



Life Journey Work Guide for Adopters

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1. Why Life Journey Work is important?

All children in Wales, who are unable to be cared for by their birth families, need to have an understanding of their family history and of their unique journey.

Life Journey Work is designed to help a child make sense of their past and understand their current situation in order to help them to move into the future.

Life Journey Work should support the child's identity, promote self-esteem, help give the child a sense of belonging, wellbeing and support good mental health.

Life Journey Work provides:

- An opportunity and a structure for the child to explore their emotions and talk about painful issues
- Children with important factual information
- It provides a narrative / explanations for the Child
- It preserves memories

Taken from the National Adoption Service (NAS) Life Journey Work Good Practice Guide

2. Talking to Your Children about Adoption

Top 10 Tips for Adopters

1. Tell the truth and tell it often!

Begin talking with your children about their birthparents and adoption even before they can talk. The story will help provide a solid sense of identity. Children deserve the truth, and are remarkably able to cope with its implications. Of course, you should always keep in mind the next point.

2. Be age appropriate.

Although it is obvious to adults, young children often believe that they are either adopted or born. It is important, when telling them about their adoption, to help them understand that they were born first — and that all children, adopted or not — are conceived and born in the same way. The birth came first, then the adoption. Keep in mind both your child's physical and emotional age.

Waiting until adolescence to reveal a child's adoption to him or her is not recommended. Disclosure at that time can be devastating to children's self-esteem and to their faith in their parents.

3. Do not wait until they ask!

It takes a lot of courage to ask hard questions. If your child comes to you with a tough question, he or she has probably thought about it a long time before working up the nerve to ask. A good rule of thumb is that if you think your child will say, "I remember the day my parents told me..." about a particular adoption issue, you have waited too long. Provide your children the answers before they ask.

4. Show your child that their birth family are on your mind too.

You can use a "birth family candle". Whenever the child thinks lot about birth families and wondering where and how they are they can light the candle. You and your family can do the same. Accepting and honouring birthparents is accepting and honouring the child.

5. Use life story books, later life letters and letter box contact.

Different from a scrapbook, a life story book is your child's adoption story told in words and pictures. It helps the child and the parents talk about adoption and keep the facts straight. Use later life letters and letter box contact to talk with your child about their history.

6. Be aware of possible trigger.

Birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day and school projects (family trees, for example, or an assignment to bring baby pictures from home) are occasions that might be difficult for adopted children. Be alert to how your child is feeling and behaving. But remember, these events do not trigger questions or concerns for every child, every time. And other events you don't anticipate might be trigger points for your child.

7. Read adoption books to your child.

Adoption books can be a means to help children understand adoption and process their emotions. There are many age-appropriate books to assist children in expressing their feelings. Because adoption is a life-long process, revisiting it at different developmental stages and finding age appropriate books is important. Additionally, reading to your child is an excellent activity to help promote bonding and attachment.

8. Be aware of eye contact when talking about sensitive issues.

Some children and adults alike are more likely to talk about sensitive issues when they aren't making eye contact. Go for a drive or braid your child's hair. Take advantage of this principle of human nature; you might have a more in-depth conversation.

9. Teach your child how to respond to questions about adoption.

Talk with your child about how he or she might respond to comments like, "At least my mother wanted me." You will be providing the tools to handle awkward or hurtful situations and to educate others. This empowers children and helps them feel proud of their adoption expertise.

Remember it is their story, too. Ask your children how they feel about adoption questions they hear from strangers, friends or family members. How would they like you to respond? Your child might be more private than you are about adoption. Your child might be more outgoing, wanting to chat about adoption at every chance. Respecting and honouring these differences will help your child take ownership of his or her story.

10. Support groups for your adopted child.

You can't be all things to your child at all times. Therefore, it's important for children to have other people in their lives with whom they are comfortable talking about.

3. Explanations for Children of Different families

BIRTH FAMILIES

Your birth Dad put the seed in your birth Mum's tummy and this is where you grew until you were born.

It is their job to look after you keep you safe and well and happy.

FOSTER FAMILIES

When birth families can't look after their children and the children become unsafe or unhappy living with them. Then the children go and stay with foster families until the social worker or the Judge decide if it is safe for them to return home.

ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Adoptive families are families who want to give children a safe and happy life. They can wait a very long time until the right match is made with children who need "just the right family" for them.

The love for their children grows in their hearts rather than in their tummies.



4. Digital life story work

The publication of 'Digital life story work' by Simon Hammond and Neil Cooper (2013, BAAF London) provides practitioners with an easy to follow manual that promotes the use of technological resources in the development of life journey work. The authors recommend that we "tap into the things that young people are already doing in their everyday life and use these communication tools to encourage reflection within young people".

Suggestions for digital life story work include:

- Using a camera phone to film 'a day in my life'
- Digitising old or current photos
- Recording a personal story and saving as an audio file / burn onto CD
- Linking music with emotions and meanings – making a sound track
- Making a photo collage / mash-up using on line tools
- Making a three minute movie – using '*windows movie maker*' or *iMovie*
- Pod-walk – Revisiting significant locations with a video camera and recording stories the places evoke then burning these onto DVD
- Using Google Earth to revisit places where a child has lived / gone to school etc. from the safety and comfort of where the child lives now

Interactive life journey work

- For children who enjoy interactive activities BAAF developed interactive life journey work on a CD Rom: 'My Life Story' by Bridgett Betts and Afshan Ahmad. This provides a wide range of colourful interactive games / activities with sounds, for children to record different aspects of their life.

Recommended links to assist in digital LJW

Make Beliefs Comix- This is a great website that is recommended by Simon Hammond and Neil Cooper (2013 BAAF London). It can be used in a variety of ways with children and can help children to express feelings through the use of characters they have created. <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/>

Google Earth – https://www.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/earth/

Story Jumper – This is a US site. It offers the opportunity to easily create online and physical books, the site offers options to add audio to the books, such as voices and music.

<https://www.storyjumper.com/>

5. Life Journey Work web links

Bellew R and Mesie J (2015) *How Adoption Social Workers can deliver first class life story work*, Community Care

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2015/08/10/adoption-social-workers-can-deliver-first-class-life-story-work/>

Contact After Adoption, Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia, Professor Elsbeth Neil

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/contact-after-adoption>

Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association. *Life Book Pages*

http://www.ifapa.org/publications/ifapa_lifebook_pages.asp

Lifestoryworks.org

http://www.lifestoryworks.org/Life_Story_Works/HOME.html

Rees J. <http://thejoyoflifework.com/life-story-books/>

Schofield, Gillian and Beek, Mary. *Secure Base Model*, University of East Anglia, <https://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/the-secure-base-model>

6. Useful LJW ideas – book websites – Katie Wrench

Blossom Social Care Training

www.birthstones.org/uk - information and facts about birthstones and birth flowers

www.behindthename.com - look up the child's name and tell them the meaning

www.google.com – Great for maps, images etc. You can look up addresses and it will show you on a map.

www.dayofbirth.co.uk – Find interesting, fun facts about the day and year the child was born.

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

www.genopro.com/genogram - How to build a genogram. You can also download the package for a trial period and put the information into your computer which will build the genogram for you.

www.famous.adoption.com – an alphabetical list of over 700 famous or influential people who were either adopted, fostered, lived in residential unit or were raised by people other than birth parents.

www.paranormality.com/birth_sign.shtml - a guide to western and Chinese birth signs.

7. Metaphorical Stories – Katie Wrench

Aims

To use a creative method to tell the child's story.

To use metaphor as a safe way to explore difficult issues with the younger child.

To give the child permission to explore his history through story and play.

For the child to have a story he can keep and come back to whenever he wants perhaps with his foster carer or adoptive parent. Repetition is often the key to information processing for traumatized children.

Materials

A story you have prepared for the child (optional – toys or figures to use in the telling of the story).

Process

Stories can be powerful tools to help children explore very difficult issues. For the younger child in particular a story about a mouse, prince or dinosaur who has some of the same problems as them can be easier than talking about it directly. The use of metaphor allows for distance from the child's own painful experiences so that the feelings can be more easily and safely thought about and discussed.

Whilst there are story books on the market that explore issues such as parental mental health or bereavement, we usually prefer to write an individual story for the child; one that speaks directly to their circumstances but uses other characters to represent them or their family. Think about whether the child has a particular interest that you could incorporate, such as dinosaurs or fairy tales. Then create a simple story that is developmentally appropriate to the child. We either use photographs of small toys or figures to illustrate the story or use clipart or Google images. Remember to reflect the feelings of the characters as you go along. The advantage of photographing miniatures or figures is that it allows you to tell the story and act it out at the same time which can be more engaging for younger children. You may need to practice this first! At the end of this activity you will find an example of a story we have written that includes elements of real stories produced for children we have worked with.

Handy Hints

This is a good activity in which to include the carer so that s/he can continue to read the story to the child at appropriate times. The child may need to come back to their story again and again in order to begin to internalise it.

Don't assume that because you have written about a family of animals rather than the child's own family that they won't be affected by this activity. It can bring up painful emotions and you and the carer need to be able to support the child just as if you were telling them directly what happened to them.

Useful published stories we have used with children include:

The Wise Mouse, Virginia Ironside, 2003, Young Minds. (Describes parental mental health issues).

Elfa and the Box of Memories, Michelle Bell, 2008, BAAF. (About the importance of memories, it includes a workbook for the child to explore his own memories).

Trace Moroney Feeling Series, 2011, Brimax. (About rabbits with different feelings).

Dennis Duckling, Paul Sambrooks, 2009, BAAF. (Tells the story of having to leave birth family and go into care).

Six Dinner Sid, Igna Moore, 2010, Hodder Children's Books. (About a cat whose carers go away on holiday and leave him).

Owl Babies, Martin Waddell, 1994, Walker Books Ltd. (About missing your mum).

Jade's Story, Helena Pielichaty, 2002, OUP Oxford. (A story about parental depression for older children).

The Nutmeg Series, Judith Foxon, 2001-2007, BAAF. (Stories about a squirrel's experiences of adoption, contact, new sibling, challenging behaviour).

Badger's Parting Gift, Susan Varley, 1997, Magi Publications. (Bereavement).

Sample metaphorical story suitable for a child under 8.

NB: This would be illustrated for a child with photographs of figures/toys or clipart

Once upon a time, which is how all good stories begin, there lived a cheeky little monkey called Marvin. Marvin lived with mummy and daddy monkey and his little sister Mandy. Mummy and daddy monkey loved their little monkeys very much. Sometimes they all enjoyed fun times playing in the jungle and swinging from the trees, but sadly life was not always this happy in the monkey den. Let me tell you why...

Now of course, it was mummy and daddy monkeys' job to take good care of Marvin and Mandy because they were such special cheeky monkeys. All little monkeys need warm, safe dens to live in and parents who can keep them safe and feed them tasty bananas and monkey milk. They need a mummy and daddy who can give them big monkey cuddles when they're feeling sad or scared. It was very sad that mummy and daddy monkey found it very hard to always put their little monkeys first which is what all mummies and daddies should do.

You see, sometimes mummy and daddy monkey were so busy making themselves feel happy that they forgot about taking care of their babies and left Marvin and Mandy alone in the monkey den. Poor babies! So Marvin, who was the best big brother in the world, tried his hardest to make sure his little sister was OK. He did a brilliant job, but he had to do much more looking after than any little monkey should have to do, trying to make sure Mandy had enough monkey milk and bananas to eat.

What's more, the mummy and daddy monkey didn't always get along. Sometimes the daddy monkey would get very cross. He would shout at mummy monkey and even hit her when the babies were watching. I don't know if you've ever heard monkeys getting angry with each other, but what a loud, screeching noise they make! This meant that sometimes the monkey den was a scary place for the little monkeys to be because there was so much shouting and fighting. I wonder if the mummy and daddy monkey realised just how scared their babies would feel when they screeched so fiercely.

After a while, other animal neighbours started to feel very worried about the little monkeys. They weren't sure that anyone was keeping them safe, making sure that they had a nice warm home to live in and enough bananas to eat. They asked a kind elephant called Mary to come and visit the monkey family to try to help. It was her job to make sure the little monkeys were safe and well. Mary Elephant told the monkey parents that there was too much fighting and screeching in the den for the babies to hear. She tried really hard to help mummy and daddy monkey to look after their little monkeys better. She even asked other friendly animals to help too, but sadly the mummy and daddy monkey didn't always want help. This was a big worry for everyone...

One day a neighbour found Marvin and Mandy all alone in a very cold monkey den and she knew she had to tell Mary Elephant about this. Mary decided she had to do something very quickly to keep these precious little monkeys safe. She had to find another family to take care of them while she kept on trying to help the mummy and daddy monkey. Mary knew of a really kind giraffe family, Graham and Gertie, who looked after baby animals who couldn't live with their own mummies and daddies anymore. This mummy and daddy giraffe knew just how to keep little monkeys safe and to make sure they had everything they needed to grow up to be big and strong and healthy. In the giraffe home there was always enough to eat and, best of all, there was no screeching or fighting.

So the baby monkeys went to live in their new home, which felt very strange and scary for them indeed. Marvin still sometimes worried about not having enough to eat, even though they had lovely dinners every day and lots of treats. He also still felt he should take care of his little sister Mandy. But we have to remember that when Marvin lived with mummy and daddy monkey he often went hungry and had to look after Mandy and make sure she was safe. He had to be a brave, strong little monkey and try to look after himself and Mandy.

It was sometimes hard for Marvin to feel at home with Graham and Gertie Giraffe. He missed his mummy and daddy and looked forward to seeing them at contact. Now of course mummy and daddy monkeys still loved their two little monkeys very, very much. Even so, after lots and lots of careful thinking, all the helping animals decided that they wouldn't be able to look after these precious little monkeys well enough. It was very sad for everyone.

The good news is that now Marvin and Mandy are growing up to be big, strong monkeys with Graham and Gertie Giraffe, who have got to know them very well and care for them so much! They make sure Marvin goes to bed at the right time so he can get up for monkey school and not feel too tired. They know when he's feeling sad and missing mummy and daddy and know just what to do to make him feel better. He gets lots of hugs and stories and plenty of fun and warm, cuddly times. And that is just what a cheeky little monkey needs!

Useful LJW ideas -book websites + Metaphorical Stories

By kind permission of Katie Wrench - *Life Story Work with Children who are Fostered or Adopted - Creative Ideas and Activities*. Wrench & Naylor (pp. 84-89) 2013, Jessica Kinsley Publishers)

8. BOOK LIST FOR ADOPTERS:

A comprehensive Reading List for Adopters, plus Personal Accounts of Adoption, Novels and Films, Books for children on the theme of Adoption, and Children's Films covering the themes of: different types of families; adoption; and different paths to adoption

A Child's Journey through Placement

by Vera Fahlberg

Attachment, Trauma and Resistance

by Kate Cairns

Bubble Wrapped Children

by Helen Oakwater

Building the Bonds of Attachment

by Daniel Hughes

Parenting the Theraplay Way (*Purchase through Adoption UK*)

Trauma through a child's Eyes

by Peter Levine

Adopting a brother or sister

by Heidi Argent

Inter Country Adoption – *Developments, Trends and Perspective*

by Peter Selman

Adopting a Child (9th edition)

by Jennifer Lord

Windows to our Children

by Violet Oaklander

The Secret of Happy Children

by Steve Biddulph

I wish I had been born from you

by Karen Lomas

What to expect when you're Adopting – *a practical guide to the decisions and emotions involved in adoption*

by Dr Ian Palmer

One of the Family - *A Handbook for Kinship Carers*

by Heidi Argent

If you don't stick with me who will? *The challenges and rewards of Foster Care*

by Henrietta Bond

Gay and Lesbian Fostering and Adoption – *extraordinary yet ordinary*

by Stephen Hicks and Janet McDermot

How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk

by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish 2001

Adoption Conversations by Renee Wolfs

Talking About Adoption

First Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurts; Tiddlers and Toddlers

By Caroline Archer

Bruised Before Birth: Parenting Children Exposed to Parental Substance Abuse by

Joan McNamara

Parenting a Child affected by Parental Substance Misuse'

by Donald Forrester

Parenting a Child with Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties'

by Dan Hughes

Attaching through Love Hugs, and Play by Deborah D Gray

A Place in My Heart by Mary Grossnickle

Big steps for Little People, Parenting your adopted child by Celia Foster

Child Adoption, A guidebook for Adoptive parents and their Advisors by R.A.C.

Hoksbergen

Grief in Children, A Handbook for Adults by Atle Dyregrov

Nurturing Attachments, Supporting children who are fostered and Adopted by Kim S

Golding

Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption by Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek

What to expect when you're adopting : a practical guide to the decisions and emotions involved in adoption by Ian Palmer

'The everything parents' guide to raising your adopted child: a complete handbook to welcoming your adopted child into your heart and home by Corrie Lynne Player with Brette McWhorter Sember and Mary C. Owen

Listen to your child- a parent's guide to children's language by David Crystal

The Highly sensitive child: Helping our children thrive by Elaine N Aron

Websites for Adopters

<http://corambaaf.org.uk/> This organisation offers a wide range of information with regard to adoption.

<http://www.adoptionuk.org/> This organisation offers guidance for adoptive parents and those who are interested in adoption.

<http://www.adoptcymru.com/home/> (Wales') National Adoption Service.

<http://www.westernbayadoption.org/our-children/> Western Bay Adoption Service.

Personal Accounts of Adoption

No Matter What: An Adoptive Family's Story of Hope, Love and Healing by Sally Donovan

An Adoption Diary
by Maria James

The story of an adoption
by Nicky Campbell

Take Two: A story about confronting infertility, exploring alternatives and adopting two babies by Laurel Ashton

Family wanted: Stories from adopters/birth families and adoptees by Sara Holloway

Little prisoners: a tragic story of siblings trapped in a world of abuse and suffering
by Casey Watson

Too hurt to stay: the true story of a troubled boy's desperate search for a loving home by Watson, Casey

Novels and Films

Lilly Alone

by Jacqueline Wilson

The Story of Tracey Beaker

by Jacqueline Wilson

Long way Home

by Michael Morpurgo

Good Will Hunting

by William Goldman

Books for Children – theme adoption

When Daisy Met Tommy

Daddy, Pappa, and Me (LGBT)

And Tango makes three (LGBT)

King, and King and Family (LGBT)

Forever Fingerprints by Sherrie Eldridge

Can I Tell you About Adoption? A guide for friends, family and professionals

By Kim S Golding and Dan Hughes

A Mother for Choco by Keiko Kaska

The Day we met you by Phoebe Koehler

My new family (a first look at adoption) by Pat Thomas

We belong together by Todd Parr

Chester and Daisy move on (for children 4-10years)

And then you arrived and we became a family by Annette Hildebrandt

Nutmeg gets adopted by Judith Foxon

Finding a Family for Tommy By Susan Bagnall and Tommaso Levente Tami

Motherbridge of Love Barefoot Books

The Teazles baby bunny Susan Bagnall and Tommaso Levente

My New Family A First Look At Adoption Pat Thomas

I Wished for You Marianne Richmond

Dennis and The Big Decision Paul Sambrooks

Rufus Finds a Safe Place to Stay Jill Seeney

Twice upon a Time Born and adopted Eleanora Patterson

Our Twitchy Kes Gray & Mary McQuillan

Josh and Jaz have three mums Heidi Argent & Amanda Wood

And Tango makes Three Justin Patterson and Peter Parnell

Zachary's New Home Geraldine Blomquist and Paul Blomquist

Dad David Baba Chris and Me Ed Merchant

You Choose Nick Sharratt & Pippa Goodhart

Who's In a Family Robert Skutch

Finding the Right Spot When Kids can't live with their parents Janice Levy

A Koala for Katie Jonathan London

The Lamb- a- roo Diana Kimpton

The Great Big Book Of Families Mary Hoffman& Ros Asquith

Its Ok to Be Different Todd Parr

The Family Book Todd Parr

We Belong Together Todd Parr

The Feel Good Book Todd Parr

Feelings Flash cards Todd Parr

Films for children- theme different types of families, adoption, different paths to adoption

- Stuart Little
- Kung Fu Panda
- Box trols
- Secret Life of Pets
- Describable Me
- Annie
- Lion King

