



# Life Journey Work Guide for adopted children and young people

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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. 'Life Journey Work – What's it all about?'

You may be reading this because you've heard about something called Life Journey Work but are not sure what it means. You might have some questions about your early life that you want someone to help you understand.

Everyone is on a journey in their life from the day they are born. All children and young people need help to understand their early life experiences, as not many people can really remember being a baby or toddler. Where children do not live with their first families / birth families, they often need extra help to fill in the gaps, in what they know and can remember.

Life Journey Work involves helping make sense of the past and present (the here and now) and can involve looking to plans for the future.

All Life Journeys are different:

- Some have lots of moves and different people involved along the way
- Some can be sad, when people have difficult times
- Most are a mixture of sad and happy, boring and exciting
- Everyone's Life Journey is important

Even before you begin to read through the next few pages you might want to think about the people you are close to that it might be good to talk to about your feelings. Someone who you can perhaps read this with you, someone you can talk to and talk with, someone who can listen to you, someone who can help you make sense of it all. Whomever you choose to talk to, it is important that they know how important and private your Life Journey is to you.



You might also want to talk with other adopted young people, there may be an adoption support group close to where you live. Your local adoption team will know if this is the case.

We know that people sometimes worry that they might upset their parent/s, by asking questions about their first family / birth family. It is important for you to know that it is absolutely OK to ask questions.

Sometimes the information parent/s have may be limited, or there may be something missing that you want to know about particularly. If, as a family, you want some more information, you can ask your local adoption service for help and this will be an adoption support service.

When you become 18 you have the right to access (independently) all the information your adoptive parents have from the adoption service. You will probably have all of this information from your adoptive parents anyway, but it remains your right once you become a legal adult.

### **So, what does Life Journey mean?**

Life Journey Work helps adopted children and young people understand and make sense of what happened when they were little, why they were not able to live with their first family / birth family, and how they came to be adopted.



Your Life Journey isn't a made-up story, like Harry Potter. Your Life Journey Book is an account of your early life, with information and photographs, from when you were born and living with your birth family

to when you moved in with your other families, including maybe your foster family or adoptive family.

Life Journey Work can be done in so many ways, such as looking through your Life Journey Book and the things your adoptive parent/s were given when they adopted you. It can also involve talking with a trusted adult, such as your adoptive parent/s and perhaps an adoption social worker and exploring together your own memories, thoughts and feelings and answering questions you may have.

By asking questions and having help to make sense of the answers, you will get a better understanding of your own Life Journey.

### **Why might I want to know more about my Life Journey?**

You may be curious at times about your own life journey and want to know a little more about the family you were born to, where you had lived when you were younger and what had happened along the way.

Some people are curious about things about things like “*Where do I get my freckles from?*” or “*Who else in my family was good at sports?*” or “*Why do I have blond hair?*”

### **Who will be able to help me understand my Life Journey better?**

Your adoptive parent/s will have been given lots of information about you when you came to live with them. They will have met with your foster carers and talked about your time living with them, what you were like then and things that you did. They might have even had the chance to meet your birth mum and dad, or other people who were around when you were little, like childminders or play group leaders who would have been able to give different bit of information and stories about you and your family.



As well as a Life Journey Book, they might also have been given photo albums, a Memory Box (with items in such as tickets, baby clothes, pictures, drawings, and certificates), videos or DVD's. It is important that you have the opportunity to go through all these things with your adoptive parents and ask questions along the way. Your local adoption team can also offer support with Life Journey questions. You might want to speak with an adoption social worker about your Life Journey; if you do, your parents can ask for your local adoption service to provide this.

Your adoptive parent/s should also have been given a 'Later life Letter' written by your social worker when they knew you. This letter will be addressed to you and the plan is for it to be opened when you are old enough to understand what it says; your parents will know when the time is best for this. The letter will have more information about the reasons why you were adopted.

### **Anything else?**

Sometimes certain times and events in your life might make you think more about your Life Journey. Maybe times like moving school, Birthdays, Christmas, going on holiday or moving home, might make feelings and worries that you haven't had for a long while come to the surface again. Or even simple things like a smell that you remember from when you were little or seeing an old T- shirt that you wore when you were in your foster family. Sometimes these feelings can be overwhelming. At these times it can be helpful to talk with someone you can trust, such as your adoptive parents, so that between you, you can make sense of worries and feelings.

### 3. Digital life story work

The publication of 'Digital life story work' by Simon Hammond and Neil Cooper (2013, BAAF London) provides 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/](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/>

#### 4. Useful LJW ideas -book websites - Katie Wrench

Blossom Social Care Training

**Donated to the NAS LJW Toolkit by Katie Wrench, co- author of *Life Story Work with Children Who are Fostered or Adopted, Creative Ideas and Activities*, by Katie Wrench and Lesley Naylor**

***(ISBN 978-1-84905-343-3)***

#### Useful LJW book websites

[www.birthstones.org/uk](http://www.birthstones.org/uk) - Information and facts about birthstones and birth flowers.

[www.behindthename.com](http://www.behindthename.com) - Look up your name and see the meaning.

[www.google.com](http://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](http://www.dayofbirth.co.uk) - Find interesting, fun facts about the day and year a child was born.

[www.history.com/fdih](http://www.history.com/fdih) - Suitable for older children. Look up what happened on the day you were born.



[www.genopro.com/genogram](http://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](http://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](http://www.paranormality.com/birth_sign.shtml) - A guide to western and Chinese birth signs.