

## Fact Sheet N° 12

### **A global policy for Children and the Family PROVISIONAL PROTECTIVE MEASURES: THE CHILD'S LIFEBOOK**

It is recommended, that as soon as a child is placed under protective care of a third party (the State, a non-governmental organisation, a foster family) that a lifebook be opened for him, in which the evidence of his upbringing, the stages of his life and the private moments will be collected. This book or file will be his childhood memory and he will keep it throughout his life as a child. It will be a precious thing for the adolescent and the adult that he will become and it will be the same for the family that takes him into care on a permanent basis (his family of origin or the substitute family).

#### **Objectives**

1. to provide the child with a complete chronological record of his life.
2. to provide a tool for the family of origin, in case of reintegration or for the adoptive parents (or for those who guarantee the child long-term care) with which they can most easily find the details of the child's life and history before he arrived in this family.
3. to help the child to understand his past and his life-story, including elements relating to his family of origin.
4. to help the child to know where he comes from and to develop a sense of identity.
5. to help the child to understand why he was separated from his family of origin and who looked after him until his placement in his adopted family.
6. to help the child put his past into perspective.

#### **General recommendations**

The extent of the child's participation in preparing his lifebook depends to a large extent upon his level of emotional development and on the way he integrates in his living environment.

His lifebook should be consulted by the child with a responsible adult present so that the documents it contains can be talked about, and if possible open a dialogue between the adult (father or professional from the institution) and the child. Parents who adopt should be taught to use this book according to the child's age.

#### **Format**

The lifebook should be conceived in such a way that it can be completed in step with the child's development and life. When the life plan is adoption, the adoptive parents will be advised to start filling it with information, documents and photographs of themselves and their family, the adoptive line of the child, at the end of the book, as a clear indication of the child's twin origins.

#### **Advice for its usage**

The lifebook belongs to the child and should remain within his reach, every time he shows interest in looking at it. It will be kept up by a professional (if possible, the social worker or the psychologist) of the

institution with the help of people directly dealing with the child.

It will contain photographs of the child, of his parents of origin if possible, as well as people who were important in his life (those who look after him, the children who are his friends), as well as the places of his every day life (the bedroom, play room, classroom).

On some occasions, parents or grandparents of origin agree to participate in compiling the information that will figure in the child's lifebook; whenever possible, this attitude should be encouraged by the professionals.

Every important document in the child's life (birth or baptism certificate, whichever is the case) can be photocopied and included in this book, as well as a family tree with the names of the members of the biological line of the child (provided by the parents or family members, when available); the adoptive parents will complete this tree later with the data about the adoptive family. Whenever possible, all the information, all documents about the day the child was born (information about the weather that day, photocopy of the front page of the newspaper that day, the little bracelet provided by the maternity clinic where he was born) should be carefully preserved and the given a place in the life-story book. In this way, information will be gathered relating to the child's development and his life in the institution, like the date when he smiled, when he sat up, began to walk, spoke for the first time, the first words he spoke etc. The handprint and/or footprint of the child is easy to obtain and to keep in the lifebook. Some drawings done by the child can also be included in this book. It

is important to keep copies of the photographs included in the book (with names and dates), like a copy of the information contained in the child's file in the institution.

Naturally, producing a lifebook needs just a minimal budget so the child can personalise his book.

#### **An alternative: the "here-and-now" model**

Certain authors\* propose a different use for the lifebook, centred rather upon the learning and emotional skills of the child, and his own perception of his evolution. Rather than a chronological compilation and facts, the "here-and-now" model is based on the experiences that the child encounters (relationships with the family environment, the school environment and social background, of friends etc). In writing these elements in his life-story book, the child gives the social worker the means of identifying his adaptation mechanisms, his strengths and the resources at his disposal. The most difficult themes could be treated progressively, depending upon the elements identified by the child, without inevitably following a chronological order. By letting the child explore his past freely, the social worker can gain in confidence and respect the child's choices. This will allow him also to gather important information about the understanding and existing ties between the child's present operational mode and experience acquired earlier.

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#### **For more information:**

\* Holody R. & Maher S. « Using lifebooks with children in family foster care: a Here-and-now process model » Child welfare league of America, vol. LXXV July/August 1996

**We are interested in your opinion!** To tell us your experiences, ask us your questions about the themes addressed in this file, or to send us your suggestions for changes, don't hesitate to write to us at [irc-cir@iss-ssi.org](mailto:irc-cir@iss-ssi.org). We also invite you to share this file with other interested persons in your country. Thanks in advance!

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