	State of Tennessee ***Department of Children's Services***

Policy Attachment: 16.8 Attachment 3

Subject:	**Guidelines for Life Story Books**

Additional Information:

Purpose:

1. The purpose of the Life Story Book is to document and preserve the history of a child in DCS custody/foster care. It should be created with the child's active participation and may include material to improve self-esteem and to help the child prepare for the future. The focus is the child's feelings and understanding of major life events, through the interpretation of these events.
2. The Life Story Book addresses self-concept issues relating to the child's identity. It helps the child to:
   - Understand separation,
   - Gain a sense of "who am I and how did I get here?" and
   - Gives hope for what future plans may be.
3. The Life Story Book development is a process that is timed at the child's pace and generally includes:
   a) Meeting with the child, birth parents, and resource parents (not necessarily at the same time) to discuss the purpose of the Life Story Book and what the work together will be like.
   b) Research of the child's and the parent's records. Once the child and the Family Service Worker identify the information the child wants to put in the Life Story Book, the case manager will be prepared to verify the dates of placements, names, etc.
   c) Involvement of significant others in the child's life (birth parent, resource parent, mental health therapist, etc.) as the child indicates interest. However, it is very important to reassure the child that his/her work is confidential. The Life Story Book is never shown to anyone without the child's permission.
   d) Review of examples of other Life Story Books.

Family Service Worker responsibilities in assisting the child with understanding his/her circumstances:

1. The child's Family Service Worker, in cooperation with the agency staff or foster parents, shall be responsible for:

   a) Assisting the child in the development of the Life Story Book. The child's Family Service Worker must arrange for the supplies necessary to develop the book.

   b) Assisting the child with events, feelings, and concepts that the child is having difficulty dealing with.

   c) Assisting the child in validating those feelings and helping him/her understand what happened, but still maintain a sense of hope.

   d) Being honest with the child to the extent that he/she is developmentally able to understand. The truth of the child's placement should not be hidden.

2. It may be necessary to consult with a therapist regarding any major issues that come up during the development of the Life Story Book.

Preservation and updating the Life Story Book:

1. Family Service Workers/agency staff and resource parents shall ensure that the child's Life Story Book is preserved and updated at significant intervals during placement. It becomes particularly important for the child preparing to go home to the birth parents or into an adoptive placement.
2. The Life Story Book shall be kept in the resource home of the child.
3. The FSW shall review the Life Story Book no less than once every three (3) months to ensure the Life Story Book is being updated on a regular basis and shall be documented in case recordings.
4. Children leaving custody may take their Life Story Book with them, along with the original birth certificate and Social Security card from the child's case record. Copies of the birth certificate and Social Security card are sufficient for any future needs the Department may have, at that point.

Supplies and materials:

1. Basic materials and supplies may be obtained through the local DCS office supply procurement process, i.e., notebooks, page protectors, paper, tape, construction paper, etc.

2. Staff should refer any special needs to their local supply clerk, and if unavailable through normal supply channels, local funds may be used to purchase specialized items and to develop film.