

## **Navigating Family Engagement Today**

### **Sharing Your Family Stories**

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One of the things that can make children and adults feel safe and cared for is to be part of something larger than themselves. Membership or participation in schools, religious organizations, and other groups can shift as people move out of a community, graduate, grow, and change. The one constant in most of our lives is family.

While the family may be primary and constant, many children don't know very much about their family history. We may intend to tell them stories about how their great-grandparent or other family member grew up in a different country, or what it was like when you were a kid, but we often don't have time in our busy lives.

Now that we have time at home with our families, it might be the perfect opportunity to spend some of those extra hours introducing our children to our families' stories.

Here are a few suggestions to help you get started:

- Get that box of old pictures out of the attic, drawer, or closet and look through it with your children. There may be pictures of people you don't recognize, but many you will know or know about. Tell your children about the people you remember and include some stories about them. These stories not only let them "meet the family," they also tell them about the values that have been important to their family. If you do this slowly over time, they will become more acquainted where they came from and who they are. Make sure the pictures are labeled so the children will know who people are in the future.
- Use this time to encourage your children to learn about their family from other family members. Help them develop interview questions for some of the older members of the family. Questions might include: Where were you born? What stories do you have about your close family (siblings, aunts uncles/cousins)? What was it like growing up in \_\_\_\_\_ (if family members were born in another region)? These conversations can happen online (Skype, Zoom, FaceTime, WhatsApp, etc.), by phone, or even through written correspondence like email or physical letters.
- Don't ignore any family members because of their age. They may know stories you have forgotten or never heard.
- Using any of the devices or apps already mentioned, children can make new friendships with family members closer to their age (e.g. cousins) who may live far away and don't know well.
- Work with your child to develop a family tree. This can be a very simple pencil and paper drawing that goes as far back as you remember or it can be elaborate and involve some research. There are online resources you could use, as well. This could become a piece of art in the family home.

These activities will help children know more about who they are – something important that can focus us, especially in difficult times. It will also provide a meaningful way for you and your children to work together and create your own new memories of the time you taught them about their family during the COVID-19 quarantine.

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