the talk with a loved one, only that you make time to do it. Everyone has a story to tell and there's always more you can learn about the one-of-a-kind lives your loved ones have led and the impact they have made on others.

## Tips for Starting or Continuing a Conversation

- Don't stress over how or when you will have the talk. A conversation with your loved one should feel relaxed and natural. It can happen at any time or place that feels comfortable.
- You can have the talk with anyone who matters to you: a parent, grandparent, spouse, aunt, uncle or close friend.
- Rely on open-ended questions that require more than a one-word answer, such as: *"Describe the time..."*, *"Tell me about..."* or *"How did you feel when..."* Ask follow-up questions to draw out more details.
- During your conversation, your loved one may want to talk about something they have never shared before. Listen carefully with an open mind and heart. Avoid passing judgment.
- If you mention a topic that your loved one is uncomfortable discussing, respect his or her wishes and move on. Your loved one may have other reasons for not wanting to share a part of their story. They may, however, be willing to revisit the topic later.
- Family photos, heirlooms and other treasured items may help start a conversation and bring memories flooding back.
- Just start talking. While the conversation may not go exactly as you'd planned, enjoy it. Your loved one may have things to share that you haven't thought about. No matter where your talk leads, you will walk away with memories and stories you can treasure for a lifetime.



"No matter what age you are or what your circumstances might be, you are special, and you still have something unique to offer. Your life, because of who you are, has meaning."

**Barbara de Angelis**

# Conversation Starters

The following questions might be useful as you start talking to your loved ones. These are merely topics to help you get started; there isn't a set order and you don't need to cover everything in one conversation. Depending on with whom you are having the talk – parents, grandparents, other relatives, friends – the things you may want to know and the questions you ask may be different from these suggestions.

## Getting to know you... again

- What is your earliest memory?
- What is the story behind your name? Did you ever have a nickname?
- What is your family's ethnic background? Are there particular traditions that have meaning for you?
- How would you describe yourself as a child? What is your best memory of your childhood?
- When you were a child, what did you think your life would be like in the future? How is it similar? How is it different?
- Did you have pets growing up? Which was your favorite?
- What was your favorite meal/food growing up? Who prepared it for you – your mother, grandmother, another relative? Did they teach you how to prepare it?
- Tell me about the schools you attended. What was your best subject? Did you participate in sports, fine arts or math/science clubs? Tell me about a teacher who influenced you.
- Did you serve in the military? Why did you choose to serve? What was your experience? How did your service change you? What lessons did you learn? Are you still friends with anyone with whom you served?
- When did you know that you had finally grown up – the first time you realized you were an adult? What happened? At that moment, did you realize, "Ah ha! I'm an adult now" or did that realization come to you later?
- Tell me about what you do/did for a living? What drew you to that kind of work? What is your favorite part of your job? What lessons has your work life taught you? Did you have a mentor who helped you, especially when you were starting out? Did you ever mentor someone?
- What historical event do you think defined your generation? Why? Tell me what happened? How did it impact your life, family and hometown? Looking back, how do you feel about the event now?



- What, if any, religious/faith tradition has influenced your life? Are there prayers, scripture passages or other religious texts that are important to you?
- Did you ever receive an award or win a contest? What did that mean to you?
- Have you ever met anyone famous? What happened?
- Describe the most adventurous thing you've ever done. Were you frightened? How did you feel afterward?
- Describe your greatest accomplishment. What makes it so special to you?
- What are you proudest of in life?
- What has been the happiest moment in your life? The saddest?
- Do you have any regrets or things you wish you had handled differently?

### About the people in their life

- Tell me about your parents. What were they like when you were growing up? What was the best birthday present you ever received from them? What did you learn from them?
- Can you tell me about your grandparents? What were they like when you were growing up? Do you have a favorite memory of the time you spent with them? What did you learn from them?

- Tell me about your sisters and/or brothers. Were you close to them when you were growing up? How has your relationship with them changed?
- Who is your best friend? What made you such good friends? What is your favorite memory of him/her? Tell me about other friends you've had. What was the nicest thing one of your friends ever did for you?
- Tell me about your first boyfriend/girlfriend. Where did you meet him/her? What was your favorite thing about that person?
- Tell me about your husband/wife. How did you meet him/her? When did you know that he/she was "the one"? Tell me about the proposal. What is your favorite memory from your wedding day? What advice for a happy marriage would you want to share with young couples in our family?
- When did you learn that you were going to be a parent? Can you describe the moment you saw your child for the first time? How has being a parent changed you? What have you learned from your children? What advice would you share with expectant parents in our family?
- Who has been the most important or influential person in your life? Can you tell me about him or her? What did you learn from him or her?



"I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen."

**Ernest Hemingway**

# Conversation Starters



## Lessons for future generations

- What family traditions do you hope your children, grandchildren, etc., will carry on?
- What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
- What words of wisdom would you pass on to me? Do you have advice you'd want to pass on to other people who matter to you?
- How would you like people to remember you? What words do you hope will be used to describe you and your life?

## Special objects

Sometimes, special objects – photos, family heirlooms or other items your loved one has collected during his or her lifetime – can spark a conversation.

- Photos
  - Describe when this was taken. Where was it taken? Who is in the photo? How did you feel that day? Looking back at this photo, how do you feel about it now?
  - What is your favorite photo ever taken of you?
- Mementos
  - What is the history of this item as you know it? Why is it special to you?
- Collections
  - How and when did you start collecting these items? Which was the first item in your collection? Your most recent acquisition? Which one is most special to you?

“The thing that interests me most about family history is the gap between the things we think we know about our families and the realities.”

**Jeremy Hardy**

# Share **Your** Memories

The things that you learn as your conversation with your loved one unfolds will be precious beyond measure. However, as much as you will gain from the experience, having the talk with your loved one should be a dialogue – a shared experience. These conversations can be an opportunity for you to share your treasured memories of them as well.

You might want to thank your mom for teaching you how to make her famous cheesecake. Or tell your dad how thankful you are he taught you how to drive a car. You may wish to tell your aunt and uncle how much you enjoyed the summer camping trips with your cousins.

Sharing memories will help your loved ones understand how important they are to you. They will see that their life matters.



“There was never yet an uninteresting life. Such a thing is an impossibility. Inside the dullest exterior there is a drama, a comedy and a tragedy.”

Mark Twain

# Document **Your** Conversation

Having the talk doesn't have to be a one-time occurrence. Rather, think of it as a series of conversations during which you can openly talk about any number of things – from reflecting on the past to planning for the future.

When you talk with your loved one, you might want to document what is said. You may wish to take notes on the journal pages in this guidebook during or after your conversation. If you need additional space, use a notebook or journal to record what you learned during your conversation.

You could take a formal approach and make an audio or video recording of your interview with them, thereby preserving their voice and/or image.

You should choose whatever method is most appropriate given the setting of your conversation and your loved one's level of comfort.

The things you discuss will help you get to know your loved one better, appreciate their life story and get a glimpse of the legacy that they will one day leave behind.









## Pets

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## Accomplishments and Special Memories

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## Community Service and Clubs

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## Faith and Cultural Traditions

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# Honoring Those Who Matter Most

Having the talk will help you better understand who you are and where you come from; you will gain an even greater appreciation for your family history and the individuals who have come before you.

Having the talk may be helpful in the future when your family must make important decisions about how to remember and honor your loved ones when they die. These shared reflections may help your family memorialize them in a way that honors their life while giving you, your family and other friends a chance to reminisce and say goodbye.

When grieving a death, memorialization – that is, taking time to honor the life of a loved one in a meaningful way – can be an important step in the journey toward healthy healing.

Memorialization has changed to better meet the needs of today's families. There are so many ways you and your family can remember and honor the unique people in your lives. Memorialization can be a meaningful experience that reflects the personal values, interests and experiences of our loved ones and helps those who are left behind remember those who matter most.

Having the talk of a lifetime is the first step.

Funeral professionals, like those who are part of the Funeral and Memorial Information Council, will support you and your family as you plan a personalized service based on your loved one's life story, one that enables your family and others who cared about your loved one to gather and offer support and comfort to one another.

Funeral professionals are available to support and encourage you and your family and provide resources to guide important conversations about all of your memorialization options. Whether your family desires something traditional or something different, memorialization should be as unique as the individual being remembered.

No matter what form memorialization takes, what is most important is taking time to honor and remember the people who matter most.

To learn more about how you and your family can honor the lives of those who matter most, visit [www.talkofalifetime.org](http://www.talkofalifetime.org).



“Getting to know someone else involves curiosity about where they have come from, who they are.”

Penelope Lively



## FAMIC Members



[www.talkofalifetime.org](http://www.talkofalifetime.org)

