



LifeBooks

Life isn't like the movies. We don't always get the answers we want but with help from loved ones, children can build their own identity based on material from the past and present.

A Life Book ...

- ... Tells the story of the first part of your child's life, is a celebration of your child's past, and shows your beginning as a family
- ... Is your child's life story (*pre-adoption onward as your child's story begins before you met him/her*)
- ... Fills in the gaps for your child to help him/her understand why an adoption plan was made and a way to make sense of the past (*It's up to you to put the details of his/her story together before they fade from your memory*)
- ... Can convey your own particular adoption journey to him/her in a clear and positive way
- ... Will be a tremendous help as you talk with your child about adoption! And as your child matures, the book will be a tool for helping him/her feel comfortable asking questions

A Life Book is important because it ...

- ... Relates and preserves history (*putting together a memoir of images, thoughts and information will be one of the most meaningful gifts you can share with your child*)
- ... Can convey the various aspects of adoption in a clear and positive way
- ... Helps your child feel cared for and important
- ... Assists your child in identifying feelings, especially loss, and understanding where they came from
- ... Helps build trust and attachment
- ... Helps counter misinformation and fantasy

The Format or Construction of a Life Book includes ...

Your child's Life Book doesn't need to be fancy or follow a specific format. It should be as unique as the child for whom it's created! They can be detailed or simple and can include pictures, letters, post cards, and other pertinent memorabilia.

Some things you might want to incorporate in your Life Book include:

- Pre-Adoption information, items from the placement process, and information from the post adoption process
- Date and location of child's birth, health records from birth, photos, etc.
- Things you did to prepare for your child before you met him/her (*application to AFTH, Dear Birthparent Letter, important dates such as education course certificates, copies of your adoption prepared profile and video, etc*)
- Details of the adoption process experience (*details of "the call" such as where you were, how you felt, etc; pictures from meeting birthparents prior to birth, copies of correspondence between yourself and birthparents, first meeting with you child, took your child home, visit with birth parents, include lots of dates, photos, etc.*)

Things to include continued:

- Information about your child's birthparents (*include all information you know about birthmother and father and share the things that your child's birthmother did to prepare for your child's adoptive plan before he/she was born.*)
- Things your child's birthparent(s) did after he/she was born and things that they continue to still do.
- Talking about your child's birth siblings, grandparents, and other special relatives (*maybe including a birth family tree and a new family tree including information about adoptive parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.*)
- Official documents, personal observations, drawings, mementos, photographs, letters (*Note for those children adopted internationally: Something as small as a leaf from a tree outside an orphanage may become very treasured*)
- Your parental reflections or journal entries that include feelings and observations about your child's adjustment to the family (*first reaction to hearing about the child, meeting birthmother, first meeting child, etc.*)

Life Books for an Older Child ...

... Should cater to his/her specific age

... Should include past memories and experiences because this will help him/her process the past, when joining your family as an older child.

... Can help a child deal with loss. (*Remember to be realistic, however. If your older child has negative memories and you portray his early life as absolutely wonderful, it will not build trust.*)

... Must always tell the truth in age appropriate ways (*This is important and piecing together as much as you can, will help fill in the gaps for your child. You do not have to share everything you know. For example, telling your five year old that his mother had multiple arrests will not be helpful information for him to have.*)

... Will allow your child, as well as yourself, the opportunity to examine the story of his/her life, including the past.

Some other helpful tips...

- Once your child is old enough, encourage him/her to help you add to the book
- If birthparent(s) have lost contact for any specific reason, include pictures or letters that your child might want to make for them
- Don't fantasize. List any unconfirmed information as "unconfirmed"
- Preserve pages in plastic and put in a 3-ring Binder.
- Make/obtain 2 copies of everything if at all possible, in case one is lost. Also you may want to put a copy in your child's bedroom with other story books.
- Make age appropriate (*Pictures bring "the story" to life for a child, but words explaining "the story" need to be continually revised in age-appropriate ways. For example, the simplest version would say "Once upon a time you Mommy and Daddy met each other...."*)
- Update it regularly to keep it "alive"
- Have fun with it and be creative and unique!!