

Sharing Stories: communication for life story work

Children and adults who have been adopted frequently report that they would like to have known more about their original families. Therapists and families who are working with adopted children report that narrative therapy helps children re-frame their experiences, which aids recovery from trauma and that good quality data is essential for those children to make sense of their own history.

Sharing Stories aims to facilitate the sharing of life story data between birth families and early permanence carers by creating a safe space for the exchange. Individual meetings will enable the worker to collect the information and then, where appropriate, a carefully mediated joint meeting may be held between the birth family and the receiving family. The information that is collected as part of the Sharing Stories project will not form any part of the on-going assessment of the case, unless the nature of the information triggers the safeguarding or vulnerable adult policies.

Sharing Stories participants

Birth families say that they frequently have not felt included in the case and that they would have liked the opportunity to present themselves differently to their children. Research shows that the birth family's experience of the trauma of removal may be reduced if they are given the opportunity to contribute to their child's wellbeing in some way. Birth families will be encouraged to provide information that they would like to share with the child about themselves and their extended families. They will be encouraged to think about what sort of information would be appropriate and helpful for the child, given the child centred nature of the project. The families involved in the project will be part of early permanence placements therefore consideration must also be given to the possibility that the child is returned to the birth family. In such circumstances the process will have been invaluable in terms of its encouragement to the parent to see things from a child's point of view. Information gathered from the child's time away from their birth family can be shared in a positive and supportive environment that will help the child make sense of what may well otherwise become oddly disconnected memories.

Adoptive families frequently say that they do not have enough information about the child's early years and they will be encouraged to accept the information provided by the birth family, on behalf of both themselves and the child, and to build on the experience to continue to provide the child with good life story work support. Adopters report that meeting birth families is a positive and valuable experience. Positive exposure to each other during the early stages will support successful on-going contact between the families, if that forms a part of the adoption plan.

Sharing Stories Aims and Objectives

Sharing Stories hopes that establishing a positive indirect relationship in the early days will encourage all the adults who care about the child to build on that relationship and continue to support the growing child to flourish.

- Birth parents that are more fully supported are more likely to understand and be able to address the issues that led to the removal of the child. Supporting this recovery may support successful parenting in the future. Involvement with the project will mean that the often unmet support needs of birth parents are more likely to be identified and they are more likely to be referred to other support services.
- Adoptive parents who have as much life story information as possible are more likely to be able to support good life story and narrative therapy work with the child and will be more open to using the support that is available.
- Children who have a good understanding and acceptance of the events in their journey are more likely to flourish. This will positively impact learning, social skills, mental health and the overall future well-being of the child and the adult that they will become.
- The well-being of the adults who are important to the child is important not just to the adults themselves but also to the child. Positive interactions (direct or indirect) support that sense of well-being.
- Contact is likely to be more respectful, meaningful and child-centred. This is especially important in the digital age where adults need to be able to have a greater level of trust and understanding of each other and to be able to negotiate for a child-centred solution.

Referral to Sharing Stories

Any worker or family participant involved in the early permanence case can refer their case to Sharing Stories. The process is flexible enough to be useful either from the start or at any point during the life of the placement.

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