

Life Books: A Lifelong Priceless Treasure

What is a Life Book?

Life books are a way to provide youth with an opportunity to safely record their life stories through their own personal collection of words, pictures, artwork, and other memorabilia. A simple and creative tool, life books can help children and youth in foster care or who were adopted celebrate their unique qualities and talents.

Benefits of Life Books

In addition to providing youth with a platform to share their life stories and highlight their strengths, life books are a way for children and youth to begin to make sense of their pasts, learn to embrace their presents, and give them hope for their futures.

Other benefits of life books include:

- An outlet to create and express themselves
- An opportunity to explore issues related to self-esteem and self-identity
- For many youth, a way to validate feelings about the past
- A therapeutic exercise to help the youth begin the healing process, which can include grief and loss, forgiveness, etc.
- A tool to help build attachment and bonding between the youth and caregiver or provider



Engaging Children/Youth in the Creation of Life Books

Foster and adoptive parents play an important role in providing support while a child or youth creates their life book. The same is also true for any safe and supportive adult who has an interest in helping the youth celebrate, heal, and make personal connections with his or her past, present, and future.

Creating a life book – or even helping to create a life book – can sometimes feel like an overwhelming task, especially when there is limited (or no) information or only a few tangible personal items available to include. Sometimes, children may feel reluctant to share information, especially if they are not ready to revisit the past.

In any situation, focus on doing the best you can with the resources you do have. Work together with the youth and others who may have a role—current or former—in their life to gather as many additional personal items and mementos that you can. Be open (when appropriate) to contacting family members, past and present social workers, teachers and caregivers, mentors, and others who have been involved in the child's life. Examples of things you can ask these individuals to help you with may include:

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gathering pictures, school records, awards, certificates, milestone achievements, etc.

A youth's life book is exactly that: a youth's life book. While foster or adoptive parents and others can provide support and assistance in helping a youth create a life book, ultimately, the book belongs to the youth and is really all about their story. Encourage the children in your care to take an active role in preparing and creating their life books from the very beginning. 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.

Keep in mind that children of all ages play an active role in creating their life books. 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. And because it's their story, it's important for us to support the youth, if they so desires, to go back at any time to remove, add, or even re-write their story at different points their life.

Life books are intended to be youth-focused and youth inspired. But if a youth is having difficulty coming up with creative ideas to start, below are a handful of topics that could be possible considerations for inclusion in a life book:

- Introduction: All About Me
- Information about my birth mother and father
- My foster/adoptive family
- Pictures of the child, relatives, friends, sibling(s), 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
- Where I have been – Descriptions of previous placements
- School records and achievements
- The origin of my name
- Favorites – food, movies, songs, etc.
- My artwork page
- My poetry page
- What inspires me
- When I grow up
- If I had one wish
- If I had a million dollars



Creative and Alternative Life Book Ideas

Life books can be created in many different fashions and take on different formats. Traditionally, life

books have been created on paper and formatted into a scrapbook. While there are similarities between a life book and a scrapbook, in that they both often contain photos, artwork, and other memorabilia, the major difference is that life books are designed to get youth to think about the “hard stuff” and encourage them to weave their past, present, and future together, which can include a number of positive things, but also grief, loss, and other traumatic life events.

In the course of the last 10-15 years, in light of our vastly changing world of technology, life books have evolved digitally to keep up with the times. Many of our youth in foster care or those who were adopted are more

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comfortable using alternative means to create their life books. In the earlier days of the evolution of digital life books, interactive CD-Roms and the use of computer software programs such as Microsoft Word or Power Point were used. The latest trends in alternative life book creation has been influenced by the explosion of social media. With appropriate monitoring from a safe adult to ensure for privacy, safety, and security, some youth in foster care or youth who were adopted may be able to create their life books online in the format of a blog (a regularly updated web page that consists of entries written in an informal or conversational style), vlog (a regularly updated web page that consists of video entries), or a combination of both using a web-based/online community platform.

Everything that a youth chooses to include in their life book has significance and value. They are the property of the youth and only the youth gets to decide when and if he wants to share the contents of his life book. Regardless of what format is used to create a life book, you may wish to encourage the youth to make a hard paper copy or a duplicate copy of his life book to ensure safe keeping.

Though it may seem trivial at times, life books are invaluable. They provide youth with a view to their past, a look at their present, and a glimpse into their future. As a foster or adoptive parent, or another caring, safe, and supportive adult in the life of a youth, you have the unique opportunity of helping the youth create his or her own personal life book. Be sure to soak it all in and enjoy being a part of an inspiring and priceless journey that both you and the youth will treasure for a lifetime.



Resources

From the [Resource Library](#)

- *My Life Story*, by Bretts and Ahmad
- *The Complete Life Book*, by Jim Mooney
- *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past*, by Betsy Keifer
- *Real Life Heroes: A Life Storybook for Children*, by Richard Kagan
- *Adoption Life Book*, by Cindy Probst
- *Amelia's Notebook*, by Marissa Moss

Additional Resources

- [Behind the Name](#)
- [Iowa Foster Care and Adoptive Parents Association \(IFAPA\) Free Life Book Pages](#)
- [Beth O'Malley's Lifebooks](#)
- [What is a Lifebook?](#)