

SOCIAL WORK HANDBOOK

LIFE STORY WORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

A best practice guide for use by all social work professionals completing life story work for children and young people in care.

‘Children are not slates from which the past can be rubbed by a duster or sponge, but human beings who carry their previous experiences with them and whose behaviour in the present is profoundly affected by what has gone before.’

Gilligan 2001 Promoting Resilience BAAF

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Statement

Kent County Council is committed to promoting the longer term resilience and emotional wellbeing of all children and young people in care. This handbook sets out the minimum standards of good practice and guidance for social workers and supervisors involved in planning and delivering life story work. It is Kent's expectation that life story work is an integral and established part of social work practice for all children and young people not just for those being placed for adoption.

Our legal responsibility is set out in the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 to ensure children and young people's views and wishes are at the heart of any process that affects their lives. This includes that their active participation is sought in work with them.

Social workers have a responsibility to support children and young people engaging in life story work to help them come to terms with past experiences, providing them continuity of their life histories and preparing them for their future. Life story work is fundamental in developing children and young people's aspirations, the formation of identity and a positive sense of self. Life story work must be seen as a priority.

All professionals working with children and young people in care have a duty to be transparent, sensitive and supportive when explaining significant issues that have impacted on the child/young person however painful and difficult. Life story work provides a structure for this to take place and for it to be contained. To do life story work effectively takes effort, time and commitment.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor/team manager to check that life story work has been considered, planned and undertaken to the standards laid out within this guidance. Life story work can be emotionally demanding for the social worker who must have regular support via supervision.

Section 1 - Context

'Putting life jigsaw together' or 'disposing of sad memories' Willis & Holland 2009

'Emotional capital for the future' Willis & Holland 2009

What is the purpose of life story work?

All children and young people in care have had profound experiences of loss, separation, abuse and/or neglect. For some children and young people placement changes will have exacerbated these feelings and experiences, their past may be lost, much of it forgotten. Life story work can help them understand and integrate their past, make sense of their present and develop a clear sense of identity for their future. It is an invaluable tool in raising awareness of the impact of their earlier experiences on their capacity to express their feelings and needs. The work also assists them in making sense of what has happened, and what is happening to them providing a structure for talking about their situation. If denied this opportunity children/young people may believe that they were personally responsible for anything that went wrong. Life story work is an attempt to dispel fantasy and give back these children/young people some realistic sense of their past.

Life story work is a way of working which includes the gathering of information to produce an improved understanding for the child/young person of their continuous journey. Throughout this process the following key elements contribute to the work:

- The creation of a recorded story that explains the reasons for the child/young person's moves from their birth family, a comprehensive chronology;
- Integrate the past into the future so that childhood and life experience makes sense;
- The gathering of treasured objects from the past, which includes photographs and mementos of childhood;
- Providing information about their birth family and other significant relationships in their past and present life;
- Increase a child/young person's self esteem and self worth and in doing so develop a sense of security and permanence for the future.

Life story work is a way of working; it is not a therapeutic model but can support and assist the child/young person at times of key transitions/difficulties. In very difficult circumstances it can help them to understand what is happening to them, to express their feelings and contribute to decision making and share their story with their new family. Therefore, planning needs to be based on an up to date assessment and what the child/young person needs at a particular time.

Life story work is never actually complete, and at different stages of the child/young person's cognitive development, and over time, the social worker or others may have to help the child/young person to revisit their history and retell their story.

'A life story book is an attempt to give back to the child in care his or her own past life through the gathering and discussion of facts and people in that life and to help him or

The processes of Life Story Work

Life story work needs to provide the child/young person with an understanding of their individual journey. It is an evolving process and not a one off piece of work. Social workers must aim for an inclusive approach to life story work with the child and young person. However, there may be times when it is appropriate for the initial life story work to be started for them. This may be due to the young age of the child or the young person not wanting to engage in the process. A life story work plan should be part of the care plan and be addressed fully when permanency options are being considered.

Who completes and organises the life story work:

Kent expects that the qualified allocated social worker undertakes life story work with the child/young person. Supervision must detail the level of management oversight of the work dependent on the skills and experience of the social worker. It is expected that there is continuity in the planning and with the worker completing the life story work. In exceptional circumstances some of the work may be delegated to a skilled social work assistant, foster carer or another qualified social worker who is well known to the child/young person and who has regular contact with them. If life story work is complimented by the assistance of other professionals this must be closely supervised by the child/young person's social worker or their line manager to monitor its suitability, progress and any issues arising.

Children and young people are central to the process of life story work. It is vital that those undertaking the work have the skills to maximise the child/young person's engagement in the process according to their age, understanding and development.

Parents, family members and any significant adults play a key role in providing accurate information, anecdotes, photographs and memorabilia for the child/young person and should be supported and encouraged to make a valuable contribution.

Once permanence has been secured for the child/young person the record of the life story work will transfer to them or their permanent carer for safekeeping, additions and revising throughout the child/young person's minority.

Where should life story work take place?

There are no hard and fast rules to where the work should take place. However, it is recommended that there is an identified venue that is safe, secure and uninterrupted and becomes familiar to the child/young person for carrying out the work. There needs to be consideration of the impact of the work and its association with the venue, therefore, the placement should not be used. It may be appropriate from time to time to take the child/young person to significant places as part of the recollection of earlier events and times.

Every visit to the child or young person is an opportunity to reevaluate the impact of life story work and their understanding.

How do you complete life story work?

Inherent in social work training and practice are the skills for undertaking direct work with children and young people and knowledge of child development and attachment theory. The most fundamental skill is that of communication and observation. All social workers will have theoretical knowledge regarding the impact of abuse and neglect on children's presentation and development. This aids the social worker in being able to 'select' the most appropriate approach and tools to support the child/young person in engaging in life story work.

There are various methods and tools that can be used to develop life story work for example: Listening, talking, drawing, painting, playing, storytelling, compiling ecomaps/family trees, using sand trays, puppets and interactive packages. This is not an exhaustive list.

The life story book is often regarded as the end product and most commonly used when adoption is the plan. However, life story books can be useful for all children and young people who have experienced time in care or away from their birth family. All pieces of life story work are important and memory boxes, photos, drawings and so on must all be kept safe.

To complete successful life story work you need to be able to develop and adapt templates and skills to match the needs of the child/young person you are working with.

It is vital that the sessions are planned for all future work and not subsequently changed due to other commitments. The social worker will need to prepare the child/young person for the work and this should include talking with their carer.

An important aspect of life story work is to acknowledge the child or young person's feelings about things that have happened to him or her. They can experience a range of feelings during the life story work. Some children or young people may be still be grieving, and recognising that the separation and loss can take a long time to heal; their sadness must be acknowledged and not suppressed. At times children and young people may act out their fears and experiences of their birth family e.g. violence. It is important that those working with/caring for the child/young person come alongside them and accept what they have experienced and reassure them that they are safe now. It is important that the child or young person is encouraged to talk about these feelings with a person they feel comfortable with. Additional support such as counselling can help deal with any difficult or sensitive issues that arise during life story work.

It is also important to tell the child or young person that their life story book belongs to them and that they decide who else can look at it. If someone wants to look at their life story book they must have the child or young person's permission.

The child or young person's social worker should enable them to communicate what they wish to find out from the life story work; this may include information on;

- The reason why they could not stay with their birth family
- Birth family and where they were born
- Siblings and why are they not together
- What life was like before they came into care
- In care history

- Agreed contact arrangements

To fully answer these questions the social worker should ensure, as a minimum, that they;

- Gather full and accurate information on the child/young person's history and reasons for he or she being in care;
- Develop an on-going chronology of significant events, significant relationships with family and friends, moves of placements and schools in the child/young person's life;
- Record all decisions made on behalf of the child/young person about their future. Children's Guardians could be approached to write a letter to the child/young person to explain their role, events and decisions made for them in the court arena;
- Record the child/young person's views wishes and feelings about the plans and decisions made or endorsed at their reviews;
- Collect photographs, certificates and documents to support the life story work;
- Ensure the child/young person's contribution is included as far as it is practicable in the gathering of information based on their developmental understanding;
- Where there are gaps in important information make it clear to the child/young person that the information is not fact and cannot be confirmed. Record this uncertainty clearly within the child/young person's file;
- Maintain a copy of the life story book on the child/young person's file.

The timing of life story work

Life story work needs to be planned as a result of an up to date assessment of the child/young person's needs which can be evidenced on the child/young person's file. This may have been discussed at the Child in Care review and be included in the care plan, specifying who is to do the work and in what timescales. Where the child is not ready to undertake work directly, the information must still be gathered for the child for a later time and this process not delayed.

Consideration must be given to the child/young person's age and understanding and their ability to engage in the work. Whilst there needs

to be a plan for the work including the number of sessions, this should not be rigid but should meet the needs and ability of the child/young person. The primary consideration must be the child/young person within the work and their wishes, feelings and desire to engage in the work. Key factors to consider are; age, understanding, significant issues impacting on the child/young person e.g. contact, court processes and key transition stages. Remember that life story work is a process not an event.

On some occasions there may be compelling reasons why painful past issues are not dealt with by a specific professional. In such circumstances this should be carefully considered and a decision made by the supervisor in conjunction with the social worker as to who will undertake the work within specific timescales. This must be recorded on the child/young person's file along with the plan of work.

A child/young person who does not wish to, or is not ready to deal with their past they still need an explanation about what happened and to be informed about their plans for their present and future. In these situations, the opportunity should be taken when the child/young person is receptive and to listening and to share their views, wishes and feelings.

Life story work with black and minority ethnic children and young people

Life story work for all children and young people must be prepared carefully and the social worker must be sensitive in their approach and perspective. Uncovering historical family information may be difficult for some children and young people who could be harbouring misconceptions about themselves. Social workers need to be aware that alongside these feelings could be another dimension linked to how they feel others and themselves view their culture, heritage and ethnicity. For Asian, African and Caribbean children and young people and those of mixed parentage identity and cultural heritage is vitally important in developing identity and in explaining their journey into care and helping to develop a positive sense of self.

The social worker needs to ensure that they respectfully and sensitively aware of language and are honest if they have any gaps in their own knowledge regarding their understanding of the child or young person's culture.

It is essential that the social worker talks to the child or young person about their wishes and feelings. This includes whether the child or young person would prefer to have links with someone from their own culture to identify with.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people who have entered into the care system have often had a traumatic journey from a frightening reality in their home countries. Not only will they have a culture barrier to deal with they have to learn to trust people and manage the memories and feelings they have brought with them. They are likely to be feeling afraid, vulnerable and confused.

Life story work for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people can be extremely beneficial in helping them to overcome some of their life experiences and in helping to develop a positive self esteem. However, communication difficulties often provide a challenge for workers when planning life story work. This does not mean it should not be planned and started with the child or young person. Obtaining a good interpreter is key in this process but it is equally important to complete

life story work through non verbal communication such as drawings and photos.

Life Story work with children and young people with a disability

All children and young people, regardless of whether they have a disability, have a right to understand their own individual stories. The care plan for a child or young person with a disability must include a plan for life story work. The life story plan would need to address the preferred method(s) of communication with the child or young person, level of understanding and factors that can support the process such as sensory rooms, visits to memorable places and so on. The planning is no different from any other child in care - what is important is to ensure the disability does not lead to worker inactivity through workers feeling unable to communicate with the child or young person.

Children and young people with learning disabilities or who are disabled may present a challenge to the worker wishing to use the 'traditional' method of life story work. Creativity around timings, venues and activities need to be planned and adapted throughout the process to fully facilitate and support the work. A written life story book may be pointless if the child or young person is unable to read, write or concentrate, but one that is interactive or visual may be beneficial. For example models, computer programmes or personalised DVDs.

Do not assume that a child or young person is unable to communicate instead question your own ability to understand how they are communicating with you. Ensure you use your observation skills and that you are engaging and talking to the child or young person. Make good use of the child's communication passport where they have one.

'For Aaron who was blind, much of his life story work was interspersed with tactile stimuli, for example, buttons from a favourite person's jacket, a shell from a seaside outing with the family, dried flowers from the garden. It also included a handkerchief perfumed with his birth mother's favourite perfume.'
Life story work - Ryan & Walker BAAF 2007

The participation of children and young people

The right of the child and young person to participate and have some level of influence over the decisions affecting them is enshrined in the Children Act 1989, 2004 and the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in particular Article 12.

Meaningful participation is a process that should be evidenced in all our work with children and young people and not simply a tokenistic one off event.

It is important that before any decision is made about the child/young person you should find out what their wishes and feelings are. These should then be considered, depending on the child/young person's age and understanding, when developing life story work. This also includes a need to gain a level of their understanding of the situation and their ability to cope with information at any given stage in the planning and process.

Engaging children and young people effectively and helping them to participate often leads to a clear recognition of their difficulties, develops their strengths and promotes their resilience. If the child/young person is involved from the beginning it is more likely that they will feel some ownership of the life story work and less fearful of what is happening.

What is meant by wishes and feelings?

WISHES:

- What they want to do themselves and what they want others to do.
- What they hope will happen and what they do not want to happen.

FEELINGS:

- Being anxious or fearful about something, unhappy or sad, feeling ok, happy or indifferent, feeling numb.
- Even acknowledging that currently they do not know what they feel or are confused.

There is not a set way of establishing the wishes and feelings of a child/young person as each individual will express their views in different ways dependant on their age, understanding and what is comfortable for them. For example this

may be through talking, art (drawing/painting), in collages or models and so on. As a social worker it is your job to find the best way to facilitate participation that is inclusive and adaptable to the child/young person's needs at that time.

If a child/young person finds it difficult to express their wishes and feelings about any decisions being made about them then they are entitled to have an advocate.

The child/young person's identity.

A crucial aspect of life story work is the formation and development of the child/young person's identity. Life story work with children and young people can help them understand and integrate their past, make sense of the present and develop a clearer self-identity for the future. All children and young people are unique and in life story work individuality should be respected and diversity valued. Needs must be fully addressed in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, disability and sexuality.

When planning life story work particular attention needs to be given to the impact of the work on the child/young person's perception of themselves and how they feel others view them. Children and Young People form their identity as an individual in two ways:

- By identifying with others - Who am I similar to?
- By differentiating from others - How am I unique or different from others?

Identity can be broken down into four key components*:

- 1) A feeling of inner sameness and continuity
Is this child/young person comfortable in their own skin?
- 2) A feeling of personal freedom
Do they have age appropriate choice in decisions that affect them?
- 3) Having a goal for which one can work towards
Do they have hobbies/interests and aspirations?
- 4) Feeling of acceptance and belonging by one's social environment
Having a sense of belonging to a family, school, friends and community.

To build, strengthen and consolidate the child/young person's identity the work needs to be undertaken in a way that can enhance the child/young person's self esteem and positive sense of self. This requires the social worker to develop a high degree of sensitivity and to demonstrate the use of social work values as outlined in the HCPC code of conduct (refer to GSCC code of conduct).

If the child/young person's life story work is inaccurate, incomplete or poorly presented the child/young person may find it very hard to develop any kind of understanding of their background history and their current placement/permanence plan. This may lead to significant problems in forming and developing their identity, attachments and future relationships.

Consideration also needs to be given to the child/young person's culture. The term culture in this guide is used to mean a person's life experiences drawn from their family, their community, their disability, their sexuality, their race and religion and their personal history. There are differences across and within cultures and the main message is:

**Don't assume - ask the child/young person and
wherever possible, ask the family.**

For further guidance refer to:

http://www.clusterweb.org.uk/UserFiles/CW/File/Policy/Childrens_Social_Services/Culturally_Compentent_Care/Policy_Procedure_and_Guidance/CulturallyCompententCare_0209.pdf

*Erik Erikson 1982 Childhood & Society: The Life Cycle completed. Norton, NY

Please also access Tri X:

<http://kentchildcare.proceduresonline.com/index.htm>

Section 2 - Examples

'Material artefacts (can be) vital building blocks of identity' Willis & Holland
2009

Things that might usefully be included in life story work and books

The focus of life story work and contents of life books/memory boxes will differ depending on the child/young person's individual story and age, the information and materials that are available:

- An original copy of the birth certificate
- A copy of the birth family tree
- Photographs of significant people and places
- A map of places where they lived with their birth family
- Their full birth name and why this was chosen by the birth parent/s
- Background information about the family of origin and any relevant events that occurred before they were born.
- Details about the child/young person's birth, for example, it should say where and when born, birth weight, length, and perhaps circumstances surrounding the birth etc.
- Good memories and anecdotes - e.g. close relationships, pets, holidays
- Some discussion of abusive or neglectful care that has occurred, and what happened to the person who neglected or abused them. It may also need to cover the work and decision making of the agencies and the court involved in trying to protect them.
- Time lines of important events, dates and decisions

- Their birth family members views on the plan for permanence
- Contact arrangements and endings
- What they loved doing and were good at
- Details of how a match was made with their current carers
- Information to be continually added and updated...

This is a link to an origami memory box template that can be used with children and young people in creating a personalised box through their life story work

<http://www.origamiway.com/origami-box-with-lid.shtml>

Key elements of life story work

Life Story Book Contains the child/young person's story in a sensitive, honest, age appropriate way. Tells the story of how they came into care and be living with their current carers, provides reasons for decisions and aspirations for the future.

Life story work in boxes/folders Contains all the material used during the life story work sessions and the plans.

Memory boxes Contains information, anecdotes, developmental milestones, photos, cards, certificates and other mementos gathered while the child or young person lives with the foster family. This should also hold the child or young person's favourite or treasured item(s) e.g. toy or cuddly bear, best possession.

Photos An invaluable and essential element of life story work. They are not only a record of past events but also a means by which the child or young person may be able to talk about the past and express feelings about it. The photos would include gathered pictures of birth parents, siblings and significant others, places they have lived, visited, schools, pets etc. Make a separate album without any text so that they can view with friends without having to read through their story.

Family Tree or Genogram Family Trees or Genogram's are pictorial representations of a family's history. Helping a child or young person pull together details of their family can help them see where they came in

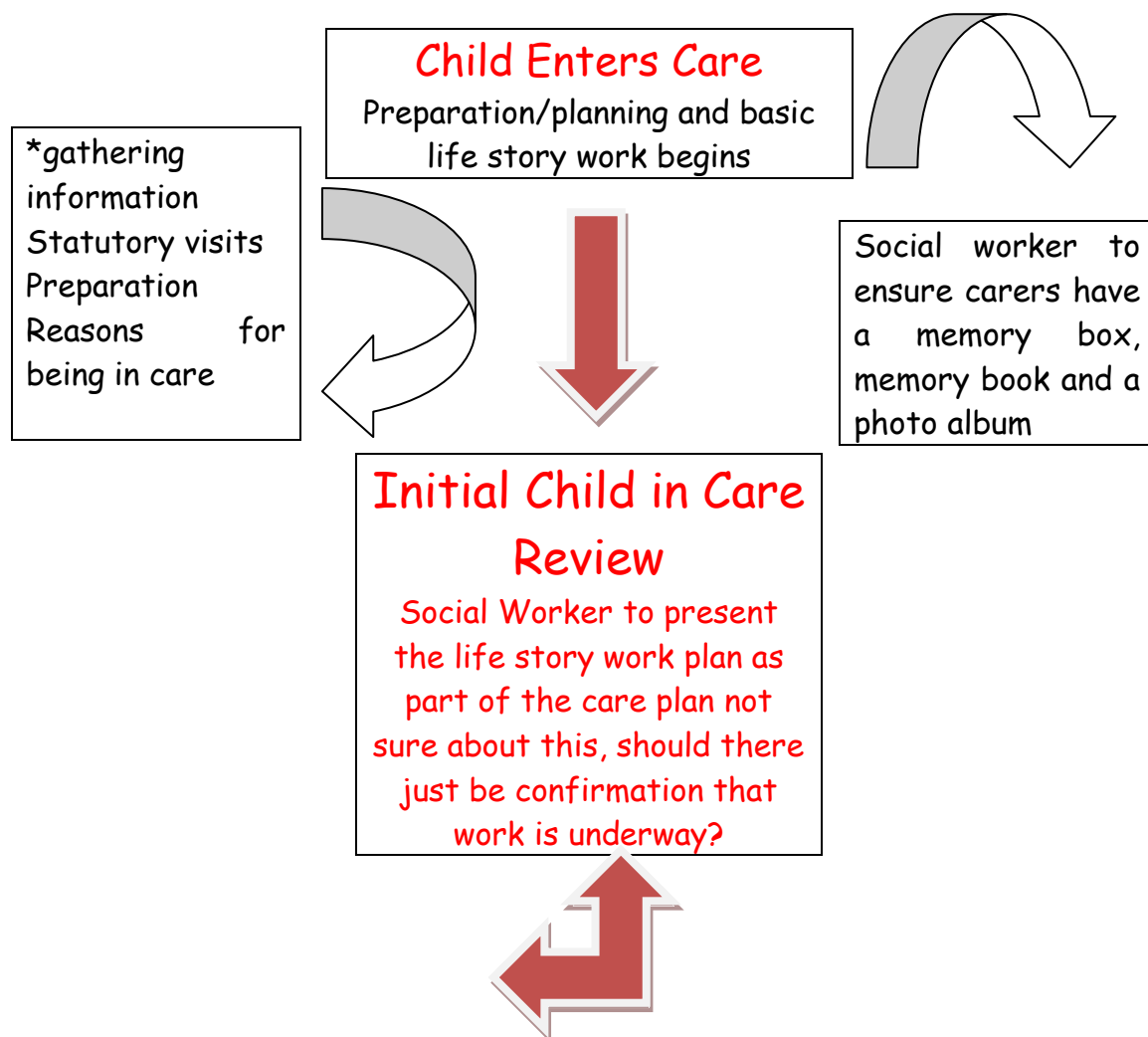
their birth family and begin to unravel some of the complexities of extended families. It can show relationships, ages and you can plot the strength of some of the relationships through different lines e.g. whether people are still together, divorced, married etc.

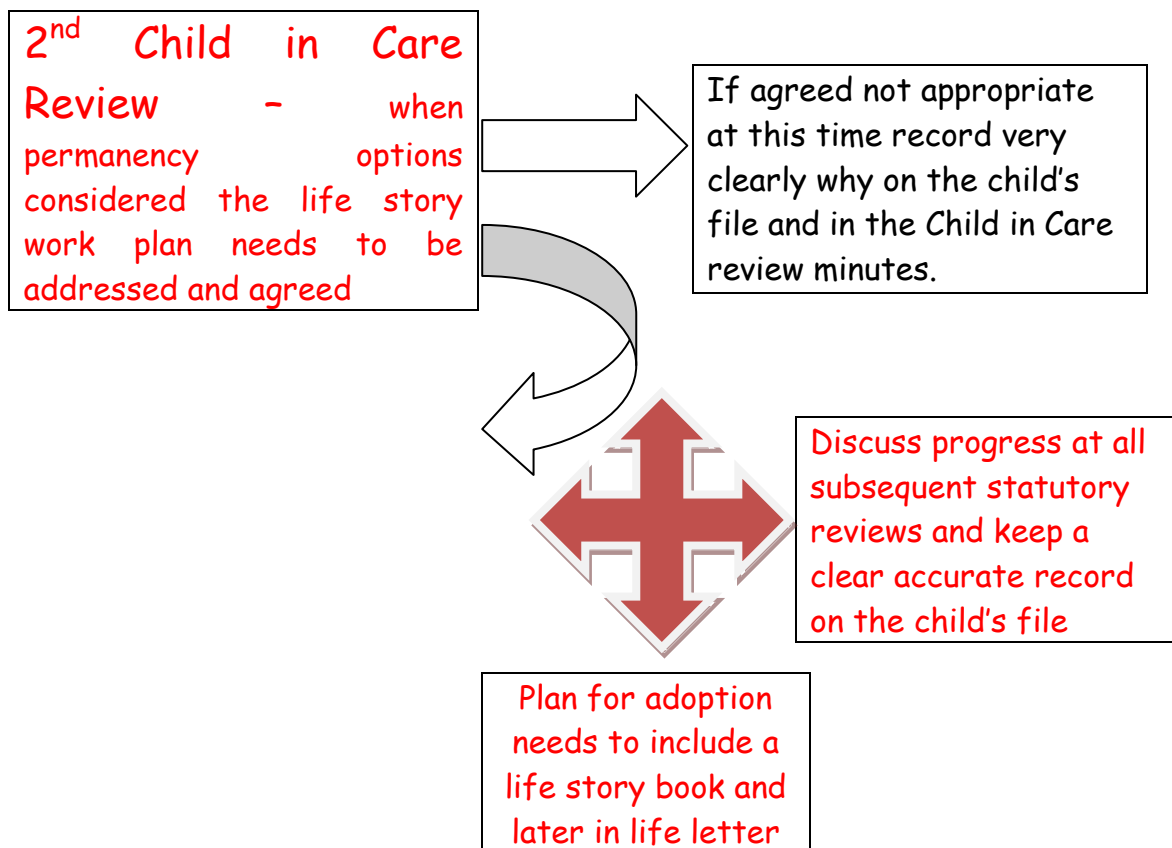
Chronology A written comprehensive record of events and decisions in the order of occurrences throughout the child/young person's life.

Timelines or Life Graphs Simple diagram that helps plot and understand the movements in the child or young person's life. You can work from whatever point is comfortable for them e.g. from now working backwards in time, at a date that had significant meaning for them or at the very beginning when they were born.

Later Life Letters a letter that can provide a more adult version of events to be opened by the child/young person at a later stage.

Flow Chart





A New Approach to Consider!

Kent County Council agrees strongly that Life Story work is not only an individual and personal process but extremely important for all children and young people.

The process of undertaking this type of work traditionally follows a set

pattern where the journey begins with the child's entry into this world and ends with child or young person finding permanence. It is recommended that consideration is also given to a family friendly approach described by Joy Rees in her book Life

Story Books for Adopted Children that offers a different starting point and vision.

'This clear and concise book shows a new family-friendly way to compile a Life Story Book that promotes a sense of permanency for the child, and encourages attachments within the adoptive family. Joy Rees' improved model works chronologically

Copies for:

- Child/young person
- Carer
- File

backwards rather than forwards, aiming to reinforce the child's sense of belonging and security within the adoptive family before addressing past and early trauma. The book contains simple explanations of complex concepts, practical examples and helpful suggestions.'

Social Work Practitioners and their Managers need to adapt and choose various techniques for the child or young person they are working with based on the principles set out within this handbook. Planning and consultation with the child or young person is essential. All life story work will have similar elements to it but the end product should be individualised.

The book is short and easy to read with good examples. It is important to acknowledge that this approach may not suit all children or young people. In addition life story work should not be left unplanned or considered until the point of adoption or securing permanency. However, this is a refreshing approach and worth reading to equip yourself with a deeper understanding of why life story work is vital and to have additional tools to use.

Example Life Story Books

The following examples are basic ideas that can be developed further.

The first is written for a two year old. The idea is that it is colourful with clear pictures/photos and limited writing. The book could be printed, laminated and put in a ring binder so the child is able to look through it with someone. This is to demonstrate that life story work begins early in the process and develops alongside the child's chronological age and needs. At this stage the memory box and storage of key information is vital. For example birth certificate, hospital wrist band, red health book, special bear, first baby outfit, early photos must all be kept.

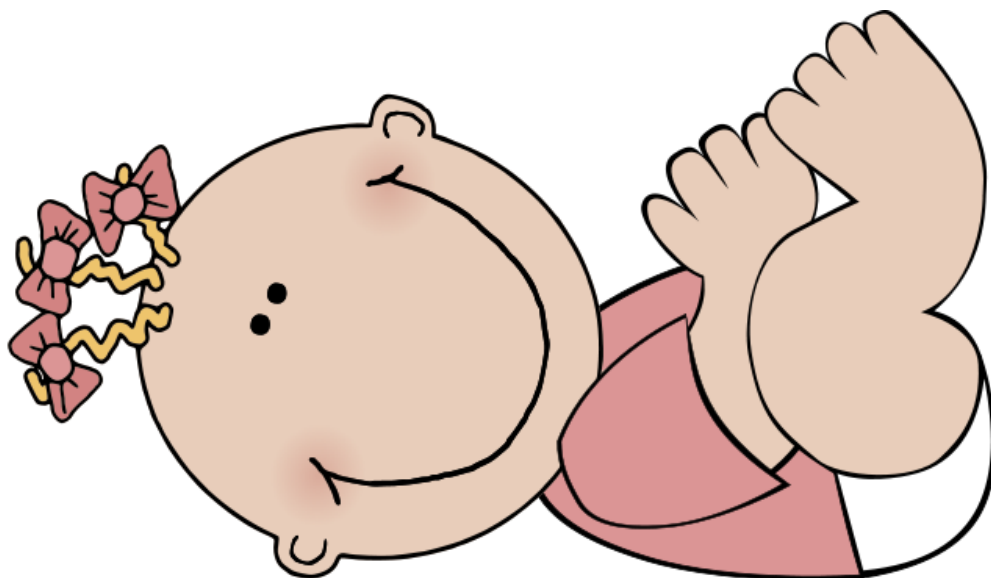
The second is written for the same child now that she is 6 years old. This holds more detail about the child and tries to explain the moves and

different carers she has had to date. This could be printed off and placed in a file for ease of reference and additions. Any life story work completed through the process of completing the book needs to be stored for her in a safe place.

The third follows the same child now aged 12 years. Included within this are time lines, deeper explanations which have resulted in less photos and more writing. Obviously this would depend on the child's needs and development. It was deliberately written as a life story book that can stand alone. It is the social workers choice as to whether they wish with the child to record information that can be added to the previous work completed when 6 years old. However, it would be expected that the 6 years between the books would have involved numerous updates and collection of life story work, photos, special certificates etc.

NB life story books are only one part of life story work.





GRACIE'S BOOK

INSERT PHOTO



**YOUR BIRTHDAY IS
01 JANUARY 2003**



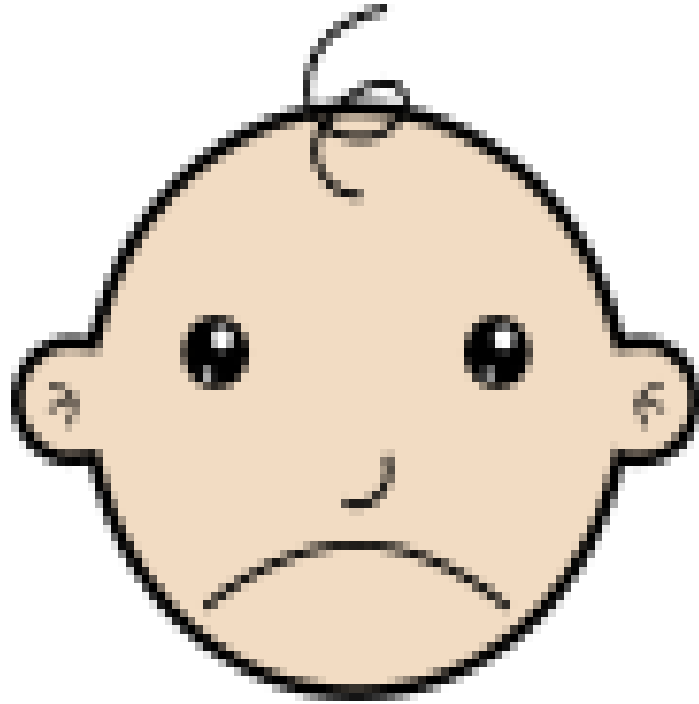
YOU WERE BORN AT MAIDSTONE
HOSPITAL

THESE ARE YOUR BIRTH MUMMY JADE
AND DADDY ALI

Insert photo of parents (ideally holding Gracie)

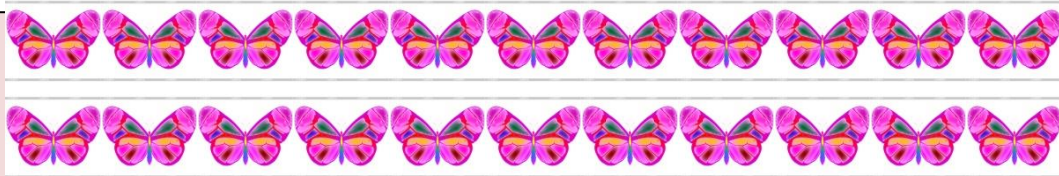


MUMMY JADE AND DADDY ALI
SHOUTED AT EACH OTHER AND YOU
WERE SAD.



SO YOU AND MUMMY MOVED TO
CORNWALL TOGETHER

Insert photo of house lived in



MUMMY JADE COULD NOT LOOK
AFTER YOU SO YOU CAME TO LIVE
WITH NANA PAULINE IN MAIDSTONE

Insert photo of Nana Pauline with Gracie in front of house

NANA PAULINE ALSO HAS SKIP THE
DOG AND FLUFFY THE CAT – YOU
LOVE THEM



THIS IS SUSIE YOUR SOCIAL WORKER

Insert photo

SUSIE IS HELPING NANA PAULINE,
MUMMY JADE AND DADDY ALI SEE
WHO CAN LOOK AFTER YOU FOREVER





A BIGGER BOOK FOR GRACIE AGED 6 YEARS OLD

INSERT RECENT PHOTO OF GRACIE



**GRACIE WAS BORN ON 01 JANUARY
2003**

**at 2.45 in the morning at MAIDSTONE
HOSPITAL**



**GRACIE WEIGHED 6lb 3oz
SHE WAS A BIT POORLY FOR A COUPLE
OF DAYS SO SLEPT IN A SPECIAL BABY
COT**

Insert photo of Gracie in the incubator



**THIS IS A COPY OF GRACIE'S BIRTH
CERTIFICATE**



**WHEN GRACIE FELT BETTER SHE WENT
HOME FROM THE HOSPITAL TO LIVE
WITH HER BIRTH PARENTS - MUMMY
JADE AND DADDY ALI**

Insert photo of the 3 of them

**GRACIE LIVED AT 99 BROWN ROAD,
BARMING**



JADE AND ALI HAD LOTS OF GROWN UP PROBLEMS AND WERE ALWAYS IN A MUDDLE. THEY WERE OFTEN CROSS ABOUT THINGS AND THERE WAS A LOT OF SHOUTING AND FIGHTING.



© Ron Leishman * www.ClipartOf.com/439575



**GRACIES BIRTH PARENTS FOUND IT
HARD TO GIVE HER ALL THE CARE SHE
NEEDED BECAUSE THEIR GROWN UP
PROBLEMS KEPT GETTING IN THE WAY.**



**THIS WAS A SAD AND SCAREY TIME FOR
GRACIE.
GRACIE HAD A SOCIAL WORKER CALLED
JOHN WHO CAME TO SEE GRACIE AND
TO HELP JADE AND ALI TO TRY AND
KEEP HER SAFE AND WELL.**

Insert photo of social worker



JADE AND ALI HAD MORE AND MORE GROWN UP PROBLEMS. THEY SHOUTED AT EACH OTHER ALL THE TIME AND ALI HIT JADE. EVERYONE WAS WORRIED ABOUT HOW SAFE GRACIE WAS LIVING WITH HER BIRTH PARENTS.



(Insert photo of Gracie at that time)

JADE LEFT ALI AND TOOK GRACIE AGED 3 YEARS TO LIVE IN CORNWALL at 101 BAKER STREET...



(Highlight where on map)

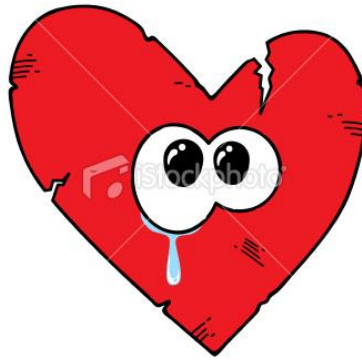


GRACIE MET HER NEW SOCIAL WORKER LEXI

(Insert photo)

**LEXI WAS VERY WORRIED ABOUT JADE'S
DRINKING AND HOW SHE WAS LOOKING
AFTER GRACIE.**

**JADE DECIDED TO LET GRACIE LIVE
WITH NANA PAULINE WHEN SHE WAS 3
1/2 YEARS OLD**



**GRACIE MOVED TO NANA PAULINES
AND LIVED AT 246 LOOSE ROAD,
MAIDSTONE, KENT**

(Insert photo)

**DADDY ALI CONTINUED TO SEE GRACIE
AND WHEN NANA PAULINE FOUND IT
DIFFICULT TO CARE FOR GRACIE HE
ASKED A JUDGE IF HE COULD LOOK
AFTER GRACIE. THE JUDGE AGREED SO
WHEN GRACIE WAS 4 YEARS OLD SHE
MOVED TO LIVE WITH HER DADDY ALI
IN SNODLAND, KENT.**



(Insert photo of daddy Ali and Gracie)

**GRACIE DID NOT HAVE A HAPPY TIME
LIVING WITH ALI AND WAS HURT BY
HIM.**



**ALI AGREED FOR HER TO LIVE WITH
FOSTER CARERS WHEN SHE WAS 6 YEARS
OLD, WHO ARE PEOPLE WHO LOOK
AFTER YOU WHEN YOU CAN'T LIVE
WITH YOUR PARENTS.**



**THEIR NAMES ARE RON AND SYLVIA
GREEN**

(Insert photo of Gracie with her foster carers)

**GRACIE'S SOCIAL WORKER TOM HAS TO
DECIDE WHO THE BEST PERSON IS TO
CARE FOR HER UNTIL SHE IS OLD
ENOUGH TO LOOK AFTER HERSELF.**

(Insert photo of social worker)



**IT IS TOM'S JOB TO MAKE
SURE HE UNDERSTANDS
WHAT GRACIE WANTS
AND FEELS.**

**HE WILL MEET
REGULARLY WITH
GRACIE AND TALK TO
EVERYBODY WHO
KNOWS HER TO HELP
MAKE THE RIGHT
DECISION FOR HER.**

The idea of this book at age 12 is to pull all of the direct work completed over the years together and to ensure the child is part of collating this information.

THIS IS THE THIRD BOOK THAT TELLS THE STORY OF GRACIE'S LIFE

Insert photo of Gracie

This book contains some of Gracie's own words/work and pictures.

About Gracie:

- Name – Gracie Pauline Alikhail. **Gracie means love.**

The name was chosen by her mother who stated that since she was a young girl she wanted to have a daughter called Gracie. Gracie's middle name is after her maternal grandmother – Nana Pauline.

It is said that girls with this name have a deep inner desire for a stable, loving family or community, and a need to work with others and to be appreciated. Gracie states that this is very true and that she has always wanted to belong to a loving family – *'it's a proper shame my own family couldn't do it'*.

Alikhail is her father's surname and is a traditional Islamic name. Gracie does not like it and wishes to have her surname changed. *'Since I was little I have always been picked on and called names due to my surname. Plus my dad was horrible to me and my mum so I don't want nothing to do with him.'*

- Date of birth Tuesday 1st January 2003

'Tuesday's child is full of grace' from the Nursery Rhyme *Mondays Child*.

Gracie believes that to be 'full of grace' you have to be classy and know your p's and q's. She states that she knows them but often forgets to use them! One day Gracie wants to be seen as confident and graceful.

Gracie's Family Tree

(Copy direct work exercise into here – ensure it was completed with the child)

believe me as my skin is the wrong colour and my hair is really black and wiry. My social worker thinks I should spend time understanding my background and Religion. I just want to spend time thinking about the future and how to fit in with my new family.'

Gracie's dad wanted her to be raised as a Muslim, her mother strongly refused this but did not nominate a religion for her daughter to follow. Foster carers have always encouraged Gracie to talk about her roots and feelings. Gracie has always wanted to 'fit in' with her peers and forget her past influences. Gracie knows that when she is ready she can explore these further with Jan and Paul and/or her social worker Tom. *Insert feelings:*





Gracie's timeline (examples of things included)

<i>Parents met</i>	<i>December 2002</i>
<i>Prebirth CP Conference</i>	<i>Registered under Emotional and Physical Abuse</i>
<i>Born</i>	<i>1.1.03 at 2.45am</i>
<i>Special Care Baby Unit</i>	<i>11 days left 12.1.03</i>
<i>Home with parents</i>	<i>12.1.03 - 99 Brown Rd, Barming</i>
<i>Move to Cornwall with mum</i>	<i>3 yrs old - 101 Baker Street, Truro</i>
<i>Moved to live with Nana P</i>	<i>3.5yrs - 246 Loose Road, Maidstone</i>
<i>Nana P in hospital</i>	<i>2007</i>
<i>Interim Residence Order</i>	<i>2007 to dad</i>
<i>Moved to live with dad</i>	<i>4 yrs old - 321 Ash Road, Snodland</i>
<i>Told teacher re dad</i>	<i>6 yrs old - hitting with shoe and belt</i>
<i>Foster Care</i>	<i>Ron and Sylvia Green</i>

Reasons why Gracie could not live with her birth parents

Gracie has been known to Childrens Social Care before she was born. Social Workers and Midwives had serious concerns about how she was developing in the womb due to her mother's poor antenatal care and heaving drinking and/or occasional drug use. In addition to this report's had been received regarding Gracie's parents volatile relationship and her father being extremely controlling. Police had been called out to their home on numerous occasions by neighbours reporting Ali being physically violent towards Jade. Jade always denied any violence and blamed her injuries on accidents such as walking into cupboards. Jade had extremely low self esteem, was depressed and continued drinking. Gracie continues to question whether her parents actually wanted her as she knows that she was not a planned pregnancy.

Gracie was born dependent upon alcohol and diagnosed as having foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). She spent 11 days in the special care baby unit at Maidstone Hospital withdrawing from the affects. Social Workers were worried about her parent's lack of reaction to this and cavalier responses. Gracie has managed well with the side effects of FAS but finds it hard knowing that her symptoms were caused by her mother. Gracie left hospital and went home with her parents and into what was later described as a turbulent home life. Jade left Ali taking Gracie to Cornwall for a new start with the intention of being as far away as possible from Ali. Cornwall Social Care Services became involved and had increasing concerns about Jade's ability to provide good enough parenting to Gracie. Contact had been maintained with grandparents who on occasions allowed Ali to see Gracie when she stayed with them. Gracie has vague memories of her time in Cornwall but remembers clearly her overnight stays with her grandparents. Jade had fallen back into her patterns of drinking and drug taking eventually asking Nana Pauline to care for Gracie full time. Jade's initial intention was to give herself space to sort herself out. Unfortunately Jade was unable to achieve this and stopped having contact with her daughter and remained in Cornwall.

Nana Pauline and Gracie had a special relationship together and a bond that is still present today. Due to Nana Pauline's own health

needs, age and pressures from Ali she began struggling to provide long term care for her granddaughter. Nana Pauline was attacked in her home by Jade's new partner that resulted in her stating she could no longer care for Gracie. Ali went to court and obtained an Interim Residence Order and resumed care of Gracie.

There were a number of allegations made by Gracie's grandparents against Ali alleging that he was isolating Gracie from her maternal family. Gracie remembers this clearly and states that he made her tell the social workers that she was happy with him. At the age of 6 years Gracie found the strength to disclose to a school teacher that her father was regularly hitting her with a shoe and belt. She was terrified of being returned to his care and was requesting to live with Nana Pauline again. Unfortunately Nana Pauline was not in a position due to her health to care for her. Gracie states that she is very grateful to her teacher who listened to her when she most needed it.

Gracie was subsequently placed in foster care with her parent's agreement at the age of 6 years old. Assessments proved she was a victim of physical and emotional harm from her father. In addition it became known that her maternal grandfather had a conviction of a sexual offence against her mother. Gracie's mother felt unable to put herself forward as a carer for her daughter. There were no other suitable family members. Gracie said that around this time she felt scared and rejected by everyone she knew and thought loved her.

A care order was secured and the permanence plan was to secure a family for Gracie via adoption. Gracie remained in foster care for a further 18 months having moved to two different foster carers. The adoption plan was changed to allow permanence to be secured with her current foster carers. Gracie struggled a lot with not being found a family who wanted to adopt her.

Gracie knows that most people who have children love and want to keep them. But love is more than just an emotion it is someone giving another person what they need to be happy and safe. Gracie understands that her mum loves her in her heart but has never been able to give her what she needs to be happy and safe. Equally she knows that her dad has said he loves her but Gracie finds it hard to understand how that '*so called love*' shows itself in violence towards her.

Include pages in the book that cover where Gracie lived, what schools she attended, hobbies/interests, social workers etc.

This can also include places with happy/sad memories, past likes/dislikes, significant memories

Examples:

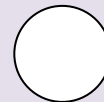
Gracie said that she loved living with her Nana Pauline and always remembers bedtimes being special and calm. Nana Pauline would read her favourite book to her and stroke her hair until she fell asleep. Gracie has managed to keep the copy of her favourite book which she has in her memory box. Nana Pauline gave it to her and she often reads it when she feels sad.

.....

Gracie remembers clearly being, in her words 'terrified', of her dad and waiting for him to lose his temper and 'whallop' her. She would hide under her bed or in the small wardrobe in her bedroom so he could not find her. Gracie said that it was not long until he found her hiding places. She still flinches now if a

door is slammed or someone moves towards her quickly or unexpectedly.

GRACIE'S ECOMAP



a solid or thick line represents an important, strong or positive connection



a broken line represents a tenuous or weak connection



lines with crosses through them indicate a stressful relationship



arrows along the line point towards the direction or flow of resources, energy or interest.



Female symbol - name, age



Male symbol - name, age



Unknown gender



Separation - date or ages



Divorce - date or ages

List children in birth order and put names and ages either within the symbol or underneath.



Death - a small cross in the corner of the symbol (record date if known)



Dotted circle - this can be used to enclose the members living together currently, for example, who the young person is living with.



Conflictual relationship

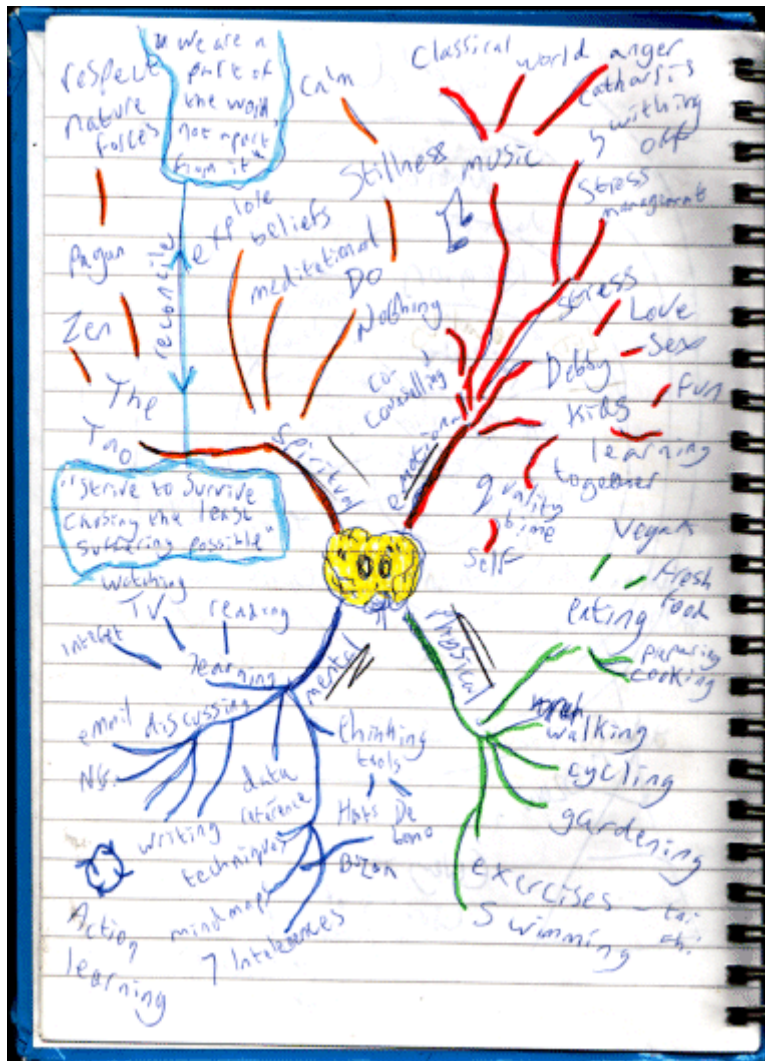


Very close



Distant relationship

Include pieces of direct work used to illustrate Gracie's view and feelings. This is an example of how someone sees them self gaining positives and strength around their feelings. For example Gracie may say she loves swimming and reading as it helps her feel calm and forget. But emotionally she may identify that having a special person to talk to about her feelings and life history is important



GRACIES JOURNEY TO FINDING HER FOREVER FAMILY

Gracie has lived with Mark and Rebecca Fleece since she was 8 years old. Prior to this Gracie had two previous foster placements. The first was with Ron and Sylvia Green who were only able to care for Gracie for a short time because she came into care under emergency arrangements. Gracie then moved to Ella and Aaron Pearce's where she remained with them for 13 months. This placement broke down following Ella and Aaron giving notice on the placement. Gracie recalls not feeling able to settle, she was not the youngest in the family and felt

she had to compete for attention. Gracie openly admits that she pushed the boundaries all the time and for her the only good thing at the time was school.

A planned move took place over a period of 3 weeks for Gracie to meet and get to know Mark and Rebecca. An important factor for ensuring this placement worked was that Gracie was the only child in the family. At the time Gracie was experiencing significant feelings of rejection and was unable to trust people. However, since moving in with Mark and Rebecca everyone has seen how much she had grown in confidence and has settled. Gracie says they did not give up on her despite her 'being a cow at times'! A superb relationship has developed between them all.

Gracie is now under an arrangement called **permanent foster care**. It has been formally agreed that Mark and Rebecca will care for Gracie through to her adulthood. Whilst they do not hold parental responsibility for her it is intended to provide stability and security for Gracie.

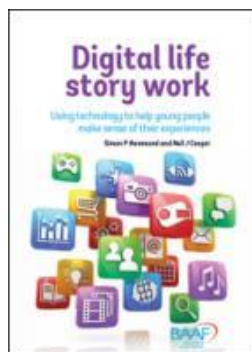
For Gracie this formal agreement for the placement to be permanent has allowed her to attach to Mark and Rebecca with whom she chose to refer to as mum and dad. Gracie has said that it was really important to her to know that she was wanted, loved and secure. That no-one would be looking to change where and with whom she lived and that she was no longer needing to look over her shoulder thinking her birth parents were trying to get her back. Gracie sees Mark and Rebecca as her family and this as her home

Some useful references



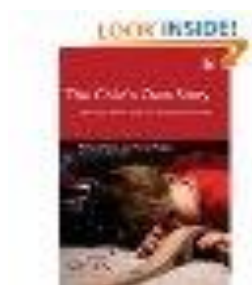
Life Story Work

Ryan and Walker BAAF



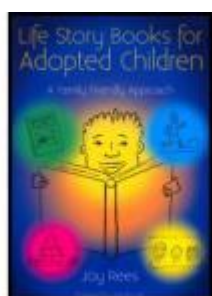
Digital life story work

Hammond and Cooper BAAF



The Child's Own Story, Life Story Work with traumatised children

Rose and Philpott



Life Story Books for Adopted Children: A Family friendly Approach. Joy Rees 2009 JK Publishers

Life story books for adopted children

Rees

Connecting with Kids through stories

Lacher, T & M Nichols & May

Life story books for people with

Hewitt, BILD

Learning disabilities

The child's journey through placement	Fahlberg, BAAF
Direct work: social work with children And young people in care	Luckock and Lefevre, BAAF
Preparing children for Permanence	Romaine, Turley & Tuckey, BAAF
Bruce's story (available on CD Rom)	MacLiver & Thom, BAAF
Talking pictures/Moving Pictures	BAAF
My Life and Me	BAAF

<http://www.bemyparent.org.uk/info-for-families/your-questions/what-is-life-story-work-and-why-is-it-important,128,AR.html>

www.inmyshoes.org.uk/In_My_Shoes/About.html

My Life Story

PC and Mac CD-ROM | Age range 8-16 | £69.95 inc. VAT

Available from Information PLUS

www.behindthename.com- look up the child's name and gives them the meaning, helpful if you know why they were given then name.

www.dayofbirth.co.uk - Learn what day of the week someone was born on, and other links

www.history.com/tdih - Suitable for older children. Look up what happened on the day they were born.

<http://kentchildcare.proceduresonline.com/index.htm>