
What is a Life Book and Why Should I Create One?

When a child or youth enters foster or kinship care, they have suffered trauma and loss of their birth family. This can contribute to a loss of identity. No matter how compassionate, loving, and nurturing you are, they may still have challenges caused by trauma or a lack of knowing their history. Having a Life Book could help them put their life experiences in perspective and hold on to memories.

A Life Book is created to help children and youth understand their trauma and aid them in working through the trauma they have endured. It gives them some control over their story, an opportunity to process the events and changes in their life, and possibly set a foundation for the future.

What is a Life Book?

A Life Book is a collection of information that forms a coherent record of a child in care's life events and journey through foster care. It provides a place for memories and a connection to a child's past.

In addition to holding great sentimental value, a Life Book can also help a child in care understand their current situation and prepare them for a healthy transition to permanency.

Why should I create a Life Book with the child or youth in my care?

Adults who have lived a part of their lives in foster care and have been adopted or those who have aged out of care while transitioning to adulthood may ask themselves questions like:

- *Who am I?*
- *Where did I come from?*
- *How did I get here?*
- *What happened to my family?*

Life Books can help a child or youth in care maintain a connection to the parts of their life that are disrupted when they go into care and as they move through the system to permanency.

Although entrance into foster care was the result of a series of incidents or one incident that was unsafe or traumatic, there may still be memories of people and experiences they may want to hold on to. Additionally, as a child or youth moves through foster care, they will develop relationships and have experiences that will contribute to who they will become.

A Life Book could provide the answer to some of the questions about their early life and the period while they were in foster care that would otherwise go unanswered.

When should I start a Life Book?

If a child or youth has a Life Book that is up-to-date, start from that point with information about their time with you and your family. If they do not have a Life Book, talk to them about creating one. You can also talk with their Worker to obtain additional pertinent information. Whether or not a child or youth already has a Life Book, it is never too late to get started.

What information should go into a Life Book?

A Life Book can include pictures and information about:

- *Their birth*
- *Their parents and siblings, if any*
- *Other family members*

What is a Life Book and Why Should I Create One? Cont.

- *Days and/or events important to their family*
- *Names and photos of friends, teachers, and other people important to their life*
- *Letters and mementos*
- *Their foster family, current, and previous*
- *Changes in family*
- *School information*
- *Recognition of their achievements*

Remember, it is their story, historical and current. They have the right and need the opportunity to tell it how they want. Life Books can be an actual book, a playlist of music, or however the child or youth wants to create their lifebook.

If you need to purchase items, like high quality paper and ink to print photos, petty cash can possibly be accessed by contacting the child in care's Worker as well. It is helpful to collect and organize information about the child as day to day events occur. If possible, plan to work on the Life Book on a regular basis. You can turn it into a family event!

If you have children in your home who are siblings, please remember that each of them should have their own Life Book. While much of the information for each child may be the same, there will still be events, achievements, and people unique to a particular child's experience.

What happens to the Life Book when the child leaves my home?

The Life Book belongs to a child in care and should be with them wherever they go; whether they are reunifying with their parent, joining a relative, or pre-adoptive home, being placed with a relative, or in a pre-adoptive home. In fact, Life Books should be developed with a child's understanding that it is their own story to keep.

Creating a Life Book with a child is a great way to show your concern, love, and respect for them as an individual

and not just a product of circumstance.

Note: embrella has Life Books available at no cost for resource and kinship families. The Life Book is designed to encourage the child in care to record their memories, hopes, and dreams. Visit embrella's website at www.embrella.org or call 800.222.0047 to request a Life Book. embrella also offers a live Life Book workshop to help caregivers learn more about how Life Books aid children and young people as well as the unique ways they can be developed. Reach out to your Family Support Advocate to learn more about Life Books and ways you can further support our children and young people.

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