

Life Books

Suggested Materials

- Paper
- Construction paper (for covers)
- Markers/ crayons/writing and drawing materials
- Materials to decorate book
- Clips or ribbon to bind book
- Pictures of child and significant others (including pets) etc.

Techniques

The goal of a Life Book is to help the child create and “own” a cohesive narrative of who she is, where he comes from, and significant life events.

Life books can be particularly useful for children who have been immigrants or refugees and have experienced a wide variety of homes. Life books are also often helpful for adolescents who are working to understand, make meaning of, and create a narrative about their life experiences and current identity.

For younger children, life books should ideally be done with the assistance of a primary caregiver and/or someone who has known the child over time (e.g., an ongoing social services caseworker, a school staff member)

There is no single best way to do a Lifebook, and there are many existing models for their construction. In working with a child to construct a life book, consider the following:

Timeline:

- Begin with the basics: what happened, when, and who was involved?
- Help children create a timeline of significant life events. For example: Where were they born? How old were they when they started school? Who was their teacher then? What was their house like?
- Help them name the different places in which they have lived and what they did and did not like about each of those homes.
- Is there a significant object (e.g., toy, blanket, piece of clothing) that a child has carried over time? If so, draw it or write about it.
- Fill in significant events that the child designates- for instance, the child’s favorite memory, a holiday party, visits with family or friends, etc.
- Help the child fill in missing information. Elicit help from current caregivers, teachers (with consent), caseworkers, etc.

- Once significant life events are identified, place them in roughly chronological order.

Thoughts and Feelings:

- Go back through the book with the child. Slowly (be aware of pacing) help the child add information about his or her thoughts and feelings in connection with specific events. Incorporate pictures, words, etc., into relevant places in the book.

(Note: it is very important that children have ready access to basic affect regulation skills learned prior to beginning this task. These exercises may elicit strong feelings, and children must have a basic repertoire of coping skills.)

- For children who are able to do so, help them consider any changes in their feelings: Is how a child feels right now about the event the same or different from how he or she felt then? Write or draw both.

Meaning and connection:

- Primarily with older children and adolescents, a next step is to look at past events and experiences in connection with the present. Consider examining the following:
 - How has each event impacted the present? Pay attention to both positive and negative impacts
 - How did the child or adolescent cope with or manage the events? What skills were used to survive or get through it? How do these skills connect to skills the child or adolescent continues to use? How has the skills changed?
 - Upon whom was the child or adolescent able to rely when those events happened? Are those people still in the child's life? If not, are there other people who fill similar roles? For people who are no longer present, are there ways for the child to concretely remember them or incorporate their qualities into present life?
 - In what ways is the child or adolescent still similar to who they were when the events happened? In what ways has he or she changed?

Extensions

Quarantine Diaries

- Daily interviews
 - What did I do today?
 - What was the best thing about this day?
 - What was the worst thing about this day?
 - What am I grateful for today?
 - What is one question I have right now?
 - What am I proud of today?
 - What do I want to do better tomorrow?
- Document anything you created or learned—photos, videos, drawings, journaling

- Write letters to the people and places you miss, even if you don't send them

Future Self

- Who might I be 5, 10 20 years from now?
- Where would I like to live? How will it look? Who will live there with me?
- What kinds of relationships do I want to have?
- What will I do for fun? For work?

*Adapted from **Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents, Second Edition: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency Second Edition** by [Margaret E. Blaustein](#) (Author), [Kristine M. Kinniburgh](#) (Author)*