



Approach to Direct Work with Children

Priority 2
Practice



Contents

• Contents	2
• Introduction	3
• Voice of the child and understanding their lived experience	4
• Direct Work	5
• Life Story Work	7
• Later Life Letters	9
• Recording Direct Work	11
• Further Guidance	12

Introduction

Our partnership approach to direct work is underpinned by our **ethos** and **standards**:

Our ethos centres around **children** and **families**, which means:

- We have high aspirations for our children, we make a difference and change children's lives for the better
- We place children at the heart of everything we do
- We keep families safe, keeping them together where possible
- We work alongside our families, guided by their needs
- We empower and work with the whole, extended family
- We only use language that our children and young people can understand
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Click image to access Purpose, ethos and standards

Our ethos also focuses on our **staff** and **partners** which means:

- We support and look after each other
- We make meaningful connections and collaborate effectively with the wider Sandwell family
- We share a common understanding of our responsibilities
- We encourage each other to learn, develop & reflect
- We embrace diversity and celebrate each other's differences

Based on our ethos, we have a set of **practice standards**, one of which is being that:

We will understand and improve children's lives through regular communication and high quality direct work and life story work

Our standards promote quality practice that places children at the heart of everything we do. This underpins work we undertake with our families, alongside all our partners.

Voice of the child and understanding their lived experience

The voice of the child and understanding their lived experience is central to everything we do. We need to ensure that the child's voice and lived experience is reflected from our first point of contact and in our partnership assessments and plans. We should explore the child's experience of living in a home with a continuous significant parent/s or carer/s, understanding their experience of stability and quality of care. We should assess how to understand the child's world and ensure plans are timely and purposeful to improve their experiences at home.

When children cannot live with their birth families or connected family we should ensure that our approach to finding a new home improves their experiences whilst maintaining birth family relationships, wherever possible.

It is important that children:

- understand that we want them to remain at home with their parents and family wherever possible.
- are not separated from brothers and sisters wherever possible. However, when separation is assessed as the best plan, it is important that clear arrangements and direct work are undertaken to ensure they remain in contact with one another.
- help to influence where they are going to live by our observations and direct work experience us actively listening to them and understanding their specific needs understand that Sandwell Children's Trust staff, alongside partners and communities will ensure that all permanence planning incorporates attention to their diversity needs and how these will be met. These include but are not limited to age, disability, learning need, identified gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation



Direct Work

Direct work supports practitioners in understanding the child's world within the context of their family home, school, relationships and other settings in a meaningful way.

Direct Work relates to the work we undertake with each family member as part of these visits to gain an understanding of their wishes and feelings, hopes, fears, risks, concerns, relationships and experiences. This work should be generally be a planned activity with a specific purpose, linked to the reasons for our involvement and can be undertaken using a wide range of tools to inform assessments, decision making and plans. It can also involve things like observations and interactions of the quality of relationships between children, parents and carers.



Visits to children involve spending time with children, young people and their families linked to a specific purpose such as an assessment, plan and direct work. The frequency, type of visits and where these take place will include the home, school and within their community and will depend on the level of risk or vulnerabilities for the child and the relevant practice standards.

Being creative helps to make the direct work interesting using resources that are unique to each family member considering their identity and needs. For example, for some families, where learning needs, emotional and mental

health issues, trauma and where English is not their first language and might require support from advocacy services and/or an interpreter, as required as part of direct work sessions. Direct work supports practitioners in understanding the child's world within the context of their family home, school, relationships and other settings in a meaningful way.

In Sandwell we record direct work with the child in the **colour Blue** so that the voice, wishes and feelings of the child is clearly identified.

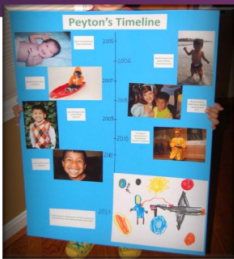
Sandwell has a range of direct work resources that can be used when working with families along with guidance on the [Trust's intranet site](#).



Some ideas of how to use the tools

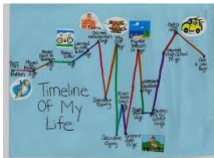
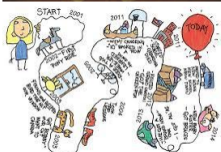


Activity to encourage discussion about uniqueness and individuality. Suitable for 6 years and over.



Timelines and Roadmaps to explore lived experiences

Sandwell
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DIY puppets that can help with role play and can also be used as worry puppets/Monsters.

Sandwell
Children's Trust



DIY worry, question or idea jars can be used for a child to express any worries/concerns or questions they may have about their past or present situation.

Life Story Work

In Sandwell Children's Trust we believe it is important that children in care understand and accept what's happened to them, and this forms the basis of our approach to Life story work with children.

We know that many children and young people who are in care or adopted may have little understanding of why they don't live with their birth parents, the reason for them entering care and events that took place in their early lives. This can have a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing and self-esteem. Life Story Work aims to help children in care begin to understand and accept their personal history.

In Sandwell, we believe that it is best practice for all children who are to remain in long term care to have Life story work undertaken with them. Life Story work details the child's life history, people in their lives, personal information, stories, achievements etc. to promote their sense of identity and understanding of who they are, where they came from and why things have happened.

Life Story Work aims to answer many questions – the what happened, when and why questions that they may have about their lives.

The main purpose of Life Story work is to:

- give details and understanding of the child/young person's history
- build their sense of identity, including religious, cultural and ethnic identity enable the child/ young person to share their past with others
- give a realistic account of early events and to dispel fantasies/ fears about their birth family
- link the past to the present and to help both the child/young person and the carer or parent to understand how earlier life events continue to impact on behaviour acknowledge issues of separation and loss
- enable carers/parents to understand and develop empathy for the child/young person
- enhance the child/young person's self-esteem and self-worth



Significant people in the child's life should assist in completion of Life Story work. Foster carers, key workers, parents, teachers, health professionals etc, can all make significant contributions to providing such a picture even if at times the information may seem contradictory.

Photographs, videos etc. may all help to "bring the child to life". This information should start to be gathered at the onset of our work with children usually by the child's social worker, supervising social worker and carers to ensure that no relevant information is lost or forgotten. 'Adoption@Heart' develop life story books through the adoption process and the child's social worker will lead on developing life story work.



Life story work can be produced a variety of different ways – for some children this can be in the form of a book, photo story board, memory box or digital recording/ web page. What is most important is that it provides the child with a lasting record of their life including their past, present and future in a format that makes sense for the child so that they can explore and understand their family history. Even if the child is not yet ready to participate with their life story work, it is important that we are able to make information readily available to them for them to access when they are ready to.

The [Trust intranet site](#) has a wealth of resources, templates and ideas to help practitioners with life story work.

Sandwell Children's Trust Home HR Finance Health & safety Equality & Diversity Home Page

Tri.X SBS ICT Issues SCSP CP Safeguarding

Your Guide to Life Work, Life Story Books and Later Life Letters

What is Life Work and why is it important?

"Children separated from their birth families are often denied the opportunity to know about their past and to clarify past events in terms of the present. They may have changed families, social workers, homes and neighbourhoods. Their past may be lost, much of it even forgotten. Losing track of the past can make it difficult for children to develop emotionally and socially. Life story work is an attempt to give back some of this past." (RYAN T AND WALKER R 2016).

Here at Sandwell Children's Trust, we promote Life Work and Life Story Work as part of our commitment to the children we look after. We want to ensure each child has a good history of their background, their journey and a full understanding of what happened in their past up to the present day.

All of us that work with children and young people play an important role in gaining and recording information appropriately from the work we do on a daily basis. Many of our children are given the facts of their life, but cannot create a meaningful narrative without the support of the people that are there to support them.

We want to embed Life Work into our practice; its work we already do, those journeys, shared stories and building relationships helps the child unpick their past and engage with the present more fully. Life Work is an ongoing process, and it will help children contain their experience and emotions in the long term.

If you have any questions or just need to know more about Life Work and Life Story Books, please contact our team:

Lifework_development@sandwellchildrenstrust.org

Resources

Five minute read
→

Teenage template part one
→

Teenage template part two
→



Later Life Letter

The provision of a Later Life letter is a statutory requirement for all children placed with adoptive parents.

The Later Life letter has two purposes: the first is as a letter to be read by the child when deemed appropriate by the adoptive parents; the second is as a tool to be used by the adopters when talking to the child about their background and history. The term 'telling' is often used as convenient short-hand for this. It is important to recognise that telling is not a one-off event, but an on-going and incremental process whereby the child is helped to learn about and understand their past.

The Later Life letter gives the child an explanation of why they were adopted and the reasons and actions that led up to this decision being made. This should include, whenever possible, the people involved in this decision, and the facts at that time. You must be aware of the mixed emotions, including sadness and anger that may have been around then, and this needs to be reflected in the letter.

The child is the focus of the letter and it must be remembered when writing the letter that the child has a need to know why he/she was placed for adoption. This is important information and it must be a true account of the process.

If birth parents were involved in the choice of adoptive parents, the letter should include reasons why they chose their child's adoptive parents. This may seem simplistic - e.g. "they live in the country"- but it needs to be stated (in contested situations this information may not be available). If the child's birth parent expressed any wishes about the choice of adoptive parents these should be included, e.g. would like him/her to have a sibling.



*Dear Thomas
As you are aware I've been your Social Worker since June 2018 and now it's been decided that you will be staying with your Nan permanently the court will grant a Special Guardianship Order. This means Natalie can take care of you and your sisters, we know you are safe, so you no longer need me involved.*

As you lived with your Mum until you were 9 years old, you have memories and know why and how you came to live with Natalie. As you will be living with your sisters and will regularly see other family members you will be able to ask questions as you get older. I've been asked to write this letter to tell you why Sandwell Children's Services became involved, you can it keep and read it when you want to:

When you were younger you lived in Birmingham with Mum, Dad and Kayleigh. In May 2009 Mum went to the local Children's Centre as she was very upset. She had been arguing with your Dad, she said he had been drinking and he had hit her, she did say he had never hurt you or Kayleigh. There were concerns that both Mum and Dad were drinking too much alcohol. The Police visited to speak to Mum, she told them she was no longer in a relationship with your Dad. It was recommended that a Social Worker complete an assessment, so they could see if Mum could care safely for you and Kayleigh.

During the assessment there were concerns that both your Mum and Dad drank too much alcohol, and this led to arguments. Your Mum denied this and said this was the first time he had hit her. The Social worker was told that Mum had post-natal depression after Kayleigh was born, she felt unwell

Remember that every child will see the letter at a different age, but this is likely to be during adolescent years, and so the letter needs to be written using language appropriate for the young person.

The decision on actual timing of this letter being shared is at the discretion of the adoptive parents. They will be in the best position to know when the young person will be ready to read the letter.

The letter is in addition to the child's Life Story book and should build on the information already contained in the book and should never be a substitute for the book



You can see examples of Later Life letters on the [Trust intranet](#)

Recording Direct Work

In Sandwell we believe that all work with children should be meaningful for children, whether this the form of a visit to a child, part of an assessment or part of a plan. Evidence of direct work with children should be at the centre of everything we do.

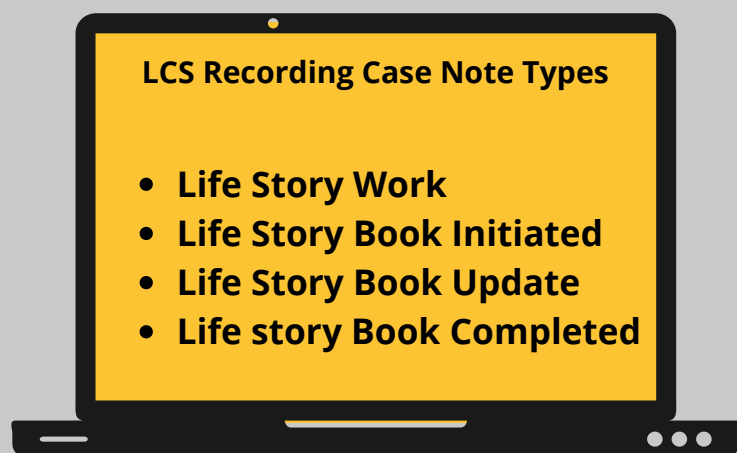
In Sandwell we record direct work with the child in the **colour blue** so that the voice, wishes and feelings of the child is clearly identified.

In addition, there is a specific case note type called Direct Work where you can record any specific direct work that you have undertaken with the child.

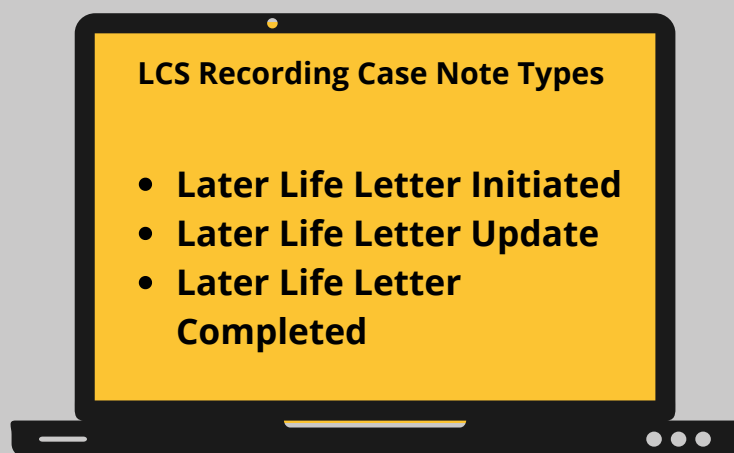
Recording on LCS

There are dedicated spaces on LCS to record specific pieces of Life Story work.

As well as uploading pictures, photos and documents to LCS, there are the following case note types that should be used to record evidence of Life Story Work:



Where to record Life Story Work



Where to record Later Life Letters

Further Guidance

More information on Direct Work, Visits and Intervention is available on the Practice Note for all Practitioners, Managers and Staff: [Visits, Direct Work and Intervention](#)

More Guidance on Life Story Work can be found on [Sandwell's Tri.X page](#)

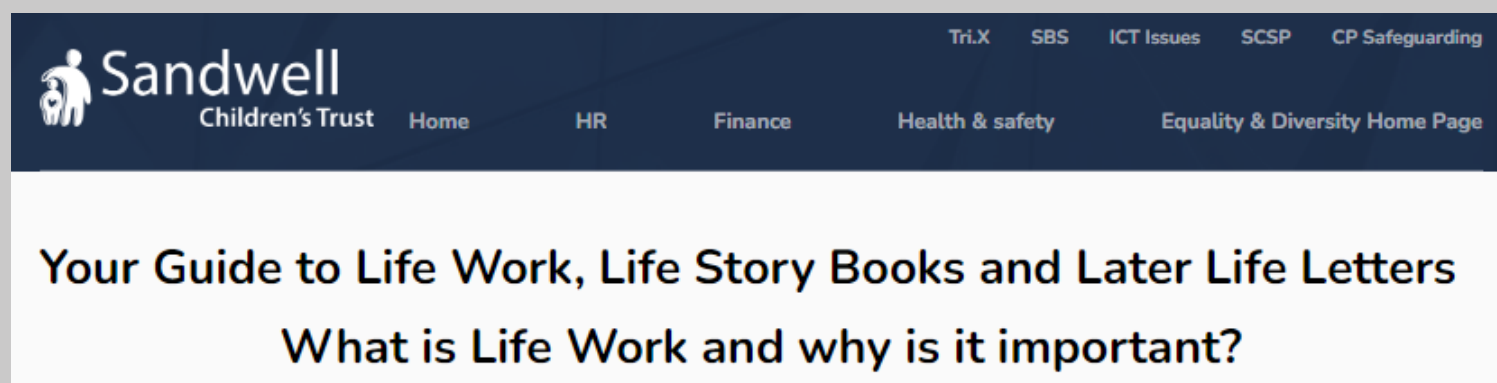


The screenshot shows the header of the Sandwell Children's Trust Procedures Manual website. On the left is the Sandwell Children's Trust logo. To its right is the title "Sandwell Children's Trust Procedures Manual". Below the title is a navigation menu with links for "Home", "Contents", "Sandwell Guidance", "Regional Child Protection Procedures", "Resources", and "Accessibility". A search box with the word "SEARCH" is located on the far right.

[Guidance on Life Story Books](#)

[Guidance on Later Life Letters](#)

There is also information on the Trust's [intranet site](#)



The screenshot shows the intranet site for Sandwell Children's Trust. The header includes the Sandwell Children's Trust logo and a navigation menu with links for "Home", "HR", "Finance", "Health & safety", and "Equality & Diversity Home Page". On the right side of the header, there are links for "Tri.X", "SBS", "ICT Issues", "SCSP", and "CP Safeguarding". The main content area features the heading "Your Guide to Life Work, Life Story Books and Later Life Letters" and the sub-heading "What is Life Work and why is it important?".