



Sharing Life Stories — A Family Experience

An Educational Program Guide by Rabbi Mark H. Levine



**THE JEWISH
EDUCATION PROJECT**

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Overview

In this 90-minute intergenerational program, teens (ages 12–15) and family members will experience how to have deeper and more meaningful family conversations. Together they will identify significant events in their lives and learn to ask open-ended questions that can cultivate stronger emotional connections in their family.

Enduring Understanding

Every person, regardless of age, education, or social status, yearns for meaningful connections with family or friends. We can build strong connections, especially within families, by sharing personal stories that are important to us and by expressing the feelings associated with the stories.

Goals

- Identify significant life experiences at different stages of life.
- Explore feelings associated with those significant life events.
- Learn how to write and ask probing questions that can elicit a personal story from others.

Materials

O: Organization provides

F: Families bring

F	Charged devices to connect with extended family members (cell phone, iPad, laptop, etc.)
O	" Grandparents, Tell Your Personal Story: I Wished I Would Have Asked ," both emailed to families in advance of the session and copies available at each table
O	11 X 17 sheets of paper on the tables, plus extra paper
O	Pens, pencils, sharpies, and highlighters on the tables
	Whiteboard with markers
O	Name tags for participants, pens/markers
O	Copies of StoryCorps' " Tips for a Great Conversation "
O	Copies of "My Storyteller's Prayer" (included below)

Suggested Room Setup

- Large room with good cell reception and strong Wi-Fi, outlets for charging
- Clear directions to connect to Wi-Fi
- Large round tables that seat at least eight people
- Microphone and microphone stand

Timing (90-minute program)

PROGRAM STEP	TIMING
Welcome and set induction	15 minutes
River of Life activity	25 minutes
Identifying feelings	15 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Question writing	20 minutes
Wrap-up and survey	10 minutes

Program Steps

0:00–0:15 Welcome and set induction

Welcome the participants and explain the goal of the session: Today, we are going to try something new and quite dramatic to recall stories from different parts of our lives and experiment with questioning techniques that will help us share our stories with people we love.

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the first sentence of the article "[Grandparents, Tell Your Personal Story](#)," which is on each table ("In a funny way, I feel I know as much about Baskin Robbins' ice cream as I know about my grandmother").

If multiple families are seated at each table, invite them to introduce themselves (remember to include family members on screen) and discuss the sentence together. Ask: What feelings do you think the writer is expressing? Do you think this is a common feeling among families? What might prompt someone to make a statement like this?

Give the groups 5 minutes to discuss, and then ask for volunteers to share their perspectives.

0:15-0:25 Introducing the River of Life activity

The River of Life activity will help participants recall and discuss key events in their lives. Start by reading the following sentence from the article: “So many of us feel that way. We want to leave our families with the stories of our lives. But how? How do we write them down?”

Explain: We are now going to learn a way to capture meaningful stories of our lives.

Write the following quote by Emma Smith, an English novelist, on the whiteboard: “Life is like the river, sometimes it sweeps you gently along and sometimes the rapids come out of nowhere.” *Alternative:* Write the quote before the event, cover it with a sheet of paper, and reveal the quote when you are ready.

Discuss with the group: In what ways do you think life is like a river? What are some examples of rapids in a river of life? Examples of smooth waters?

0:25-0:40 River of Life Activity

Tell participants they are now going to create their own river of life.

Ask each person to take a sheet of 11 x 17 paper and markers/crayons and to draw the banks of a river that is at least five inches wide, flowing diagonally up or down the paper from corner to corner (any direction). Next, ask participants to divide and label the river crosswise into time segments, up to their current age. For example, adults might use ten-year intervals (0–10 years, 10–20 years, etc.) and teens might use three-year intervals. Make sure there is room in each section of the river to write a few short sentences describing one or two significant experiences. Have extra paper on hand.

Ask participants to take a pen or pencil and list occasions in their lives that hold deep meaning for them, such as a school graduation, memorable vacation, moment of close friendship, being recognized at work, and life-cycle events (birth of a grandchild or sibling, becoming b-mitzvah, getting engaged, etc.). Allocate about 15 minutes for this activity, and encourage conversation among family members.

0:40-0:55 Identifying feelings

Focus the attention of the group on the front of the room. Write the heading “Feelings” on the whiteboard.