



Investing in the future with your family's past

Wells Fargo Family & Business History Center

Five ways to engage with younger generations

Many of us have a desire to pass down family stories and wisdom to younger generations, but the pace of modern life, generational differences, and geographic distance can stand in the way. Yet, research shows that families who know and intentionally share their histories are investing in their future.

The benefits of knowing your past include:

- Establish identity and reinforce children's sense of self.
- Build cohesion, helping family members feel like they are part of something greater than themselves.
- Define family responsibilities and answer questions such as: What am I expected to contribute?
- Provide a foundation of resilience. Children who know that their family has endured and overcome challenging times gain confidence that they will, too.

Consider weaving history into family meetings or retreats, holiday celebrations, and, perhaps best of all, into everyday moments. Children of all ages respond well to activities that appeal to their senses. Think about how to enrich your family stories with images, objects, and even tastes and smells. Use the ideas on the back of this page to envision how you can make your family history come alive for the rising generations.

1. Gathering in the kitchen

Inviting children into the kitchen can be one of the best ways to pass on family history. You (or they) can pick a tried-and-true family recipe, or search the internet for a dish from your ancestral home. Share recollections and insights as you chop, mix, or bake. Whose favorite dish is it? When is it usually served? Is the recipe card or cookbook page well-worn? Or, maybe it's a recipe that you've committed to memory and has been passed down from cook to cook, with some memorable modifications over the years. Tell those stories.

2. Home explorer

Your home (or a beloved family vacation retreat) may be a treasure trove for family history. Tell the stories behind some items on display in your living spaces, your attic, or other storage areas. Pay particular attention to things passed down through generations, but also pieces that are dear because of the more recent memories attached to them. Ask your family members to join in by sharing their favorite things. What makes them special? This activity could take the form of a scavenger hunt and would also work well as an activity shared virtually across multiple family households connected by video-enabled technologies.

3. Detective work

Family history is all about discovery. Do you have any genealogists in your family? What clues have they left about your past? Are there family trees, names and dates within the pages of a family bible, or even published accounts? Can you match this information with historic photographs or precious heirlooms? Tools such as our "All About Me and My Family" booklet may help younger members of your family understand their important place in your larger family story.

4. Capturing voices

Record family members sharing their past. Children can use digital recorders to interview a parent or grandparent, or use modern technologies to help your family conduct remote video interviews. You may want to consider focusing on specific events in history, culture, or different stages of life. For example, "what did you like to do when you were my age?" or "what was your home like?" You can help your child construct a list of questions before the interview starts. Ending interviews on reflective questions is a good way to emphasize legacy.

5. Walking in their footsteps

Involve children or grandchildren in planning a roots trip to see your family's distant homelands. Family trees or historical documents may reveal the addresses of your ancestors' homes and workplaces. Online videos can also provide an easily accessible "trip" to distant lands that may be part of your family's larger story and origins. To explore inaccessible places or more recent chapters of your history, use online maps and street viewing tools to take a virtual tour of an old neighborhood, and recall stories about what and who you remember. For example: What were your neighbors like? Was there a sense of community?

Conclusion

Above all, consider your audience. Tailor your approach to age, attention span, and the recipients' specific interests. Seek practical ways to not only convey family history and legacy through words, but also through actions like giving or civic involvement. And, remember to listen. While sharing history is powerful, cultivating an ongoing dialogue about the past, present, and future is a best practice.

Discover more

To learn more about the Wells Fargo Family & Business History Center, please contact your advisor.

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