

LIFE STORY WORK WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ADOPTED

What is Life Story Work?

Life Story Work is a concept which is used to allow a child or young person to explore their personal history and to ask questions about the circumstances which have led them to be where they are at that present moment. Life Story Work is primarily used for children who are in fostering or adoptive placements and who have suffered disrupted attachment and may have a history of multiple placements or caregivers.

Life Story Work allows children to explore safely and securely how they have reached where they are and to attach identity and meaning to their lives, to consider, to think, to understand and to reflect (Rose and Philpot, 2005, p.84).

Why is Life Story Work Important?

Adopted children often have limited information about their birth and life prior to their adoption. This may particularly be the case if they were adopted from overseas as information may not have been recorded or available at the time you took custody of your child.

Life Story Work provides the opportunity to build your child's sense of identity, which in turn will build their self-esteem and self-worth. At times, children with limited information about their birth history will fantasise and make up stories and Life Story Work allows them to piece together their past, work through issues with their caregiver and to explore and acknowledge their feelings of grief and loss.

What to include in Life Story Work?

There are many different models of Life Story Work and you may need to consider which model suits you and your child best. Generally information will be obtained by the caregiver and discussed with the child, as it is included in a scrapbook or journal.



- This information may begin with the child's birth certificate, photo of the hospital where the child was born, genogram or family tree of birth family and details about birth family members (including any names, photos or addresses).
- The next collection of information will include details about how your child came to live with you. This may be information which was provided by their orphanage or foster carers, travel itineraries, plane tickets, photos of you meeting them for the first time and photos of your time together in their birth country before arriving in Australia.
- You may choose to include copies of your child's adoption order, immigration paperwork, health checks or photos of their arrival in Australia. It is important to use this time to discuss these events with your child, exploring their feelings and answering any questions they may have.
- You may also choose to include photos, movie tickets, school certificates or memorable events which you and your child have enjoyed together.

Life Story Work will strengthen the relationship between you and your child and allow them to feel comfortable making a connection between their past, present and future.

Responses to Life Story Work

Although Life Story Work is a positive way for you and your child to communicate about their history and formation of identity, it may sometimes act as a trigger. Your child may display challenging behaviours during or after doing the work with you.

Triggers from trauma may be unknown to your child and it may be the sight of an image or discussion about a particular topic which will cause a child to either display outwardly challenging behaviours or withdraw into themselves.



Well renowned clinical psychologist Dan Hughes recommends keeping in mind the **PLACE** principles when working with children, particularly when doing Life Story Work.

Playfulness use humour, play games, laugh, have fun and spend quality time together.

Love be attuned to your child's emotional state and engage with them in a positive, emotional and nonverbal communication.

Acceptance continue to accept your child despite any difficult behaviour.

Curiosity being actively interested in your child's thoughts feelings and experiences.

Empathy show understanding, care and support regarding their difficulties.

Where do I learn more?

Some children have very unique and complex backgrounds and you may require additional support to navigate your child's story with them.

Contact the ISS Australia Intercountry Adoption Worker in your state for further advice and support.



For further information and resources see:

- Website: [Life Story Works](#)
- Book: [Example of a life story](#)
- Book: Telling the Truth to your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past by Betsy Keefer, Jayne E. Schooler.
- Book: Life Story Work with Children Who are Fostered or Adopted: Creative Ideas and Activities 1st Edition by Katie Wrench & Lesley Naylor.
- Website: [Digital life story work: cyber space and digital inclusion: Be Net Wise](#)