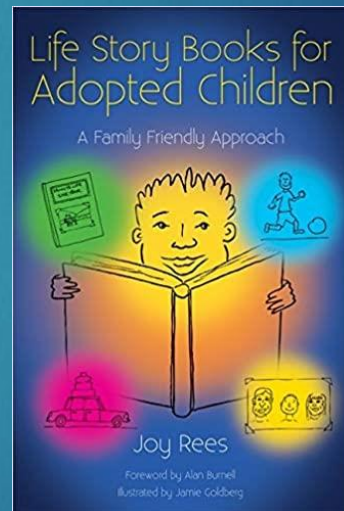
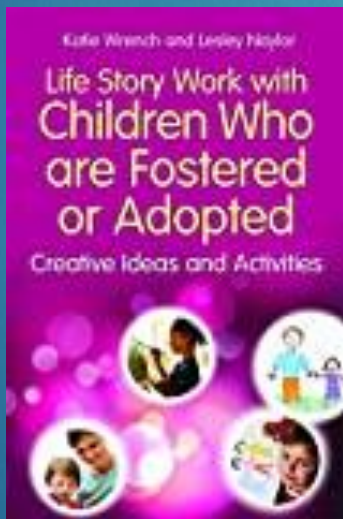


Guidance for writing a Life Story Book – Joy Rees

Here at Sandwell Children's Trust we follow
the Joy Rees Model of Life Work and Life
Story Books.

Read below for more information.



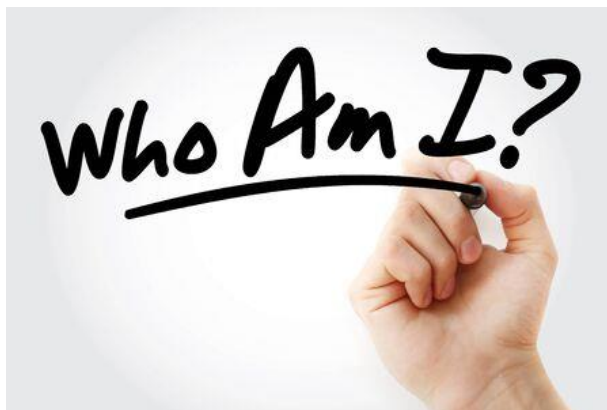
Life Work Development
Officers:
Deannie Harris and Trish Cox

What is a Life Story Book

A Life Story Book is exactly that...it's the story of a child's family history birth and adopters.

A Life Story Book is not something that can be completed ad-hoc it is an important record of a child's history. It helps them understand the decisions made by professional's and the reasons why they were made. This vital piece of work needs to be treated with the time and respect that it deserves.

It allows a child to make sense of their life and establish their identity.



So where do we start?

Arrange to meet with birth parents where possible. If not possible there may be a family member that you could speak with.

When meeting with parents the questions that you need to ask are:

- Where were you born?
- Who are your parents/grandparents?
- Do you have siblings?
- What was your childhood like?
- Where did you go to school?
- Photos of parents and significant family members •
What qualifications did you achieve?
- Have you ever worked and what was it?
- What are your likes/dislikes?
- Do you have any hobbies or interests?
- Relationship history
- Medical conditions in the family

Ask them about the child who you are writing about:

- ▶ Where were they born?
- ▶ How much did they weigh?
- ▶ What time were they born?
- ▶ What was the pregnancy like?
- ▶ Do they have scan photos?
- ▶ Did mother have any cravings?
- ▶ Who was present at the birth?
- ▶ Who chose their name, and does it have any significance?
- ▶ Any birth photos
- ▶ What were they like as a baby?
- ▶ Do they look like any family members?
- ▶ Did they sleep well?
- ▶ How were they fed bottle/breast?
- ▶ What were their first words?
- ▶ How old were they when they took first steps?
- ▶ Did they have a favourite toy?
- ▶ Photos of child
- ▶ Nursery/School details

Meet with carers past and present.

- ▶ When meeting with carers the questions that you need to ask are:
- ▶ How old were they when they came to you?
- ▶ How did they settle in?
- ▶ How well did they sleep/eat?
- ▶ Describe the child's personality
- ▶ Any likes/Dislikes?
- ▶ Any favourite toy/games?
- ▶ Photos of events/holidays/days out
- ▶ Any achievements such as certificates from school or out of school activities.
- ▶ Nursery/School details – name of school, friends
- ▶ Photos of any contacts with parents/family members
- ▶ Any illnesses/allergies the child may have had.
- ▶ When putting this book together it can seem like a daunting task however always ensure that you follow the Joy Rees model which is:
- ▶ **Present....Past....Present....Future.....**

- ▶ This template has been proven to have a positive effect on a child and young person's emotional wellbeing. Always end on a positive note.
- ▶ I try to include things such as Star Sign, Number One Song and Film at time of child's birth and the meaning of their name if you can find one.
- ▶ The language you use when writing the book is hugely important, you must not write in a judgemental way and never use jargon. It should be written in a child friendly and accessible way.
- ▶ If you are uncomfortable explaining the reasons why a child was removed from their parents or have difficulty with the wording I have attached some examples of how to tackle difficult stories.
- ▶ Overleaf are examples of a contents page and some borders that I have used when making the books. You can find these and many more all online.

Beginning a book

Contents

Chapter 1:

All about ??

- All about ???
- ??? with Carers
- School

Chapter 2: The beginning

- Before ??? was born
- After ??? was born
- The family gets help
- Moving to Foster Care and changes for ?????

Chapter 3:

The next part of the journey

- Decisions are made • More about ????

Chapter 4: The future

- Who knows where this journey will take you.....



JOY REES MODEL

► Present:

The book should not start with the child's birth and the birth family. It should begin with the child now and the current primary carers – adopter, permanent foster carer or Special Guardian. Information should be fun and non-threatening. Include details of child's hobbies, interest, talents, the current home and family, friends, pets, nursery or school before moving into the child's early history.

► Past:

Begin this section with factual details of the child's birth: date, place, time, day, weight, length, origins of name, if known. With increased use of social networking sites be wary of including surnames or previous addresses. Consider the risks. This information can be given at a later stage, when the child is considered mature enough to make a more informed decision about tracing and contact.

Introduce the birth mother and birth father if known, and again, if the book is for an adopted child, it is best to use the first names only, with age, description, ethnic origin, religion, health, interests and employment. Details of siblings and any other significant family member would also be included here.

Remember, the book is the story of the child's life, and not the birth parent's lives, so do not overwhelm them with too many details. The child should not have to own the birth parents' troubled history.

There should be an accurate but child friendly account of events leading to the placement in foster care. The underlying message for the child needs to be that

'None of this was your fault!'. Give details of foster carers. If a child has gone through more than one placement, provide an explanation for each move, emphasising that this was not because the child was 'bad' or 'naughty'.

A child friendly account of the decisions made by the social workers, police or judge should be given. There is no need to list all of the conferences and meetings or give dates. This is too confusing for a young child and could detract from their understanding of their story.

► **Present:**

The book should bring the child back to present with meeting their permanent family, and moving into their current home. Include Court Hearings and details of the Care Order, Special Guardianship Order and, if applicable, Adoption Order and Celebratory Hearing. A sense of permanency or 'the forever family' could now be reinforced.

But do not end the book here.

► **Future:**

Give the child a sense of a hopeful future. Mentioning family rituals, familiar routines and adding more family photographs are grounding and can strengthen the child's sense of belonging. Include family plans, perhaps a holiday or the child's hopes and aspirations. End on a positive note and by reminding the child that wherever they go and whatever they do they will always be loved, are part of this family and will always be in the adopters' or carers' thoughts.

Having a sense of history is important, but to enable children to move forward to the positive futures they deserve, this alone is not enough. A sensitively written book can lay the foundation for healthy attachments with the primary carers and can reinforce a sense of belonging and security. It can raise self-esteem and help the child to feel loveable, loved and valued.

