



The Science of Family History

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Family History is now a multibillion-dollar industry and science is playing a greater role each year. How do the generations before us make up who we are and what we do? New research is shedding more light on how connecting to our family story can help children and adults cope with the effects of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Stories connect us

Connecting with our family story is something we can all do, and everyone wants to belong to something bigger than themselves. Natalie Merrill and Roby Fivush talk about “intergenerational connections” in their research and how this affects identity and development. Bruce Feiler said, “The single most important thing you can do for your family may be the simplest of all: develop a strong family narrative.” A family narrative is built on how connected families are to each other and to their family stories. Most people these days are more concerned about their Wi-Fi connections than they are about their family connections.

Stories heal us

Science says that telling family stories is good for you. Martha Driessnack notes that the key element, “for both the teller and the listener, is the sharing of positive moments, alongside the ability to bounce back from difficult ones.” Those that do this have been shown to handle stress better. This is especially true when children were tested using a “Do You Know” (DYK) scale. Here are a few examples from the scale:

1. Do you know how your parents met? Y N
2. Do you know where some of your grandparents grew up? Y N
3. Do you know the source of your name? Y N

4. Do you know some of the lessons that your parents learned from good or bad experiences? Y N

Family stories, both the good and the difficult, can heal us and provide strength. Results are similar with adults.

How do I tell my family story?

You are probably thinking, nobody wants to hear my story. But those closest to you would probably not agree, and, like was mentioned above, it's good for you. Remember that you can capture your story and preserve it forever for free on FamilySearch.org. You can also connect with others who can help you tell the family story. As you consider your story, remember that there are two parts:

Step 1 – Find a story

There are many ways to do this. Here are a few ideas:

1. Scroll through your camera roll, is there a story?
2. Where were you on 9/11, what happened?
3. What is the greatest piece of advice you've been given?
4. Who is a person you admire and why?
5. What do you want to be remembered for?

Step 2 – Share your story

The best stories are the ones that get shared. Try to find someone who you can share it with in person, maybe at dinner or a family event. You can also share it via text, WhatsApp, or using social media. If you want to keep it short, make a meme or record an audio clip.

Should you choose not to share your story, writing it down can still provide stability and healing. What Driessnack says is true. Both the teller and listener play important roles. A good way to get started might simply be through listening to someone else. Ask questions and be a good listener.

Next steps

The most important thing is to remove the belief that your story doesn't matter. Tell your story! Keep trying, keep searching, and keeping asking questions.

Sources

1. "The Ties That Bind Us," Bruce Feiler
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4. "Intergenerational narratives and identity across development," Natalie Merrill, Robyn Fivush