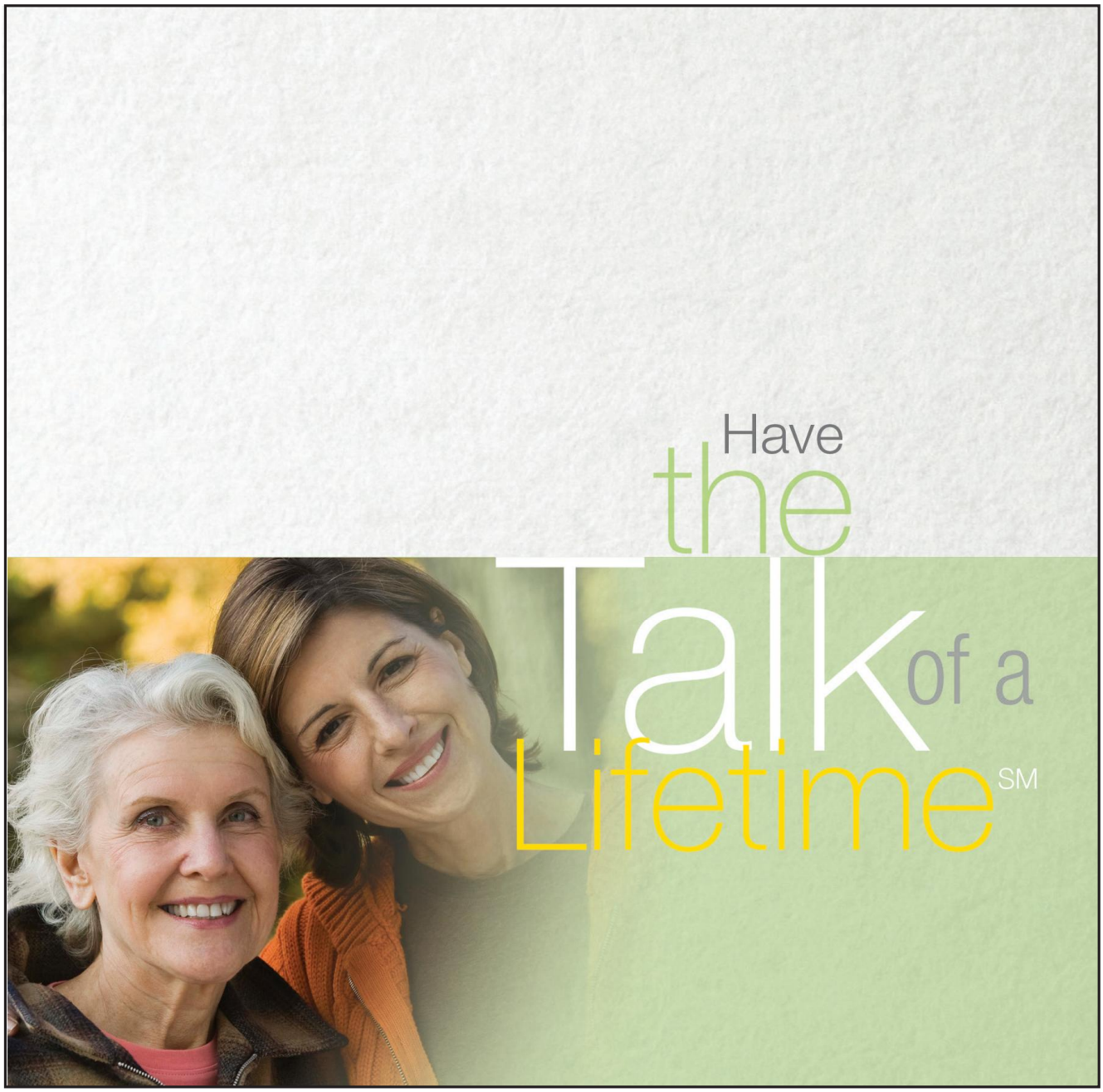

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Life.

There's a Lot to Talk About

There's so much we experience in our lives. There are the big moments that shape us – graduation, a first job, falling in love and getting married, having children, seeing children grow into adulthood. When we reflect on our lives, it's these memories and milestones that may come to mind first.

But a life story is so much more than that. The small moments and people we meet along life's journey are a part of us and helped shape who we are and what we value.

Although we may know about some of the big moments in the lives of our loved ones, we may not know much about the other experiences and people who helped shape them.

Sitting down with our loved ones to talk about their lives can be rich and satisfying. Learning about memorable events and people, places and favorite activities, values and lessons they have learned, can help bring us closer to those we care about most.

Family

Friends

Hopes

Dreams

Accomplishments

Pleasures

Talents

Values

The little details

The big events

Having the talk of a lifetime can make the difference of a lifetime. It can help reacquaint us with our loved ones and help us get to know them in a new and different way.

Finding a way to start talking with a loved one may be the most difficult part; we might find that once the conversation starts, it may be hard to stop.

You mattered.

Deep down, most of us want to know that we, in some way, made a difference in this world – that we mattered to someone, and that after we die, we will be fondly remembered by those who knew and cared for us.

When grieving a death, memorialization – taking time to honor the life of a loved one in a meaningful way – and remembering the difference a loved one made in our lives can be an important step in the journey toward healing.

Today, there are so many ways we can remember and honor the unique people in our lives. Memorialization can be a personal experience that reflects the personal values, interests and experiences of our loved ones and helps those who are left behind to remember those who matter most.

Sharing stories and reflecting on a person's life offer opportunities to remember how our loved ones shaped and influenced our lives. Acknowledging the importance of loved ones in our lives is an essential step in the healing process.

Having the talk of a lifetime is the first step.

Make the difference of a lifetime.

You can have the talk of a lifetime with anyone you hold dear – your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, a spouse. It can happen anywhere you and your loved one are most comfortable – over a meal, at home, on a walk, while playing a game. The talk can be between you and your loved one, or you could include others, like family or friends. Your conversation can take place at any time – not just at the end of life.

Sometimes, using a visual prompt, such as a photo album, souvenir or memento, can be a great way to start a conversation. Memorable locations, such as the church where your loved one was married or a favorite park can also help someone begin to open up and share their story.

A conversation might start this way: “Mom, I’ve always liked this photo of you and Uncle Tom. Tell me about when this was taken.” “I know grandpa taught you to fish on Green Lake. Tell me what you remember about that first fish you caught.” “Honey, I know you and your friends always hung out at Benny’s Diner in high school. Has it changed much since you and your friends went there?”

As much as you will gain by getting to know your loved one better, having the talk should be a dialogue. It’s an opportunity for you to share some of the ways they have impacted your life and the lives of others.

For example, you could share a memory about a vacation you took together and will always remember, a piece of advice that you cherish, a song that reminds you of them or the ways you will never forget them.

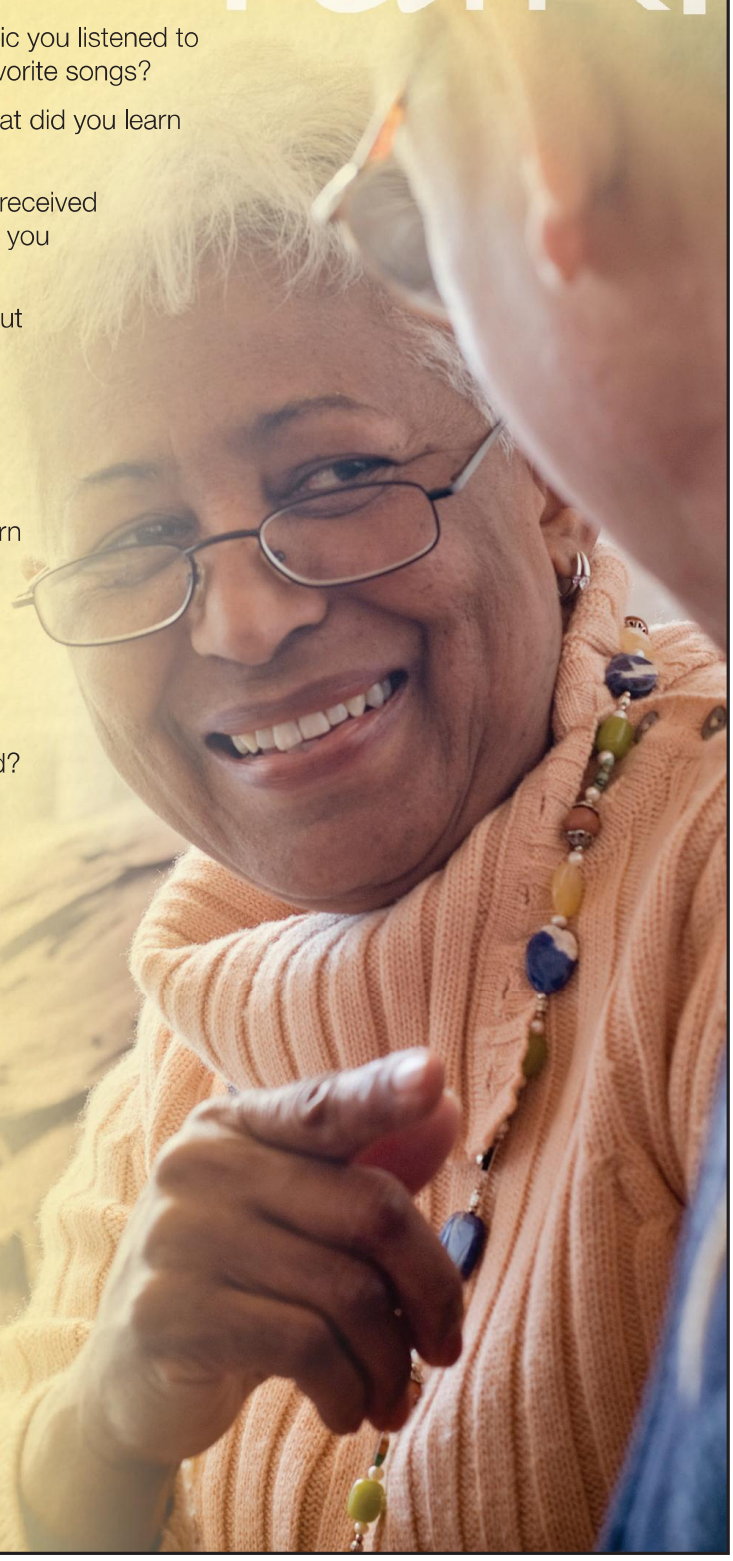
Doing so will help them understand how they have impacted your life. They will see that they matter to you.

Have the Talk.

The list below offers some ideas for questions that might help get the conversation started or help your loved one share their story.

- What did your parents think of the music you listened to growing up? What are some of your favorite songs?
- Tell me about your favorite teacher. What did you learn from him or her?
- What was the one piece of advice you received from your parents or grandparents that you never forgot?
- Where did you and your friends hang out when you were in high school?
- What is your proudest achievement?
- Tell me about the most memorable summer you had growing up.
- Tell me about your first job. Did you learn something from a boss or a co-worker that's helped you over the years?
- Tell me about one of the most difficult things you've had to endure. What did you learn from it?
- How do you hope you are remembered?
- What do you not want people to forget about you?
- How would you like your family and friends to commemorate your life when you die? Is there something special you would like us to do for you?

There are no rules for how to have the talk, only that you make time to do so. Everyone has a story to tell and there's always something more that we can learn about the one-of-a-kind lives our loved ones have led.



We had the talk. What happens next?

- **Having the talk doesn't have to be a one-time occurrence.** Rather, think of it as the beginning of a dialogue during which you can openly talk about any number of things – from reflecting on the past to planning for the future.
- **When you talk with your loved one, you might want to document what is said.** You may wish to take notes during or after your conversation, or make an audio recording. You should choose whatever method seems most appropriate and comfortable given the setting of your conversation.
- **The things you discuss may be helpful in the future when your family must make important decisions about how you wish to remember and honor your loved one when they die.** These shared reflections may help your family memorialize your loved one in a way that honors their life while giving you, your family and other friends a chance to reminisce and say goodbye.
- **Memorialization has changed to better meet the needs of today's families and enables them to tell the story of their loved one.** Funeral professionals, like those who are part of the Funeral and Memorial Information Council, support families as they plan services that are personal and meaningful – services that help families heal by reflecting on the way their loved one indelibly changed their lives.
- **Funeral professionals are available to support and encourage you and your family and provide resources to guide important conversations about all of your memorialization options.** Whether your family desires something traditional or something different, there is always room for personalization. A celebration of life should be as unique as the individual being remembered.
- **What is most important is that you take time to honor and remember the people who matter.**

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