

## The Do You Know Scale

Please answer the following questions by circling "Y" for "yes" or "N" for "no." Even if you know the information we are asking about, you don't need to write it down. We just wish to know if you know the information.

1. Do you know how your parents met? Y N
2. Do you know where your mother grew up? Y N
3. Do you know where your father grew up? Y N
4. Do you know where some of your grandparents grew up? Y N
5. Do you know where some of your grandparents met? Y N
6. Do you know where your parents were married? Y N
7. Do you know what went on when you were being born? Y N
8. Do you know the source of your name? Y N
9. Do you know some things about what happened when your brothers or sisters were being born? Y N
10. Do you know which person in your family you look most like? Y N
11. Do you know which person in the family you act most like? Y N
12. Do you know some of the illnesses and injuries that your parents experienced when they were younger?  
Y N
13. Do you know some of the lessons that your parents learned from good or bad experiences? Y N
14. Do you know some things that happened to your mom or dad when they were in school? Y N
15. Do you know the national background of your family (such as English, German, Russian, etc)? Y N
16. Do you know some of the jobs that your parents had when they were young? Y N
17. Do you know some awards that your parents received when they were young? Y N
18. Do you know the names of the schools that your mom went to? Y N
19. Do you know the names of the schools that your dad went to? Y N
20. Do you know about a relative whose face "froze" in a grumpy position because he or she did not smile enough? Y N

Score: Total number answered Y.

Important Note: About that last question! Fifteen percent of our sample actually answered "Yes!" This is because the stories that families tell are not always "true." More often than not they are told in order to teach a lesson or help with a physical or emotional hurt. As such, they may be modified as needed. The accuracy of the stories is not really critical. In fact, there are often disagreements among family members about what really happened! These disagreements then become part of the family narrative. Not to worry!

Dr. Duke and Dr. Fivush asked those questions of four dozen families in the summer of 2001, and taped several of their dinner table conversations. They then compared the children's results to a battery of psychological tests the children had taken, and reached an overwhelming conclusion. The more children knew about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem and the more successfully they believed their families functioned. The "Do You Know?" scale turned out to be the best single predictor of children's emotional health and happiness.

"Once again," Dr. Duke said, "the ones who knew more about their families proved to be more resilient, meaning they could moderate the effects of stress." Why does knowing where your grandmother went to school help a child overcome something as minor as a skinned knee or as major as a terrorist attack?

"The answers have to do with a child's sense of being part of a larger family," Dr. Duke said. Psychologists have found that every family has a unifying narrative, he explained, and those narratives take one of three shapes. First, the ascending family narrative: "Son, when we came to this country, we had nothing. Our family worked. We opened a store. Your grandfather went to high school. Your father went to college. And now you. ..."

Second is the descending narrative: "Sweetheart, we used to have it all. Then we lost everything."

“The most healthful narrative,” Dr. Duke continued, “is the third one. It’s called the oscillating family narrative: ‘Dear, let me tell you, we’ve had ups and downs in our family. We built a family business. Your grandfather was a pillar of the community. Your mother was on the board of the hospital. But we also had setbacks. You had an uncle who was once arrested. We had a house burn down. Your father lost a job. But no matter what happened, we always stuck together as a family.’ ”

Dr. Duke said that children who have the most self-confidence have what he and Dr. Fivush call a strong “intergenerational self.” They know they belong to something bigger than themselves.

Jim Collins, a management expert and author of “Good to Great,” told me that successful human enterprises of any kind, from companies to countries, go out of their way to capture their core identity. In Mr. Collins’s terms, they “preserve core, while stimulating progress.” The same applies to families, he said.

Mr. Collins recommended that families create a mission statement similar to the ones companies and other organizations use to identify their core values. The military has also found that teaching recruits about the history of their service increases their camaraderie and ability to bond more closely with their unit. Dr. Duke recommended that parents pursue similar activities with their children. Any number of occasions work to convey this sense of history: holidays, vacations, big family get-togethers, even a ride to the mall. The hokier the family’s tradition, he said, the more likely it is to be passed down. He mentioned his family’s custom of hiding frozen turkeys and canned pumpkin in the bushes during Thanksgiving so grandchildren would have to “hunt for their supper,” like the Pilgrims.

“These traditions become part of your family,” Dr. Duke said. Decades of research have shown that most happy families communicate effectively. But talking doesn’t mean simply “talking through problems,” as important as that is. Talking also means telling a positive story about yourselves. When faced with a challenge, happy families, like happy people, just add a new chapter to their life story that shows them overcoming the hardship. This skill is particularly important for children, whose identity tends to get locked in during adolescence.

The bottom line: if you want a happier family, create, refine and retell the story of your family’s positive moments and your ability to bounce back from the difficult ones. That act alone may increase the odds that your family will thrive for many generations to come.

When stories are difficult, tell them anyway. Tell them with as much humor and openness as you can, she said. “Children deserve to be playful about who they are,” she said, “and to be proud, and to interpret their own stories into their own ideas.” And if a story brings up strong emotions for a child, let it. “Ask yourself if you’re the one who is uncomfortable,” she told me, and if I am, I need to either address it, or hide it, and let the children tell their stories.

Dr. Aronson told me, essentially, not to run away from those moments but to run toward them — not in order to push my daughter to tell her own stories when she doesn’t want to, but to make sure that those stories don’t become too scary to tell.

Sometimes, it takes courage to share stories. I think about widowed parents telling stories about lost partners to their children, or about grandparents telling stories of poverty, or children telling stories of bullying; I think about my younger daughter telling her stories. There may be some stories that are never publicly told, but as families, we are the keepers of one another’s stories, no matter how brutal they are. We have to find our own ways to tell them.

Often, we eventually recast stories in a different light. As Bruce said, “When faced with a challenge, happy families, like happy people, just add a new chapter to their life story that shows them overcoming the hardship” (and he is [no stranger to difficult stories](#)). But we have to share those stories to see them change. We have to practice. We have to learn how to change our hard stories, in life and in the retelling.

Not every story has to start happy. It’s telling them that helps us find our happy endings.

The DYK comprises 20 questions seeking knowledge about family history. The major criterion for inclusion in this set of questions was that they test knowledge of things that children could not possibly have learned first-hand, either because they happened before the children were born or they involved family members that were less familiar to them than parents and grandparents. Given this limitation, the children who knew the information would therefore have had to receive it from others through stories, writings or other indirect sources. As was mentioned by Bruce Feiler, in our research, higher scores on the DYK scale were associated with higher levels of self-esteem, an internal locus of control (a belief in one's own capacity to control what happens to him or her), better family functioning, lower levels of anxiety, fewer behavioral problems, and better chances for good outcomes if a child faces educational or emotional/behavioral difficulties.

I write this blog post because many people have written and asked us to send them the list of twenty DYK questions so they can be sure their children know what our test children knew. However, correlation is not causation. Simply knowing the answers to questions will not produce the good outcomes described above. The good outcomes as well as the knowledge of family history that the children possessed were all the result of something else. We have written about this "something else" in several publications and I quote from one of those publications here:

[Psychotherapy \(Chic\)](#). 2008 Jun;45(2):268-72. doi: 10.1037/0033-3204.45.2.268.

**Knowledge of family history as a clinically useful index of psychological well-being and prognosis: A brief report.**

[Duke MP](#), [Lazarus A](#), [Fivush R](#).

**Source:** Department of Psychology, Emory University.

#### **Abstract**

Based on an instance of "clinical lore" we assess the efficacy of children's and adolescents' knowledge of family history as an index of psychological well-being and potential for positive change in clinical and educational settings. We report that knowledge of family history is significantly correlated with internal locus of control, higher self-esteem, better family functioning, greater family cohesiveness, lower levels of anxiety, and lower incidence of behavior problems. We suggest that through the use of a brief measure of family knowledge, practicing clinicians can rapidly generate a data-based correlate of children's well-being and likelihood of overcoming psychological and educational challenges.

#### **“Do You Know...”**

##### **The power of family history in adolescent identity and well-being**

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#### **Abstract**

Family stories are theorized to be a critical part of adolescents' emerging identity and well-being, yet to date we know very little about adolescents' knowledge of their family history and intergenerational family stories. In this study, we expand our previous findings that pre-adolescent children who know more about their family history display higher levels of emotional well-being. Sixty-six broadly middle-class, mixed race, 14- to 16-year old adolescents from two-parent families were asked to complete a measure of family history, the "Do You Know..." scale (DYK), as well as multiple standardized measures of family functioning, identity development and well-being. Adolescents who report knowing more stories about their familial past show higher levels of emotional well-being, and also higher levels of identity achievement, even when controlling for general level of family functioning. Theoretical and clinical implications of these findings are discussed.

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**[“Do You Know...” | Journal of Family Life](#)**

[www.journaloffamilylife.org/doyouknow.html](http://www.journaloffamilylife.org/doyouknow.html)

Feb 23, 2010 - The power of *family history* in adolescent identity and *well-being* ... Theoretical and *clinical* implications of these findings are discussed. ... Please address correspondence to Robyn Fivush at Department of Psychology, 36 Eagle Row, ..... *Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 45, 268-272.

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