

What is a Life Book and Why Should I Create One?

When a child is placed into foster care there is a high probability that they will suffer a huge loss in addition to the physical proximity and contact with their birth family. That is the loss of identity. No matter how compassionate, loving and nurturing their foster and/or adoptive families are, a child may still deal with issues caused by a lack of knowledge of their beginnings and the course of their life.

Having a Life Book could help a child put their life experiences in perspective and provide a means for her or him to hold on to memories and gain an understanding of how they came to be where they are.

A Life Book is created to give a child some control of their story, an opportunity to process the events and changes in their lives and possibly help set a platform for the future.

What is a Life Book?

A Life Book is a collection of information that forms a coherent record of a child's life events and journey through foster care. It provides a place for memories and a connection to the child's past.

As well as holding great sentimental value, a Life Book is also a tool that can help a child understand their current situation, how they came to be there and prepare them for a healthy transition to permanency.

Why should I create a Life Book?

Individuals who have lived a part of their lives in foster care and have been adopted or transitioned out of care to adulthood ask themselves recurring questions: Who am I, Where did I come from, How did I get here and sometimes What happened to my brother, What happened to my sister and/or What happened to my mother?

A Life Book can help a child maintain a connection to the parts of his or her life that are disrupted when they come into foster care and as they move through the system to permanency.

Although placement into foster care was the result of a series of incidents or one incident that was unsafe or traumatic there may still be memories of people and experiences a child

might want to hold on to. Additionally, as a child moves through foster care they will develop relationships and have experiences that will contribute to the person that they become.

A Life Book could provide the answer to some of the questions about their early life and the period while they were in foster care that would otherwise continue to be asked and go unanswered.

When should I start a Life Book?

You can start or add to an existing Life Book as soon as or shortly after a child is placed with your family. If a child comes to your home with an up to date Life Book you can start from that point with information about your family and the child's placement with you and your family. If the child doesn't have a Life Book, then you would start by talking to the child about creating one and have them provide what information they can.

Let them show you what is important to them.

What information should go into a Life Book?

Information the child and you may want to collect to place into the child's Life Book includes pictures and information about:

- the child's birth
- the child's parents and siblings, if any
- other birth family members
- days and/or events important to the child's family
- letters and mementos
- the child's foster family, current and previous

A Parent's Perspective

"My children were 5 and 6 when we adopted each other. We have no idea what they looked like prior to that. No idea how old they were for their 'firsts'; words, steps etc. They are now 17 and 18 and not knowing has come up often, I believe it always will. As a parent it hurts my heart - this is one loss my children did not have to experience. It has certainly hindered their development of identity, self-esteem and personal worth."

-Teresa McClure, Resource Parent



All About Me

A Guidebook for Resource Parents



- changes in placement
- school information and
- recognition of the child's achievements

Remember it is their story, historical and current, and they should have the right and opportunity to tell it.

Also speak to the child's caseworker and seek his or her collaboration. At the same time begin to collect and organize information about the child as day to day events occur. If possible, plan to set some time aside to work on the Life Book on a regular basis. Make Life Book work a family event. In either case, whether a child already has a Life Book or you and she or he will be starting one together, it is never too late.

If you have children in your home who are members of a sibling group, please remember that each should have her or his own Life Book. While much of the information for each may be the same there will still be events, achievements and people unique to a particular sibling's experience that she or he may want to remember.

What happens to the Life Book when the child leaves my home?

The Life Book belongs to the child and should go with her or him wherever they are on the way to; whether they are going back to their parents, being placed with a relative or in a pre-adoptive home.

In fact, Life Books should be developed with the child understanding that it is their own story and their book to keep. Creating a Life Book with a child is a great way to show your concern, love and respect for them as an individual person and not just a product of circumstance.

Note: FAFS has a limited amount of Life Books available at no cost for resource families. The Life Books are pre-assembled and designed for easy insertion of information that is collected and provides suggestions for different stages of life. Visit the FAFS website www.fafsonline.org or call 800.222.0047 to order a Life Book.

If you have any questions about **Life Books**, or if you would like to know if FAFS has any Life Book materials available, please contact FAFS' Information Line at 800.222.0047, or visit us online at www.fafsonline.org.

All of our services are free and confidential.



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FAFS' MISSION:

Our mission is to provide support, training and advocacy to meet the special needs of foster, adoptive and kinship families, who provide safe, stable and nurturing homes for children in foster care.

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