



MY LIFE AND ME

HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

My Life and Me is a life story book, a tool to collate information that is individual for a child or young person that captures their experiences and memories in a way that is meaningful to them.

This resource, *Having Difficult Conversations*, provides guidance to practitioners and carers to start and/or continue conversations with children and young people about their past and their future.

It is good practice to discuss how to approach these conversations with your manager or a professional, for example, therapist or psychologist, prior to having these conversations with children and young people.

KEY POINTS

Key points about collecting and recording information with and for children and young people:

- There is value when the factual information and explanations and/or narratives are balanced, capturing events honestly without underplaying negatives or overplaying positives.
- Life story books which accentuate positives about parents or previous carers and underplays the parents' or other carers' parenting limitations can leave a child confused about understanding why they come into care and what has influenced their current circumstances. Information needs to be accurate and considerate of privacy implications for other family members.
- Conversations with children and young people should be considered as therapeutic opportunities, exploring their feelings and associated meanings, sensitively and responsibly. This could involve asking questions to explore how the child or young person understands the word he or she uses to express feelings, and the emotional impact associated with the words. Some words like 'love', for example, can have many different meanings for children and young people.



Issues to consider when

ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT COMING INTO CARE

Why did I come into care?

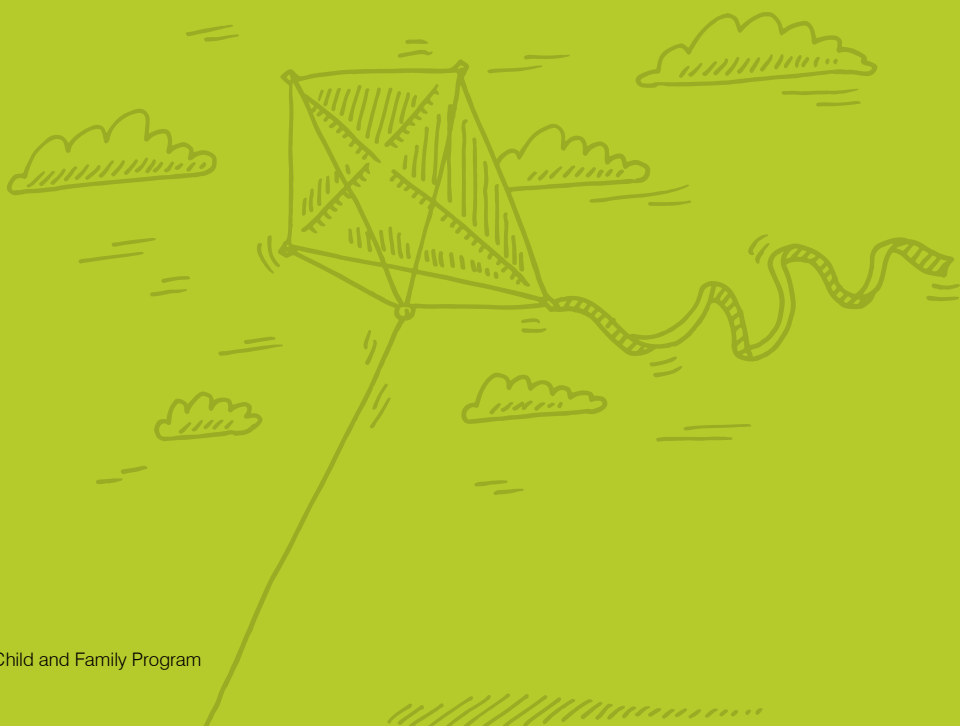
This topic is very important. The right approach and response, and the language used, will help the child or young person understand their circumstances. This can positively contribute to the healing process.

Children and young people have lived through the experience and survived. Talking about it and recording the reasons, does not make them get stuck in the past, it can remind them that they have moved on.

The very fact that adults hesitate to share information about the past with a child can imply to them that their past is so bad that they won't be able to cope with it.

Whatever the past was – the child lived through it and survived, and so can live with the truth.

(Vera Fahlberg, 'Helping children when they must move', 1981, pg. 51)



Talking about emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can have a significant negative impact on a child or young person's self-esteem. Many children and young people feel worthless, frightened or vulnerable and at risk of being bullied, suffering from anxiety or other mental health problems.

Words that may help explain or talk about emotional abuse include:

- *Sometimes it was hard for your mum to think about how things she did or said would make you feel.*
- *Your dad was not very good at thinking about how children feel when grown ups are sad and angry and words they use are frightening.*
- *Your mum was too caught up or focused on her life to think enough about how it made other people feel.*
- *Because your dad was not feeling very happy about himself it made him feel better to be rude and hurt your feelings. This was not right and it was not fair that you were by yourself and didn't have a grown up to look after you and make you feel safer.*

Talking about neglect

Neglect is when an adult is not meeting the child or young person's physical, medical, educational or other basic needs. Neglect is also when a child or young person is left unsupervised or with inadequate supervision, as such circumstances leave the child or young person at risk of being hurt.

Words that can help explain or talk about neglect include:

- *Your mum did not have enough money for food as she had spent it on other things that were important to her. Many times your teachers found you at school without any lunch and looking very pale and hungry.*
- *When your mum and dad were using drugs they were not able to focus on you and they forgot about things they need to do as parents looking after children, so you were left alone for long periods of time without an adult watching over you.*
- *Your mum and dad didn't know how to look after children. They did not have anyone to teach them how to be parents. Your mum and dad had parents who did not look after them very well, also.*

Having Difficult Conversations
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