

**Direct work** describes working face-to-face with a child using a variety of methods, according to the age, level of understanding and preference of the child. The focus can be on any subject. Methods include play, story books, workbooks, family trees, ecomaps, timelines etc.

**Life Story work** means telling the story of a child's life history to enable the child to understand their past. In the majority of cases this will involve direct work with the child, since even very young children can be involved in an age-appropriate way.

The **Life Story** is the means of recording information about the child's past in an accessible way for the child. It can include both photos, narrative, music, memorabilia and videos for example. For those children who cannot be engaged in direct work (mainly the under 2s) the information will be prepared on their behalf for the future and added to as they grow and develop.

### Why is it important?

Children who live with their birth families have many opportunities to know their past and to clarify past and present events. However, children separated from their birth families are often denied these opportunities; they may have changed families, social workers, schools, homes and moved away from familiar neighbourhoods and communities. Children who lose track of their past and who are confused about the present, are likely to find it difficult to develop emotionally and socially. They will struggle to develop a secure understanding of who they are, have difficulty in developing secure attachments to other adults, and may get 'stuck' in damaging fantasies they form to make sense of their confusion.

### How do we do it?

The gathering of factual information for the child is of great importance, and should start as soon as the child becomes looked after. If this information and memorabilia is lost, it may never be regained for the child. Birth families, workers from Children's Services Teams, foster carers, residential staff and Contact Centre staff all have a role in collecting mementoes of all significant events/achievements for the child. This information should be recorded for the child and any keepsakes given to the child (or held in safekeeping by the carers according to the child's age and understanding).

The journey the child/young person makes when away from the care of birth family should be sensitively recorded and have a child focus. Very often adults choose to have copies of their records. This should help them piece their journey together and help them recall significant events in a sensitive and empowering manner.

### For more information:

Therefore it is imperative that Life Story work begins at the start of the process of involvement and forms part of the handover for the social worker in Through Care or Adoption to continue with. The LAC review process should trigger this at the initial review and should be explored in more depth at the second review. In the initial stages of social work intervention the restorative meeting should include discussion about the importance of this work.