

Chapter four: Lifestory Work

From:

WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND

FAMILIES

VOLUME 2



A TRAINING MANUAL

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The Family Protection Project

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CHAPTER FOUR

LIFESTORY WORK

This chapter describes methods for communicating and recording children's care history in order to increase their understanding and acceptance of what happened to them and why.

This chapter will cover the following topics:

- 4.1 Purpose
- 4.2 The Importance of Identity
- 4.3 Separation and Loss
- 4.4 Planning Issues
- 4.5 Gathering Information
- 4.6 Compiling Information
- 4.7 Worker Skills
- 4.8 Life Story Tools
- 4.9 The Life Story Script
- 4.10 Putting It All Together
- 4.11 Dealing with Difficult Issues
- 4.12 Ending Life Story Work
- 4.13 New Placements
- 4.14 Summary

4.1 Purpose

Life story work is a process through which the worker helps children learn about events in the past, present and future in order to make sense of their lives. It involves a series of individual sessions with the child and a trusted worker, where they discuss negative and positive events of the child's life and collate factual information relating to the placement into care. Life story work centers around the development of an album of the child's life. It includes photographs, descriptions and explanations, which the child can refer to in times of stress and into adulthood.

This work is vital for children who are in care and are unlikely to return to their birth parents in the near future or at all. Such children will feel confused about

the reasons for their placement and insecure about what will happen to them. Life story work helps to reassure them that they are not at fault and prepares children for any future move.

Many children in care lack memories of their past and are unable to make sense of who they are or how they ended up in care. This may be because they are too young, have had too many moves, have blocked out bad experiences to protect themselves, or have become numb to their environment. An inability to remember people and events from the past can cause children to believe that they are at fault, are unlovable, or lack any ability to shape their future. This results in worry, depression, low self-esteem and confidence. Life story work enables children to realize that they are not to blame; they deserve to be cared for and loved, and gives children more control over how they can feel and the actions they can take in the future.

4.2 The Importance of Identity

Our identity is drawn from knowledge of our past, stories passed down from relatives, photographs, and belongings. For children who are in the care system, these sources of identity are frequently absent. They may have no recollection of the past, no photographs or belongings to reinforce memories, and no contact with relatives who can fill in the blanks for them. Such a lack of identity can be extremely disconcerting and raises anxiety and insecurity issues, which may continue into adulthood if not resolved.

Children without a sense of identity may make up one in their imagination, by believing that they come from awful or wonderful parents, that their parents died in a tragic accident, that they have a long lost sibling who will rescue them, or that they were so naughty that no-one could take care of them. Such fantasies can be damaging since they increase fears and raise hopes in a disempowering way. While knowledge of what actually happened to children may be extremely painful, if done in a positive manner it will help them to cope with their past and prepare them to make the most of their present and future. As an adult, knowledge about family members and problems assists in explaining aspects of a person's personality, health, and relationships.

Without this knowledge adults may again feel uncertain about their identity and preoccupied with the possibilities drawn from their imagination.

To avoid such problems, it is very important that children living away from home have belongings from their past, are kept in touch with family and friends wherever possible, and undertake life story work.

Exercise 4a Identity



Work with your partner to explore how you form your identity.

- a. Open your bag, pocket or wallet. Where did the items come from, what do they say about you, and what memories are linked to them?
- b. Look through some family photographs. What can you say about the people in them? What stories are associated with them? What can you say about yourself in the photographs? How do those memories affect who you are today?
- c. Answer the following questions relating to your past, present and future:
 - How do you see yourself?
 - How did you get to where you are today?
 - How do others see you?
 - Where do you belong?
 - What are your roles in life?
 - When you look back on your childhood, what events stand out?
 - What aspirations do you have in terms of your home and work life?
 - What life chances do you have, based on your past and present?
 - What other changes are there likely to be in your future?

4.3 Separation and Loss

A child who is separated from his loved ones, home and belongings, and brought to unfamiliar carers, is likely to suffer from shock, fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety. This will be particularly traumatic if the separation is sudden, without explanation, and the move is not wanted. Boys, children under 4, and children who have experienced several moves, are particularly vulnerable. If unresolved, children will either act this stress out in aggressive or attention seeking behaviours, or internalise their feelings and become withdrawn and depressed.

The degree to which children will be negatively affected by separation and loss will depend on the following factors (Fahlberg, 94):

- Age and developmental stage
- Attachment to the caregiver
- Previous experiences of separation
- The child's understanding of the reason for the separation
- The child's preparation for the next move
- The leaving message the child received
- The post-separation environment
- The child's temperament
- The environment from which he was moved

Life story work supports the child in addressing grief, facilitates the child's ability to form attachments to new carers, and helps the child to settle in the placement. Without such work, children are likely to be nervous about further separations and distracted by the uncertainty of their future. Undertaking individual work to explain and discuss these issues through a life story book will greatly help in the child's ability to trust new carers and to adapt to the placement.

4.4 Planning Issues

Life story work is a powerful tool that needs to be taken very seriously by the worker and her team. It requires a lot of planning and preparation to do justice to the child's history. Rushing the process is likely to result in an incomplete, over simplified or inaccurate account.

The type and scope of life story work will depend on the child's age, length of placement, degree of trauma, separation or loss, and the number of past and likely future placements. The following table gives guidelines on these issues and the possibilities for life story intervention.

Factor	Detail	Life Story Work
Child's age	0 to 8 years	The worker will need to take a greater role in

	old	making the life story album. This will include gathering information and writing up memories. Explanations should be written in a way that the child can understand. Avoid oversimplification since this will cause confusion when the child is older. Pictures and drawings may take a greater part.
	8 to 12 years old	<p>From the age of 8 children become more interested in their family history. They like hearing about themselves when they were younger and seeing photographs. They also have ideas about what they want to be in the future. In addition children from this age upwards become more able to understand why things happened when given simple explanations, and therefore it is a particularly good time for more in-depth discussions (Fahlberg, 94). The child's questions and the answers can also be recorded for future reference.</p> <p>As children grow they benefit from having a cover story - this is a shortened story of the truth which does not reveal information that can be used against the child by peers. This is important since they may feel they have to tell everything, and are not very able to discern who can be trusted. Instead the child can learn to say give vaguer responses e.g. "My family had problems and were not able to take care of me".</p>
	12-18 years old	In adolescence children are more able to relate to the feelings of others and to why

		<p>people make decisions. This helps in understanding the reasons for their parent's difficulties in bringing them up. The worker's role is to support the teenager in empathising and in recognising that they can make different life choices to their mother and father.</p> <p>Teenagers are also vulnerable to wanting to 'save' parents from whatever problems they have, and may need support in rationalising what is within their control (Fahlberg, 94).</p>
Length of placement	0-3 months	<p>If this is the child's only placement, then work may be limited to photographs of the current home and the people the child is close to. It may also include a simple explanation of why the child is in care.</p> <p>If the child has had several placements, and no previous life story work has been completed, then a full life story book may be necessary. If the child has an album from a previous placement, this can be reviewed and updated.</p>
	3 months plus	The child would benefit from comprehensive life story work.
Degree of trauma, separation or loss	Major	Life story work should be done under supervision and in co-ordination with any professional who is providing therapeutic help to the child.
Number of past and future placements	1 placement	If the placement is more than 3 months, the child is not returning to his previous home, or the child is showing signs of anxiety, life story work is recommended.

	More than 1 placement	The child would benefit from comprehensive life story work.
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Workers should consider which professional is best placed to undertake the life story sessions. Ideally it should be someone who has knowledge of the child's past, has access to family members and other professionals, the child trusts to tell the truth and someone who can handle the child's emotions during the work. This person will frequently be the child's social worker.

Once it has been agreed that the child will benefit from a life story book, the worker should discuss this with the child by going over the following:

- a. Describe how life story work is helpful to children in general and to the child in particular.
- b. Explain that you will try to answer any questions the child has about his past, present or future, and will explain why he is here and what will happen.
- c. Encourage the child to use this time to raise any concerns he has and to talk freely. Reassure the child that it is normal to have mixed feelings, and to share these as much as possible.
- d. Arrange a regular meeting time.
- e. Find out what the child's likes and dislikes are e.g. drawing, computers, football etc, as this will help you plan what 3rd objects to use in later sessions.
- f. Get the child's permission to contact others to help answer questions and contribute to the book.

4.5 Gathering Information

In order to be in a position to help a child understand his care placement, the worker needs to have information about the child, his family, previous placements, schools, and plans for where the child is ultimately to stay. Such information may come from:

- The child
- Case records

- Reports from other agencies
- Previous or current professionals involved with the child or family
- Immediate and extended family members
- Medical files
- School records
- Court papers
- Neighbours
- Previous carers
- Current carers
- Police records
- Activity leaders

The worker should consider what information is needed from these sources, in order to provide the child with a full and useful account of his past. The following is a list of data which is helpful for an individual to have:

- Developmental milestones
- Childhood diseases
- Information about injuries, allergies, hospitalisations etc
- Ways the child showed affection
- What the child did when he was happy, excited or sad
- Things the child was afraid of
- Favourite friends, activities, toys, or stories
- Birthdays and celebrations
- Trips
- Descriptions of important people
- Anecdotes e.g. of a happy memory
- Nicknames
- Pets
- Visits to relatives
- Names of teachers and schools attended
- Report cards
- Special activities
- Photographs of people, places and pets

- A letter e.g. from a parent explaining how much they love the child and the reasons for not being able to look after him.

Parents, siblings, and other immediate family members are usually the best source of information, and the one which the child cares most about. In addition to the list above, the worker can gain the following useful information from relatives:

- What can you tell me about your family?
- Can you describe family members?
- Can you describe the child as a baby?
- How did the child get his name?
- When did he start to crawl/walk/talk?
- Did he have a favourite toy?
- Were there any family pets?
- What were his favourite foods/games/friends?
- Who were important people in the child's life?
- What talents did the child show?
- What objects were important to him?
- How did he get your attention?
- Tell me about his friendships?
- What illnesses or injuries did he have?
- What was the child's disposition?
- What were the child's nicknames?
- What were the names of his teachers?
- What stories do you have about the child?
- What things was he afraid of?
- Can you describe family holidays, trips, or special occasions which the child would have taken part in?

Workers will need to follow agency and data protection procedures for releasing information to the child. Relatives should also be advised on how information will be used and their rights in relation to this. Below is a sample

letter which requests permission for information (adapted from Ryan & Walker, 2003):

Sample letter

Social Work Address

Family Name

Address

Date

Dear

Next week we will be helping your child to make a life story work book. This is a written account of good memories, important people, and information about the child's current placement. We find that this really helps children to feel more secure about their past, and less anxious about their present and future. We would be really grateful for your help.

I would like to visit you this week to ask what information you can contribute. This may include descriptions of your child's family, friends, and other important people, pets or toys, favourite memories, things your child liked or disliked, and family trips or occasions.

We would like to include photographs in the workbook also. Could we borrow any photographs of the family and of your child when younger? We will copy these and return the originals to you at your request. Please write on the back your child's name, what the photograph shows, and if you would like the photographs returned.

If there is anything we should not ask about, or anything you would like us to understand before we do this activity, please tell us.

I would be very grateful if you could call to arrange a suitable time. If you are unable to meet, the above information can also be sent by post.

Thank you so much for helping.

Yours sincerely

Name and Signature

4.6 Compiling Information

The information gained from the child, family members, and professionals needs to be organised in meaningful way, so that the worker can identify what gaps still need to be filled, and the child can make sense of it. To help in doing this, the worker can collate the information in chronological order, noting the source, the reasons for any decisions made, and whether permission has been granted to share the material.

The gathered information will provide the foundation for explaining how the child entered the care system and why subsequent decisions were made. Such explanations will be recorded in the album and referred to over the course of the child's life. It is therefore important that any written accounts are not too childish or generalised. In addition, the writing should be neat and legible, ideally done via a computer for a more professional look. This may mean that if the child is too young, the worker takes responsibility for writing up information. Any account must also be recorded in a positive way. This means providing explanations which do not blame the child, are respectful of family members, and highlight positive aspects of their history and future (please refer to 4.9 for a sample script).

Each life story book should be unique to the child. The end result need not be a book, but can in the form of a video diary with interviews of relevant people, a compilation of letters, or a computer file of information. Whatever the format, the final product should be a positive reflection of who they are today. It will typically include a variety of sections such as:

- a. **Photographs** of significant people, places, and pets, from the past and present. If the child is moving on to another placement, photographs of the new carers and their home and pets should be added wherever possible. Every photograph should have a caption since this ensures it will continue to have meaning as the child grows older. It is helpful to photocopy photographs and keep them on file in the workplace since this ensures they can be replaced if damaged or destroyed.

- b. **Important documents** such as birth certificates, inoculations, awards, school reports, and court records. (Do not glue in any papers which may be needed at a later date).
- c. **Letters** from friends and family.
- d. **Pictures** the child has drawn. These may be done to substitute missing photographs e.g. a child may make a fake birth certificate, or draw a picture of a loved one.
- e. **A written explanation of how the child came into care.** Please refer to section 4.9 for a sample of what to include.
- f. **A question and answer section.** This is a record of the important questions and concerns the child has raised and the response of the worker or other relevant person. The responses should be factual and reassuring to the child.

Additional resources which are helpful to include are listed in section 4.8. These are creative tools for encouraging the child to talk and share feelings, and provide additional methods for the child to understand where he has come from and where he is going.

The order of the sections is also important since the album may be shown by the child to friends and family members. Placing photographs at the front and more private documents at the back helps children to share only the information they want. If necessary an envelope can be attached for confidential documents.

The final product should be professionally presented and be able to withstand wear and tear. This may be as an album – with each sheet inserted behind the protective cover, or as a ring folder – with the pages inside plastic covers. Make sure space is left in each section for the child to add to over time.

4.7 Worker Skills

Life story work should have a lasting, positive impact on the child. If done without planning, knowledge, or effort, there is a risk that the child will be left with heightened concerns, feelings of guilt or anger towards others, and a

negative self image. Sufficient resources and time need to be allocated, and the worker should have regular supervision.

Other professionals and family members should be advised that this work is underway since when a child relives negative experiences, a regression or progression in the child's behaviour may take place. Adults can be supported in preparing for this.

It may take the child a few sessions to build trust in the worker, to be able to open up, and to be ready to hear certain pieces of information. The worker should spend at least the first session by explaining her role, and doing non-threatening activities using a third object. They may discuss likes and dislikes, and general information about themselves. One such activity is called the '**Getting to Know You Board**'. The worker draws two separate large squares, each divided into 9 smaller squares. One is given to the child; the other is for the worker. Both draw in each of the 9 squares a picture which represents something about them. This could be a hobby, a personal possession, a person, a feeling, or a place. For example the worker could draw a chocolate bar to show her favourite food, a stick picture of her brother, a yellow squiggle to indicate her preferred colour, or a drawing of her cat. Both do this at the same time, without revealing information about their pictures. When finished, they role dice and whichever of the partner's pictures they land on, they can ask a question about it. Alternatively the person can be asked to volunteer information about the picture. Such an activity sets the stage for later sessions and helps to develop the relationship between the child and worker.

Once the child feels relaxed, the worker can move on to describing the life story book and what information might be included. Please refer to section 4.10 for more information on later sessions.

The following is a list of the most important skills needed to be successful in life story work:

- a) Take your time. Do not rush to ask probing questions. It often takes time for a child to open up to an adult and therefore extra sessions should be planned to take into account the child's pace.
- b) Make an effort. If you cannot find information from the case files or do not have access to the parents, do whatever you can to gather meaningful information. This may include driving the child to his old neighbourhood and taking pictures of the area, asking new workers how to get in touch with previous professionals who knew the child, or finding information from books about the school the child went to.
- c) Let the child tell his own story. Encourage the child to do as much as possible. If the child is not good at writing, you could offer to write as he dictates, or to write in pencil so he can write over it in pen.
- d) Assume the child is in need of a clear explanation to his concerns. Do not take it for granted that someone before has explained to the child why he is in care, or what will happen to him. Start from the beginning and do not avoid issues that are difficult to discuss.
- e) Understand the child has been hurt in the past, and is likely to be fearful of the future. Even if the child is not showing signs of anxiety, assume he has been affected.
- f) Accept children's feelings and opinions as true for them. For example, the child may want to live with his abusive parents, and miss them very much. The worker should acknowledge these feelings and include them in the script with the explanation of why the child's wishes are not possible. Do not enforce your own opinions on the child.
- g) Sensitively challenge false information. Do not perpetuate misconceptions or fantasies as these will be increasingly unhelpful to the child as he grows older. Provide honest answers which do not place undue blame, but which are factual.
- h) Use creative play materials rather than relying on just talking in the sessions e.g. art, computer, books, or photographs. This helps the child to feel relaxed and to open up.
- i) Be consistent and regular in your sessions. Let the child know in advance of the sessions, and do not cancel them. If you cannot make

- a session, you should let the child know and give a reason for your absence.
- j) Do not abandon life story work half way through. If the child moves during the placement, the new worker can be given instructions on where to recommence, and be provided with all the materials gathered to date.
 - k) Recognise that no 2 children are the same and will have different feelings and perceptions about experiences.
 - l) Help children develop an acceptable explanation of their lives to the outside world.
 - m) Do not take sides. Be honest about facts, in a sensitive way. Be careful not to criticize a child's family as the child is part of that family. Try to identify some positives about people the child complains about, but do not cover up negatives.
 - n) Respect confidentiality and data protection laws. The worker should not divulge information to the child unless permission has been granted. Information about the child should not be shared without the child's knowledge, unless it is necessary to keep the child safe.
 - o) Finally, the work should not be used as a prize or punishment as this negates its therapeutic value. Children should undertake the work regardless of whether or not they are serious about it, or well behaved.

Exercise 4b Gathering information

As a training group, select a colleague to do research on. Interview other group members to find out as much information as possible about the person. Go back and tell your colleague what you learnt. Ask the colleague for feedback on how this felt. Try to add to the list above of the necessary worker skills above.



4.8 Life Story Tools

This section provides a range of activities which help children open up, express concerns, and digest information about the past and future. Such tools are necessary since the life story process takes time to fully explore (Ryan & Walker, 2003).

a. Feeling Faces

Children often have difficulty naming and expressing emotions. Life story work raises many mixed feelings in children and it is important that these are recognized and discussed. The worker can use a range of pictures, placed on separate cards, to help the child share concerns and explore emotions in relation to the past and the current placement. The child and worker should select suitable pictures together and write the emotion depicted. The pictures can be selected on computer via clip art, from magazines, or drawn by the child and worker. For example:



The picture cards can be used to talk about times when the child has felt this emotion. The cards should be on hand at all times so that when the child or worker are discussing an issue, the worker can invite the child to select the picture which represents how they feel about the topic. This information can be included in the life story book.

b. Ecomap

An ecomap is a picture depiction of the important people and places in a child’s life. It enables children to visually make sense of how they arrived at their current placement. Fahlberg (1994) suggests including the following information. The child can be invited to draw a picture of the topic while it is being discussed:

<p>Personal information</p>	<p>I am</p> <p>Today is</p> <p>I am ---- years old</p>
<p>Why am I here?</p>	<p>The child gives own explanation. The worker clarifies</p>

	this answer and advises that they will talk more about this in the sessions.
Social worker why?	The worker explains what her job is.
Court	The worker describes the role of the judge.
My homes	The child explores the similarities and differences between his family or previous home and his current home.
Brothers and sisters	The child describes who and where his siblings are. The worker and child look at ways of keeping in touch with brothers and sisters if they have been separated.
My feelings	The child is asked about his current emotions (see Feeling Faces, 4.8a).
Things that bug me	The child lists all the things he does not like or is unhappy about.
School	The worker and child discuss the new school and feelings or concerns about this.
I worry about	The child can be invited to list questions he has or issues he wants to talk about.
Things I like to do	The child describes the things he enjoys and that others do with him that make him happy.
My dreams	Any nightmares or day dreams the child is having can be raised and explored.
My friends	The child lists his friends and considers how he can keep in contact. The worker can support the child in making new friends.

c. My family

The child writes down all relevant family members, and groups them according to where they live. For example, a child may draw one home and include his parents and siblings, another for his grandparents, and a third for him in



the children's home. This can be combined with Feeling Faces (4.8a) to encourage conversation about what this is like for the child.

d. My Map

If the child has had several moves, or has family who are located in different areas, a map can be used to help the child mark out different homes. This may be a street, city, or country map, depending on the distance between the different locations.

e. Questionnaires

Workers can design questionnaires which elicit the child's feelings and opinions. It is helpful to alternate easy questions with more sensitive ones. Such questions can lead into useful discussions between the child and worker, and help to develop their relationship. The results of the worksheets and subsequent conversations could be included in the album.

The following is a list of suggested questions:

- I like my.....
- I hate it when....
- My face has a big smile when.....
- I am afraid to
- I would not like to live without....
- My favourite colour is.....
- I hope that.....
- My least favourite person is
- When I grow up I will.....
- When I leave this home I will feel.....
- My best friend is

f. Talking Pictures

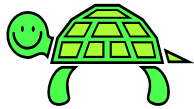
These are pictures which the child completes with personal information. For example :

This is my magic wand. If I had 3 wishes, I would wish for.....





I feel really angry about....



The things that make me happy are.....

The pictures should be selected according to the age of the child. Alternatively the child can be invited to draw his own designs.

g. My Birth

Children enjoy learning about themselves as babies. Where possible the worker should obtain the child's birth certificate, photographs, and information from the birth parents about the child as a baby e.g. his weight, time of birth, choice of name, and the positive feelings his parents had for him. When such information is not available, the worker should draw on other resources. Babies have many similar features and therefore the worker can generalize as to what the child might have looked like, and his needs. A flour bag can be brought in for the child to get an idea of what he would have weighed.



h. Time Line

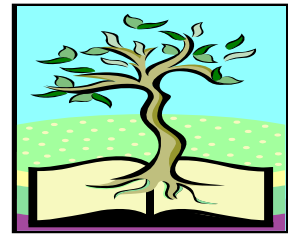
A child's history is often clearer when it is depicted chronologically. Information is added to each year to build up a picture of the child's life since birth. This is particularly helpful when a child has had many moves and is at risk of forgetting significant events. Having this knowledge in later life enables the person to make sense of what happened. The child can choose to start working on the chart from the current year, or their first year of life. The child and worker can explore each year, one session at a time, adding

photographs, memories, or other useful information. An example time line follows:

<p>My seventh birthday. Lina and I moved to Dar Al Aman. Children's home on 24 November.</p>		<p>2004</p>
	<p>My sixth birthday. My father remarried. Yousef went to Saudi to live with dad.</p>	<p>2003</p>
<p>My fifth birthday. I started school. My best friend was Iman. My teacher's name was Ustaz Ra'ed.</p>		<p>2002</p>
	<p>My fourth birthday. My sister Lina was born on 20 November.</p>	<p>2001</p>
<p>My third birthday. My father moved to Saudi Arabia for work. I had a cat named Tom.</p>		<p>2000</p>
<p>My second birthday. My brother Yousef was born on 13 April. We moved to another house near Khalda.</p>		<p>1999</p>
	<p>My first birthday. Grandma Hana died on 20 June. My grandfather came to live with us.</p>	<p>1998</p>
<p>I was born in Jordan Hospital at 6pm on 12 March. I weighed 8 pounds. I lived with my mother, Muna, and my father, Safe, in Jebel Al Hussein.</p>		<p>1997</p>

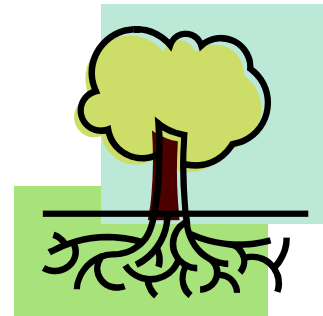
i. The Loving Tree

Children draw themselves on the tree trunk, and then put the faces and names of people they love inside hearts on the branches. They can add the reasons why they have chosen these people and describe how each one cares for them.



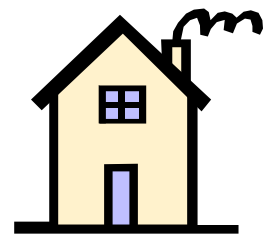
j. A Tree with Roots

Children put themselves on the trunk, then fill in the roots and branches with other family members. They could depict birth parents or other carers as the roots, then use the branches for extended family, siblings, and other significant people.



k. My Home

Children draw and name the people they live with inside a simple house frame.



l. The Candle Technique

The child is presented with numerous candles and is asked to imagine that each represents a carer from their past, present or future. The child is reminded that when he was born, his parents loved him and cared for him as best they could. They had special feelings for him as did he for them. Invite the child to light the first two candles to represent the love of his mother and father. Explain that even though he was loved, his parents were not able to take care of him in the way that all children need, and so he went to live with new carers. Describe to the child some of his mixed feelings about the move and any positive relationships that have been formed with the carers. Invite the child to light a candle for each new carer to represent their love for him and his love for them. The child should be made aware that when he develops new relationships, the love of his former carers and parents is still there, i.e. the candle flame does not get put out. This sends a strong message that it is good to form new attachments and in no way is the child betraying his parents. This process can continue to include all



the carers the child has had and also siblings and grandparents (adapted from Jewett, 94). Candles should be included for future carers, if the child is about to move to a new placement. While these are not yet lit, they are symbolic of the new relationships the child will develop.

4.9 The Life Story Script

This section provides a sample script to explain to the child their history and any immediate plans (adapted from the Washington State Dept website). The worker has to select those sections which are applicable to the child and personalize them with additional facts. These should be discussed at length with the child, written up, and inserted into the book. Alternatively, the worker and child can develop the script together based on the known facts. Whichever method is used, make sure that sensitive issues are not avoided and that the record is as accurate as possible.

Starting the story:

On (enter date of birth) a baby (girl/boy) named (enter name) was born at (enter hospital, city and state). This was a very happy day for (name of birth parents) because they had a new (son/daughter). You weighed (enter weight) and were (enter length) inches long.

About your Birth Parents:

Birth Mother

Your birth mother, (enter first name), had (enter hair colour) hair. She wore her hair (enter long/short (style of cut)). She had beautiful (eye colour) eyes. She was approximately (enter height) tall and (enter weight) pounds and was (enter age) when you were born. When you were a baby, some of the things your birthmother enjoyed doing were (enter any hobbies and interests she may have had). Your birth mother loved you very much.

Birth Father

Your birth father, (enter first name) had (enter hair colour) hair. He had beautiful (eye colour) eyes. He was approximately (enter height) tall and (enter weight) pounds and was (enter age) when you were born. When you were a baby, some of the things your birthfather enjoyed doing were (enter any hobbies, and interests he may have had). Your birth father loved you very much.

Placed In Residential Care

On (enter date came into care), (enter child's name) was placed in residential care. You moved to (enter the name of the care home and carer). This was a time of many changes for (enter child's name). You no longer lived with your birth (mum/dad). You were living in a home that was new to you, where there were different rules, different sounds and smells, and a different way of doing things. Children in care frequently have confused feelings about this move and the reasons for it.

Reason for Residential Care Placement

Every child has the right to a safe, stable and permanent home. Children are placed in residential care when their birth parents are not able to meet the basic needs of their child. While the child is in care, a plan is developed to help the parents learn the skills to take care of their child. This plan offers the parents the help and support they may need to be successful. Parents can ask for things they think will help them do a better job. If parents follow all the steps in their plan, it should be safe for the children to return home. But sometimes, it just does not work out.

Counselling Treatment

Sometimes children living in residential care need special support. They may have experienced intense abuse or neglect and are very (angry/sad/depressed) about their past. You needed to be in a place where you could be safe and where you could get support to feel better. You went to live in (Name of Treatment Center) on (date) and lived there for (amount of

time). (Include any available information on favourite staff schools or activities while at this program.)

Multiple Care Placements

Sometimes, through no fault of their own, children have to move from one care home to another. After you were in residential care for (name amount of time in first placement) you moved to the (name of 2nd care home). The reason you were moved was (state reason).

(Repeat the statement above if child was in several placements)

Mental Illness

Your birth (mommy/daddy) was diagnosed with (identify diagnosis). This is a mental health condition that in some instances can affect a person's ability to parent. Having a mental health problem is not something that is planned. It also does not mean the person is bad. It just means the person may not be able to handle daily life very well. Activities or jobs that are easy for most people can be very difficult. This includes taking care of a (baby/toddler/child.) To find out more information about mental health problems you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the American Psychiatric Association at: <http://www.psych.org/>. This is just one of the many places you can get information.

Sexual Abuse

Sometimes children come into care because they have not been protected from a person who touched their private body parts. This touching is called sexual abuse and often is done by a person that the child knows and trusts. This is not the same touching that occurs when you wash during a bath or when a doctor examines you for a check-up. You came into care because your birth parents were not able to protect you from this kind of abuse.

It is important to remember that adults are responsible for their behaviour and you are not to blame for what happened. It was your birth parents job to protect you from this kind of touching and they were not able to.

To find out more information about sexual abuse you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the American Academy of Paediatrics, Web site: <http://www.childabuse.org> or <http://www.aap.org/family/csabuse.htm>.

Physical Abuse

Sometimes children come into foster care because of physical abuse. Physical abuse is when a parent injures a child; not by accident, but because of their own frustration or anger. You came into foster care because your birth parents physically abused you.

Why do parents hurt their children and why did your parents hurt you? That is not easy to answer. It is not because you were not loveable or that your mum and dad did not love you. Parents that abuse children are not always able to understand the difference between discipline and abuse. Things that were done may have appeared 'normal' to them when in reality it was causing harm to you. Your birthparents may have lacked the ability to understand and learn basic parenting skills.

There are many factors related to child physical abuse. To find out more information you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the American Academy of Paediatrics at <http://www.childabuse.org>. This is just one of the many places you can get information.

Neglect

Sometimes children come into foster care because of parental neglect. It is the job of parents to watch out for, feed, and take care of their children. Children who are neglected do not get the care and attention they need to grow up and be healthy and strong. You came into care because your birth parents neglected you.

Why do parents neglect their children and why did your birth parents neglect you? That is not easy to answer. It is not because you were not loveable or that your mum and dad did not love you. Your birthparents may have lacked the ability to care for you and give you the attention that you needed.

There are many factors related to child neglect. To find out more information you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the American Academy of Paediatrics at <http://www.aap.org>. This is just one of the many places you can get information.

Emotional Abuse

All children need parents who can show love, affection, encouragement and support. While the parents love their child, sadly some are unable to show it. You were placed into carer because of emotional abuse by your (mum/dad/parents). Why do parents hurt their children emotionally? It is not because you were not loveable or that your (mum/dad) did not love you. You deserved to be taken care of, and your parents lacked the ability to do this.

There are many factors related to emotional abuse. To find out more information you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the American Academy of Paediatrics at <http://www.aap.org>. This is just one of the many places you can get information.

Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Sometimes children come into care because their birth parents abuse drugs or alcohol. People addicted to drugs or alcohol often do not take care of the basic necessities for themselves or their children, including things like having food to eat, keeping a job, or having a stable place to live. Some parents who abuse drugs and alcohol begin to physically abuse their children. You came into foster care because your birth (mother/father/parents) abused drugs or alcohol and did not take care of you.

Why do parents become addicted to drugs and alcohol and why did that happen to your birth parents? That is not easy to answer. It is not because you were not loveable or that your mum and dad did not love you. Your birth (mother/father/parents) had an addiction problem and needed to get clean and sober.

To find out more information about abuse of alcohol or drugs you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at: <http://www.casacolumbia.org/>. This is just one of the many places you can get information.

Suicide

Sometimes for reasons often unknown, a person chooses to take his or her own life. Sadly your (father/mother) felt the only way (he/she) could see to provide relief from (his/her) deep pain was to stop living. This is called committing suicide. You came into foster care because your birth (father/mother) committed suicide.

Why do people commit suicide and why did your birth (mother/father) do it? This is not easy to answer. It is important to remember that you did nothing wrong and you are not to blame for what happened. There was nothing you could have done to prevent the death. It did not happen because you were not

loveable or that your birth (mum/dad) did not love you. It was (his/her) decision and no one else's.

There are many factors related to suicide of a parent. To find out more information you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the American Psychiatric Association at: <http://www.psych.org/>. This is just one of the many places you can get information.

Law Breaking

Sometimes parents choose to do things that are against the law. They may steal from people, get involved with drugs, or hurt someone, among many other possible activities. You came into foster care because your birth (father/mother) broke the law and had to go to prison. At that point, (s/he) was no longer able to take care of you.

Why do parents break the law and go to jail and why did your birth (mother/father) make that choice? The reasons are different for every person but it was (his/her) decision and no one else's. It is important to remember that you did nothing wrong and you are not to blame for what happened. There was nothing you could have done to prevent them from going to jail. It is not because you were not loveable or that your birth (mum/dad) did not love you.

There are many factors related to breaking the law and going to jail. To find out more information you may want to talk with your counsellor, your social worker, your carer, or do research at the library or on the Internet. You could try the American Psychiatric Association at: <http://www.psych.org/>. This is just one of the many places you can get information.

Your Care Planning Process

When children are placed in residential care, a plan is developed with the birth parents so they can identify the problems that created an unsafe home and solve them so the family can safely live together. Sometimes birth parents are

not able to solve their problems and an alternative permanent plan is made. One of those plans is to move to another home. Even though your birth parents loved you very much, they were unable to provide you with the safe home that all children deserve. They agreed that you should not return to live with them. This was a very hard decision, but (parent) wanted very much for you to be part of a happy, healthy home that would, cherish, protect, and care for you.

You may be wondering why a parent would voluntarily give up right to a parent. There are many reasons, and none of them are simple. It could be there were so many problems to work on. There could be a number of other reasons, but remember, it is a decision that your parents made because they love you and want you to be happy and safe.

Termination of Parental Rights

When a child is in care, the parents, social workers and others go to court to talk to a judge about what changes are needed and how things are going. The parents are supposed to do certain things that will help them provide a safe, healthy home for the child. When parents don't make these changes after many chances, the social worker may ask the judge to end the rights of the parent and allow the child to remain in care. This is called Termination of Parental Rights.

Your parents did not make the changes they needed to but it was not because they did not love you. For many reasons they simply could not take the steps to learn to provide the parenting you needed.

So, on (date), the judge ordered that (Parents) parental rights be terminated as it was clearly in your best interest to remain in care where you could be protected, loved, and cared for you so that you could grow up happy and healthy.

Why Did This Happen To You?

It's not your fault. This is probably the most important thing to remember. You are not responsible for your parents' decisions. There is nothing you could have done to change things or make your parents better able to care for you. You are a very special person who deserves a family and a home of your own to grow up in where you will be loved and protected. You deserve parents who care and want to do all the things for you that children need parents to do, like praising you, listening to you and loving you. This will allow you to be as happy, healthy and self-confident as possible. Your birth parents want the same things for you; they just were unable to provide them for you themselves. However, it is difficult to separate the angry, frustrating and disappointing feelings about your birth parents from the good feelings. It is okay to have and hold the good memories about your birth parents because they love you even if they can't be with you.

Separated Siblings

Your social worker, (name) would have preferred to have you and your (brothers/sisters) stay together. There are some instances when this is not possible and all attempts are made to keep families in contact with each other. The decision to separate you from (First name of sibling(s)) was not an easy one to make. The social worker along with a review team looked at all the options available for all (number) of you and then made the decision to find separate homes. Social workers often ask all the new carers to keep in regular contact so the children can stay in touch. Why were you separated from your (brother/sister)? That is not an easy to answer. It may be that there was no room to take all of you into one home. Or it may be that some of your (brothers/sisters) had special needs and required a special kind of family. Try to remember you were placed in separate homes not because you did something wrong but because it seemed to be the best plan for everyone.

Your Feelings

There are times when it is hard being a child who has been placed in care. The reality is only YOU really know how you are feeling and what your

experiences have been. It is how you deal with these feelings/experiences that will help you move on with your life. Your history is just that...history. There is no way to change it, but only you can learn from the past and make good choices for the future. Your past memories and feelings; (sad, happy, angry, and depressed) are all-important and are a part of who you are. You should not forget your past or your feelings, but you can build upon these experiences and benefit from the things that a new carer has to offer.

Sadness/Depression

It is normal to feel sadness over what could have been. It is normal to feel sad about not living with your birth parents or about what your life could have been like had your birth family been able to keep and parent you into adulthood. These are valid feelings and you may feel a great deal of sadness. It is important to talk to someone: your new carers, your social worker or a counsellor about these feelings. Hopefully with the love of your carers and some support, you will be able to move on from the sadness and enjoy your new home.

Missing Birth Parents

At some point, most children who are not living at home miss their birth parents. Your birth parents are the people who gave you life. It is sad your parents were not able to watch you grow and develop into a happy well-rounded adult. You may never get an answer that satisfies you about why your birth parents were unable to do what needed to be done to get you back. Some birth parents might have felt that it was no use; that no matter what they did, they would not be able to get you back. It could be that they just couldn't learn to make safe choices. They may not have been in your life that much and may not have provided you with everything that you wanted and needed, but you loved them. You can also love your new carers. It is ok to love both.

New Placement

On (enter date) you moved into your new home with (name new carers and other children). This was an important day and you may have had many

mixed up feelings such as being sad, happy, scared or excited. In the beginning there was a period of getting used to each other. This adjustment period was not just for you, but for your carers as well. Not only were you not used to living with them, but they weren't used to living with you. So everyone had to take time to learn about each other and how things were going to work.

Your carers may have some difficulty understanding how you feel at times. It could be that you don't know how to tell them how you feel or that you don't know exactly how you feel and things are confusing. It can be scary learning to trust and open up about your feelings. But your new (mum/dad) try very hard to understand and help you. They very much want you to know that they love you and want you to be a part of their family.

As in any family, there will be some good days and some bad days for everyone. You will all learn, grow, and love each other..... you will be a family. There will be exciting times ahead with many opportunities in your future.

4.10 Putting it all together

A worker may combine the life story tools over the course of several sessions, building towards more difficult issues as the child feels increasingly comfortable to share feelings and worries. The following suggested sequence will very much depend on each individual child. The worker should focus on the child's needs and pace and plan the next session according to the progress made in the previous one.

Session	Suggested Topic
One	The worker explains her role and agrees the timetable for sessions with the child. Getting to know you board (4.7)
Two	The worker helps the child to feel comfortable about expressing good and bad feelings. Feeling Faces (4.8a)
Three +	The worker introduces the idea of a Life Story book

	and helps the child to raise questions that need answered. Ecomap (4.8b)
Four	The child explores the location of family members and the feelings around separation and loss. My Family (4.8c) and My Map (4.8d)
Five	The worker encourages the child to express emotions and concerns about their past, present, and future. Questionnaire (4.8e) or Talking Pictures (4.8f)
Six	The child explores information about when he was a baby. My Birth (4.8g)
Seven +	The child and worker examine the significant events in the child's life so far, and identify what information is still missing. Time Line (4.8h)
Eight +	The Time Line is expanded, with letters from significant people, documents, photos and captions added. This may take several sessions to complete.
Nine +	The worker helps the child address difficult issues and records the reasons why the child is in care and the intervention plan. The child is likely to need a lot of support at this time from the whole team. Life Story Script (4.9)
Eight	The child is encouraged to focus on the positives in his life and the people who care about him. The Loving Tree (4.8i) and A Tree with Roots (4.8j)
Ten	The worker raises areas which may help the child develop the relationship with current carers and peers. Preparations for any future move are made (see section 4.12 & 4.13).

	My Home (4.8k)
Eleven	The book is completed and the child considers how he can use it in the future and which parts to show to others. The worker reassures the child of the support available in the future. The Candle Technique (4.8l)

4.11 Dealing with Difficult Issues

For each child there will be good and bad times that will need to be included in the life story book. While some of these events may be painful, it is important to reflect the reality of the child's experience, while emphasizing positive points. Children need to have a realistic and believable account of their history. It is worth providing the birth parents and professional perspectives, in order for children to understand any disagreements about their care.

If there are certain topics which the child is unwilling to talk about, such as sexual abuse, these still need to be explained in the life story book in order for the child to have information when they are ready. The child's feelings should be included in the script e.g. John was touched in bad ways and does not want to talk about this, but he might want to later. He would have liked his mum to have believed him, and for his uncle to have stopped. He feels sad when he thinks about these things.

Children will often have questions that are difficult to answer. It is very important that the worker :

- Lets the child know that it is ok to ask this question.
- Gives the child honest, clear information that does not infer blame in any way on the child.
- Gives information via examples as this is easier for the child to understand.
- Lets the child know what needs to happen for a situation to change e.g. when your mother stops drinking then... When your parents can show that they can take care of you without hurting you then...

- Helps the child to still see the parent as still a good person.
- Considers if the child could misunderstand in any way.

The following is an example of what might be said to explain why a parent was not able to care for her child, and what happened as a result:

Your birth mummy was not able to look after you in the way that all babies need and deserve. The police wanted to keep you safe and so they phoned the social worker to visit your family to find out how you were and if your mum was able to give you the love that babies need. They thought that your mum needed some help to learn how to look after you in a better way and the court agreed. The court said that you should live in the centre until your mum had learnt how to take care of babies. Your mum is trying very hard to do this and will visit you every week here because she loves you and wants to see you.



Exercise 4c Life Story Explanations

Are the following explanations acceptable?

- Your mother loved you very much but she did not have enough money to look after you because she had no job.
- Your mother became ill, and that is why you came to live here. But she still loves you.

Answer 4c Life Story Explanations

Both explanations can cause confusion in the child's mind. In a. the child may believe that anyone without a job or money cannot be a parent, or that if his mother gets a job, he can go home. In b. the child may believe that when any future carer is ill, he will have to leave.

Exercise 4d Case Study

Read the following case study and write a paragraph for Ahmad, explaining in a sensitive and non-blaming way why his mother was not able to care for him.

Ahmad is 4 and had been removed from his mother's care as a result of neglect and physical abuse- she left Ahmad unsupervised and hit him. The social worker met with his mother and discovered that she had an unhappy childhood and also lived in a children's home for a while. She



had Ahmad when she was 17 and looked after him on her own. During this period she was sad and lonely.

Answer 4d Case Study

E.g. Muna, your mother, had an unhappy childhood with her parents, and spent some time in a children's home herself. When you were born she was only 17, she was all on her own and without any help. Sometimes, because she was lonely she went out and left you on her own. At other times, when you cried, as all young children do, she smacked you too hard and bruised you. She was not a bad person, but did not know how to look after young children. (Ryan & Walker, 2003).



4.12 Ending Life Story Work

The life story work is never a finished product and the end result should not just be a photo album. It should include enough information for children to have an understanding of the past and how they arrived at their current position. Remember that the child will usually not have an opportunity to go back and fill in the gaps, and the future carer may not be able to answer questions, therefore it is the worker's responsibility to include as many facts as possible. The child can add details of revived memories or new events at any time. There will come a point when both the worker and child agree that they have reached the present day.

The life story work is the child's property. No-one should have access to the life story work without the child's permission. If the child wishes, he can show the book to as many people as he wants. Often showing and talking about one's history to others, gives children a sense of security in who they are. Caution is needed however when there are concerns that the child may destroy the book out of anger. The worker needs to assess at what time the child is ready to keep the book.

When the child moves on, he should take the life story work with him. The child's concerns and hopes about moving on can be shared in the book. The child should be encouraged to show the new carers his work, in order for them to be aware of the child's feelings about being in the new placement.

Any move to a new placement should be done with as much preparation as possible. Children need time to say goodbye, prepare their belongings, separate mentally, and ask questions about their new home. Unless there are safety reasons, the child should never be moved suddenly. A lack of thorough planning and preparation will make it extremely difficult for the child to feel secure in the new home for fear of another impromptu move. If there are other children in the placement, this will also send a very negative message, since it applies that one day they too could be sent away without warning. It is crucial that the children feel that they are going to a new home rather than being taken from their old one. Even when children are to return to parents or relatives, preparation is needed to help them feel secure that they will be looked after and reassured regarding what will happen if they are not.

To help children prepare, the worker should:

- Explain to the child the intervention plan and the reasons for any decisions made. This should be done in a way that the child can understand. The child should have lots of time to ask questions and raise any concerns during the weeks before the move.
- Prepare staff for the intervention plan and inform them to support the child during this process. Colleagues should feedback any distress the child is showing.
- Prepare the child for each stage of the move, and ensure support is in place for the child. Make a leaving calendar so the child can keep track of what is happening next.
- Arrange for the child to visit the new carers and their home several times before the move. If this is not possible, take photographs of the new placement and discuss these with the child.
- Talk to the new carers about the child – his likes, dislikes, fears, concerns, behavioural problems, and needs. Ask the child what he would like the carers to know about him e.g. he may like a night light on, have a favourite TV programme, or dislike getting up in the morning.

- Tell the carers the child has made a life story book which he will show them when he is ready.
- Encourage the child to take an object from the old placement to the new one. Such transitional objects help children to feel more continuity in their lives.
- Encourage previous carers to give their explicit consent for the child to move on and form new attachments. Where possible, ask them to help the child pack since this gives permission for the move.
- Pass all relevant documentation to any new professionals who will be working with the child.
- Invite the child to share his life story book with the new carers to help them learn about who he is. The carers can also show photographs and give information about their family and background.
- Explain what will happen after the move. Reassure the child that you will visit, phone and write letters. Give the child the date of your first post placement visit and advise of the frequency of later contact. Make sure the child knows how to get in touch if support is needed. Encourage the child to remain in contact with previous friends via phone calls, letters and emails. Talk about any arrangements for contacting workers or friends with the carers, in front of the child. This tells the child that the carers are giving permission for him to remain in touch with important people in his life.
- Prepare a leaving ceremony. Ideally such an event should be standard for every child in a placement. It signals to the other children that they are valued, that they will have time to prepare for a move and will not be forgotten. It also helps children to observe how others manage separation, and to realise that each share similar feelings. Leaving activities may include a special group dinner, a cake, a card signed by all the other children and workers, or a group photograph. The carer can say a leaving message that shows the person will be missed, but is also positive about their move. For example: "We are all going to miss Hana very much. We will remember the way she is so much fun to be with, her smiles and hugs, her helpfulness in doing errands, and her

friendship. We know that Hana deserves to be well cared for and we want her to know that every night when we go to bed we will say a short prayer that she is safe, well and happy in her new home”.

Each night the children can gather to remember their friends and to send them their love. This is beneficial both for the children who have left, and for those who remain.

4.13 New Placements

When a child arrives in a new placement, he is likely to feel insecure and fearful. The more support the child receives in the first few days, the quicker the child will be able to settle in the home and will reduce the incidence of depression or behavioural problems. The key worker allocated to the child should be there to welcome the child and provide information on the new placement. This should include a simple explanation of people’s roles and who to go if he needs something. A good way to do this is to have an album of photographs of all the staff, with descriptions of what each person does. This should be placed in an accessible place. An example of the type of information to include follows:



This is Ms. Maha. She is the nurse. She is the person you see if you are feeling sick or if you have any questions about your health. When you arrive and about every month, she will see you to check that you are healthy and feeling well. She may go with you to see the doctor if you need any medicine or check ups. Maha is very sweet and has a quiet voice. She always tries to answer any questions you have in a simple way. Ms Maha comes on Mondays and Wednesdays in the afternoons. Her office is next to the front door.



This is Tom, our centre cat. He is a boy cat with grey fur all over. He loves having his back stroked gently and will purr if you do this in a soft way. He hates

having his tummy, or tail played with and will get angry if this happens. We take it in turns to feed him. Maybe you would like to feed him soon? Tom lives in a basket in the main living room but is free to go in and out when he wants.



This is Mr. Mohammad. He is our teacher. He takes the study classes after school which everyone goes to. At study class we do our homework or catch up on things we need more practice in. Mr. Mohammed really wants us to do well and has a big smile on his face when we get better marks in school than before. When we don't concentrate or listen in his class he is not so happy and sometimes becomes very serious. He never shouts or gets angry though. Mr. Mohammed is the person to ask for any help that you need in school. His classroom is on the top floor of the building and sometimes it is tiring climbing all the way to the top!



This is Ms. Iman. She is the secretary. She is the person who answers the phones and greets all the visitors. Maybe you met her when you arrived. She is always very busy and she wishes she could spend more time talking to all the children, but has lots of jobs to do. She has 3 children of her own and you can see a picture of them on her desk. She leaves the centre everyday at 4pm and comes back in the morning at 8. If someone phones or visits for you, she will let your caregiver know so that you get any messages. She is the person you ask if you are having problems finding someone in the centre.

Ms Iman has a very special job. She looks after everyone's pocket money and gives this to your carer every Friday morning, to give to you. You can ask Ms Iman how much you have in your account if you want to save up for something special rather than spend your money every week.



This is Yara. She will be your carer at the centre. She is similar to a mum in that she will help you with the day to day things that you need. She will help you get ready for school, give your meals, play with you and the other children after school, take care of you if you are feeling sick or unhappy, and will tuck you into bed at night. Yara loves singing and will hum tunes when she is cooking. She is a bit grumpy in the morning as she takes time to wake up. If you need help with something, it is usually better to ask her when you get home from school. Yara

doesn't like Tom the cat in the apartment as he makes her nose red and she starts sneezing. You know when Yara is happy because she smiles, plays, and sings. You know when Yara is annoyed when she is quiet and serious. Yara hardly ever shouts and always tries to explain things to us. If you have a problem or are worried about something, Yara is a good person to speak to first because she will listen and really try to help you.

In addition to explaining about the centre and people's roles, the worker should reassure the child that mixed feelings are normal and that many children feel nervous, sad, or strange when they come to a new place. Encourage the child to talk to staff about their feelings. Introduce the child to the carer and let him know when you will visit next. Ask the carer to explain more about the home, the other people, and any routines. All staff need to remember that children will take time to settle into a new placement, and that their patience and support is paramount.

If the child has completed a life story book in a previous placement, the worker should not assume that the child has understood everything and has come to terms with the move. Sessions will still be needed to review what happened before and to continue the story with information about the current placement and the child's feelings.

4.14 Summary

For children, entering the care system is a traumatic event. It is usually accompanied by fear, uncertainty and sadness. Children may be confused about what has happened to them and insecure regarding their future. Life story work is a powerful tool in helping children to explore their past, come to terms with abuse, loss and separation, and prepare them for their intervention plan. If done well, life story work will provide children with reassuring information which will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

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