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Legacy Projects

Leaving a legacy becomes especially important as we get older or during serious illness. Knowing loved ones will have a way of remembering us can be a great comfort. Whether you are aging, seriously ill, or just want to try legacy work, we hope these tips help you create a meaningful legacy project. Loved ones, caregivers, and care team members can also benefit from this information.

What is a legacy project?

A legacy project is a physical item (or recording) that captures something about a person that can be seen, heard, read, or touched. Legacy projects can include:

- Biographical information and life events
- Awards and accomplishments
- Spiritual or faith traditions
- Keepsakes and tokens
- Audio recordings or music
- Photos, videos, or other images

These projects can be used as daily reminders, brought out on special days, passed on, and treasured for generations. This can help loved ones hold gratitude for the past, process grief, and eventually incorporate the loss into their lives.

Legacy project ideas

There is no right or wrong way to create a legacy project. They are as unique as each person. They can be as easy or as in-depth as you need them to be. Do whatever best suits your situation.

Several ideas are listed below or look online for more inspiration.

- **Autobiographies, life timelines, and memoirs:** Complete the booklet, *My Life Story: A Brief Autobiography* (see “Tips for helping someone complete *My Life Story*” on the back of this page) or search online for life timeline templates and memoir guidelines.
- **Digital recordings and music:** Collect past recordings, create new recordings, or make a playlist of the person’s favorite songs to share with loved ones.

Tips for helping someone complete *My Life Story*

- **Cards and letters:** Have the person fill out birthday cards, cards for other milestones, or write letters that can be passed out on special days in the future.
- **Photos:** Framed photos can be placed in the person's room and passed to loved ones later. Or collect pictures in an album or photobook.
- **Memory books or boxes:** Gather clippings, small personal items, quotes, and other souvenirs to add to a scrapbook or place inside a memory box.
- **Handprints or thumbprints:** Hand- or thumbprints can be taken with ink and paper or air-dry clay and made into jewelry, bookmarks, keychains, and more.
- **Cremation gifts:** If the person chooses to be cremated, there are many options for incorporating a small portion of the ashes into jewelry, sculptures, artwork, etc.
- **Arts and crafts:** Work with the person on a simple craft project, such as coloring, a small painting, sculpting clay, doing a puzzle, etc., and save the project as a special keepsake.
- **Cookbooks:** Collect the person's favorite recipes, family recipes, or cooking and entertainment tips in a book to share with loved ones.
- **Pocket cards:** Quotes, messages, prayers, images, etc., can be printed on small cards, laminated, and handed out to friends and family to be carried as daily reminders.

Please contact us if you need more support. We are here for you!

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- **Explain what you are doing and ask the person for consent.** "I'd like to make a short biography in your honor. Can I ask you some questions about your life?"
- **Consider asking the person to try another legacy project if they prefer not to talk.** If the person cannot speak, some families or close friends may be able to complete *My Life Story* on their behalf.
- **Read "Tips for creating your autobiography"** at the front of *My Life Story* before you start.
- **Choose a setting and time that works best for the person.** Be sure the person is alert and as comfortable as possible. Allow plenty of time for the interview so you don't have to rush. Try a few shorter sessions over time, if possible.
- **Sit near the person and make eye contact** as you ask questions, write answers, and listen.
- **Embrace silence after open-ended questions.** Allowing the person to pause and think about their answers can encourage them to share more.
- **Consider recording the interview,** either as audio or a video. Always ask the person for consent before recording. The recording can serve as the biography or the conversation can be transcribed later.
- **Skip items that do not apply or seem upsetting to the person.** Keep in mind even the simplest questions could be distressing to some people.
- **Extra space is provided for the person to add more thoughts.**
 - Some people may share things that could be hurtful to others. In this case, allow the person to tell their story, listen without judgment, and take notes.
 - You might suggest edits so the person can speak their truth in a way that does not offend others.
 - Some people may share troubling stories. If the person shares information that is alarming to you, let us know so we can provide support.