Creating a Life Story Book

Ki te whei ao
Ki te ao Mārama
Tihei wa mauri ora!

To the glimmer of dawn
To the bright light of the day
There is life!

The whakataukī talks of a life: a newborn, a pēpi, born of light. Blessings are bestowed on the beginning of life which rests in the whakapapa of pēpi.

This book is for you. A collection of stories and memories.

What are life stories?

- Life stories are a continuing journey, not a destination.
- They recognise that our identities emerge over time and are shaped by whānau stories.
- Tamariki who live with their birth whānau have the chance to hear about their past and clarify past events.
- Tamariki who are separated from their birth whānau are often denied this opportunity. Parts of their past may be lost or forgotten.
- When tamariki lose track of their past, they may struggle to develop emotionally and socially.
- It is important that adults discuss the past with them.

“It is difficult to grow up as a psychologically healthy adult if one is denied access to one’s own history.”

Vera Fahlberg

“Life story work involves taking children along their journey step by step, not passing over events, facts and beliefs or making the assumption that a child has understood or accepted when that may not have been the case.”

Terry Philpot and Richard Rose

Why are life stories important?

The voice of the adopted person

"I found out my dad kept a sonogram from my birth mother's pregnancy, which I now have and is so special to me. As an adopted person, you don't expect to have baby photos, let alone a sonogram – I couldn't believe it. To know he kept that is amazing, it shows my life is an ongoing journey."

"It has been important to me to have information, stories and keepsakes as connections to my past. It has helped to have a sense of belonging and self"

"Having a minimal amount of information has meant at times I feel like I didn't really exist, and if I didn't exist then who am I now?"

"My life began from the moment I was conceived, not from when I was adopted. There is a huge hole for me because I have no information about this part of my life."

"Having information about my birth family history meant more than I can say. Any small bit of information was so valuable, however insignificant it might seem to someone who was raised in their own family."

"I'll never forget seeing what my birth mother's handwriting looked like. It meant so much to me that she had written the words herself."

"They are my treasured memories and it's important to look after them."

What a Life Story Book brings

Creating a Life Story Book:

- enables the adopted person to understand their history promoting oranga (wellbeing) and reducing trauma
- helps the adopted person to have a coherent and understandable way of talking about themselves
- helps maintain cultural connectedness
- supports the adopted person's spiritual, religious and cultural beliefs
- supports an adopted person's sense of self-esteem and self-worth
- provides a basis on which important information about the birth family, whānau, hapū is shared with the adopted person
- means they have something to return to when he/she wants to and clarify and/or help them to understand the past
- helps the adopted person to consider their memories as taonga (treasure).

Capturing a life story

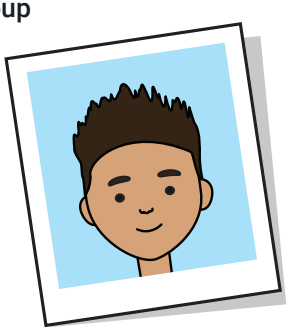
It can feel overwhelming to start putting together a Life Story Book. We hope that the following resource, which we have divided into sections, helps you to make a start and gives some guidance.

Please use these ideas as prompts to get you started. You can take them in any direction that works for you. It's up to you to decide how you want you record this information. There's no set template.

Your social worker is there to help at any stage.It is important you know they are there to suppport you in whatever way you will find most helpful when putting together your story for your tamaiti.

Memories can be captured and maintained through:

- a photo album
- a box for physical memories (keepsakes and taonga)
- a scrapbook
- photos in frames
- a portable USB drive
- other digital devices or storage accounts
- videos
- access or visits with whānau or the family group
- a pepeha journal, a plain diary or journal.



Taonga

Alongside capturing a life story you may also like to consider a taonga which could be one or more of these things:

- pounamu, bone carving
- a gift they have received
- jewellery or a family heirloom
- a photo, audio/video recording
- a pillow and/or blanket
- a soft toy or books
- spiritual — for example, a prayer or prayer time
- a cultural item or artefact
- religious items or objects
- clothing, such as a significant piece of clothing of a loved one
- hair from a first haircut.

Taonga might not be a physical object. It may also be:

- a prayer or cultural connectedness
- smells that keeps them connected to their whānau or family or someone they love or have an attachment to
- notes about your feelings, thoughts and wishes.

Taonga provide a tangible reminder of people and places. They can be used intentionally to support tamariki in coping with changes and in remaining connected to loved ones and environments.

What do you identify as taonga to you?

Taonga will differ for adopted people depending on their age and stage of development.

What will be special for te tamaiti as they grow into adulthood?

Gathering stories

The first page

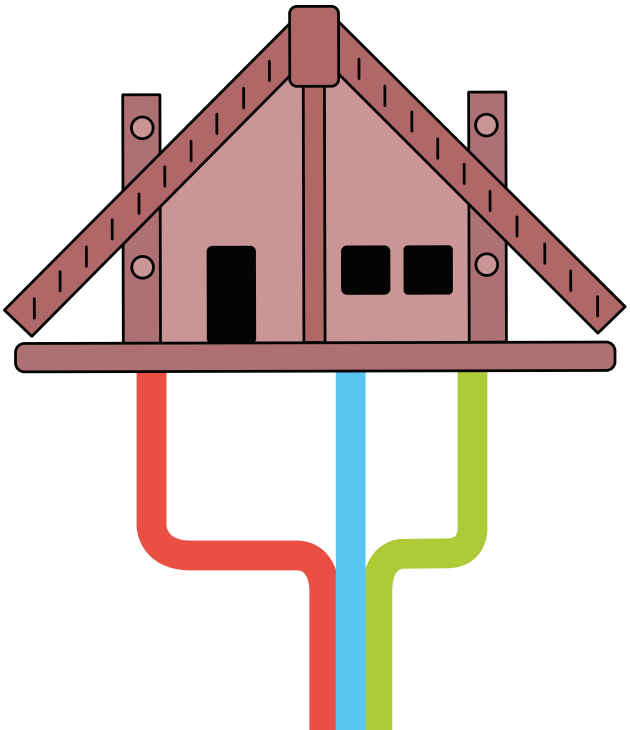
Should you choose to produce a book or album, the first page provides you with the opportunity to write a meaningful message to your tamaiti. It could be a personal message addressed to your pēpi, a favourite story or a poem, a religious message or passage or a drawing if you are feeling artistic.

Whānau/Family history

You can use this as an opportunity to record the ancestry of you and your tamaiti. Go back as far as you can and illustrate where they sit in the family tree in amongst great grandparents, uncles, cousins, siblings and more. Having it all mapped out in a long-lasting format will ensure history is preserved for future generations.

Be truthful and positive about what you are sharing and creating for your tamaiti. They will cherish this as they grow.

Your social worker will encourage you to gather information about yourselves, whānau and family members.



We encourage you to include:

- your own story; we recognise that not everyone feels comfortable writing and talking about themselves (if you need help, please let us know)
- information about the pregnancy, including any photos, you may like to note down certain feelings or milestones for your tamaiti to read about at a later date
- any other tamariki born to you, giving their names, birth dates and where they are living
- your whānau or family in the process wherever possible– your parents will know about your own early development and family health history
- anything you can about the other parent of tamaiti. If they're not in the position to give any information about themselves, what can you offer? Please give as much information as you can
- give names and dates of birth of your parents and siblings. Can you include their occupations, interests or talents that might be relevant for your tamaiti? Are any of your whānau adopted?
- photos of yourselves and whānau or family – both current and from childhood if possible
- significant people, places and cultural values that strengthen the connection of tamariki to their whakapapa – including marae, hapū and iwi information
- letters, artwork or stories from whānau. Ask them to help with capturing the family history. Your tamaiti will love reading through the sentimental letters from friends and family when they're older, particularly from those who may no longer be around.

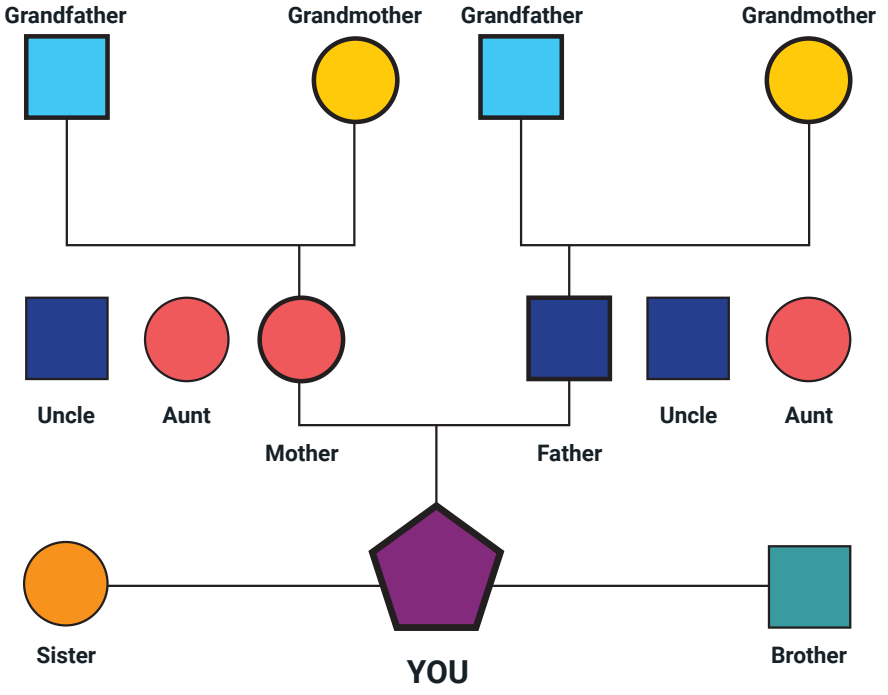
Draw up a draft of your whānau or family history and develop it through further discussion.

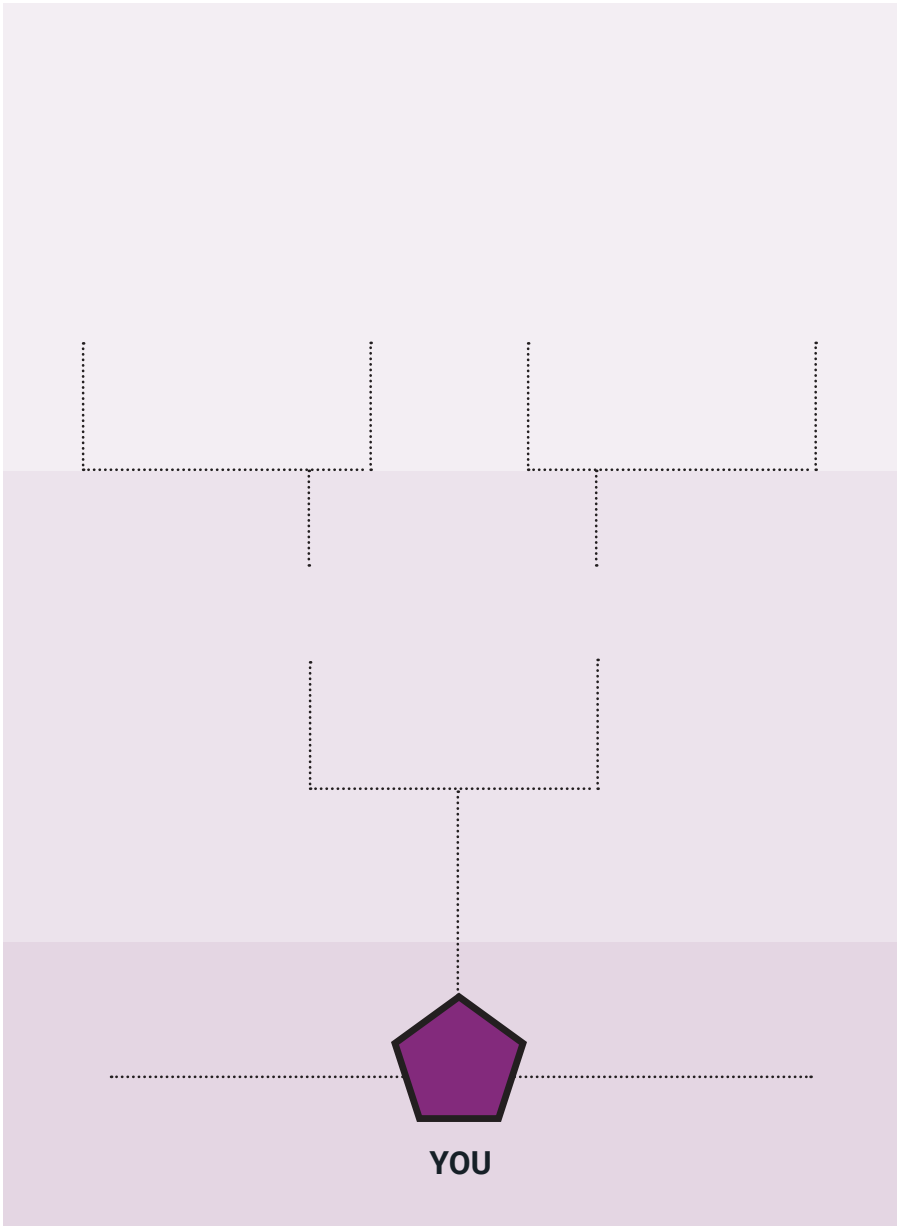
Create a genogram

Draw a genogram, going back three generations if you can. Include maternal and paternal names, relationships and photos, if possible.

Creating a genogram as a supporting document/information to go with the whānau or family history is a good idea.

Social workers will endeavour to confirm and record the whakapapa genealogy of up to three generations of the birth maternal and paternal family/whānau.




YOU

Personal history – ko wai au?

Your name

What is your full name?

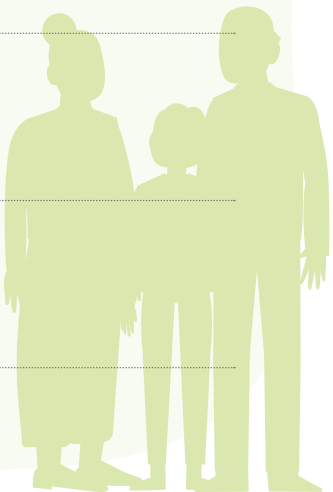
Are you aware of any special meanings behind your name?

Are you known by any other names?

What is your date of birth?

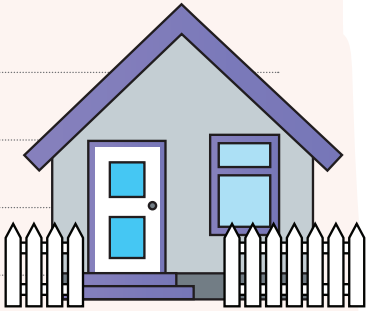
What is your racial identity?

Where were you born?



Your whānau

Where did you live growing up?



Where are you in terms of birth order?

Do you have any siblings? What are their names?

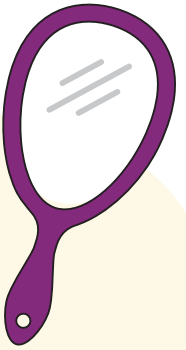
Growing up

Describe your childhood, who did you grow up with?

Describe what you look like; you could include photos of you at different ages and stages.

What were your talents when you were younger?

What did you want to be growing up?



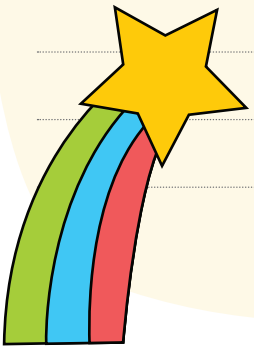
You now

How would you describe yourself?

Your personality, temperament?

What do you enjoy doing now?

What are your talents?

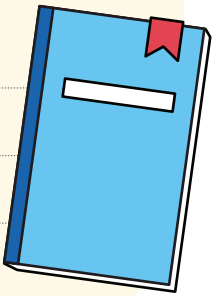


You now

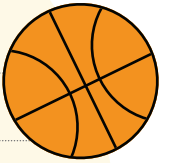
Favourite hobbies and activities?

What kind of music do you like to listen to?

Books that you like to read?



Sports that you like to play?



What do you find challenging? What do you dislike?

What helps you relax?

Where are the places of significance in your life?

Include fun facts such as your favourite foods, your favourite colours.

You now

Talk about your beliefs, the things that are important to you in life.

Pregnancy

Take a moment to record experiences, feelings and thoughts throughout pregnancy.

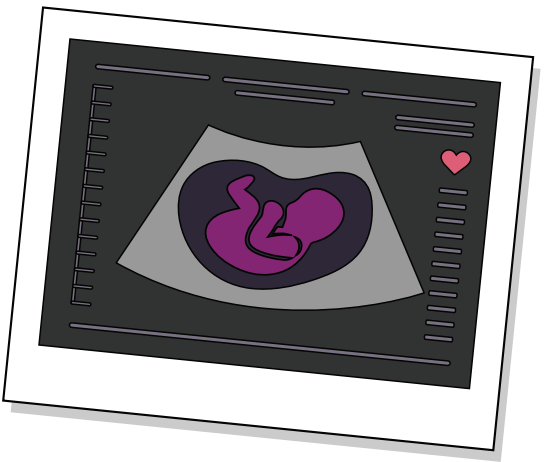
For example, when did you first find out you were pregnant, did you have any cravings, did you experience any morning sickness?

Pregnancy photos

Add in your ultrasound photos. These can be printed on thermal paper that is susceptible to fading, make sure to correctly archive these precious ultrasound pictures.

One way to do this is to scan a copy or take a photo of the images and upload the digital version. Your ultrasound images offered you the first glimpse of your pēpi and their stages of growth well before birth.

Being able to add a high-quality print or having a digital copy, if possible, will ensure they're given the permanent, and protected, home they deserve. Don't forget to note down the date of the scan.



Birth experience

Depending on how your pregnancy panned out, you may or may not want to include the details of your birth story.

For those who feel able, it can be a great inclusion painting a complete picture for your tamaiti to read when they're older. It may just impart some much-needed wisdom for the day they welcome their own tamaiti into the world.

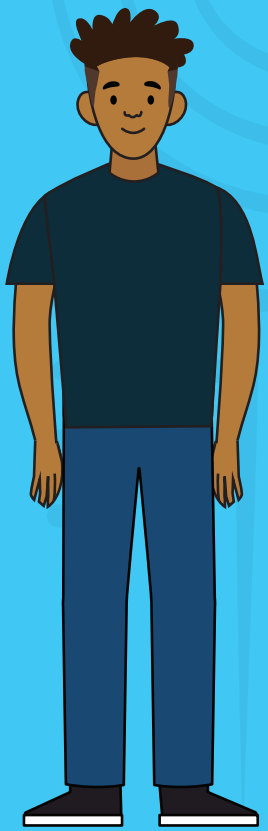
Here's some inspiration to help you get started:

- Where did you go into labour?
- What was the date and time?
- What stands out the most about the experience?
- Were there any funny memories during labour?
- What did your day look like when you gave birth?
- What was your journey to the hospital like?
- What was the birth date and time of pēpi
- What was the weight and height at birth of pēpi?
- Where was pēpi born?
- Why did you choose the name you did? Is there any special meaning behind it?

Other things to consider including:

- Copy of birth certificate
- Footprint? Handprints taken at the hospital
- Hospital cot card and hospital bracelet
- Some of the firsts such as cuddles, feeds, being weighed
- Copy of the discharge summary from the hospital.

If you progress with an adoption plan the next sections will also be relevant.



Between birth and going home with adoptive parents

Share who cared for pēpi when they left the hospital and why?

What significant events happened during this time? Was there a first bath, car ride, first outfit?

If you are not caring for pēpi we will ask the person caring for pēpi to document meaningful information. This information will sit alongside your information.

What was the meeting between the families like?

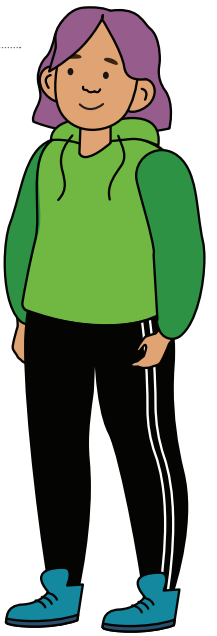
When and where was it?

Reasons for adoption

If you are planning on having contact post adoption you will have the opportunity to stay connected and maintain a meaningful relationship with your tamaiti.

You will be able to answer questions in the future, however, sometimes plans change and it is good to note down your thoughts at this time.

What would you like to write for your tamaiti about your life now?



What will be important for them to understand?

What are your reasons for choosing adoption?

What are your aspirations for your tamaiti?

What are your aspirations for your tamaiti as they grow into and reach adulthood?

What closing message do you want to leave?

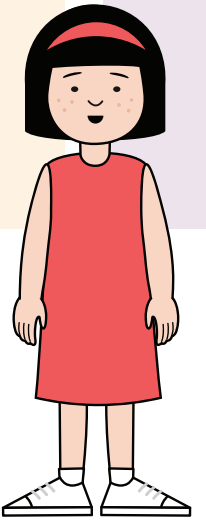
Use of this information

If you do not proceed with an adoption plan, we will ensure that all information is returned to you, and that confidentiality of the information is maintained.

The thought and care you have put into researching your family and thinking about your own personality and characteristics, will be of benefit to you and your tamaiti. The Life Story Book of your tamaiti can continue to be filled in by you as you parent.

If you do proceed with an adoption plan, this important life story will be given to the adoptive parents and later to the adopted person. A copy will be held on the adopted person's file with Oranga Tamariki.

The Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, the Privacy Act 1993 and the Official Information Act 1982 will apply to applications for access to it.



Family medical history

What is family medical history?

Family medical history is a record of health information about a person's family, usually including three generations of relatives. Families share genetic makeup and these factors can provide insight into medical conditions that may run in your family.

Why is knowing your family medical history important?

Your traits and properties that make you as a person are taken from your parents and ancestors, including health. Just as you might inherit eye colour and body shape, you inherit health.

Alongside your own up-to-date medical information, your wider family medical history is valuable knowledge to be shared with your tamaiti. We are often asked for our medical history by a health professional and it can be difficult when no, or limited, information is available.

Having knowledge of medical history helps professionals deliver the most appropriate and effective treatment or support for the presenting person. It can also help diagnose possible illnesses, understand hereditary and likely diseases, as well as allergies.

Noticing concerns in a patient's health as well as having an understanding of patterns of diseases or disorders will make a diagnosis more likely, which is particularly important in catching something harmful early.

When providing information about the pregnancy we ask that you be honest and transparent as this enables us to ensure that an adoptive family has the right skills and knowledge to provide any extra necessary support for your tamaiti to thrive.

Family medical history

Name:	
Height:	**Weight (usual):**

Please indicate if you or birth family members have any of the following medical conditions. Please specify where appropriate, and add further details over the page. In the case of family members write in the relationship (eg, grandmother, brother).

	Self	Family
ADHD		
Addictive disorders		
Allergies		
Asthma or bronchitis		
Autism spectrum disorder		
Cancer		
Depression		
Diabetes		
Down syndrome		

	Self	Family
Eczema		
Epilepsy		
Eyesight conditions		
Hearing disorders		
Heart disease		
High blood pressure		
Intellectual disability		
Rheumatism or arthritis		
Schizophrenia		
Thyroid disorder		
Other (eg, Haemophilia, Huntington's disease, HIV, Cystic Fibrosis, Kidney disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Motor Neurone disease etc)		

Additional Comments

Pregnancy medical history

Were you a smoker while pregnant? **Yes/No**

How many per day?

Did you take any medication during the pregnancy? **Yes/No**

Give details of the medications taken and frequency.

Did you use non-prescription drugs? **Yes/No**

Give details of drugs and frequency.

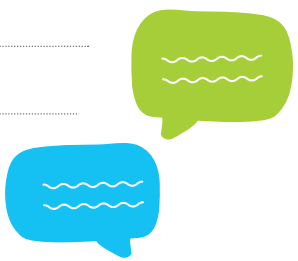
Did you consume alcohol during the pregnancy? **Yes/No**

How much and how often?

Was there any risk associated with the pregnancy? **Yes/No**

Give details of the risks

Notes



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