

Questions to Ask Your Relatives

Building Your Family Story One Conversation at a Time

Talking with family members is one of the best ways to begin your Jewish genealogy journey. Use these questions to spark memories, stories, and clues that can lead you to new records or family connections.

Family Origins & Immigration

1. Who was the oldest person you remember as a child?
2. Who were the first to come to the U.S., when, and why?
3. Who were the first to become citizens?
4. Where did the family live before immigrating?
5. Why did they leave their country of birth?
6. If they were immigrants, what was happening in their region of the world at that time?
7. Did anyone travel back and forth between the U.S. and their homeland?
8. Did the family change their surname, and if so, why or when?

Family Life & Traditions

9. What languages were spoken at home?
10. What foods or recipes were special for holidays or family gatherings?
11. Which family traditions or religious customs were passed down?
12. What synagogue or congregation did the family belong to?
13. Are there any old family photographs, letters, or heirlooms?
14. Did the family have any favorite sayings or expressions in Yiddish, Hebrew, or another language?

Work, Education & Daily Life

15. What kinds of jobs or trades did family members have?
16. Did anyone own a business or a shop?
17. Where did the children go to school?

18. Were there any musicians, artists, or writers in the family?

Military, History & Challenges

19. Did anyone serve in a war for the U.S. or in Europe?

20. Was anyone a Holocaust victim or survivor?

21. How did the family cope during the Depression or other difficult times?

22. Were there any major family losses or separations?

Family Stories & Memories

23. Where are family members buried, and are there gravestones with Hebrew inscriptions?

24. What is the most important family story or legend you've heard?

25. Who in the family might know *more* about our history that I should talk to next?

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