



# 'TALKING POINTS' LEARN ABOUT YOUR FAMILY AND THE PAST

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## Overview

My name is Dr Joel Morley. I'm an oral historian. I interview people who I've not met before to find out about their lives and about social history. Even though listening to people's stories about the past is my job, I haven't sat down with my grandparents or parents and asked them about their pasts. I doubt I'm the only one. Lots of grandparents and grandchildren cannot see each other in person or do things together as much as they would like. It's lovely to keep in touch by talking on the phone or via the internet, but it might be hard for them to find things to talk about. Inspired by my oral history background, I've put together a list of 'Talking Points' that could help children learn about their older relative's history and help older relatives to enjoy sharing their stories.

As well as being a great way for younger people to get to know their relatives, this can be an opportunity for children to:

- practice speaking and listening skills
- learn about the past
- learn that people have varied experiences and opinions
- develop their curiosity and empathy

These 'Talking Points' are intended to encourage stories about day-to-day life and to enable children to compare their own experiences to those of an older generation so that they can see how things have changed and how people remember historical events. These questions are general enough to suit a wide variety of family situations, but you may want to add, remove, or change questions to suit your particular conversation. The questions are grouped by theme so that this activity can be spread out over a number of conversations and can suit children's different concentration spans.

### Important notes:

You should use your own knowledge of your family's history, and your understanding of your child, to decide if these questions are appropriate. In particular, at the end of the worksheet are some questions that might be more suitable for older children.

Although I'm an oral historian, I'm **not** suggesting you should record these conversations. If you're interested in doing so you should read the Oral History Society's guidance about interviewing family members and Informed Consent [[Click Here](#)]. This matters even if everyone involved is in the same family.

For more about me and my research see my webpage [here](#).

# 'TALKING POINTS' ACTIVITY GUIDE

Historians try to find out about the past. Lots of historians do this by reading things that were written down, but some historians (called oral historians) find out about important events and what people's everyday lives were like in the past by asking questions.

Oral historians make a list of questions to help them, and they listen really carefully to what the person remembers. Sometimes they ask questions that are not on their list because the person they are listening to says really interesting things or because they do not understand what the person means. You can ask the kind of questions that oral historians ask to help you to learn things about someone you know and about the history of your family. This list of questions should give you some ideas of things to ask about and you can add your own questions too. You don't have to ask all the questions in one go – listening carefully to the answers is hard work!

There are some important things you should do **before you start** asking someone the questions. You must:

- Ask them if it is okay to ask them some questions to learn about their past
- Tell them that it doesn't matter if they don't remember something or if they don't want to answer a particular question. You've got lots of different things you can ask them about!

## Questions

### Family And Place

- When were you born?
- Where were you born?
- Who did you live with when you were growing up?
- Where were your mum and dad from?
- Did your mum and dad work? Where?
- What were your mum and dad like?
- Did you have any pets?
- What was the home (or homes) you grew up in like?
- Did you have your own bedroom? What was that like?
- Did you have a garden?
- What was the place that you grew up in like?

### School

- Where did you go to school?
- How did you get to school?
- What were your schools like?
- Did you like school? What were your favourite subjects?
- Did you get homework?
- What were school meals like?
- What games did you play in the playground?
- Did you play sports at school?
- Can you remember your best friend from school?

# MORE 'TALKING POINTS'

## **Free Time And Fun**

Did you have any hobbies?  
Were you part of any clubs?  
What else did you do for fun?  
What were your favourite toys or games?  
Did you go to the cinema?  
What did you do at the weekend?

Did you get pocket money? What did you spend it on?  
What was your favourite thing to do for a treat?  
What was your favourite chocolate bar or sweets?

## **Work**

When you were at school, did you know what job you wanted when you grew up?  
When did you finish school?  
What did you do next?  
What was your first job?  
What other jobs did you have?  
What was your favourite job? Why?

## **Family Life**

Where did you live as a grown up?  
What was it like?

Did you get married? When? What was your wedding like?  
How did you meet?  
When did you move to where you live now?  
What was it like then? Did you change it a lot?  
Did you buy a house? Is it where you live now?  
Was it hard to buy a house?  
What did you do at the weekends?  
What did you do for fun as a grown up?

## **Travel**

Where did you go the first time you went on holiday? What was it like?  
Was it easy to travel then?

Did you ever learn to speak another language?  
Have you ever lived in a different country than where you live now?  
What was it like there? What did you like about it?  
What is your favourite place that you have been to?  
Why did you like it so much?

## **Comparisons With Now**

How do you think life is different for young people now?  
What are the biggest changes that have happened in your life?

# 'TALKING POINTS' FOR OLDER CHILDREN

## Historical Events

You could also ask people whether they remember particular historical events and whether they were important to them. Some historical events might be celebrations or things people might have happy memories of, but some of these are things that people might have sad or complicated memories about. Remember, part of being a good listener is understanding if someone doesn't want to discuss something.

You could ask if they remember some of these things that happened in the last 90 years:

## Social/Political Events

- Rationing (1940s and 1950s)
- Independence movements or decolonisation after 1945
- Civil Rights and political activism
- Changing to modern money (Decimalisation) (1971)
- The Miners' Strike (1972)
- Britain joining the European Economic Community (1973)
- The Three-day Week (1974)
- Thatcher's Election (1975)
- The Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989)

## Cultural Events

- Elvis Presley
- Beatlemania (1960s)
- England winning the World Cup (1966)
- The first moon landings (1969)
- Britain winning Eurovision song-contest (1997)
- 2012 Olympics

## Royal Events

- The Queen's Coronation (1953)
- Prince Charles and Diana's Wedding (1981)
- Prince William and Kate's Wedding (2011)
- The Queen's Diamond Jubilee (2012)

## Wars

- The Second World War (1939-1945)
- The Falklands War (1982)
- The First Gulf War (1991)
- The 9/11 terrorist attacks (2001)