

Why Children in Foster Care in Need a Life Books?

What is a 'Life Book'? Why is it so Important?

Children and youth who are in foster care, have more complex layers in their lives than other children/youth. To some extent, all of them have experienced the loss of their biological parents, some loss of their birth culture and relatives and others have experienced neglect, abuse, or have lived in multiple homes.

A Life Book provides a chronology of the child/youth's life, as well as a tool to enhance self esteem. A Life Book can link the past to the present by helping the child/youth to understand how earlier life events affect current perceptions and behaviours. It can be used as a tool to help the child grieve as well as to understand their past, what is happening to their family, what it means to be a child in foster care and even prepare them for an upcoming move. The history provides a vehicle for sharing information with significant others in the child's life, such as new foster parents, etc.

Preparing a Life Book for your child is part of the job of being a foster Parent. It is a irreplaceable gift that you can send with the child once they leave your care.

“The only mistake that you can make with a Life Book is not to start one at all.”

(Beth O'Maley)
life book expert and adoptee

Some Ideas of What to Include

- Country of birth
- Explain why the child/youth came into care
- Cultural heritage
- Photos and information about important people in the child/youth's life—birth parents, foster parents, extended family, friends, caregivers, teachers, social workers and pets
- Personal characteristics and developmental milestones—baby bracelets, lock of hair, height and birth certificate
- The day your child/youth was placed in your home
- Mementos and photos of significant events—birthdays, holidays, vacations
- Mementos and photos of activities the child/youth is involved in—schools attended, school events, academic achievements and awards, sports achievements and awards
- Goodbye letters or notes from people the child/youth has left behind



Using The Life Book

- Be honest about difficult information in an age appropriate way.
- It is important to be specific about the reasons your child/youth's birth parents could not parent them. If you are unsure of the circumstances please refer to their social worker for further information.
- Always make it clear that your child/youth is not responsible in any way for adult behaviour or decisions that affected their life.
- Talk about the feelings of your child/youth's birth parents.
- If you don't have photos of birth parents, you can always leave space for your child to draw a picture.
- Reading a Life Book regularly makes foster care a part of everyday conversation in your home.
- A Life Book is not necessarily for sharing with others. It's your child/youth's story and they should feel in control of it. However, it's also not a secret. Allow your child/youth to have the book in their room and to share it with others as desired.
- Make reading the Life Book a ritual. Don't put the book away for safekeeping—it's a tool that will help your child to understand their story. By looking at the Life Book frequently, you can determine how your child understands how they joined your family and it can help clear up misunderstandings.
- Make a copy of your child/youth's Life Book—it would be awful for it to be lost. Photocopy the original, make two copies, or scan the pages. Some parents put copies in safety deposit boxes or speak to your resource worker to see if it is appropriate to leave with them so the book can be given to another foster parent once the child leaves.

Types of Life Books

Some parents make online Life Books with text, photos and scanned images.

You could make your own and print it yourself or you could have it printed by one of several online services. Scan copies of birth certificates and other important documents and place them in the book.

If you make your own Life Book, use a book that has removable pages and that you can add pages to. You will want to add age appropriate information as you go along.

Buy stickers and scrap booking materials to decorate the Life Book—they are available at dollar stores and craft stores. Most kids love anything to do with stickers.

Life Book Resources

<http://fosterparenting.suite101.com/>
www.adoptionlifebooks.com
www.adoptionshoppe.com
www.stickerplantet.com
www.adoptionclubhouse.org
www.bcadopt.com
www.scrapandtell.com

Life Book Materials

Walmart, craft stores, Michaels, Life Book Magazines, Dollar stores

“A Life Book isn't just a baby book, a scrap book or a photo album. A Life Book is a detailed account of a child's life that helps that child make sense of the past and prepare for a successful future.”

**(Beth O'Maley)
life book expert and adoptee)**