



Guidance for Foster Carers

Life Story Work With Children and Young People



What is Life Story Work?



Life story work is completed with children and young people to support them to understand their life history and their journeys in care. Life story work can help children to understand who they are, what they have experienced and why, and support them to establish a sense of identity and adjust to their family lives.

Life story work can include stories from early childhood and beyond, memories, anecdotes, and belongings. This can all be collated in to a Life Story Book which provides the child with a visual record of the significant events and relationships in their lives.



Why is Life Story Work important For the Child/ren I am Caring For?

Life story work is important for children growing up living without their birth family. It gives them the same

information about their history that most children will have received from their families through conversations, baby books and photograph albums. As a child moves through care, much of the important information about them can become lost, particularly if there have been a number of placement moves. Their understanding of their journey may become chaotic and fragmented, which can impact upon their sense of personal identity. A life story book can help recover this information and support the child to really make sense of their feelings and experiences.

Children and young people living in care may also have difficulties regulating their feelings, low self-esteem, and low self-worth. Having access to life story work can be helpful in addressing these feelings, and can open up communication.

Life Story Books

Life story work can be shared with the child in the form of a Life Story Book that is personalised to them. A Life Story Book is written in chronological order and in a way that is easily understandable for the child.



A Life Story Book seeks to support the child with identifying the connections between past, present and future. It can help Foster Carers, Adopters, Social Workers, and most importantly, the child, learn to associate certain behaviours they display now to their past.

A Life Story Book can also be helpful in facilitating attachment between the child and their Foster Carers or Adoptive Parents.



What Can I Contribute to Life Story Work?

- **Photographs** – images of the child, their bedroom, their school, favourite shops, toys, friends, neighbours. It is really important to include as much detail as possible, such as when, where, what, and who was there.
- **Memories** – this can be funny things that the child has said or done, holidays and trips out, school plays. Again, being as specific as possible is helpful to the child in their life story work.



- **Firsts** – First steps, first words, first food they tried and enjoyed/did not enjoy, first haircut, first issue at school etc.

- **Child's Personality** – how the child was when they first came to live with you and how this has changed over time from your perspective.
- **Skills** – activities or skills that the child showed a real interest or achievement in, i.e. bike riding, swimming, dancing.



Top Tips for Life Story Work

★ Date all photographs so they are easier to remember, and place them in order in the Life Story Book.



★ Include a story that the child can associate with a memory, for example, *'For your first holiday we went to Cornwall for the weekend and you really enjoyed eating ice cream with your sister, Kelly, on the beach front. One time you dropped your ice cream cone and began to cry and we*

had to get you a new one! Examples like this help the child to begin to understand their life journey better.

★ Providing copies of important documents can be useful in Life Story Books – for example, children’s tags from the hospital where they were born, or any certificates from classes they have attended.

★ Include information about any illnesses or hospital stays the child may have had, i.e. chickenpox or a broken bone – what happened? How long did this last? What was the hospital or Doctor called?

★ Refer to any quirky habits or sayings the child may have had.



Life Story Work Sessions

Life story work sessions can be completed with children and young people. These are usually delivered by the child's Social Worker or another professional who has been asked to provide specialist, therapeutic support. The sessions involve providing a narrative to the child about their story, and supporting the child to understand and accept their feelings about their personal history.

Life story work sessions can bring up memories for children that may cause them to feel confused, angry and upset. When completing Life Story Work sessions, the child's Social Worker / professional should discuss with Foster Carers what they have planned. This way any issues or problems in the session can be addressed. **It would be good practice for Social Workers to provide Foster Carers with a Life Story Work Plan which clearly**

details the dates of sessions, what they will cover, and the plan for support for the child following this.

If the child does present as upset or angry after their sessions, the child's Social Worker or the Supervising Social Worker can be contacted for advice. During this time, it is best to let the child know that as a foster carer you are there for them, and allow them to have some space, maybe by spending some time in the garden or in their bedroom. **It is important not to force them to talk to you. The best approach is to talk about this at the child's pace.**

You can provide the child with a diary or journal to write in after their sessions, so that they can record their thoughts and feelings. They can then be supported to work through these feelings by the professionals around them.



Memory Boxes

Memory Boxes should be bright and colourful, and they should be tailored to the age of the child/ren you are caring for. These can be bought or custom made. Items in the Memory Box should be labelled with dates.

Memory Boxes should be started at a child's first foster placement, and travel with them between placements. If a child is adopted, the memory box/boxes are given to the adoptive parents at "The Life Appreciation Day".

Anyone can contribute to a child's Memory Box, including birth parents, the wider family of Foster Carers, school friends, the person who supervises contact etc.

Useful items to include in a Memory Box are;

- Birth tags, hospital tags, milk teeth, locks of hair from hair cuts.



- First shoes or other significant clothing.
- Any personal items associated with the child's birth family, including toys, teddies and books.



- Drawings, notes, letters.



- Any form of school certificates, reports or project work.
- Ticket stubs from the cinema, theatre, bowling etc.
- Restaurant/holiday receipts, programmes for events and concerts, leaflets.



Whose Responsibility is it to Transfer a Life Story Book or Memory Box Between Placements?



The child's **Social Worker** and the **Supervising Social Worker** should ensure that the Life Story Book and Memory Box moves with the child if they move to a different placement or to their adoptive home.

Where Can I get Further Advice and Guidance?



The child/ren's Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker can address any queries you may have regarding life story work with the children you are caring for.

Dudley Children's Services have example Life Story Books completed for children of varying ages and life journeys.

These can be accessed via Dudley's Procedures on the Centre for Professional Practice Website (www.dudleycpp.org.uk) at the following links:

https://dudleychildcare.proceduresonline.com/q_life_story_book.html

https://dudleychildcare.proceduresonline.com/q_later_life_letters.html

Life Story Work Training is available for Foster Carers to access via the Booking Form within Dudley's Training Brochure on Dudley's Centre for Professional Practice Website:

<https://www.dudleycpp.org.uk/eventsandtraining>

This resource has been created in consultation with Alyson Poyner, Life Story Work Trainer for Dudley Children's Services.



Dudley Lighthouse Links

Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council



Centre for Professional Practice