

Guidance for life story books – Adoption

Purpose of this work:

The life story book given to an adopted child should provide them with information about their birth family and their journey to being adopted. The purpose is for them to have a book that is accessible as they grow older and want to know more about why they are adopted.

What it is and what it isn't:

It is a factual account, as known by children's services, of the reasons that the child was removed from their birth parents and placed for adoption, and their journey from birth to being adopted.

It is an account of key information about the child and their development at the time of writing.

It is not a later life letter and does not need to go into great detail about everything that contributed to the decisions that were made.

When should it be completed?

All children placed for adoption should have their life story book given to them by the time of the celebration hearing or at a goodbye visit shortly afterwards.

Depending on the age of the child the social worker should read the book with them and it should then be given into the care of the adoptive parents to be shared with the child as and when they are interested in seeing it. For very young children it might just be that they are shown it to see the pictures, older children might keep the book in their rooms or somewhere they can access it as they choose but that will be a decision for their parents.

What should be included?

Please see the PowerPoint template that can be used to create an adoption life story book and provides clear guidance for what to include in each section.

In summary the layout of the book should be as follows:

- Letter from the social worker explaining what the book is about, when it was written and the relationship that the social worker had with the child.
- Information about the child that is relevant now – this includes birth information, their family tree (adoptive family), their development to date and their heritage (birth and adoptive).

- Information about their birth family – details of their birth parents and any siblings as well as other key birth family members. Include information about the parent's relationship and the birth family tree.
- Children's services involvement – why they were removed from their birth parents, the court proceedings and why the decision was made for them to be adopted.
- Foster care – any information about foster carers that the child lived with and how the child experienced that care.
- Finding their adoptive parents – information about the process and the preparation work that was done with the child. The introductions, moving to live with them and settling in. Details of the adoption hearing and the celebration hearing.
- Timeline of the key events for the child – a summary of the chronology that might provide a bit more detail than elsewhere in the book.

Include photos wherever possible but have a balance with the writing. A separate photo book should be provided to the child if a lot of photos are available.

Further points to consider:

- The adoptive parents should be referred to as the parents (mummy, daddy etc.) throughout and the birth parents should be referred to by their first names.
- The book should be created electronically so that it can be easily saved to the file and re-created if need be.
- Write the book to the child.
- Involve the birth parents/family where possible, especially in agreeing the information that is shared about them and for getting photos of the child before they came into care.
- Agree the content with the adoptive parents in terms of the wording and what they might want left to be in the later life letter. The narrative in the book needs to be one that the adoptive parents are happy to tell to the child as they grow older.
- Birth parents should be aware that the book is being completed and have the contents explained to them if they want. Where appropriate, a birth parent might contribute by providing photos or stories, or they may write to the child in a way that can be included in the book (or in the later life letter).