**Joy Rees Model**

This is the working model that we follow at Sandwell Children’s Trust when carrying out Life Work. It is a model that was produced by Joy Rees, an Adoption Support Worker with over thirty years Social Work Experience. She carried out extensive research throughout her career and found that by beginning any Life Work with positive information about a child’s or young person’s current stage in life it promoted a sense of belonging and security between carer, family member, Special Guardian, Adopter and the child.

**Present:**

Life Work should not start with the child or young person’s birth and the birth family. It should begin with the child now and their current primary attachment figures – adopter, foster carer, family member they live with or Special Guardian. Information should be fun and non-threatening. Details to include their hobbies, interest, talents, the current home and family, friends, pets, nursery or school before moving into the child’s early history.

**Past:**

Begin this section with factual details of the child or young person’s birth: date, place, time, day, weight, length, origins of name, if known. With increased use of social networking sites be wary of including surnames or previous addresses. Consider the risks. This information can be given at a later stage, when then child is considered mature enough to make a more informed decision about tracing and contact.

Introduce the birth mother and birth father if known, and again, if the book is for an adopted child, it is best to use the first names only, with age, description, ethnic origin, religion, health, interests and employment. Details of siblings and any other significant family member would also be included here.

Remember, any Life Book is the story of the child or young person’s life, and not the birth parent’s lives, so do not overwhelm them with too many details. The child or young person should not have to own the birth parents’ troubled history.

There should be an accurate but simple account of events leading to the placement in foster care. The underlying message for the child needs to be that ‘*None of this* *was your fault!’.* Give details of foster carers. If a child or young person has gone through more than one placement, provide an explanation for each move, emphasising that this was not because they were ‘bad’ or ‘naughty’.

A simple account of the decisions made by the social workers, police or judge should be given. There is no need to list all of the conferences and meetings or give dates. This is too confusing for a young child and could detract from their understanding of their story.

**Present:**

The book should bring the child back to present with meeting their permanent family and moving into their current home. Include Court Hearings and details of the Care Order, Special Guardianship Order and, if applicable, Adoption Order and Celebratory Hearing. A sense of permanency or ‘*the forever family’* could now be reinforced.

But do not end a Life book here.

**Future:**

Give the child a sense of a hopeful future. Mentioning family rituals, familiar routines and adding more family photographs are grounding and can strengthen the child or young person’s sense of belonging. Include family plans, perhaps a holiday or their hopes and aspirations. End on a positive note and by reminding the child or young person that wherever they go and whatever they do they will always be loved, are part of this family and will always be in the adopters’ or carers’ thoughts.

Having a sense of one’s history is important, but to enable children and young people to move forward to the positive futures they deserve, this alone is not enough. A sensitively written Life Book can lay the foundation for healthy attachments with the primary carers and can reinforce a sense of belonging and security. It can raise self-esteem and help the child and young person to feel loveable, loved and valued.