



Achieving More Together / Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

The NAS Post Adoption Training and Development Framework

- These materials have been developed for the National Adoption Service for adoptive families
- Their purpose is to provide a learning and development resource for adopters post placement
- These tools can be used by groups or by individuals.
- There is lots of information in the notes below each slide so it is important to read these too as they provide much more information, and some useful ideas for more reading.

What is Life Journey Work?

Life Journey Work involves engaging with children to enable them to make sense of information about:

- Their birth family
- Their “Life Journey” thus far
- The reasons for the decisions that were made, that led to the plan for adoption
- Their adoptive family
- Their sense of identity

Discussion

- Why is Life Journey Work important? What are your thoughts?
- List the possible benefits of your child / children learning about his/ her/ their “Life Journey” information.
- You may have some reservations, if so, list these too.

Why is Life Journey Work important?

“We need to acknowledge and value the role of the Life Story as an integral element to the lifelong attachment and bonding process for the adopted person and their new family.”

The primary purpose of Life Story is to promote permanence and attachments within the adoptive family and to support the healthy development of the young person’s identity, so they are able to grow up a psychologically healthy adult.”

(National Adoption Service Adoption Life Story Literature Review by Joan Hunt, AFA Cymru)

Why?

- Life Journey Work is a process that can be therapeutic when undertaken in the context of a secure base relationship.
 - It is essential for mental health
 - It supports building attachments and identity
 - It is a life long process (Brodzinsky)
- If we get this right we can decrease the need for adoption support later on (Wales cohort study, Catherine Shelton et al, 2018)

Unconscious Negative Beliefs

Published author, Joy Rees suggests that adopted children often have negative beliefs that they are not fully aware of, but affect how they see the world...

***If my birth parents
had been given
more support I
could have stayed
with them***

***My birth parents
were on drugs /
mentally ill so
the same will
happen to me?***

***I must be very
bad because I
can't live with
my brothers
and sisters***

Good Messages

- It is therefore important to provide children with the following messages:
 - *Past events are not their fault*
 - *They are loved and loveable*
 - *They deserved better care and parenting*
 - *They are claimed and belongs*
 - *Adults can be trusted and they understand*

What can Adopters expect?

“All children in Wales, who are unable to be cared for by their birth families will have an understanding of their family history and of their unique journey.”

(National Adoption Service for Wales Life Journey Work Good Practice Guide)

- All children placed for adoption should be provided with good quality Life Journey materials to support this.

The NAS Life Journey Work Toolkit

- The National Adoption Service have provided a Life Journey Work Good Practice Guide and toolkits to support
 - Adoptive families,
 - Foster Carers and
 - Social work professionals.
- Further toolkits for adopted children, young people and adults, birth family members and other professionals will be available soon.

The key role of adoptive parents

- Adoptive parents are at the heart of this approach.
- They are the keeper of the child's information for the life long task of life journey work.
- They are the “go to” person for the Child, as part of having a secure base they are “the person who supports the child in exploring emotions and thoughts in a safe, supportive and empathic setting”

Schofield and Beek (2006).

LJW Key Principles

- Life Journey Work must begin as soon as a child becomes 'Looked After' (Comes into the care of the Local Authority)
- Professionals must work together with birth families, foster carers and other professionals to achieve this
- Life Journey conversations should be part of everyday life for the child. Information is best provided incrementally, as age appropriate and according to the needs of the child at that time.
- Life Journey Work materials provide tools to assist in this, but we need to support and train adopters to carry on this important work.

LJW Key Principles

- Each Child will receive Life Journey Work materials (including a book and later life letter) that provide a 'coherent narrative', meaning the child's story should be clear.
- Life Journey Work materials should provide children with many of the answers, to many of the questions that they will have in the future about their early life experiences.
- Collaboration between the prospective adopter/s and the key person involved in the production of Life Journey Materials should occur
- Draft Life Journey Materials will be quality assured, taking into consideration the feedback of Prospective adopters

What to Expect

“LJW provides an account of a child's life in words, pictures, memorabilia, anecdotes and documents. It provides an opportunity and a structure for the child to explore their emotions and talk about painful issues. It provides children with important factual information. It provides a narrative / explanations for the Child. It preserves memories.”

The role of Adoptive Parents in Life Journey Work

*Children separated from their birth families need honest information about and explanation for their life changes **immediately** the separation takes place, and who better to explain this than the person who is nurturing them*

(Livingston Smith, 2014)

Using your Words

- It is important that you feel confident in their Child's Life Journey materials.
- It may be that the wording does not sit comfortably with you, or you are unsure about the timing of the sharing of difficult information.
- It is best to say if this is the case, as it may stop you from sharing vital information with your child, now or in the future.

Discussion - Life Journey Materials

Please have a look at the sample Life Journey books and Later Life Letters provided in the toolkit -

- What do you like?
- What do you dislike?

Talking to Children

- What resources are available to help Adopters in talking with their children?
- The National Adoption Service has provided a toolkit to assist families in life journey conversations and sharing their Child's Life Journey materials.

Resources for Adopters

- Resources are available to help adopters in talking with their children.
- The toolkit covers subjects such as telling difficult information and top tips in talking to children about adoption.
- The toolkit also provides practical activities you can use and a list of useful books and resources you might find helpful.

Children's Stories

- There are a number of children's stories available to help children prepare for adoption and to explore feelings about adoption, when children are in their adoptive families.
- There are a couple of suggested reading lists within the toolkit, of course there are always new books being published too!
- "Metaphorical stories" by Katie Wrench is available for free within the toolkit and is well worth a read.

Lifelong Conversations

- As children move through developmental stages the meaning and implications of being adopted change for them.
- They may have new questions, or need to re-work complex feelings that they have come to terms with before.
- This is all to be expected – think of the questions you asked about events when you were 3, and again at 13.

Accessing Support

- It is not always easy to talk about Life Journey information.

The National Adoption Service Good Practice Guide states:

“Support should be available for the Prospective Adopters and Child to continue to build a secure base. This will include support in continuing LJW with the Child.”

- This course is part of a series developed by the National Adoption Service to support adopters after approval.
- These can be accessed at the National Adoption Service website.
- Please talk to your adoption support team for further information