



# THE GENERATION FACTOR

Research into the knowledge  
and wisdom passed down  
through families

## **Introduction**

We should celebrate the knowledge and wisdom held by our older generations. What it means to be old is changing. We now see older people leading the way on the cultural, business and international stages. Most are less well known. But every day they make a difference to communities, workplaces and families across the country.

This research gives a snapshot of the wealth of experience and knowhow being quietly passed down through families. From practical skills such as baking cakes and growing vegetables, to oral culture such as songs and family history, there's a real appetite to learn and keep this knowledge alive.

Swapping stories, skills and ideas across generations gives us an opportunity to discover what we all have in common and a chance to foster respect for the role older people play in our society.

We need to recognise the huge contribution older people make to families and communities everywhere as grandparents, carers and volunteers. All of us share the responsibility to tackle outdated stereotypes about age and challenge discrimination wherever we find it.

As we celebrate older people for who they are – often people with vitality, wisdom, energy and talent – not what age they are, let us remember to take an inclusive approach to age so that older people aren't excluded or isolated from the rest of society. By making new connections with the older people who live around you, you may learn something along the way.

**Mike O'Brien, Minister for Older People**

### **Note on the methodology**

Research was conducted via BMRB's in-home face-to-face omnibus, from 10 - 16 July 2008. A sample of 1003 adults, aged 15+ across Great Britain, were interviewed, the data was subsequently weighted to the known profile of this population.

## FAMILY KNOWLEDGE

The findings show a rich range of knowledge being passed down through families across the country. Family history is mostly likely to be passed down, followed by practical skills, stories and family recipes. This family wisdom is more likely to be passed onto women than men.

Table 1: People who agree different types of knowledge have been passed down through their family

Type of knowledge	Agree it has passed down through family (%)
Family history	65
Practical skills	59
Stories	51
Family recipes	48
Superstitions	43
Old wives' tales	43
Knowledge of natural world	42
Jokes	37
Traditional remedies for illness	35
Traditional songs, music, dances	33

Table 2: Breakdown of men and women who agree different types of knowledge have been passed down through their family

Knowledge or skill	Men (%)	Women (%)
Family history	61	69
Practical skills	56	61
Stories	48	53
Family recipes	37	58
Superstitions	34	52
Old wives' tales	32	53
Knowledge of natural world	37	47
Jokes	37	37
Traditional remedies for illness	28	42
Traditional songs, music, dances	25	40

## PRACTICAL KNOWHOW

Looking at specific skills, the findings show people have inherited a wide range of practical knowhow from their families, from playing party games to baking cookies and cakes.

Despite this, over three quarters of people believe this kind of knowledge is in danger of dying out. Women feel this slightly more than men and generally, the belief that we are losing these skills increases with age.

Table 3: Percentage of people who say they know how to do a wide range of practical things

Traditional skill	Know how to do it (%)
Play traditional party games	89
Cook a roast dinner	88
Bake cookies and cakes	81
Grow fruit and vegetables	80
Rewire a plug	80
Mend my own clothes	79
Play traditional card games	72
Jump start a car	67
Make jams and pickles	58
Hang a door	55
Make curtains	48
Do tapestry, embroidery or crochet	46
Make my own clothes	45
Make furniture from wood	38
Navigate using the sun and stars	31

Table 4: Percentage of people who agree this kind of knowledge is in danger of dying out

	%
Agree	77
Disagree	13

Table 5: Breakdown of men and women who agree this kind of knowledge is in danger of dying out

	Men (%)	Women (%)
Agree	74	79
Disagree	14	12

Table 6: Breakdown by age showing agreement that this kind of knowledge is in danger of dying out

	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Agree	62%	70%	82%	84%	80%	81%
Disagree	25%	15%	6%	9%	9%	13%

## THE GENERATION FACTOR

There's a general acceptance that this wisdom is held by the older generations. Around three quarters of people agree that their parents' and grandparents' generations are more likely to hold this knowledge than people their own age.

This shows turning to parents, grandparents, older friends and relatives for this kind of practical knowhow could be the best way to swot up on traditional skills.

Table 7: Percentage of people who agree that their **parents'** generation is more likely to have this practical knowhow than someone their age

Agree	73%
Disagree	14%

Table 8: Percentage of people who agree that their **grandparents'** generation is more likely to have this practical knowhow than someone their age

Agree	76%
Disagree	14%

## APPETITE AND MOTIVATION TO LEARN

When asked, over two thirds of people said they would like to learn some of this practical knowhow. Appetite to learn is high amongst both men and women and is generally higher among younger age groups.

Reasons why people want to learn vary – for fun and to save money are the top two motivators.

Table 9: Percentage of people who agree they would like to learn some of this practical knowhow

<b>Agree</b>	68%
<b>Disagree</b>	32%

Table 10: Breakdown of men and women who agree they would like to learn some of this practical knowhow

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Agree</b>	68%	69%
<b>Disagree</b>	32%	31%

Table 11: Breakdown by age group who agree they would like to learn some of this practical knowhow

	<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
<b>Agree</b>	86%	81%	72%	68%	59%	47%
<b>Disagree</b>	14%	19%	28%	32%	41%	53%

Table 12: Top reasons why people would like to learn some of this practical knowhow

<b>Top reasons to learn</b>	<b>%</b>
I would enjoy doing them	30
To save money	26
To pass down to my children	25
To have a new hobby	21
To help stay healthy	16
To help the environment	14
To make money by teaching it	5

Table 13 Top reasons by age group why people would like to learn some of this practical knowhow

Top reasons to learn	15-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55-64 %	65+ %
I would enjoy doing them	86	81	72	68	59	47
To save money	14	19	28	32	41	53
To pass down to my children	34	40	36	23	15	7
To have a new hobby	35	23	22	15	22	11
To help stay healthy	19	21	15	14	15	13
To help the environment	17	19	16	13	16	8
To make money by teaching them	7	5	9	5	2	2

FULL OF

VITALITY

FULL OF

ENERGY

FULL OF

WISDOM

FULL OF

TALENT

FULL OF

KNOWLEDGE

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