



Bedfordshire
county council

Children Looked After Policy and Procedures

Life Story work with Looked After Children

Jo Blake, Neil Candlish, Maureen Cavanagh
Tom Murphy, Fiona MacKirdy, Katherine Peddie
Julie-Anne Saunders, Vivienne White

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Life Story work with Looked After Children

1. Statement of Policy

- 1.1 All children moving to permanent substitute families will have life story work carried out and will have a life story book.

Procedure

2. The Purpose of Life Story Work

- 2.1 Life story work is intended to help looked after children make sense of their situation. It should attempt to answer the following questions for the child:
- Who am I?
 - How did I get here?
 - Where am I going?
- 2.2 Life story work is an integral part of working with any looked after child and not a separate process that is 'tagged on' when time permits. Working with a child to understand why they are in care begins the day the child is admitted to care, as does the collection of information about the child's past and their family. It should not be something that is only commenced once a decision has been taken to place a child in an alternative permanent family.
- 2.3 Life story work is not just about producing a life story book. The book should be part of the outcome of life story work, to enable the child to refresh his or her memory of past events and people.
- 2.4 Life story work should always start with trying to establish what the child knows and understands. Some children will have a clear view of what has happened to them but may not know why. Others will be very confused. Never assume that the child's view is right or wrong. The purpose of life story work is to try and ensure that the child ultimately has an accurate understanding

3. Who Should Carry out the Work

- 3.1 The overall responsibility for obtaining information and ensuring that life story work is carried out rests with the child's social worker. However, the direct life story work with a child should ideally be carried out by someone who knows the child well and has daily or regular contact with them. This would in most cases mean the child's foster carer or residential social worker, as this permits greater flexibility and more natural opportunities for discussion with the child. Children do not always want to talk about what is happening to them at prescribed

times, so set appointments with their social worker to do life story work may be less than productive. In some cases however there maybe compelling reasons why painful past issues are not dealt with by the child's carer and in those situations the child's social worker may be the best person to carryout the life story work. Occasionally it may be desirable to bring in an independent person to work with the child; someone who the child does not associate with the responsibility removing them from home.

4. Gathering Information

- 4.1 Life story work depends on gathering full and accurate information and that information being correctly recorded. Information can be obtained from birth parents, siblings, other relatives, friends, school and health records.
- 4.2 Gathering information retrospectively is often more difficult than gathering it at the time. It is therefore wise to assume that every child that enters care may not return home, and proceed accordingly. When children first enter the care system, efforts should be made at that time to obtain family photographs, the child's birth certificate and the child's personal belongings. Carers with whom the child is placed should be encouraged to take photographs of the child's time with them and to record significant events. It may be possible in some cases to take photographs retrospectively of places the child has lived, schools attended etc.
- 4.3 It is important to bear in mind that in some cultures and religions, taking photographs of people is not acceptable.
- 4.4 Much information can be obtained where a child has an existing social work file, but never assume that all the information is accurate. Double check crucial pieces of information such as dates of birth, other significant dates, essential information about the child's birth parents and birth family. If it is not possible to confirm whether an important piece of information is a fact, then this should be made clear to the child and made clear in the child's life story book.
- 4.5 Where there are gaps in the information, talking to the child, may provide clues as to where to obtain further information, providing they are of sufficient age and understanding.

5. Timescales

- 5.1 There are no set timescales for life story work, it should be seen as ongoing work with any child. However, if the plan is to place a child in a permanent substitute family, much of the groundwork should have been completed by the time the child is to be placed, to enable the child to make sense of the move to a new family.

6. The Life Story Book

- 6.1 Life story work is not just about the production of the Life Story Book. The Life Story Book is part of a process and is a tool to help the child make sense of what has happened to them and what is happening to them. For children moving to an alternative permanent family it should be a record of their life before coming into care, their life in care and their move to a new family.

- 6.2 The life story book should contain photographs of significant people and places, a copy of the child's birth certificate, drawings by the child, birthday cards and cards celebrating religious festivals sent by significant people and an age appropriate written story of the child's life. The person compiling the book should try to be creative and not just produce a photograph album with words under the pictures. Get the child to contribute as far as they are able. Sometimes children will want to include things that are inappropriate or not accurate. They should initially be allowed to do this, but during the course of the life story work, helped to understand why this part of their book needs to be changed.