

## How to Interview Elders

Elders have a wealth of information to share. Once they are gone, so are their stories. We need their stories to keep their memory alive. We need to share their stories partly to learn about them and to learn about ourselves. Has anyone ever told you that you laugh like your mom or that you sound just like her on the phone? Do you know why? Our grandparents, great grandparents, tia abuelas and others have much experience and wisdom to share. Listen closely and be patient. Always ask for permission to ask the questions and write down or record their answers.

### The Interview

You can do your interview in a variety of ways. One is an in-person, face-to-face meeting with your relative. Find a quiet place for the interview, have questions ready and a way to record the answers, either in writing or electronically recorded. If you are using your phone to capture the interview, make sure the sound and picture are working correctly and that you have enough battery or a power source. If an in-person interview is not possible, you can try to do one on the phone or by zoom.

It is most important to be prepared for your interview. Keep in mind that if you ask a question and they say they don't remember just move on to the next question. You can always come back later and rephrase or ask the question again. Remember to listen carefully. There might be some topics your relative won't want to answer. Respect their wishes and move on.

You can center your questions on your family member's own life like their occupation, their hobbies or what their life was like during a particular time in their life. You can ask about the entire family, their siblings, their cousins and any others important to the family.

Take all the information you are given. You never know what details will spark your story and it's best to keep as much info as you can. Always begin by asking their full name and birthdate, just for the record.

Many of the questions could each spark good stories. Expand on the details of the answers to make your stories more interesting and meaningful. If one answer leads to another, ask it! Listen and ask questions accordingly.

NOTE: A few questions you might ask are suggested on the other side.

On other Cultura Kit activity cards, we will explain how to develop your stories and even make photo/illustrated books about your stories.



## Questions to Ask

Here are some basic sample questions that can be used as you interview family members:

- Where were you born? Were you born in a hospital or at home? (Are there birth/baptismal certificates that can be copied?)
- Were you named for another family member or a famous person? Where did your name come from? Did you have a nickname when you were younger?
- What was your family like? How many brothers and sisters do you have? What are their names? And what are their birthdates.
- Did you know your grandparents? What were their names? Do you have any special memories about them?
- Can you remember something you did as a family when you were young? What were holidays like in your home? What was the biggest holiday your family celebrated?
- How did your parents meet? Why did they decide to get married? Where did they marry? What was the ceremony like? (Are marriage certificates available?)
- Do you have any family keepsakes that we can look at? (Take photos if possible.)
- Do you have any family photos you can share? (Take photos or scan if you can.)
- Where did you live? What was your home like? Did you move around or did you stay in the same place? Did you share a bedroom with your siblings? Where did you sleep?
- Did your parents both work? What were their jobs? Do you remember a particular story about their jobs?
- Tell me about where you went to school? What was your school like? Who was your favorite teacher? What was your favorite thing about school? What was your least favorite thing about school? Can you tell me about something at your school that you will always remember? (If they graduated or went to college ask about that as well.)
- What was a typical day like when you were little? How about as a teenager, what were you like? What did you want to be when you grew up?
- What was your first job? How old were you? Did you like your work?
- Who did the cooking in your home? Do you remember a favorite meal? Whose recipe was it?
- How did you meet your spouse? When did you get engaged/married? Were you in love? How did you know?
- What did you like to do together before the children were born?
- How did your lives change when babies came into the family? How did you decide on names for the babies?
- What jobs did you have over the years?
- What was your favorite free time activity?
- How did your family celebrate holidays and special events?
- Was there any event or time that was meaningful to your life? Tell us about it.
- What kind of music is your favorite? Can you dance? Did you have a favorite dance partner?
- Is there something you accomplished in your life that you are particularly proud of?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your life, something you want us to remember or know about you?

