

**Life Work**

**Principles**

Of Life Work

**Principles of Direct Work and Life Work with Children and Young People**

**Preparation**

* Have a clear and purposeful plan to carry out direct work and life work. Details of how the interventions will support meeting the child’s needs should be included in care plans;
* Consider the child’s developmental level and remember some children may operate at a level below their chronological age due to learning disability or being “stuck” emotionally.
* Be aware of cultural factors and research these e.g. race, religion, identity issues, different family and community norms;
* Check your records, and your knowledge of background information and gather material on important events, the child’s life, their family names, pets etc.
* Consult and share at all stages of the work with the child’s carer and the supervising social worker. The foster carer should be informed of how and when the work will be done and ask the child if he/she would like the foster carer present at each session. Foster carers will be able to provide emotional support for the child during and between sessions, so their close involvement is crucial. The work may be painful for the child, so prepare for this, as the carer will have to support the child following the session and they need to be aware of what occurred if they were not present during the session;
* Recognise your own feelings about personal experiences of loss and separation, grief and rejection as these may be triggered for you in your work with the child. Acknowledge these feelings and be aware of them to avoid them blocking you helping the child;
* Discuss the progress of your work in regular supervision with your line manager where appropriate advice and guidance should be given. Supervision is also an appropriate place to explore any personal feelings about the information you need to share with the child about their past as well as a way to gaining feedback regarding ongoing development of skills to support the child.

**Do...**

* Get to know the child as well as possible and develop a friendly, trusting relationship (e.g. building rapport, providing undivided attention, refraining from use of Jargon, being clear with intentions, stick to planned visits, be reliable, etc…);
* Be clear with the foster carer that the focus of the visit is to undertake life work, to avoid being side-tracked into discussing day-to-day placement issues;
* Do the work in a safe, comfortable environment and work physically on the child’s level (e.g. usually on the floor);
* Respect the child’s ability to solve problems and make choices (this may include not wishing to do a particular part of the work at any one time because they are not ready). Being flexible with the agenda for the session and working at the child’ pace would be beneficial;
* Find out what the child can do well or what she/he enjoys. This will give them confidence, but give them the opportunity to try something new, and remember that children can also express themselves in play what they can’t express in words;
* Check out your perceptions. They may not be the same as the child’s. Acknowledge the child’s feelings and give feedback of observations to the child;
* Respect confidences and be aware of what disclosures may need to be passed on. Explain why to the child;
* Be alert to non-verbal responses, e.g. body language, talking in ‘third party’, eye contact etc.
* Be prepared to go over things several times and in different ways, to convey the same message. Children don’t always ‘hear’ things first time, particularly if it is painful.