

-----? Thinking about your legacy now could be good for you

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Research shows considering the legacy we are leaving behind can help us improve our mental health and find more meaning during our lives – including if we are still young.

When Beth Hunter's father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, she asked him whether she could record them having a conversation, so she could listen back to it in years to come.

He refused. He wasn't the type to have deep heart-to-hearts about their relationship, Hunter says – he didn't confront his diagnosis or talk about death. Instead, he prioritised writing his war stories, and did so by hand, before hiring someone else to type them. This is what he felt was most valuable to pass on after his death.

While leaving a legacy may feel more urgent for older adults who feel the pressing nature of limited time, some scholars argue the drive to leave one can – and maybe should – begin earlier in life. And a growing body of research suggests that better understanding our innate human interest in passing something on to future generations after we die could reveal new ways to improve mental health.

(...) Legacy can manifest in different ways and even be an unconscious act. "Everyone leaves a legacy, whether you know it or not," says Hunter. It isn't just the bequeathment of wealth or property, or everlasting art such as music or writing. Instead, some researchers have split legacy into three main overlapping categories: biological legacy, which we leave through our bodies and genetics,

material legacy, represented by our wealth and possessions, and the legacy of our values, such as faith, culture and heritage.

A bodily legacy

For many, the most obvious form of biological legacy is passing on genetics through having biological children. But genetic lineage, which refers to an ancestral line connected through genes, and legacy, our lasting impact after death, can be two separate things.

Leaving a biological legacy may also involve leaving the very shells we live in: our bodies. (...) In one recent study of over 100 people registered to donate their bodies in Belgium, the desire to contribute to science was the leading motivator, at 57%. Other motivators were altruism and gratitude for medical care, but interestingly, 16% said their motivation was to give meaning to their death. (...)

Thinking about legacy can also provide comfort for those facing imminent death. For those in end-of-life care at any stage of life, some hospitals and hospices facilitate "legacy activities" to help patients conclude their lives in a way that is most meaningful to them and their families. This could be a journal or scrapbook, a card to a loved one, an art project, or an "ethical will", which is a non-legal document allowing people to write down their thoughts, values and advice to be passed on.

Research on terminally ill adults and children suggests that these types of legacy activities may help to decrease depression and anxiety. It can also assist with the grief process during one's final months of life.

A legacy of values

Philanthropy, bequeathing an estate or passing on valuable belongings, are all ways to leave a material legacy. Heirlooms like photographs, journals or other possessions might be similarly cherished as a way of passing down valuable family histories. Donating a building in one's name, for example, leaves a mark on society too. But research suggests that what people most want to pass on as their legacy are values and beliefs – such as kindness and the importance of helping others.

(...) Leaving a legacy of values seems to have numerous benefits. When a group of US researchers interviewed a cohort of adults aged 65 and over who had created a legacy of values document, they found that participants were able to find peace, accept the past, communicate what mattered most to them, and that it inspired them to continue living. (...)

Thinking about your legacy can be good for you

While humans have likely thought about legacy for thousands of years, scholars have only been researching the concept for some 75 years. In 1950, German psychoanalyst Erik Erikson coined the term generativity, describing it as the

extent to which a person is interested in the well-being of others, particularly with regard to benefiting future generations. If a person fails to achieve generativity, Erikson posited, it can affect the trajectory of their later life, and perhaps even worsen their health. (...)

Of course, there is another motivation that drives humans to leave a legacy: the fear of death. (...) Other theorists note that with such fear comes the desire to feel that one's life is a story with meaning.

(...) Crucially, our fascination with leaving a legacy tells us that humans are wired to care deeply about the opinions of others. Even in death, we can't escape the concern. (...) Why we want to be remembered positively after we die is still something of a puzzle. After all... if you believe that a brain is required for ongoing consciousness, we'll be psychologically unable to know or enjoy our reputations postmortem.

(...) Thinking about building a legacy throughout life allows people to make decisions in line with the meaning they want to leave behind. This, in turn, encourages people to foster prosocial action, such as environmental activism or donating more wealth to charities or medical research. Entrepreneurs, meanwhile, might consider building businesses that contribute positively to society, thinking beyond profit.

The benefit, these researchers suggest, is two-fold: it offers humans a sense of motivation and meaning when we are alive, and "symbolic immortality" when we die – extending ourselves into the future, even if we are not physically there.

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20260522-why-do-we-want-to-be-remembered-after-we-die>

QUESTÕES

- Qual é a pergunta que completa o título do artigo na linha pontilhada?

- a) What will people remember about you after you die?**
- b) Are we all expected to record our conversations?
- c) Do you think you're about to die?
- d) When should we write our memoirs?
- e) How will we judge our own lives?

- Observe as afirmações abaixo. Quais delas condizem com o que é dito no artigo?

I – Depois de relutar, o pai de Beth Hunter aceitou deixar relatos gravados sobre sua doença.

II – Os registros sobre histórias de guerra foram escritos à mão e depois datilografados.

III – Alguns pesquisadores defendem que a preocupação com o legado pode começar ainda na juventude.

IV – Estudos sugerem que refletir sobre o legado pode trazer benefícios para a saúde mental.

a) II, III e IV.

b) I, II e III.

c) I, III e IV.

d) II e IV.

e) I, II, III e IV.

- Segundo a autora, quais são as três categorias principais de legado mencionadas por alguns pesquisadores?

a) Biológico, material e de valores.

b) Cultural, econômico e religioso.

c) Familiar, profissional e político.

d) Genético, artístico e científico.

e) Material, emocional e jurídico.

- Segundo o que foi lido, por que algumas pessoas decidem doar seus corpos para a ciência?

a) Porque desejam contribuir para a pesquisa científica e dar sentido à própria morte.

b) Porque acreditam que só isso garante reconhecimento público após a morte.

c) Porque esperam conseguir benefícios financeiros para os familiares que ficam.

d) Porque pretendem preservar sua herança genética para os futuros descendentes.

e) Porque, por motivos filosóficos, desejam evitar cerimônias funerárias tradicionais.

- Conforme a leitura, qual é uma das finalidades das chamadas “atividades de legado” realizadas em hospitais e instituições de cuidados paliativos?

a) Permitir que as pessoas expressem pensamentos, valores e mensagens significativas antes de morrer.

b) Incentivar pacientes a participarem cada vez mais de pesquisas médicas experimentais.

c) Registrar oficialmente a distribuição de determinados bens materiais para determinados herdeiros.

d) Substituir tratamentos psicológicos convencionais que não costumam focar na morte.

e) Avaliar a condição cognitiva dos pacientes terminais para ajudá-los a falecer tranquilamente.

- O que NÃO é afirmado no artigo?

a) Para a maioria, legar bens materiais importa mais do que valores e crenças.

b) Fotografias e diários podem funcionar como heranças familiares significativas.

c) A filantropia pode constituir uma forma de legado material.

d) Muitas pessoas desejam transmitir valores como bondade e solidariedade.

e) Um edifício doado em nome de alguém pode deixar uma marca na sociedade.

- Abaixo há afirmações verdadeiras (V) e falsas (F) sobre o tema. De acordo com o artigo, qual alternativa apresenta a ordem correta?

I – Pessoas que elaboraram documentos de legado de valores relataram maior sensação de paz.

II – O psicanalista Erik Erikson criou o conceito de generatividade no século XX.

III – Segundo Erikson, a ausência de generatividade pode influenciar negativamente fases posteriores da vida.

IV – Os pesquisadores afirmam que o estudo do legado humano existe há vários séculos.

a) V – V – V – F

b) V – F – V – F

c) F – V – V – F

d) V – V – F – V

e) F – F – V – V

- Para a autora, qual outro fator, além do desejo de beneficiar futuras gerações, pode motivar as pessoas a deixarem um legado?

- a) O medo da morte e a necessidade de atribuir significado à própria vida.
- b) A expectativa de reconhecimento financeiro para a família após a morte.
- c) A crença de que a consciência permanece ativa indefinidamente.
- d) A vontade de controlar as decisões e reputações das gerações futuras.
- e) O desejo de preservar exclusivamente a herança genética familiar.

- O que o texto sugere sobre a preocupação humana com a reputação após a morte?

- a) Ela demonstra que as pessoas se importam profundamente com a opinião dos outros.
- b) Ela prova que a nossa consciência vai continuar existindo após a morte.
- c) Ela resulta principalmente de interesses materiais e econômicos.
- d) Ela ocorre apenas entre pessoas idosas que estão se aproximando da morte.
- e) Ela está diretamente relacionada ao sucesso social e profissional.

- De acordo com os pesquisadores citados, qual é o principal benefício de construir um legado ao longo da vida?

- a) Proporcionar sentido e motivação à vida e uma forma de “imortalidade simbólica” após a morte.
- b) Garantir que a memória individual de cada um de nós possa permanecer intacta para sempre.
- c) Assegurar que futuras gerações detenham exatamente os mesmos valores construídos.
- d) Permitir que a reputação pessoal continue sendo desfrutada após a morte.
- e) Substituir a necessidade de ajudar o próximo com contribuições sociais e filantrópicas.