

Enjoying Your Family History

Research tells us it is important for grandparents to explore their family history with their grandchildren. This helps connect their grandchildren to the strengths of past generations and provide them with a feeling of family unity and belonging.

Capturing the tradition and history that help shape who we are and what we stand for is what family history is all about. Exploring our roots not only connects us to our past, it gives meaning and strength to our present. Family history has the power to give each of us and our family members a sense of purpose and belonging. The following information suggests ways each of us can explore and give meaning to our family story.



Enjoying Your Family History

Have you ever wondered what your great-great grandfather did for a living or where you got the nose that you have? Or maybe where your relatives came from and why they settled where they did? With a little investigation, you may answer these questions and in the process have a wonderful time finding out about your family history.

Start With What You Have

So where do you start? Each of us likely has a bit of family history right at home. Start simple. Pull out those boxes that are tucked away in closets. Here are a few things to look for:

- Family documents such as medical records, school records, or legal records
- Photo albums, letters, newspaper clippings, birth announcements, wedding invitations
- Old books, family mementos or antiques

If your photos aren't labeled, you may ask other relatives or longtime friends if they know anything about the pictures.

Explore

Another place to look is at the home of relatives. You can photocopy many documents so that you can return them to your relatives. Family recipes, favorite stories and adventures and family traditions are just a few things you can gain from visiting with extended family members. Aunts, uncles, cousins and parents can share in the recounting of family memories. Recording these interviews as they recount experiences can help capture a gold mine of memories. Interviews are most effective if you've recorded some questions to get you started. For example:

- Where did you meet your spouse? What attracted you to him or her?
- What was it like to live during a historical event such as _____?

- What do you remember about your parents or grandparents?
- How were things different?
- What holiday traditions did you have?

There are other places to explore your family history. Some families keep important records in a family Bible. Your grandchildren may also enjoy visiting a family cemetery and doing tombstone rubbings. You can visit the county clerk's office to check wedding dates or land purchases. Churches often maintain marriage and baptismal records. And of course, the Internet is a great source for family history information.

Family and Home Information

Family records can come from many sources. Included in your materials is a checklist that names possible sources of family records.

Organize

Now that you have gathered this information, it is time to get organized! Remember, to be effective you must sort and store in a consistent and meaningful way. Some families sort by individual. Others sort chronologically or by family era. Still others may sort by record type and keep school records together, photos together, etc. Think carefully about how you'll organize your information so it is easily accessible for you. What ideas or insights do you have for effectively organizing your family history?

Organizing information is only part of family history. To receive the full benefits of exploring your family history – you also need to find ways to celebrate it and showcase it. For example,

- Frame the pictures of your grandparents and display them in your home.
- Make family scrapbooks with your grandchildren.
- Display tools that were owned by your father or grandfather in a shadow box.
- Hang up quilts or needle work done by your grandmother.

When children are surrounded by treasures of the past, it opens the door to conversations and stories that link them to the past and help them understand the values and traditions of your family. Try to think of other ways to prominently display your family history and family links to the past.

Record Your Story!

Now that you have everything gathered and organized you may be wondering – what's next? An important part of family history is recording your own story. Taking the steps as a family can be a fun and unifying experience. You may want to start by completing your Pedigree Chart, Family Group Records or Source Note Record.

The next step is to create a family timeline. Timelines can be created several ways. A basic timeline states what events happened in what year.



We feel close to those who have shared similar human experiences. Community group participants come together around common causes such as abuse, surviving cancer, a love of gardening, the sharing of a faith or political affiliation, etc. Knowing the experiences or feelings that we share with our ancestors will link us to our past. Think about the stories or experiences that have most linked you to your past. Share those with your grandchildren.

Use Your Family History!

Family history is most joyful when we use it to strengthen our connection to others. There are many ways we can use our family history. Here are a few:

- Host a family reunion.
- Care for family graves with your grandchildren.
- Share family stories instead of watching television.
- Decorate your house with memories of the past – frame pictures, make scrapbooks, display quilts.

Connect to the Strength of the Past!

Remember, family history is more than filling out a pedigree chart. It is about connecting our children, grandchildren and families to the strength of the past. It is about deepening our understanding of life. It is about sharing, celebrating and continuing the traditions that have made our families strong and shaped our human experience.

You can learn more about strengthening families at www.uaex.edu and www.arfamilies.com.

Reference

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University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating

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Ways to Create a Legacy for Your Family

1. Collect and organize family photos, letters, papers, etc.
2. Write down or record family stories.
3. Collect and write down family recipes.
4. Record special family celebrations and traditions.
5. Keep a journal.
6. Complete a four-generation pedigree chart.
7. Research or create a family crest or shield.
8. Hold a family reunion and gather family data at the reunion.
9. If there is musical talent in the family, record a session of favorite music.
10. If there is artistic talent in the family, create a family project that could be an heirloom.
11. Interview and record all of your older family members.
12. Make genealogy part of the first day celebration during a traditional holiday.
13. Find the gravesites of ancestors and help maintain these sites.
14. Create a time capsule of current memorabilia for future generations to view.
15. Create a “photo pedigree” showing your ancestors.

Reference

This information may be found at <http://www.pbs.org/kbyu/ancestors/firstseries/teachersguide/activity-ten.html>.
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Example of Family Timeline

Year/Era	Important World Events	Important Family Events	Important Personal Events

You are now ready to start plugging in the pieces. What were you doing during the 60s and 70s? How did Watergate, Woodstock, the death of Elvis, the Vietnam War or September 11 impact you and your family? What memories do you have of your school years? When did you start your first job? What was your first car? Who was your first lost love? What situations or stories still bring you tears or laughter?

Remember, family history isn't only about passing on a legacy or life lesson to future generations. It is also about reflecting on your own life, deepening your own life mission, and gaining greater understanding about who you are. Such an understanding will help you better reach out and support each other.

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