



## StoryCorps Memory Loss Initiative Interview Tips

Here are some tips for interviewing someone affected by memory loss. For a list of question ideas for interviewers, see our [StoryCorps Memory Loss Initiative Question List](#) below.

- Keep in mind that the goal of the interview is to share general stories and emotions, not to focus on exact facts, names, or details.
  
- Use short sentences. Try not to combine two ideas. For example, it's best to ask, "How did it feel growing up during the Depression?" and then, later, follow up with "Did you feel poor?" rather than combining the two thoughts.
  
- Speak at a normal rate - not too slow, but not too fast.
  
- Keep in mind that it might take a while for someone to process a question or come up with an answer. Be patient. Don't follow up with another question right away.
  
- A little prompting may be necessary. It may be helpful to provide some information before you ask a question. For example, you might say, "I know you and dad met at a school dance. I wonder how you felt when you first saw him."
  
- You might have to phrase the same question a number of different ways before a person understands it. Here is an example:
  - "Tell me about your brother, John."
  - "You and your brother John are so close now. Why do you think that's the case?"
  - "It seems as if your brother John has always been your favorite brother. Why do you think that is?"

- Don't hesitate to share some of your own stories about the storyteller with him or her during the interview. Those stories often spark a memory or just delight the person.
- Be general when you ask a question. Instead of asking about the "happiest" or "hardest" times in the person's life, ask about "happy times" or "hard times."
- If someone goes off-topic, go with him or her. Sometimes the best conversations happen this way. You can always redirect the person to your original question later.
- Assure the storyteller that it's okay to ask for clarification. It's okay to say, "I don't remember." You can simply rephrase a question or ask a new question and return to the topic later.
- Be aware that the interview experience might evoke some of your own emotions - emotions you may not have realized were so close to the surface. It will probably bring you much joy, but it also can also evoke feelings of loss or sorrow.
- Enjoy the opportunity to share the stories, thoughts, and emotional closeness that comes with this experience.

## **StoryCorps Memory Loss Initiative Question List**

Here are some examples of the type of questions you may want to ask in your interview. You may also choose to come up with your own questions.

### **Family & Growing Up**

When you think of your parents (insert names), what do you remember about them?

What were you like as a child? Troublemaker? Studious? Social? Etc.

What did you do for fun when you were young?

Tell me about your sister/brother (insert name). What was (s)he like growing up?

Tell me about the community (insert name) where you grew up.

How would you describe yourself as a teenager?

Do you have any favorite stories from school about your teachers or friends?

Did you enjoy school? What did you like/dislike about school?

Were there family or friends that scared you growing up? Were you a curious, questioning kind of kid? What types of kids did you prefer to play with?

### **Love & Relationships**

How did you feel when you first met (insert names) mom, dad, or a special person?

Do you have stories from your marriage/relationship or about your husband/wife/partner that you think about sometimes?

How did you feel when you first found out you were going to be a parent?

Do you think that being a parent (Mom or Dad) has changed you?

Do you have stories about your kids' (insert names) growing up that you think about sometimes?

(Insert name) seems to be one of your favorite relatives. Why?

If you could write a letter to your mother or father, what would you say?

If you could write a letter to your children, what would you say?

### **Work**

Did you have any dreams as a child about what you would like to be when you grew up?

Tell me about your work (insert type of work done).

Did you like your job? What did you like/dislike about work (insert type of work)?

What made you proud when you were working?

You have frequently mentioned (insert name) as someone who helped you at work or who acted as your mentor or guide. Can you tell me about him/her?

## **Religion & Spirituality**

For as long as I've known you, you've been religious/spiritual (or not religious/spiritual). Can you tell me about your religious/spiritual beliefs?

What formed your religious beliefs? Did your beliefs change at one time in your life?

How important is religion/spirituality in your life?

## **Life's Joys & Concerns**

Can you tell me about some of the good times when you were in (name place)?

You've always enjoyed music (insert a hobby, passion, skill that the person had or has). What are some of your favorite songs?

You have a photo of (insert name) on your living room table. What is the story of that picture of you and your brother on the living room table? Can you tell me about him/her/it?

You survived/experienced The Depression, The Civil Rights Movement, WWII, The Korean War, (or another major national or world movement). Can you tell me a story about that time?

I know that (name incident or time period) was a difficult time for you. What made it so much harder than other things in your life? Can you tell me something about that?

Is there something that always scares you? What? Why?

Is there something that always worries you ? What? Why?

We all feel lonely from time to time. Are there times you feel or have felt lonely, left out or sad?

Do you look at your life differently now than you did before you realized you were experiencing memory loss?

## **An Opportunity to Share Feelings**

Is there anything that you've never told me but want to tell me now?

Is there something about me that you've always wanted to know but never have asked?

I'd like to tell you what you mean to me. May I?