

Life Books: A Lifelong Priceless Treasure

Life books provide foster and adoptive youth with personal connections to their past. A life book is a personal narrative account of a child's life. Foster and adoptive parents play an important role in providing support in the creation of life books.

Creating a life book may feel like an overwhelming task.

You may feel like you do not have enough information or enough personal items to include in the child's life book. Or your child may be reluctant to share information or want to visit his past.

Do the best you can with the resources that you have. Gather as many additional personal items and mementos that you can. Be open (when appropriate) to contacting family members, past and present social workers, extended family members, siblings, mentors, and others who have been involved in the life of the child. Ask for their help in gathering pictures, school records, awards, certificates, milestone achievements, etc.

Engaging Youth in the Creation of Life Books

A child's life book is exactly that—a child's life book. Foster and adoptive parents can

provide support and assistance in helping a child create his life book but, ultimately, the book is all about the child's life.

Therefore, encourage your children to take an active role in preparing and creating their life books. Have a heart-to-heart discussion on the importance of life books in honoring who they were, who they are now, and who they may become in the future.



Children of all ages play an active role in creating their life book. Infants can share their hand and foot prints, a toddler can choose the color scheme, a pre-teen can add personal stories and artwork, and a teenager can

add poetry or personal journal entries.

From the Heart

Consider adding your own personal touch. For example, you could write a letter to your foster or adoptive child and let them know how much they have touched your life and how important they are to you.

- Be creative.
- Be resourceful.
- Be resilient.
- Be honest.

Continued on page 2

- Be expressive.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Be inspired.

Life Book Pages

Life books are child-focused and child-inspired. The following topics are but a few of the possible considerations for inclusion in a life book. Let creativity reign.

- Introduction: All About Me
- Information about my birth mother and father
- Pictures of the child, relatives, friends, siblings, best friends, teachers, foster parents, adoptive parents, social workers, mentors, houses, favorite places, vacations, or any other place or people that are important to the child.
- Family tree
- Pet page
- Favorite holiday memories
- Family traditions
- What I am thankful for
- My memorable childhood stories
- My milestone information
- Descriptions of previous placements
- School records and achievements
- Schools I attended
- Where I'm from
- Important people in my life

- The origin of my name
- My favorite foods
- My favorite movies
- My favorite songs
- My secret talents
- My earliest memories
- My silliest childhood memories
- My artwork page
- My poetry page

Signs of the Technological Times

Life books can be created in many different fashions. You can format them like a scrapbook, design them like a journal, or create a digital life book. No matter what life book format you choose, make sure to create a copy of the life book. If you do decide to create a digital life book, make sure to print out a hard copy for safe keeping.

Under Lock and Key

Another important consideration is to honor the personal nature of life books. Life books are the property of the child and he decides if he wants to share it. Help your child keep his life book private and confidential.

Language Lessons

If you are assisting in the creation of a life book for a younger child, then the language and the content of the life book should be chronologically and developmentally appropriate.

For example, you could include an explanation of how a young girl who had been physically abused by her parents came into foster care by writing, *When you were five*

Continued on page 3

years old, your Mommy and Daddy were having trouble with controlling their anger and your social worker, Ms. Williamson, needed to find a safe place (the Johansson's foster home) for you to go while your parents received help for their anger.

If you are having difficulty in how to most appropriately enter information in the child's life book, contact the child's social worker for support. Ideally, you might also try contacting your child's parents or other extended family members for support.

Creativity is the Key

Life books provide youth with a voice to their past, a look at their present, and a glimpse into their future. As a foster or adoptive parent, you have the unique opportunity of helping the child create his or her own personal life book. Make sure to enjoy this inspiring journey that will be treasured for a lifetime.



Coalition Library Resources

You can find the following resources by visiting wifostercareandadoption.org and clicking on the Library tab.

My Life Story, by Bretts and Ahmad

The Complete Life Book, by Jim Mooney

All About Me, My Life in Words and Pictures, by Mary Jane Proft

Free Online Life Book Resources

Digital Scrapbooking (look for the free section)
www.digital-scrapbook-kits.com

Behind the Name
www.behindthename.com

Day of Birth
www.dayofbirth.co.uk

Iowa Foster Care and Adoptive Parents Association (IFAPA) Free Life Book Pages
http://www.ifapa.org/publications/IFAPA_Lifebook_Pages.asp