

The Eliyahu Project - Family Story Starter Kit

A practical workbook for preserving Jewish family memory before details are lost.

How to Use This Kit

- Do not try to record an entire life in one sitting. Begin with one person, one period, or one photograph.
- Record first; organize later. Exact wording, pauses, names and small details often matter.
- Mark uncertain names, dates and places rather than silently correcting them.
- Ask permission before sharing sensitive family material.
- Back up recordings and scans in at least two places.

Before the Interview

- Choose a quiet room and test the recorder.
- Gather photographs, letters, certificates, recipes, prayer books, immigration records and other memory prompts.
- Write down names that may need spelling clarification.
- Plan for 45-75 minutes and stop before the narrator becomes tired.
- Begin with easy memories before asking about loss, conflict or trauma.

Jewish Family Memory Prompts

- What Jewish names were used in the family, and whom were people named for?
- Which towns, countries, synagogues or communities belong to the family story?
- What did Shabbat look and feel like in your childhood home?
- Which holidays carried the strongest family traditions?
- What languages or accents were spoken at home?
- Were there migrations, expulsions, war experiences, antisemitism or rebuilding experiences that shaped the family?
- Which prayers, melodies, foods, customs, jokes or expressions came from earlier generations?
- Who preserved Jewish practice in the family, and how?
- Which Jewish objects have stories attached to them?
- What should future generations understand about the family's Jewish identity and history?

50 Core Interview Questions

- What is your full name, and how was it chosen?
- Where and when were you born? What do you know about that day?

- What are your earliest memories of home?
- What were your parents and grandparents like as people?
- What family stories were repeated when you were young?
- What foods, smells, songs, sayings or objects immediately take you back to childhood?
- What did an ordinary school day look like?
- Who were your closest childhood friends?
- What did your family do for birthdays and major holidays?
- What rules did your household have?
- What did your parents worry about? What did they hope for?
- What work did your parents and grandparents do?
- What did money mean in your household?
- Was there a move, migration or immigration that changed the family?
- Which place has felt most like home, and why?
- What historical events did you experience personally?
- What did your family lose, rebuild or preserve?
- Who taught you the most important lessons of your youth?
- What did you believe your adult life would be like?
- What was your first job? What did it teach you?
- How did you meet your spouse or important partner?
- What do you remember about becoming a parent?
- What family traditions did you deliberately continue?
- What traditions changed or disappeared?
- What was the hardest period of your life, and what helped you through it?
- What decision changed the direction of your life?
- What are you proudest of?
- What mistake taught you the most?
- Who showed you unexpected kindness?
- What family member do you wish younger generations could have known?
- What object, photograph, letter or document has the greatest family meaning?
- What family expressions or jokes should never be forgotten?
- What recipes belong to your family's story?
- What music belongs to different chapters of your life?

- What did your community mean to you?
- What did you learn about friendship?
- What did you learn about marriage or partnership?
- What did you learn about raising children?
- What did aging teach you that youth could not?
- What do you wish you had asked your own parents or grandparents?
- What do you want descendants to understand about the era in which you lived?
- Which family values are worth protecting?
- What do you hope your children and grandchildren will do differently?
- What should they never be ashamed of?
- What should they always remember about where they came from?
- If you could preserve only five stories, which five would they be?
- What photograph needs its story written down now?
- Whose voice should also be recorded?
- What unfinished story still needs to be told?
- What message would you leave for a descendant reading this fifty years from now?

Family Timeline Worksheet

- Person / event:
- Approximate date:
- Place:
- Who was present:
- What happened:
- Why it mattered:
- Source of the information:
- Photographs/documents connected to it:
- Questions still unresolved:

Photograph Identification Worksheet

- Photo number or filename:
- People, left to right:
- Approximate year:
- Location:

- Occasion:
- Who owns the original:
- What happened immediately before or after this photograph:
- Details a future viewer would otherwise miss:

From Recording to Finished Story

- Preserve the original recording.
- Create a working transcript or detailed notes.
- Build a chronology, but do not force every story into chronological order.
- Separate verified facts from remembered or uncertain details.
- Select scenes that reveal personality, place and relationships.
- Return to the narrator for missing names, dates and context.
- Edit for readability without erasing the narrator's voice.
- Add captions and source notes to photographs.
- Give the finished work to more than one family member.

When You Want Help

- The Eliyahu Project can turn interviews, recordings, photographs and family documents into finished prose.
- Use the website or installed app to start a story, prepare for a legacy interview, or give a story project as a gift.