



# Life Journey Work Guide for Foster Carers

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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. Moving young children on to adoptive placements**

Understanding how to minimise the trauma of a move to an adoptive placement

Helping to understand and respond to the needs of children facing moves to adoptive families.

- What is the role and expectation of a Foster Carer?
- General principles about Separation, loss, transition, and grief.
- Preparing children for moves.
- How can foster carers help children in order to promote a successful move?
- Can the foster carers help the adoptive carers?
- Practical ideas for carers to use with children.

### **WHAT IS THE FOSTER CARER'S ROLE IN HELPING A CHILD TO MOVE ON?**

Helping children to move on is a MAJOR part of the foster carer role. When children are about to move on regardless of the circumstances surrounding the move, they become vulnerable to the same range of emotions they had when they experienced their first loss/separation. Thus they may well exhibit feelings of anger and sadness alongside anxiety and happiness.

### **EXPECTATIONS OF FOSTER CARERS**

- When a child is distressed foster carers need to give permission and actively encourage the children to be able to express whatever it is they are feeling rather than discouraging the feelings. If a distressed child is told don't be sad it gives the message that it is not ok to have feelings or that they may be too difficult to manage. Thus they then learn to hide their emotions rather than express them.
- Carers should be fully involved in plans for a move to enable them to feel positive about the child's future.
- Being involved will mean they play a full part in enabling the child to make the transition in an optimistic way, and symbolically it gives the child permission for the children to become attached to their new carers.

- Foster carers need to help children understand their move to a new family and work towards plans for permanence.
- A plan needs to be worked out for future involvement of the carers who now become part of the child's history.
- Carers need to be able to express any misgivings they have about plans for children at reviews and meetings.
- Carers have to be prepared to work co-operatively to put in place plans for the child even if they are not in agreement with them.
  - (Skills to Foster: The Fostering Network)

## **FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE A CHILD'S REACTION TO SEPARATION AND LOSS**

The two primary factors that influence a child's reaction to loss are:

1. The strength of the relationship being broken
2. The abruptness of the separation

Other factors influencing the child's reaction to separation and loss:

1. The child's age and stage of development
2. The bond between the child and the parent
3. The child's attachment to the parent
4. Past experiences of separation
5. The child's perceptions of the reasons for separation
6. The child's preparation for the move
7. The "parting message" the child receives
8. The post separation environment
9. The child's temperament

## 10. The environment from which she/he is being moved

In general, the stronger the relationship, the more traumatic the loss. In the absence of love there is no pain in loss. The more abrupt the loss, the more difficult it will be to complete the grieving process.

(A Child's Journey through Placement Vera Fahlberg BAAF 1991)

## **THE WORK OF FAHLBERG HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE REACTION TO SEPARATION**

### **THE CHILD'S AGE AS A FACTOR**

The separation or loss of the primary carer has a profound impact whenever it occurs. Boys appear to be more vulnerable than girls to the effects of separation. The specific effects of loss depend on the nature of the relationship being interrupted. Effects of separation/loss are not any lesser/greater at one stage or another they are simply different.

### **BABIES**

Although not yet wary of strangers are still affected by parental loss and moves from one family to another. They are aware of changes in rhythm and routine and react to differences in temperature, smell, noise, touch, and visual stimulation; all things that change from one household to another. It is possible that the changes could upset their sense of security and hinder their progress.

### **TODDLERS**

During toddler years, separation interferes with the development of a healthy balance between dependency and independence. If they lack trust in the adults who care for them they may become excessively demanding and clingy. Regressing and behaving as if a younger child. However there are those children who lack trust in adults who become fiercely independent, effectively parenting themselves, becoming stubborn and oppositional and withholding their emotions.

Children who experience multiple moves in the first three years of life are particularly prone to problems in their development of social emotions which has long-term implications for their ability to develop inter personal relationships, developing a conscience and self-esteem.

## **PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN**

For children in this stage it is their magical and ego centric thinking which most affects the reaction to loss. The children often think they cause the loss that it came about because of wishes thoughts and feelings they may have had and not even shared with anyone. The propensity for magical thinking is usually reinforced by loss and thus is likely to persist.

## **PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS**

Children coping with loss at this stage will have less energy to spend on the usual developmental tasks of learning, making friends, internalising values and developing a conscience. It is not uncommon for the child to regress both at home and in school. Their sense of fairness is likely to be questioned as to why negative things should happen to them.

## **ADOLESCENCE**

Loss during adolescence can heighten emotional insecurity and impulsiveness, which is a prominent feature at this developmental stage. It is most likely if the young person did not want the separation and the consequence may be depression. If however they requested the separation they may then feel as if they are in command and feel able to get out of situations rather than resolve them. The inability to resolve problems can lead to the young person feeling out of control and unable to manage situations successfully. At this stage they are then likely to request many changes in placement.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP WITH CARERS AS A FACTOR**

In many cases the child's attachment to their primary carer and their bonding goes hand in hand. However sometimes there is a split of the two and in such cases the reactions to the loss will be different for the carer and the child. Where there is a child who may be attached to a carer who hasn't bonded with them they may well take on the role of the parent in order to meet the needs of the parent. When this is the case the child needs to be able to relinquish the parenting role in order to complete the grieving process. On the flip side there are children whose parents are bonded to their child but the child is not attached to them. Such children are likely to continue to have difficulties in relating to other adults

## **PAST EXPERIENCES OF SEPARATION AS A FACTOR**

Children who experience many moves are less likely to show a marked reaction to a current separation. Many separations can cause children to develop ways of protecting themselves against the pain of losing others, thus inhibiting their ability to make close attachments to subsequent carers. This is likely to lead to another move

which reinforces the lack of stability and trust within adult/child relationships. Thus where a child nor the parent protest much in reaction to a separation then it would be difficult both to return the child home and also to help that child develop a close and trusting relationship with other adults.

### **THE CHILD'S PERCEPTIONS AS A FACTOR**

Children's perceptions of why they have moved are an important influence on the reaction to it. Most hold themselves responsible when things don't turn out the way they want then to and they are prone to magical thinking. Children like this need help to understand how individuals are responsible for their own thoughts and feelings but is not responsible for another's actions. In order to help facilitate the grief process it is important to understand the child's magical thoughts and replace them with better reasoning skills.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE MOVE AS A FACTOR**

Preparation for moves is very important. Those who experience abrupt losses are more likely to become stuck in the grief process than those who have been prepared. The attitudes of those who are moving the child on are highly influential, do they give a blessing, a curse or nothing at all. How the child is welcomed into the new home is also highly important, are they welcomed, met with apprehension or treated as a matter of fact? The send-off and the welcome received will either support or hinder the grief process.

### **THE CHILD'S TEMPERAMENT AS A FACTOR**

At times of stress some individuals withdraw whilst others become more active, "fight or flight". Neither way is more preferable than the other because either can promote or prevent an individual's way of coping with grief. It is unlikely to be able to change a child's basic temperament but we can help them utilise their temperament so that it works for rather than against them.

### **THE ENVIRONMENT THE CHILD IS LEAVING**

Despite any shortcomings within a child's environment most would chose to stick with the known rather than move to the unknown. The child can use his/her fear of the unknown to compensate for the shortfalls within his/her own home and relationships. However if a child is fearful in their home environment they may well be relieved to be moving on or angry at not having been moved sooner. Alternatively a fearful child may well choose to remain with an abusive parent to whom he is attached rather than contemplate the extra fear of moving to an unknown place with strangers to whom he has no attachment at all.

## THE GRIEF PROCESS

Bowlby describes three stages that well attached children go through when they are separated from carers to whom they are attached. These are most evident in children from ages six months to four years:

The child:

- Initially protests vigorously and attempts to recover the attachment object, such as going to the door to try and find them
- Despairs about the return of the carer, but continues to be watchful, appears occupied or depressed. Responds hopefully if they hears a car pull up outside hoping it is the carer returning
- Becomes emotionally detached and appears to lose interest in carers in general
- Withdrawn and emotionally detached children are often mistaken as being disturbed rather than grieving

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross describes five stages of a grieving process which may help us understand the responses of children and adults aged 4 plus.

- Shock
  - Denial
  - Anger
  - Bargaining
  - Sadness/ Despair
  - Resolution
- 
- Shock and denial will be most prominent stages when the separation has been abrupt. The body's initial reaction to such a loss is to shut down, thus the child may show little emotion, may seem numb and mechanical.
  - During the denial phase the individual is prone to appetite and sleep problems as well as difficulty in paying attention. These problems are beyond the persons' conscious control and their energies are diverted to coping with their loss rather than the here and now.
  - Anger, bargaining and sadness may occur in any order and may recycle. Anger is often displaced on to others. Bargaining reflects the magical thinking which accompanies losses and many what if questions are raised.
  - Sadness and despair is accompanied by tears, increased dependency or withdrawal.
  - Resolution for children in the care system is about the acceptance of having



two sets of parents on an emotional rather than an intellectual basis.

- During the grieving process much energy is put into coping with strong emotions and there is little energy left available for day to day relationships and normal childhood development.
- Once the separation/loss has been accepted, the grieving individual can once again find the energy for continued growth and change.

## **PREPARING CHILDREN FOR MOVES AND TRANSITIONS**

In order to minimise the trauma of moves we need to pay close attention to the following issues:

- Planned moves are less harmful for the child than abrupt moves
- The stronger the relationship the child has with the primary carer the more painful the loss
- The trauma may be lessened if the child is well prepared for the move
- Everyone involved in the transition is open and honest with the child
- Careful consideration is given to the child's reactions to separation
- Everyone involved in the transition is supported
- Explain to children why they are moving and what is happening when they are moving.

## **PRE-PLACEMENT PREPARATION**

Pre placement visits should be arranged to help minimise the trauma of a move. They can help to achieve the following:

- Reduce fears of the unknown
- Be used to promote the transfer of attachments
- Help to initiate the grieving process
- Empower the new carers
- Encourage the making of future commitments

Considerations to be made:

- The younger the child the more important it is for direct contact to take place between past and future carers.
- If the child has been in placement for only a short period or the attachment is not that strong there may be little grief associated with the separation.

## **POST-PLACEMENT CONTACTS**

- The younger the child the sooner they will need to see their previous carers again.
- They children need reassurance that their loved ones are still alive and well and still care about them and know where they are and that they are safe.

(Fahlberg A Child's Journey through Placement 1991)

## **HOW CARERS CAN HELP CHILDREN TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL MOVE**

During the transitions that many children in care experience they can all too easily lose the threads of their own histories. Prior to placement it is the role of the social worker to collate such information but from the day the child is placed by recording a meaningful history of life within the foster family becomes the responsibility of the carers.

Questions commonly asked by children who lack a sense of identity that may be answered by their carers:

- How old was I when I arrived?
- What did I look like?
- What kind of baby /child was I?
- What were my first words?
- When did I start walking
- When did I lose my first tooth/ have my first haircut?
- What did I like to eat?
- Did I have a pet?
- Did I have a favourite toy?
- How did I celebrate my birthdays?

Life journey work with carers helps the child to maintain a sense of identity, belonging and history. All of which is invaluable both to the child and also to the adoptive carers who due to lack of information are often unable to give their children the sense of identity belonging and history that they are looking for.

Children joining new families who have had many previous moves may have become used to dealing with a series of "identity conflicts" without having experienced many "resolutions". The impact of their identity formation will be linked to their degree of resilience.

Building resilience is key to enabling children to recover from traumatic and adverse experiences.

(Preparing Children for Permanence Mary Romaine with Tricia Turley and Non Tuckey – BAAF)

## **INTRODUCTIONS AND MOVES TO AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY**

- When children are going to be moved to a new permanent family, the plan should be shared with them in age appropriate ways. If the moves are not planned explained or managed properly this could create a lack of resolution for the child, which will be carried forward to their adoptive family.
- It is essential that the plan be carried out smoothly and harmoniously with the foster carers and adoptive parents working hand in hand to promote a positive transition.

### **Moving a pre-verbal child**

- Pre-verbal children rely primarily on the non-verbal skills that they get from the adults around them.
- The younger the child the shorter and more intensive the introductions should be but should facilitate times for the adoptive carers to be involved in meeting the child's primary needs e.g. feeding, bathing, putting to bed, playing.
- First meetings should take place in the foster carers home
- Carers should encourage the child to connect with the new parents and praise him/her for doing so.
- During introductions new parents should become the last faces seen at night and the first faces seen in the morning. This helps the child to get used to change whilst still living in familiar surroundings.
- New parents should incorporate familiar sensory experiences for the child following the move e.g. lullaby, baby, powder, blanket, teat.
- The child's routine should be closely followed prior to the move to help the feel safe and secure thus minimising the trauma of the move.

### **Moving the verbal child**

- Older children will have some understanding of the idea of moving to a new family and the differences between foster care and adoption.
- They are more able to understand and be involved in the process and should be helped to know that their views are important and will be listened to, but they are not totally responsible for making decisions.
- The reasons for the move should be explained clearly and the child should

receive the same information from all of the important adults in their life.

- The child will want to know as much as possible about their new family.
- The most important message that a child needs is to be given permission to form new attachments to new parents.
- They may feel particularly anxious about hurting their current carers.
- Helping a child to move on is one of the main tasks for foster carers but it can often be painful.
- If carers are helped to acknowledge their feelings and to manage them, they in turn can help the child to do the same.
- Carers should not avoid talking about painful and ambivalent feelings the child may have. It is more helpful to allow children to express and discuss the negative and the positive feelings about moving, to avoid them receiving the message that negative feelings are neither valid nor acceptable.
- If carers tell the child that they will miss the child and be sad when they go, but also glad that they have a family of their own, it will give the child permission to have similar feelings and to express them.
- Older children usually benefit from longer introductions it can take weeks or months to get to know each other.
- Again initial visits should be undertaken in the foster home until the child feels confident enough to visit their home to be.

(Preparing Children for Permanence Mary Romaine with Tricia Turley and Non Tuckey – BAAF)

## **WORKING IN AGE APPROPRIATE WAYS**

Children aged between 2/4 years:

- Can learn to hold images in mind
- Are self-centred and not yet ready to share
- Beginning to develop a clearer understanding of self and others
- Beginning to play “pretend” games
- Have a vocabulary of around 300 words
- Can “catch” fears from adults
- Can experience fear of separation

During this stage of development direct work through play can help support the child in transition to feel safe.

Children aged between 4/7 years:

- Tend towards magical thinking (wishes make things come true).
- Also tend towards egocentric thinking (they are responsible for everything that happens to them and others feel the same way about things as they do).
- Can understand the concept of practising to learn a new skill.
- Many skills learnt through play will involve interactions with others. Play can teach children how things are done (bedtime routines, going to school, moving house). Play can also help children examine different kinds of families and relationships. It can also reveal a child's anxieties and feelings about what is going on around him/her.

(Preparing Children for Permanence Mary Romaine with Tricia Turley and Non Tuckey – BAAF)

Julie Howes, Social Worker, Western Bay Post Adoption Support Team.

### **3. PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING CHILDREN MOVING TO ADOPTION**

#### **MEMORY BOX**

Should be started when the child arrives in to foster care. It will help the child with their identity and also collate a meaningful record of their life history. The Memory Box should be completed by the time the child leaves placement so that they can take it with them.

Resources: Memory box checklist

#### **NARRATIVE STORY**

This is a simple factual story of the child's life thus far and should explain why the child was removed from their birth family, what decisions have been made as a result of this and who made them. The story must be written in age appropriate language and encompassed by a page border. It should be given a lot of credence and treated with respect, as it is representative of the child's life. The child should be allowed to share their story so that s/he can show it to important people in their life so that they too can understand the child's story and plan for the future. These should remain available at all times for the child to be able to refer to as and when they need to. This story can be used with birth siblings also to give them the same understanding of what is happening.

Resources: Templates can be provided to make the books which should be personalised for each child

#### **FACILITATING EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS**

Help child identify and verbalise/show feelings evoked

Resources Needed:

- **FEELING CARDS:** Help to put words to feelings.
- **FEELING FACES:** Pictures made with the child depicting a variety of facial expressions and emotions that may be useful to a child who has difficulty in verbalising their feelings. The main emotions are happy, sad, angry, scared, worried and confused. Having pictures of the faces available to them may help them be able to show rather than have to say what it is they may be feeling. The faces could be drawn on paper plates or placed on the front of plastic cups with a jar of beads available for the child to pour into the cup or onto the plate to show the feeling they are experiencing.
- **FEELINGS PINWHEEL:** Make a feelings pinwheel with the child for them to show what feelings look like rather than having to find words. Read books which help children to identify and express their feelings such as *How Are you Feeling Today?* *Maybe Days*. Build time to talk about feelings into your daily routine.

## **IDENTIFYING CHILDRENS NEEDS**

Give the child an understanding of the basic needs of children and how they should be met.

Resources needed: Blocks or sponges with the needs of children written on the side of them so that they may be used to build a wall of strength. Love warmth clothes food etc. It can be used to demonstrate how when certain pieces are missing the wall can become weak and maybe even collapse.

## **ESTABLISHING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FAMILIES**

An explanation needs to be given about the differences between birth families foster families and growing up families.

Resources: Make visual charts of the birth family tree and the foster family tree with the child.

## **CALENDARS/TIMELINES**

Get used to using calendars or daily timelines to help the child become orientated in time and place.

Resources needed: Calendar / daily timeline

## **FINAL CONTACTS WITH BIRTH FAMILY**

These should be facilitated at least 4 weeks prior to the introduction of a new family to allow the child opportunity to grieve their loss before they are introduced to a New Family. Should they not be allowed this time it is possible that their grief will become linked to the meeting of the new family and as such could affect the attachment process. It is important for them to have had opportunity to recognise their loss before they begin new relationships. A parting card or small gift may be exchanged marking the significance of the ending of a relationship. Photos taken during the final contacts should be included in their memory box along with anything the birth family is prepared to share about their recollection of their child whilst in their care. A positive leaving message from birth family members.

Resources needed: Gift/ card photos to share and to be taken. Preparation to be undertaken with the birth family about their parting message and also collation of information about their recollections of their child to be collected for inclusion in their Lifestory book.

## **ADDING TO THE NARRATIVE STORY**

Give an explanation that a Growing up family is being sought for them, what this means and how this is going to be carried out. Explain who will be part of the searching process and reassure the child that they will be seeking the best possible family that is just right for them as an individual. Growing up families are checked out to make sure they are safe and can do all of the things that children need. Reassure them that they will be told everything about them and their past so that they will understand what has happened to them and will be able to help them with anything that may be difficult for them. They will be understood loved cared for and safe within

their growing up family. Growing up families can be another foster family or an adoptive family.

### **CHILDREN'S STORY BOOKS**

Introduce storybooks that address the notion of adoption into the child's library of books to read. Eg The Teazles, baby Bunny A Safe Place for Rufus, Chester and Daisy Move On, Dennis and the Big Decisions, Coco Finds a new Mum.

Resources: List of children's story books and films

### **RELATIONSHIP BASED PLAY TECHNIQUES**

Introduce three Relationship based play techniques for the carer to use with the child on a regular basis. These techniques should be identified as those best suited to the individual child and will be passed on to the Adoptive parents to continue with the child when they move placement. Advice will be given as to which three techniques should be used and how they are carried out.

### **DIFFERENT KINDS OF FAMILIES**

Use pictures to explore with the child the different kinds of families there are. E.g. Mum and dad, single parents, same sex couples, parents with disabilities. Give them an idea of the diversity of families and how they may be able fit into these families.

Resources: Photos and story books of different family constitutions.

### **HOPES AND FEARS OF MOVING TO A GROWING UP FAMILY**

Help the child to identify their hopes and fears using feeling faces to draw up a list. In doing so their hopes and fears are named and can be shared and this will help to reduce their anxiety.

Resources: Pens / pencils crayons and paper

### **ALL ABOUT ME BOOK**

Use a large piece of paper and fold it in half so that it is like a card. Ask the child how they think other people would describe them. Help the child to write or draw these descriptions on the front outside of the card.

Then ask the child how they would describe themselves and write or draw these descriptions on the inside of the card. Encourage the child to talk about emotions and traits as well as physical characteristics. Include things they enjoy and things that worry or scare them. End with asking the child what they would like the new family to know about them – allow them to choose from the “inside” or the “outside” descriptions on the card. The child can colour or decorate the card. This activity may be done over time rather than in one sitting.

Resources: Pens pencils paper stickers paint glue cut out pictures

### **THE NOW CALENDAR**

This helps to give the child a sense of continuity when contemplating a move to a permanent placement.



Draw a simple calendar representing a week on a large piece of paper. Divide each day between morning, afternoon and evening of each day. Talk about what usually happens each morning, afternoon and evening of each day. Help the child to fill in the calendar. Ask which routines and activities are fun, boring or important to the child. Decide together which of these they would like the new family to know about. Include the food, drink the child likes, TV programmes, indoor and outdoor activities and bedtime routines.

Ask the child if they would like you to use the calendar to tell their new family about them. Encourage the child to talk about some of the things that might have to change in a new household.

(Preparing Children for Permanence Mary Romaine with Tricia Turley and Non Tuckey – BAAF)

### **THE FAMILY BOOK IS SHARED WITH THE CHILD**

The adoptive family will have prepared a book/DVD introducing themselves to the child inviting them to become part of their family. The child should be allowed to look at the book/DVD as often as they like with their carer rather than alone and be encouraged to talk about their hopes and fears about moving to their new family. If fears are not explored this gives the message that they are not allowed to have negative thoughts and feelings, as these are either taboo or unacceptable.

Identifying positives and negatives is far healthier for the child in terms of minimising the trauma and promoting a healthy transition process. This becomes the next part of the child's narrative story and can be shared by the child with teachers friends and member of the foster family ie all of those important to the child.

Read Morris and the Bundle of Worries or the Big Bag of Worries to help encourage the child to share any worries they may have. Demonstrate that no worries are too big to be sorted.

Resources: Morris and the Big Bundle of Worries, the Big Bag of Worries

Endings can now be facilitated by school and foster family to allow space for the introductions to the new family become the focus of the way forward for the child.

### **THE MOVING CALENDAR**

Similar to the calendar above but the focus is on the moving timetable i.e. planned visits and overnight stays, farewell celebration leading up to the final move.

This should be given to the child a few days at a time and not too far in advance. It will help the child to feel more in control of the introductions if they have an understanding of what is happening where and when and who is involved.

Resources: Moving Calendar template can be provided.

### **ADDING TO THE NARRATIVE STORY**

Foster carers provide the story of the child's experience with them whilst in their care.

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

During introductions the All about Me book can be shared by the child along with the entire narrative story both of which allow the child to share their story through their work. Adopters need to be taught the Relationship based play activities to do with the child during these early stages to promote positive attachments. Read: I Wished for You, Guess How Much I Love you, The Teazles Baby Bunny, Motherbridge of Love.

Resources: Reading books and items to facilitate three relationship based play activities.

## **MOVING COLLAGE**

With the child help make a collage of a variety of houses to put on the wall depicting a pathway between them and using pictures or photographs to show who lives in the houses. At least one house should be left free for the Adoptive family to become included in the collage as soon as the child is told about the family. Pictures may be moved between the houses when introductions have begun to illustrate the process. All houses should have letterboxes and there should be a post box in the collage to demonstrate how contact may be maintained.

Resources; Colourful thick painting paper and paints, felt tips to make collage.

## **SHOEBOX HOUSES**

Involve the child in the making of or playing with a group of shoebox houses to promote the notion of visiting/moving to a new house. Allow the child to decorate and explore with them what they would like to have in the houses, how they may like it to be decorated etc. Give them a sense of different houses looking and feeling different but still having the capacity to keep children safe and well cared for.

Read age appropriate stories related to adoption: Rufus finds a Safe place to stay, My New Family.

## **ROAD/PATH PLAYMAT**

Use the road/path play mat in a similar way to the shoebox houses. Use cars and people to show how people can be transported from one venue to another. Show them things like the school, shops a hospital and playground nearby, things that will be familiar to them and will be found in the community that they will be moving to.

Resources: toy cars, road mat, people and houses.

## **PAINTING/DRAWING/MODELLING**

Allow the child opportunity to explore themes of families and moving in their own way.

## **MEMORY BOX**

The bringing together of items of special significance to the child which they can take to they adoptive placement. This could include all things special which have taken place in the child's life to date e.g. a lock of hair from first haircut, a lost tooth, a

favourite baby toy or comforter, photographs, school reports etc. The Memory box is very significant in terms of both Identity and History. If carried by the child when leaving foster placement the child is symbolically owning their identity and history and taking it with them to their adoptive placement. It should never be left behind. Resources: Sturdy Memory Box big enough to house all the contents.

### **LIFE STORY BOOK**

All of the direct work undertaken with the child as part of the Transition Process can be used to form a significant part of the child's Life story book. This book should be completed and passed over at the Second Adoption Review.

### **LETTERBOX CONTACT**

The child should be leaving foster placement with an understanding of what contact arrangements are in place with regards to foster carers and also with birth family members so they don't have to worry about them.

### **LATER LIFE LETTERS**





Should also have been completed and provided at the second adoption review.

### **PRACTICAL TOOLS REQUIRED WHEN PREPARING CHILDREN FOR ADOPTION**




Feeling faces plates/cups/pin wheel Eco Map Family trees for Birth foster and adoptive family Narrative story Relationship Based play technique materials to be provided Photos of different kinds of families Feelings flash cards All about Me book Hopes and Fears chart Now Calendar Moving Calendar Daily Routine charts Children's stories and film book list

Developed by Julie Howes Social worker Western Bay Post Adoption Support Team.

## 4. (Name) Moving Calendar

DATE	EVENT	MY FEELINGS
<p>On Friday</p>  <p>00/00/00</p>	<p>(Social Worker's name) WILL come to see ME. SHE WILL BRING PHOTO'S AND A DVD ABOUT MY ADOPTIVE FAMILY.</p>	
<p>On Tuesday</p>  <p>00/00/00</p>	<p>MY ADOPTIVE FAMILY WILL COME TO MEET ME AT (FOSTER CARERS NAMES) HOUSE.</p>	
<p>On Wednesday</p>   <p>00/00/00</p>	<p>Today will be a school day.</p> <p>I will be able to tell my teacher and friends I have an ADOPTIVE FAMILY.</p> <p>(ADOPTIVE PARENTS NAMES) WILL COME TO SEE ME AFTER SCHOOL THEY WILL STAY FOR TEA.</p>	

# (Name) Moving Calendar

DATE	EVENT	MY FEELINGS
<p>On Thursday</p>  <p>00/00/00</p>	<p>ADOPTIVE PARENTS NAMES WILL TAKE ME OUT, (FOSTER CARERS NAMES) WILL COME TOO!</p>	
<p>On Friday</p>  <p>00/00/00</p>	<p>TODAY I WILL SAY GOODBYE TO MY FRIENDS AND TEACHERS. THEY WILL BE HAPPY BECAUSE I HAVE A LOVELY ADOPTIVE FAMILY.</p> <p>(ADOPTIVE PARENTS NAMES) CAN PICK ME UP AND SAY HELLO TO MY TEACHER.</p>	
<p>On Saturday</p>  <p>00/00/00</p>	<p>(ADOPTIVE PARENTS NAMES) WILL COME FOR BREAKFAST. WE WILL GO OUT FOR THE DAY, (FOSTER CARERS NAMES) WILL COME TOO!</p>	



**On Sunday**

**00/00/00**

**(ADOPTIVE PARENTS NAMES)  
WILL TAKE ME OUT FOR THE  
DAY.**

**On Monday**



**00/00/00**

**(ADOPTIVE PARENTS  
NAMES)**

**WILL COME TO  
BREAKFAST.**

**THEN (FOSTER CARERS  
NAMES) WILL TAKE ME TO  
VISIT MY NEW HOUSE.**

**On Tuesday**



**(ADOPTIVE PARENTS NAMES)**

**WILL ARRIVE EARLY TO PICK  
ME UP AND THEN WE WILL  
SPEND THE DAY AT MY NEW  
HOUSE.**

**(SOCIAL WORKERS NAMES)  
WILL COME TO SEE ME, I CAN  
TELL HER ALL ABOUT MY  
NEW PARENTS**

# (Name) Moving Calendar

DATE	EVENT	MY FEELINGS
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**On Wednesday**



00/00/00

IN THE MORNING THE GROWNUPS WILL HAVE A MEETING TO MAKE SURE I'M DOING OK.

THEN MY GROWING UP FAMILY TAKE ME TO MY NEW HOUSE.

I WILL HAVE A BATH AND PUT MY PJS ON. I WILL THEN TAKE ME BACK TO (FOSTER CARERS NAMES) HOUSE FOR BED.

**(SOCIAL WORKERS NAME) WILL FINISH MY CALENDAR AFTER THE MEETING.**

**On Thursday**



00/00/00

TODAY I WILL SPEND THE DAY AT MY HOUSE.

**MUMMY AND DADDY WILL BRING ME BACK TO (FOSTER CARERS NAMES) HOUSE READY FOR BED.**

# (Name) Moving Calendar

DATE	EVENT	MY FEELINGS
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**On Thursday**



**00/00/00**

**TODAY I WILL SPEND THE DAY AT MY HOUSE.**

**MUMMY AND DADDY WILL BRING ME BACK TO (FOSTER CARERS NAMES) HOUSE READY FOR BED.**

**On Friday**



**00/00/00**

**TODAY I WILL MOVE TO MY NEW HOUSE TO LIVE WITH MUMMY AND DADDY .**

**WE WILL BE A FAMILY AND MUMMY AND DADDY WILL LOVE US AND LOOK AFTER US FOR ALWAYS.**



**The moving calendar is designed in loose pages so that the direct worker / foster carer can “feed” to the child in manageable stages. They need to understand what will happen that day and then the next.**

**Some like this visual reminder displayed, maybe on their bedroom wall. Others prefer to look at it and then put it aside. We have found it to be very effective in helping the child keep pace with the introductions process, while minimising anxiety.**

Created by Western Bay Adoption team



## 5. Practical activities to support children and young people in making sense of another child moving on to adoption

### Create a memory box / jar

This can be done as a family or with each individual child. It could be a shared activity where mementos are given and received from the child transitioning to adoption and to children within the foster placement.

Memory boxes / jars have many potential benefits. They can aid in emotionally preparing children for the transition of the child in the placement to adoption and be a comfort once the child has been placed. The act of creating a memory box can facilitated discussion about feelings and the wishes of the child. Memory boxes / jars do not need to be full of items or have any cost value to be cherished.

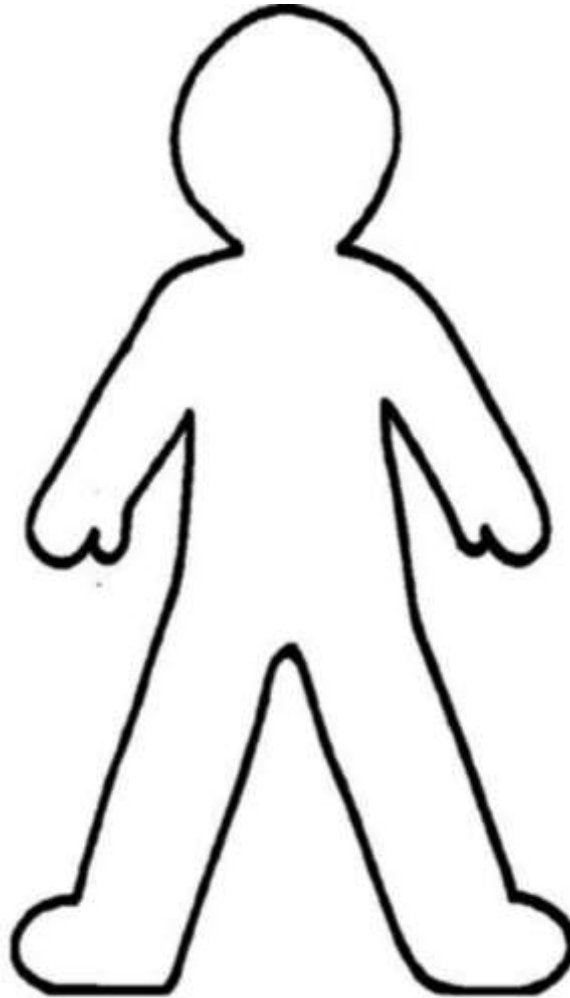
### Activities to help talk about feelings

These activities are taken from the 'Exploring feelings activities' in the NAS LJW online archive and can be adapted to share with any child, or with more than one child at a time, if appropriate.

#### Instructions for the adult:

This exercise can be undertaken by printing the body outline sheet or by drawing around the child, this will require a large sheet of paper. Wall paper lining is inexpensive and useful for this task.

- Make it playful. Use coloured pens and make it a creative activity.
- Ask the child to complete the sentences provided underneath the drawing of the figure, for example "I feel happy when my friends come over to play".
- The child should feel in control. They should be able to choose and direct the order.
- It may be appropriate to discuss just one feeling at a time. Thinking of multiple examples of when one feels happy, for example.
- It may be appropriate, especially with an older child to have a competition. Who can provide the most examples in ten minutes? This will require you doing the exercise too, providing age appropriate examples to share with the child / young person.
- This exercise should provoke discussions regarding feelings. It is important to validate these feelings, rather than to problem solve.



I feel happy when....

I feel excited when....

I feel angry when....

I feel sad when....

I feel frightened when....

I feel nervous when....

### **Extension exercise:**

**Body scanning:** Discuss with the child where in the body these feelings are often felt. For example, many people report having butterfly type flutterings in the chest when nervous and excited. The child may want to colour, draw or write on the body where that feeling is often felt by them. This could include drawn examples, such as a broken heart, the World on your shoulders or a knot in your tummy.

## Children's story books

There are a number of children's story books about children moving on to adoption, many of these are appropriate to share with other children within the foster placement. Below are a couple that we recommend?

The Family Book (2010) Author: Todd, Published by Little, Brown Young Readers, ISBN-10: 9780316070409 or ISBN-13: 978-0316070409

Chester and Daisy Move On (2012) Author: Angela Lidster, Published by Coram BAAF, ISBN: 978 1 907585 49 4

### 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



## 6. A Record of my life



### Help to keep my memories so that their not lost forever

Many adopted children sadly do not have a full record of their life prior to being placed with their adoptive parents. This record provides headings, as if they were requests from the Child, to remind you of the importance of recording information for the Child, not just the significant milestones, but everyday events. It is likely to be hugely appreciated in the future.

**“Can you please take a photo of me within the first week of placement?”**

**“Please take a photo of me every month”**

**“I’d like to have a photo of your house”**

**“I’d like to have a photo of other members of the family”**

**“Please take a photo of your pets”**

**“Please take a photo of me and you”**

**N.B. – Don’t forget to put on the back of each photo:**

- 1. The date**
- 2. Location and**
- 3. The names of people**

**Thank you!**

## YOU AND YOUR HOME

When did I arrive? Date

Who brought me to you?

How old was I?

Your address

Names and ages of other family member's

Did you have pets?

Were there other foster children placed with you?

Tell me their names and ages?

PHOTOS OF YOUR HOME

PHOTOS OF YOUR FAMILY

MILESTONES

Did I have a good sleeping routine?	
What comforters did I like?	
Feeding?	
Bath time?	
My 1 <sup>st</sup> tooth? Date? Which one?	

## 7. Foster carers ‘Frequently Asked Questions’

### What is LJW?

Life Journey Work (LJW) 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.

LJW should support the child’s identity, promote self-esteem, help give the child a sense of belonging, wellbeing and support good mental health.

LJW provides an account of a child’s life in words, pictures, memorabilia, anecdotes and documents. It provides an opportunity and a structure for the child to explore their emotions and talk about painful issues. It provides children with important factual information. It provides a narrative / explanations for the child. It preserves memories.

Life Journey Work is comprised of the following three components:

**Preparation work.** This is in the form of direct work with children, aiding them to understand the reasons why they cannot live with their birth family, supporting them to process loss and prepare them for placement with an adoptive family.

**Direct Life Journey Work.** Even very young children can be supported in creating Life Journey materials, such as a memory box and items for their Life Journey book, when supported in an age-appropriate way. Direct Life Journey Work builds on the important work that was done in the preparation stage.

**Life Journey materials.** Every child should have information about their birth family, the reasons why he/she was Looked After and the reasons why she /he was placed for adoption. These materials will be given to Prospective Adopter/s at the time of placement, and it is expected that they will share them with their child. Every child should also have a Later Life Letter, written by their Social Worker, providing further detail for when she/he reaches adolescence.

### Who should do the preparation work with children?

LJW is complex and should be guided, supported by and planned by the child’s social worker using the LJW planning checklist. The LJW Planning Checklist is a tool for planning LJW with the people supporting the child at that time. It is vital that LJW information is explained according to the specific the needs of the child and as age appropriate. The Planning Checklist is an aid in sensitive planning. Thus ensuring LJW provides positive and consistent messages to the child.

In some cases, specialist therapeutic support may be required. It is important to identify for each piece of LJW, who’s the most appropriate person to undertake direct work with the child.

The child’s foster carer is likely to be the child’s secure base in the early days of LJW and will be an appropriate partner to support this, together with the child’s social worker. Once an adoptive family are identified for the child, it will be important that

the professionals involved also work in partnership with them, in undertaking LJW work.

Adults who undertake direct LJW should be known to and trusted by the Child and must be reliable.

### **What can I do if I have concerns about LJW? (Such as it being unplanned or not undertaken).**

You should speak with your supervising social worker and ask that the matter is taken forward.

You may also request that the Independent Reviewing Officer refers to the LJW planning checklist at the child's reviews. This is a helpful tool that should assist in ensuring LJW is planned and on track.

### **When should LJW be undertaken?**

LJW should begin as soon as a child becomes Looked After. Information, photograph and memento gathering should begin immediately.

Everyone with a role in the child's life has a responsibility for this, such as Midwives, Health Visitors, Teachers, Childminders and nursery workers. Foster Carers have a particularly vital role in LJW.

It is vital that practitioners seek to work in partnership with birth families to undertake LJW. A sensitive and inclusive approach is required.

### **What sort of information / mementos should I be collecting?**

Sometimes it is the smallest fragments of information or a seemingly insignificant item that can become the biggest treasure. Of course, it is not possible to record and retain everything! Within the NAS LJW Foster Carers toolkit there are suggestions and good ideas of what information and mementoes Foster Carers should be collecting; see: '*Ideas – What to Put in a Child's Memory Box*' and '*A Record of My Life for Foster Carers*'.

### **How do I answer difficult questions?**

Life Journey conversations should be part of everyday life for children and Life Journey materials should be available to support Adopters in talking to their child. It is not always easy determining when is right to talk about difficult information, though there is much to suggest that it is better to share information incrementally, as age appropriate and to start early, please see '*AFA Cymru Adoption Life Story Literature Review*' for further information.

For young children parallel stories can be particularly helpful, these are stories that reflect the experiences of the child but from another character's perspective. There are many useful children's story books available. Margot Sunderland has a number of excellent books, as has Sarah Naish.



Of course, you could write your own story that reflects the child's situation. Please see 'An example of a parallel story' within this toolkit.

When planning how to share difficult information it is important to do the following:

- 1) Prepare and plan what you will say. This should be done in conjunction with the child's foster carers or adopters. Preparation is not always possible. If the child asks you something that you feel unprepared to answer, it is generally fine to say that you are unsure but will find out and let the child know (so long as you do so), rather than to give a reply that is ill thought out.
- 2) Read 'The importance of P.A.C.E in helping children to understand their Life Journey', you will find this within the toolkit. This approach is invaluable in sensitively supporting children to process information.
- 3) Check the sources of the difficult information. Is it reliable? Are the 'facts' subject to interpretation? It may still be important to share this information with the Child, but to do so in a way that presents it as 'that person's point of view', which may or may not be accurate, rather than as a 'fact'.
- 4) Consider the Child's current emotional functioning. It is better not to share difficult information at a time where a child is feeling particularly vulnerable. For this reason, waiting until the transition to High School to tell difficult information is generally problematic, earlier is usually better.
- 5) Where information is especially difficult to share, you may wish to consult a member of the Adoption Team or a Psychologist for guidance.

Excerpt from '*Telling Children Difficult Information*' in the NAS LJW Foster Carers toolkit.

