



# 5 Ways to Pull Great Stories Out of Your Family

BREAK THROUGH THE SMALL TALK AND CONNECT WITH LOVED ONES ON A DEEPER LEVEL THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.

By Hannah Chenoweth

1

Let them teach you something.

Show a genuine curiosity in your relatives’ passions. If your cousin is always playing *Fornite*, don’t say, “Oh, there you are playing that video game again!” Ask her how it works. Kids especially love to teach adults, and they open up when you engage in an activity side by side; it’s less intimidating than a face-to-face discussion. Everyone wants to be seen as an expert in something, whether it’s a toddler in the alpha-bet or a preteen in gaming. Offer that chance.

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Make it playful.

Play can help bridge the gap between generations. Put a piece of family trivia at each place setting (“Who had a yellow Volkswagen in high school?” “Who spent a month backpacking in Asia?”) and have guests try to match it with the correct relative. My family also loves what we call Typewriter Tales: Everyone takes turns writing one sentence of a story on an old typewriter throughout the day. The final story is always hilarious; each person’s unique humor gets a chance to shine. Playful activities work wonders helping people of all ages relax and connect on a new level.

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2

Prioritize your family history.

My father was a Holocaust survivor who passed away when I was 19, and there’s so much I wish I had asked him about our heritage. It’s important to ask questions while you can, and holiday gatherings are the perfect opportunity to do so. You can interview your relatives and record their answers. Or request that each person bring a few old photos, and ask them to tell you about the people in the photos. You may be surprised by how vividly your older family members recall their younger years. One casual way for meaningful conversations to unfold: Ask couples how they met. Everyone loves to both hear and tell those stories.

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4

Toss out some prompts.

At the Moth, we hold open mic events where participants tell stories based on prompts, which are also great for generating sharing at the holidays. Going around the table to answer a prompt can pull people out of their shells and prevent one person from dominating the conversation. Some to consider: “Tell us about a time you couldn’t believe your eyes.” “Tell us about when you bit off more than you could chew.” “Tell us about a bond in your life that was unbreakable.” You can also encourage family members to come up with their own ideas. The options to get the stories flowing are endless, and you never know what you’ll learn.

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Talk less, listen more.

Opening up interesting conversations is simpler than people think: Just listen! Talking to an active listener is so powerful, especially when they ask good questions. A typical phone call with my grandfather in Iran would be a quick hi-and-bye if I didn’t ask things like “What’s new with those neighbors who used to always give me chocolate?” I also try to connect the conversation to stories he’s told me earlier (“Oh, so now I understand why you love the beach so much!”). Show the other person that you’re truly paying attention—that you care and want to hear more.

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