



BRINGING JOY TO ELDERLY PARENTS DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

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This will be an unusual year for the holidays, as many of us will not have the ability to travel and be with our loved ones. Since we find ourselves connecting with family via Zoom more often these days, we thought we would send along a few ideas for bringing some virtual joy to your family visits, especially for your elderly parents and grandparents. We've gathered a list of three ideas for joyfully communicating, even if remotely, in this challenging time.

1. Interview your loved ones.

Make the next family Zoom call or one-on-one conversation an interview of your parents or grandparents.

Why an interview?

- *To get closer.* [Psychologists](#) have found that intimacy, even between strangers, can be accelerated by asking each other a specific series of "sustained, escalating, reciprocal, personal" questions. In other words, they found answering a series of personal questions could help even strangers fall in love...in a lab. Now imagine the impact of these questions with your own family! Being vulnerable with another person can be difficult, and a set of interview questions can help ease into it.
- *To reduce loneliness.* Kate Murphy, author of "You're Not Listening: What You're Missing and Why It Matters", found the closer we feel toward someone, the less likely we are to listen carefully to them. It's called the closeness-communication bias. It turns out that a lack of listening is a primary contributor to feelings of loneliness. And loneliness is widespread. A 2018 [survey](#) of 20,000 Americans found that almost half of them said they did not have a meaningful in-person social interaction, such as having an extended conversation with a friend, on a daily basis. And that was long before COVID.
- *To make interactions more meaningful.* The current political and health climate means conversations can quickly slip into a regurgitation of the daily news cycle. This can leave out what is really on people's minds — their joys, struggles, hopes, and fears. A specific set of intentional interview questions can deepen the conversation beyond the headlines.



What questions to ask?

You could draw on the New York Times' viral [36 Questions That Lead to Love](#), based on the original study that helped strangers fall in love in a lab, or the questions put together by the non-profit [Story Corps](#). We've included some of our favorites below:



Questions for adult children or grandchildren to ask:

1. Can you tell me about the kindest thing someone has ever done for you?
2. Can you tell me about someone who has had a big influence on your life? What lessons did that person teach you?
3. What is your favorite memory of me?
4. How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?
5. Are there things about me that you've always wanted to know but have never asked?
6. Turn the tables: tell the person you're interviewing what they've meant to you.



Questions for young children to ask:

1. Where did you grow up?
2. What was your childhood like?
3. Who were your favorite relatives?
4. What was my mom/dad like growing up?
5. Do you remember any songs that you used to sing to her/him? Can you sing them now?
6. What were your parents like? What were your grandparents like?

2. Help them record their legacy.

Often the intangibles of relationships - heritage, stories, values, and experience - are the true "legacy" that aging parents are most keen to pass down. Hire a ghost writer to help them translate their memories into words...or even a book. Services like www.ka-writing.com can help you pair an aging parent with a ghost writer, who will interview them over two or three sessions, and help organize their stories into written form. Alternately, services like [Personal Legacy Advisors](#) can provide video services.

3. Just being there.

Even though it may not seem like much, socializing with your parents could be the biggest happiness boost for them. A recent study in the Journal of Financial Planning studied what people like to do versus what they actually do in retirement. Socializing beat out all other activities on the happiness scale by a wide margin.

The Importance of Time Allocation

How Retirees Spend Their Time Is Linked to Happiness

	Average Time Spent (Hours)	Average Happiness (Scale of 6)
Watching television	3.05	3.26
Work/volunteer	1.39	3.74
Walk/exercise	0.66	3.88
Health activities	0.29	2.65
Travel/commute	0.74	3.60
Socializing	1.68	4.56
Stay at home alone	2.81	3.71
Run errands	0.61	3.75

Guo, Tao, Cheng, Yuanshan, Gibson, Philip and Pantuosco, Louis J. "Time Allocations and Self-Reported Happiness of Retirees: An Exploratory Study." Journal of Financial Planning, 2019.

However you celebrate the holidays this year, we hope you have a safe and joyous time with your family and loved ones.