



Life Journey Work Guide for Birth Parents

Contents:

1. [Why life journey work is important](#)
2. [Birth Families 'Frequently Asked Questions'](#)
3. [Ideas on what to put in a child's keepsake box](#)

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:

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

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

2. Birth Families ‘Frequently Asked Questions’:

What is Life Journey Work?

Life Journey Work is about the safe keeping and sharing of information, mementoes and memories of children. Sometimes, these can become lost or fragmented, a bit like a jigsaw with missing pieces, this can be especially so when children are not living with the parents they were born to.

In Wales we are working with families, foster carers and other professionals to make sure we make Life Journey Work a priority.

Children have told us that they want and need information about the family they were born to, where they have lived and with whom, and reasons for decisions that have been made for them.

Life Journey Work should:

- ❖ Help the child form a positive sense of identity (who they are)
- ❖ Offer children a positive image of their family
- ❖ Help build the child’s self esteem
- ❖ Give children information and explanations
- ❖ Be focused on the child’s needs
- ❖ Where a child is adopted, it should help the adoptive family to share information in a positive and supportive way

Why have I been asked to contribute to my child’s, or a family member’s child’s, Life Journey Work information?

Children have told us they want and need information, photographs and keep sake mementoes about their family, as well as where they have lived and other people that have cared for them. Parents and other family members have an important role in this.

It is important that children do not have gaps in information about their lives. That is why, in Wales, the Local Authority will begin collecting Life Journey information as soon as a child is in their care. Life Journey Work is separate from any permanency decision making and planning for children. Life Journey information, photographs and mementoes will be safely kept by the Local Authority, so that they can be given once a permanent plan for the child has been agreed.

Where will the Life Journey Work information for my child be stored?

This will be safely kept by the Local Authority, so that they can be given once a permanent plan for your child has been agreed (Life Journey Work is separate from any permanency decision making and planning for children).

We recommend that Life Journey information is shared from an early age with children, gradually sharing more and more information, as children grow in their age and understanding.

Copies of Life Journey Work information will continue to be stored by the Local Authority, so that your child can have access to it in the future, as required.

How can I make sure my child has information about his / her family history?

There are lots of ways that you can contribute to your child's Life Journey Information. Here are some suggestions from other parents of information, photographs and mementoes that you might provide:

- ❖ Details of family members – who is in the family, who's related to whom. Family tree and family history.
- ❖ Date of Births of family members
- ❖ Information and photographs of brothers and sisters
- ❖ Where the child was born, time born, birth weight, what he / she looked like
- ❖ Copies of the red book, photographs of hospital wrist bands
- ❖ Photographs. Remember to say who, when and where for each one. These can be digitally sent to the worker involved in LJW if not printed.
- ❖ Details as to where the children have lived and any memories they have of that property or area including the addresses
- ❖ Information about what it was like for their parents growing up
- ❖ Any traditions or skills that are important in the family, be it in the present or past, such as any artistic or musical people in the family.
- ❖ Who the child looks like, their eye colour, hair colour and build
- ❖ The child's likes and dislikes
- ❖ Parents likes and dislikes

- ❖ Religion, beliefs and culture
- ❖ Family values as appropriate
- ❖ Genetics, known illnesses, allergies and any mental health diagnosis
- ❖ Parents and other family members hobbies and interests
- ❖ Any special memories you have about the child
- ❖ Any toys, clothing or other things that gave the child comfort

What can I expect from the professionals involved in LJW?

You can expect to be treated as an equal partner in the production of Life Journey Work for your child.

You may request copies of any information you supply, or any Life Journey Work information about you under the Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR).

3. Suggestions of things you might like to put in a special keepsake box for your Child

This list was created by parents and family members to help other families whose children are in foster care or are to be adopted. They have provided suggestions of what they think it would be important to put in a special keepsake box for a child. These items are likely to be important keepsakes for parents and families too. Copies and photographs of items have been suggested where possible, so that is possible for two keepsake boxes to be made (one for the family and one for the child).

- Hospital identity tag (or photograph of this)
- Health record book (or copy of this)
- Scan photograph (or copy of this)
- Milk teeth
- A lock of hair from your Child's first hair cut
- A Lock of your hair
- Your Child's first outfit (or a photograph of this)
- Baby photographs of your Child
- Baby photographs of you
- Your Child's umbilical peg
- Nursery / playgroup art work (or copies of these)
- Your Child's favourite bedtime story (or details of this)
- Christening / birthday cards (or copies of these)
- Family photographs (labelled, who, when, where)
- Photographs of pets, pet collars and other mementoes of pets (remember to label)

- A sample of your perfume or details of what it is

It is a good idea to label items, so your child understands the significance of them. If you need assistance to obtain copies of items, your child's Life Journey Work worker will be happy to help.