

Life Story

A guide for preparing life story information for children with an adoption or permanence plan.



Transform a child's life...

Why is life story work so important?

Children who live with their birth families have many opportunities to know their past and to clarify past and present events. However, children separated from their birth families don't have this. Children who lose track of their past and who are confused about the present, are likely to find it difficult to develop emotionally and socially. They will struggle to develop a secure understanding of who they are, have difficulty in developing secure attachments to other adults, and may get 'stuck' in fantasies they form in order to make sense of their confusion.

Children separated from birth parents and family members have important identity needs and life history information is crucial to helping them make sense of who they are. This will help promote positive self-identity, better self-esteem, and self-worth in the future.

The purpose of a life story book is for an adopted child to have their own tool, unique to them and their story. The life story book should support adopters to continuously share information with their child throughout their childhood. It is the building blocks for the child to understand their history in an age appropriate way and is a pathway for preparing the children for more detailed information contained within their later life letter and formal documents and reports, should they wish to have access to them at a later age.

Who is responsible for life story work and the life story book?

Life Story Work is everyone's responsibility: children need their whole support network to gather, store and record memorabilia throughout their journey in our care. Life story work requires everyone working with, and caring for, the child to start collecting memorabilia, memories, and achievements as soon as they are living outside of their birth family.

It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to gather and collate the information for the book. ATV are responsible for creating a child friendly presentation of the book in conjunction with the child's adopters.

We have listened to young people, and they have told us that its really important that the life story is told by someone who knew them and could tell the story of the early months and years, through photographs, video clips, and short narratives about particular events.

Social workers responsible for the child's plan of adoption can make a huge difference to the child's life by taking time to gather lots of information, sharing out the responsibility, and making sure that information is recorded and kept safely, over the weeks and months of care planning and placement. Also, by taking time regularly to write a "narrative" on new events, or people coming into the child's life.

What sort of things should you gather?

Birth family

Below is a suggested list of things that you should consider gathering for the child from the outset of your involvement with the family.

- Who chose their name and why?
- Birth certificate

- Birth where born, weight, height etc Wrist straps etc. Photograph of hospital.
- Information from birth parents and family members on what child was like as baby and photographs.
- Information from birth parents and family members on significant events, talents and hobbies etc
- Special information e.g. on family identity, race, religion and culture
- Birth parent's information including photo and hobbies, interests, talents etc
- Birth siblings – consider where they are living and with who, under what arrangements
- Birth grandparents and other significant family members
- Photographs and details of contact, including final contact

Foster carer(s)

- Memory box
- Description of what child was like when arrived - any anecdotes?
- Photographs /videos of the time spent in foster care
- Leaflets/tickets of places visited, and holidays taken
- Birthday/Christmas cards especially from birth parents
- Significant events for child e.g. first day at nursery and school
- Dates of significant developmental milestones such as crawling, walking, talking.
- Members of foster family and people that the child would have met regularly, including pets.
- Activities/events that child took part in.
- Likes and dislikes and whether this changed over time.

Education

- Schools and nurseries attended, include photos.
- School reports and parents evening feedback
- Key achievements
- Any anecdotes and details of special events such as trips, performances

Contact Workers

- Any observations from family time sessions including mannerisms of parents / family traits
- Observations regarding the child, eg what kind of music they liked listening to in the car journey, activities undertaken during family time.