

Life Story Work



Why is it important?

Children who live with birth family are regularly reminded of anecdotes, significant memories which are not so readily available for looked after children and those who are adopted.

These memories and understanding of events help children and young people develop a sense of their own identity and make sense of the past. Without it they may become confused, angry, and often develop an inaccurate version of events all of which will have a significant impact on their ability to develop emotionally and psychologically.

All children looked after and adopted must have clear and age appropriate information about their life story.

All children including those looked after and those who are adopted should have a Life Story Book where the information about their lives and decision making is recorded in an age appropriate way.

Who is responsible?

Everyone who has a part to play in children and young people's lives.

Workers from Referral and Assessment, Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Leaving Care, all teams involved with a child, and staff supervising **family time** all have a crucial part to play in compiling information which will form the basis for future explanations and provide memories. Other agencies such as schools and health have a role to play in contributing to Life Story work.

Recording and storage

All Life Story work must be safely recorded detailing a child's journey. Add all records under type of contact: 'Direct Work', Reason for contact: Life Story work in case notes. Reference any uploaded documents. Encourage children to add to their own record.

Social workers who remove children from their birth family should add the first record explaining the reasons why the decision was made and an account of what happened at the move, how the child was, how they settled, how they were received into the new placement. It is important that workers record exactly what was said to the child, so this explanation can be built on by subsequent workers. At the time of every placement change the positives and negatives prior to the child moving placement should be recorded. This should outline reasons for removal and explanations given to the child at the time.

Foster carers are responsible for contributing to Life Story work and regularly sharing this with the child's social worker – a summary of this should be added by the social worker to the child's file (under direct work – Life Story). Foster carers are key to capturing special memories others may be unaware of such as funny anecdotes, rituals and behaviour changes. Foster carers should also be provided with a script they can share with the child about the reasons they are in care that is consistent with other messages given to the child.

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5 Minute Facts

Supervising social worker (SSW) are critical in the encouragement of carers to compile life story information and ensure all foster carers have a memory box to support children storing special things. At the annual review, the supervising social worker will ask the foster carer what they have collated for the child (photos, certificates etc).

Education staff should add information to the child's file – any significant achievements / progress should be added.

Independent Fostering Agencies and residential providers should also be expected to contribute to Life Story work and expectations should be clear in the Independent Placement Agreement.

Family support workers and **family time** supervisors are in a privileged position to contribute to Life Story work by taking photographs, encouraging reflection on what children were like when they were younger, and recording any memories shared.

Managers should ensure Life Story work is being undertaken and recorded on children's files and regularly audit that there is evidence of this.

Top tips for all to contribute to Life Story work

- Remember everything that is written on a child's file is a record of memories so think about language used and impact on a child as well as recording in a balanced way
- If you are removing a baby from hospital, supervising family time out in the community, driving past significant buildings, take a photo
- If you are supervising family time record memories, anecdotes, take lots of photos

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- Include pictures, paintings, hand prints in memory boxes; looking at tiny hands is very powerful
- Include cards received by children and school reports
- When undertaking assessments (social workers and family support workers) ask parents questions which later in our involvement may be difficult to capture e.g.
 - Tell me why you chose the name – does it have special significance?
 - Who do you think they look like in the family?
 - What can you remember about his/her first steps, first words?
 - Who do they take after (for older children)?
- Genograms have valuable information about wider family and relationships
- When you are transferring a case to another team write a 'later life letter' about your involvement, decision making, observations, memories of that child and their brothers and sisters
- Develop Life Story Champions in each team
- Social worker / workers can add to direct work their own comments and observations about working with the child 'brave, funny, sad, mixed up' etc.
- 'A Day in the Life' work is valuable information to include in Life Story work

Key contacts and for more information...

Looked after Children Team
Tel: **01942 634530**

[Life Story Work Guidance](#)

Bolton
Council