

## Life Books Why Life Books?

Most kids come into care with low self-esteem. Of all the possible strategies for building self-esteem, perhaps the most important concept is the Life Book. It is a way to respond to the “Who am I?” question most often in the mind of the foster or adopted child. A Life Book can fill in the holes of a child’s life by:

- Bringing together pieces of his/her scattered life
- Rediscovering family and siblings
- Developing a social history

Working together on the Life Book helps to build a relationship between the parent and the foster or adopted child. Knowing “where I have been” is the first step in knowing “where I want to be.” Knowing who you are is a start to building self-esteem. How better to know who you are than to keep a record of **you**?

### What goes into a Life Book?

- School records – previous schools attended and report cards.
- Collectibles – Shells from the beach, postcards from places you have visited, invitations to parties and ticket stubs of movies. If an item does not fit in the Life Book, make a Life Box for those items. You could decorate a large shoebox with the child or purchase an inexpensive plastic shoebox. Got too much stuff? Under-the-bed boxes are great, too.
- Journaling – keep several pieces of lined notebook paper in the Life Book to allow the child to journal. They may want to write down something that happened that day. This writing is also a good outlet to allow them to describe their feelings.
- Lots and lots of pictures – If a foster child has visitation, either you or the worker could ask the biological parents for pictures of the child and his family. Send a disposable camera to visitation with the child so they have current memories. Don’t worry if a child has no pictures of the past – begin with today and work forward. Pictures of the child inside his room or outside your house are great ways to start a Life Book. If you have no pictures, you can fill in the past with any information you can gather from the caseworker or biological parents or by simply asking the child. Label each page with the event and date – Johnny’s 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday party, Johnny and his friend Joey at the beach 7/4/02, etc. Do you have infants? Label a disposable camera with the child’s name and date you began using it, and put it in the diaper bag so it is always handy. When the camera is full, add the ending date. You don’t even have to get them developed – pass them on to the adoptive or biological parents to develop. If you want pictures for their Life Books, use your own camera.

### How do we get started?

Purchase the following supplies:

- 3-ring binder (these go on sale for about \$1 before school starts, so stock up then)
- Acid-free page protectors
- 8½ x 11 acid free cardstock or construction paper cut to 8½ by 11
- acid free-glue (page protectors, cardstock, construction paper, and glue sticks are reasonably priced at warehouse stores such as Sam’s Club, BJ’s and Cosco)
- Scissors
- Acid-free pens or markers
- Embellishments such as acid-free stickers, punches, rubber stamps and stamp pads (a few rubber stamps and a set of alphabet rubber stamps is less expensive in the long run than replenishing stickers)
- 12” paper trimmer – this will be your most costly item, but it makes cutting the cardstock, construction paper and photos much easier. (These trimmers sell for approximately \$20, but most craft stores offer coupons that can cut the cost up to 40 percent)

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### *What about confidentiality?*

Label the pictures with first names. Johnny may look at this book several years from now and not remember the name of his friend, so labeling is important. However, do not identify other children in a picture as foster children or use their last names. Simply refer to the child as Johnny's friend Joey. If Johnny is very young and is returned home, perhaps his biological parents would prefer he not know that he was once in foster care. Not identifying your family as his foster family in a picture may be more comfortable for his biological parents. For older children, explain the last name confidentiality of foster children to them, and ask them to identify other foster children only by their first names. As for pictures of you and your family, let the older child make his/her own decisions as to whether he/she wants to identify you as his foster family.

### *My child has a couple of old, tattered pictures. What should I do with them?*

Don't put these pictures in his/her Life Book. Make copies of the pictures, and use those instead. There are several places where you can make inexpensive copies, or you can scan them. Put the old, tattered pictures in a safe place, and send them along with the child when he leaves your home. If a child insists on keeping the pictures in his possession, give him copies to keep close to his heart so the originals don't get ruined.

### *How much time do I have to spend on the Life Book?*

It is suggested that you set aside some time each week to work on the book so it remains current. Perhaps an hour on Saturday evening would work for your family. It is less time consuming to stay current while your memory is still fresh than to try to catch up later. Get the kids involved, and let them do most of the work. Remember, it is their book, and it does not have to be perfect. Make it fun, not a chore!