

SECTION NINE

Life Story Work

Overview

All children who have an adoption plan and go on to be placed for adoption are required to have a life story book, (Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005)) and this book must be provided to the prospective adopters, for their future help and support for the child. The life story book is a key tool to help the child gain a better understanding of their birth identity, and their life journey to their adoptive family. It will be a source of information, precious photographs and documents, that help the child know something of their life history, and who has been part of their life in the early years. It is very important to all human beings to have an understanding of their birth identity and family, and this is especially so for adopted children, who will often lose significant information, due to the move to a new family, moving out of the public care system, and transfer of parental responsibility from birth parents and the Local Authority, to the adoptive parents. Life story is key to a positive identity and good mental wellbeing as the child grows up, and throughout their lives.

For children it is very important that the story is told by someone who has knowledge of them, and had a role in their care journey, planning, and support.

In Tees Valley the responsibility for the life story book is with the child's social worker who was involved in care planning, work with birth parents and family members, placed the child with foster carers and was involved in selecting the right adoptive family for the child.

Adoption Tees Valley will provide templates for life story book, and advice and guidance to social workers where requested.

Related Procedures, and guidance are [Referral, Family Finding, Matching and Placement of Children](#), [ATV Life Story Work Guide](#), [Life Story – Flow Chart](#),

Relevant Legislation and Regulations:

Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005) – schedule 5

Commencement of Care away from birth family

The child's social worker should be mindful from the outset of care planning for the child, whether through PLO, or through voluntary reception into care, of the need to begin gathering information which will help form part of the child's life story.

This procedure relates to children who have an adoption plan, however, the requirement for life story work applies also to all children who enter local authority care.

The child's social worker should consider taking photographs of key people involved in the child's life and family: Birth Parents, siblings, Aunts and Uncles, Grandparents. These are examples but each child's family network will be unique, and the social worker is best placed to understand who holds the child dear to them, and who should be asked to contribute.

The child's social worker should explain to anyone involved the purpose of gathering information, and the contribution they are making to the child for their future, whatever plan is decided upon through care proceedings.

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The child's social worker should also talk to the foster carers about their role in gathering life story information and should make arrangements for how this information will be provided to the social worker, for the making of the life story book.

Others who may have a role in contributing will be schools/nurseries; contact workers; family support workers.

See ATV Life Story Work Guide, for more information about how to gather information.

Information should be held in a secure record system, where photographs, and important memorabilia can be stored.

The child's social worker should begin writing aspects of narrative from the outset. This is better done as a continuous process, rather than risk leaving key observations and life events to a later date, when there is risk of key professionals changing roles, or the memory of key events lapses.

Children will later value information told by someone who has knowledge of them, and cares about them, their life, welfare, and future.

First Child in Our Care/ Looked After Review

The IRO will check at the first Child in Our Care Review that arrangements are underway for gathering of life story information. Also, that birth parents have an understanding of why this is being gathered, and their role and contribution to the child's life in helping. The IRO will check foster carers' understanding and contribution to Life Story Work.

Early Notification to Adoption Tees Valley

At the time of Early Notification, the ATV Permanence Champion will check the child's social worker has commenced life story information gathering and has an understanding of this requirement. Support to understanding this will be provided at the Adoption Process Meeting, following Early Notification.

Second Child in Our Care/Looked After Review

The plan for permanence should be in progress by second CIOC review. Where the plan is adoption, or where there is a twin track plan, with adoption being one possible outcome, the IRO should again check that the child's social worker and the foster carers have continued to progress information gathering for life story book.

Where the IRO identifies any gaps or is not satisfied that sufficient understanding or work has taken place to gather and commence life story information, this should be noted in the review documentation. Escalation should be to the relevant Team Manager, and then to the Adoption Lead Service Manager if unable to be assured of progress with life story collation.

Agency Decision That Adoption is the Child's Plan (Best Interests Decision)

At the time of the ADM the relevant Agency Decision Maker should seek to be satisfied that life story information is being progressed, and that the information is being prepared by the child's social worker, ready to complete the life story book, or to provide to Adoption Tees Valley, for production of the Life Story Book.

Continuing Information Gathering

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The child's social worker should continue to gather and prepare life story information for the child beyond ADM. The decision of the court to make a Placement Order will authorise placement for adoption, and family finding will be underway either before, or following the granting of the PO.

The life story book will need to detail the new family, and key aspects of the move to the new family, with accompanying narrative from foster carers, child's social worker, and other's who have a caring contribution to make.

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Confirmation of the life story information and responsibility for creating the book will be discussed at the matching and selection meeting.

The ATV family Finder will be responsible for discussing with prospective adopters their role in contributing to the life story book, and how this will be used by them in the future for the child.

Through the formal matching process, the child's social worker and the ATV Family Finder will continue to maintain good communication on the life story book.

Following Matching Panel, the ATV Assistant Team Manager will ensure that the child is added to the Life Story Book tracker. ATV will allocate an Adoption Support Worker to support the child's social worker to complete the book.

At the APP meeting, the chair will ensure that arrangements and responsibility for the completion of the life story book are discussed. Adopters' role in contributing, and timescales will be discussed. It is a requirement that the date for provision of the life story book and later life letter are confirmed at the APP meeting.

Any gaps or concerns around information provision should be escalated to the Local Authority Team Manager.

The chair of the APP meeting will set a timetable for completion of the life story book, including adopter information.

First Adoption Review

The IRO should ensure that the agenda includes a check that arrangements are clear and in place to complete the Life Story Book by second review. Any gaps or concerns should be escalated to the Adoption Lead Service Manager at that stage.

Second Adoption Review

It is usually the case that the plan for adopters to make application for the Adoption order is confirmed at the second adoption review.

In Tees Valley, this will be the point at which the child's social worker will complete the life story book and make arrangements to provide this to adopters.

Where prospective adoptive parents have not completed or provided information, this will have been discussed prior to this review.

The book will be provided in a hard copy/printed format, and an electronic copy will be provided to the adopters.

ATV can print the hard copy version if requested.

Record Keeping

All life story information will be collated on the Local Authority record system, as it is gathered, and collated. This will be subject to LA audit processes for children's records.

The child's social worker will send an electronic copy of the LS book to ATV: ATV will keep a record of the final life story book, in the ATV Charms system. If, for any reason the adopters request a copy at a later stage, this can be provided by ATV.

Historical Life Story books

Where requests are made by adoptive parents, or young people, for more information, or for production of a life story book which has never been completed, the relevant Local Authority will be responsible for gathering information and production of that life story book.

Negotiation with ATV will be discussed on a case by case basis, where support may be provided to complete the relevant book, subject to capacity.

Life Story Work

Production of life story books is not the same as life story work. The availability of the life story book will help firstly adopters and children to engage in day to day understanding around the child's history, and identity. The child's needs and understanding will change over time, as they grow, develop, and through their life journey. Life story work will primarily be undertaken by the adoptive parents, and ATV will support this for all adopters, through the ongoing provision of training, and post adoption support.

In some cases, it will be necessary for assessment of the child's needs, and provision of therapeutic support to undertake life story work with the child. ATV will commission therapeutic intervention, following the adoption support assessment.

This therapeutic provision may also be provided by a CAMHS service, or by specialist provision via Local Authority Children's Services.