

Pop these questions

There's no set of magic questions that will unlock your father's secrets. "The key move is just taking a chance and opening your mouth," says psychologist John C. Friel, Ph.D., the author of *Adult Children: The Secrets of Dysfunctional Families*. These five can kick things off.

1

What was dinnertime like as a kid? This is a fairly non-threatening question, says Friel. It'll give you a sense of his family's dynamics and possible resentments, and how he has carried it forward.

2

What's your favorite movie? The dialogue sparked by this simple question can open quite a window, says Friel. You'll learn about his values, the people he finds attractive, and the things that make him laugh.

3

What's the greatest game you ever saw? You'll learn about history, his loyalties, and his loves. If you're lucky, says Friel, you'll hear about some mischief, too. At the very least, this question will loosen your father up.

4

Have you ever hit anybody? Even if he never took a swing, your father's response can reveal what pushed him and how he handled it. "It's like a good novel, where there's conflict and conflict resolved," Friel says.

5

Who was (or is) your best friend? You'll learn the traits he values. If his buddy is still in his life, ask what he'd miss if that person was gone. "You'll tap into his vulnerability and fears," says Friel.

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