Westmorland & Furness Council

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Supporting a Child to Understand their Story, Identity and Relationships

Conversations with children about their life story can help them make sense of their experiences, understand who they are, and maintain connections with the important people in their lives. As a kinship carer, you have a valuable role in supporting a child to develop a strong and positive sense of identity by talking openly, honestly, and sensitively about their past in a way that is appropriate to their age and understanding.

Why talking about a child's story matters

Helping children understand their family history, experiences and relationships can support them to:

- Understand their family history and relationships.
- Make sense of difficult experiences and changes.
- Build self-esteem and a strong sense of identity.
- Reduce feelings of confusion, shame, or self-blame.
- Maintain connections to their family, culture, community, and important memories.

Practical Ways to Support a Child

Be honest and age-appropriate

- Answer questions truthfully using language the child can understand.
- Avoid making promises or sharing information you are unsure about.
- It is okay to say, "I don't know" and help the child find answers when appropriate.

Talk about family positively

- Speak respectfully about parents and family members, even when discussing difficult circumstances.
- Help children understand that adults are responsible for adult decisions and that children are never to blame.

Keep memories safe

- Collect photographs, certificates, school reports, drawings, letters, and other meaningful items.
- Create a memory box, scrapbook, photo album, or digital record that the child can add to over time.

Celebrate identity and belonging

- Talk about family traditions, cultural heritage, important people, and significant events.
- Encourage the child to feel proud of all parts of their identity and family network.

Use everyday opportunities

- Life story conversations do not need to be formal.
- Looking at photos, talking about family members, celebrating birthdays, or visiting meaningful places can all help children build their understanding of their story.

When a Child Asks Difficult Questions

- Listen carefully and acknowledge their feelings.
- Respond calmly and honestly.
- Keep explanations simple and suited to their age and understanding.
- Let the child set the pace and revisit conversations as needed.
- Seek support from professionals if questions are complex or emotionally challenging.

Things to Remember

- The child's story belongs to them.
- Small, regular conversations are often more helpful than one big discussion.
- Children may understand their experiences differently as they grow and may revisit questions over time.
- Your consistent care, reassurance, and willingness to listen are some of the most important parts of life story work.

Every child deserves to know their story. By helping them understand their past, you are supporting their emotional wellbeing, sense of identity, and confidence for the future.

