

## LIFE STORY WORK

**Life story work is the technical term for a process that happens naturally in most families.** Children grow up being told they have their grandfather's nose, their great aunt's sense of humour. Children ask to see photographs of your wedding (mainly so that they can laugh at the fashions of 'the olden days'). Children see photographs of themselves when they were younger and we fill in their history, "that was taken when we used to live in Cosby" "That's you with your granny", "that's the holiday when you learnt to swim". In this way children learn about both the happy and sad events in their history. It might be sad to look at photographs of a grandparent who has now died but doing this helps children to learn about death as well as to remember the happy times.

For some looked after children this story of their life never happens or is very disjointed. It is therefore important that you try and keep a record of their time with you. If a child only stays a few nights this will not always be possible. But if a child stays for weeks or months you will begin to hold an important part of their life history.

**Try to take as many photographs as possible- remember to name and date them.** Try to take some photographs for the child to take home with them. Try to keep some in case the ones taken home are lost or destroyed. If you are caring for a toddler, think about keeping their first pair of shoes. Or keep the first tooth that a child loses. Make a note of their funny sayings or expressions. Keep the paintings that they bring home from nursery. Keep school reports. You can always ask the social worker to make photocopies of anything you want to keep

If a child shows any interest in their life history perhaps you could visit houses and areas with them where they used to live. Consider taking a photograph of their maternity hospital or previous schools. Their social worker will be able to help put the pieces together for you both.

It is a good idea to give children their own photograph album. They can place family photographs in it and then add yours to it.

If a child is from another country or culture help them to complete a book about their background. The social worker can advise you on where to search or how to obtain information. The Internet can be a very useful source of information.

**Try to think about the child coming back to you in 10 or 20 years time who is trying to piece their past together. What could you tell them about their time with you? What would you have to show them?**