

Better questions for the people you love

These cards are conversation starters for memory nights, long drives, hospital visits, and any table where the generations sit together. Each one invites a story, not a fact — the kind of answer a family keeps.

How to use them

- Print single-sided on ordinary paper or light card stock, and cut along the dashed lines.
- Draw one card and let everyone at the table answer, eldest and youngest both.
- Put a phone in the middle of the table, recording. The stories these cards start are exactly the ones worth keeping.
- “Pass” is always allowed. The quiet ones are often just waiting for the right card.

Keeping what they start

Move recordings somewhere safe the same day, labeled with people and date. If your family wants a private, permanent home for them, a DearestEllie archive is free — but a shoebox and a shared folder are honorable archives too.

Print freely, and share with any family or program that could use them.

BEGINNINGS

What is your earliest memory — not the story you were told, the one you actually remember?

DearestEllie

BEGINNINGS

What did the kitchen of your childhood home smell like?

DearestEllie

BEGINNINGS

Who named you, and do you know why they chose your name?

DearestEllie

BEGINNINGS

What did you want to be when you were ten?

DearestEllie

BEGINNINGS

What was dinnertime like in the house you grew up in?

DearestEllie

BEGINNINGS

What did you do on summer evenings as a child?

DearestEllie

BEGINNINGS

What were you afraid of as a child that seems funny now?

DearestEllie

PLACES

Describe the view from a window you looked out of often.

DearestEllie

PLACES

What place, if you stood in it right now, would bring everything back?

DearestEllie

PLACES

Where did you go when you needed to be alone?

DearestEllie

PLACES

What was the first trip you ever took without your parents?

DearestEllie

PLACES

Is there a place you loved that no longer exists?

DearestEllie

PLACES

What did your street sound like in the morning?

DearestEllie

PEOPLE

Who was kind to you when they didn't have to be?

DearestEllie

PEOPLE

Tell me about your best friend when you were young.

DearestEllie

PEOPLE

Who in your family were you most like — and who told you so?

DearestEllie

PEOPLE

What do you remember about your grandparents' hands?

DearestEllie

PEOPLE

Who taught you something no school ever could?

DearestEllie

PEOPLE

Is there someone you wish I could have met? Tell me about them.

DearestEllie

PEOPLE

Who made you laugh until you couldn't breathe?

DearestEllie

WORK & MAKING

What was your first job, and what did you buy with the first money you earned?

DearestEllie

WORK & MAKING

What is something you made with your own hands that you were proud of?

DearestEllie

WORK & MAKING

What did a hard day's work look like for you?

DearestEllie

WORK & MAKING

What is something you were unexpectedly good at?

DearestEllie

WORK & MAKING

What did you teach yourself that nobody showed you?

DearestEllie

WORK & MAKING

Was there work you loved that nobody thought of as work?

DearestEllie

LOVE & FAMILY

How did you meet the person you loved most?

DearestEllie

LOVE & FAMILY

What do you remember about the day each of your children arrived?

DearestEllie

LOVE & FAMILY

What was your family's way of showing love without saying it?

DearestEllie

LOVE & FAMILY

What tradition did you keep alive because someone you loved kept it first?

DearestEllie

LOVE & FAMILY

What song can you not hear without thinking of someone?

DearestEllie

LOVE & FAMILY

What did you learn about love the hard way?

DearestEllie

LOVE & FAMILY

Tell me about a meal you'll never forget — who was at the table?

DearestEllie

TURNING POINTS

What is a decision that changed the direction of your life?

DearestEllie

TURNING POINTS

Tell me about a time you were braver than you felt.

DearestEllie

TURNING POINTS

What is something you lost that taught you something?

DearestEllie

TURNING POINTS

When did you feel most proud of yourself — not of what you did, but of who you were?

DearestEllie

TURNING POINTS

What did you survive that you weren't sure you would?

DearestEllie

TURNING POINTS

What almost happened — the move, the job, the person — that would have made everything different?

DearestEllie

JOY & ORDINARY DAYS

What did an ordinary good day look like at the happiest time of your life?

DearestEllie

JOY & ORDINARY DAYS

What food do you still crave the way it was made back then?

DearestEllie

JOY & ORDINARY DAYS

What did you do just for the joy of it, that nobody ever paid you for?

DearestEllie

JOY & ORDINARY DAYS

What made you laugh this week? What made you laugh fifty years ago?

DearestEllie

JOY & ORDINARY DAYS

What is a small luxury you never learned to feel guilty about?

DearestEllie

JOY & ORDINARY DAYS

What smell brings back a whole world?

DearestEllie

WHAT YOU CARRY

What do you know for certain?

DearestEllie

WHAT YOU CARRY

What do you hope people remember when they think of you — and what do you suspect they'll actually remember?

DearestEllie

WHAT YOU CARRY

What is something you never got to say to someone? You could say it now.

DearestEllie

WHAT YOU CARRY

What would you tell yourself at twenty-five?

DearestEllie

WHAT YOU CARRY

What are you still curious about?

DearestEllie

WHAT YOU CARRY

What do you want the youngest person in this family to know about where they come from?

DearestEllie

WHAT YOU CARRY

Is there a story you've never told because nobody ever asked?

DearestEllie