

Supporting a child through Life Story work

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Traditional Life Story work is usually carried out by a social worker, who focuses on the key events that led up to the child being placed into care. This process does not usually assess the feelings associated with the losses and traumas that Therapeutic Life Story Work (TLSW) usually would do. Therefore, with Life Story work, there can often be a greater display of the complex feelings emerging from the child through this process as they do not have a space where they can make sense of the feelings they're carrying.

Henceforth, it may be helpful to consider the following during the child's Life Story work process:

- *What happens before a Life Story work session?* Have a clear plan of the day as to what the child will be doing. It may be helpful to consider activities they enjoy or regulating activities that will help keep the child within their Window of Tolerance before the session begins, and to avoid doing anything too overstimulating.
- *What happens after a Life Story work session?* It may be useful to have a list of options depending on how the child is feeling (always try to check-in with them afterwards about how the session went and how they felt about it. You can do this creatively like asking them to pick an emoji or a colour, then asking them to expand on this). You can then offer a list of different emotions. For example, if they child expresses that they're feeling angry, you can suggest that they run around the garden or do something that requires a lot of energy – this helps to move through the 'fight' response. If the child is feeling sad and low, you can suggest making a warm drink and watching a comforting TV show. Likewise, to before a session, it may not always be tolerable to overstimulate the child – attune and see what you feel may be best suited!
- *Children may ask questions and speak about what they've learnt.* This isn't uncommon as most children will have learnt about the details of their life for the very first time and are very much trying to make sense of this information. This can be a sensitive process to navigate. It may be useful to consider acceptance and validation in these moments in helping the child feel that what they're saying is important. Empathising may also be used in reminding the child that it's okay for them to be curious about their life. If there's a question that you're not sure how to answer (specifically about their life experiences), you could support the child in creating a list of questions to ask the social worker in the next session. This reminds the child that the process is not yet over; there will be further opportunities for these questions to be asked and helps the child to understand that they're being held in the mind of the social worker.
- *You may see a negative shift in the child's presentation and/or regression being displayed.* This can be for a few reasons – there could be aspects that are re-traumatising for the child or that they do not yet have enough tools to cope with feelings of pain that may be flooding them. This is when co-regulation through the support of the caregiver would be crucial. Not only does this attuned relationship allow for the child to share and manage some of the emotional load, but it also allows for the caregiver to be the 'supportive voice' through the process. The caregiver can serve as a reminder to the child of all the progress and successes they've achieved in the past.