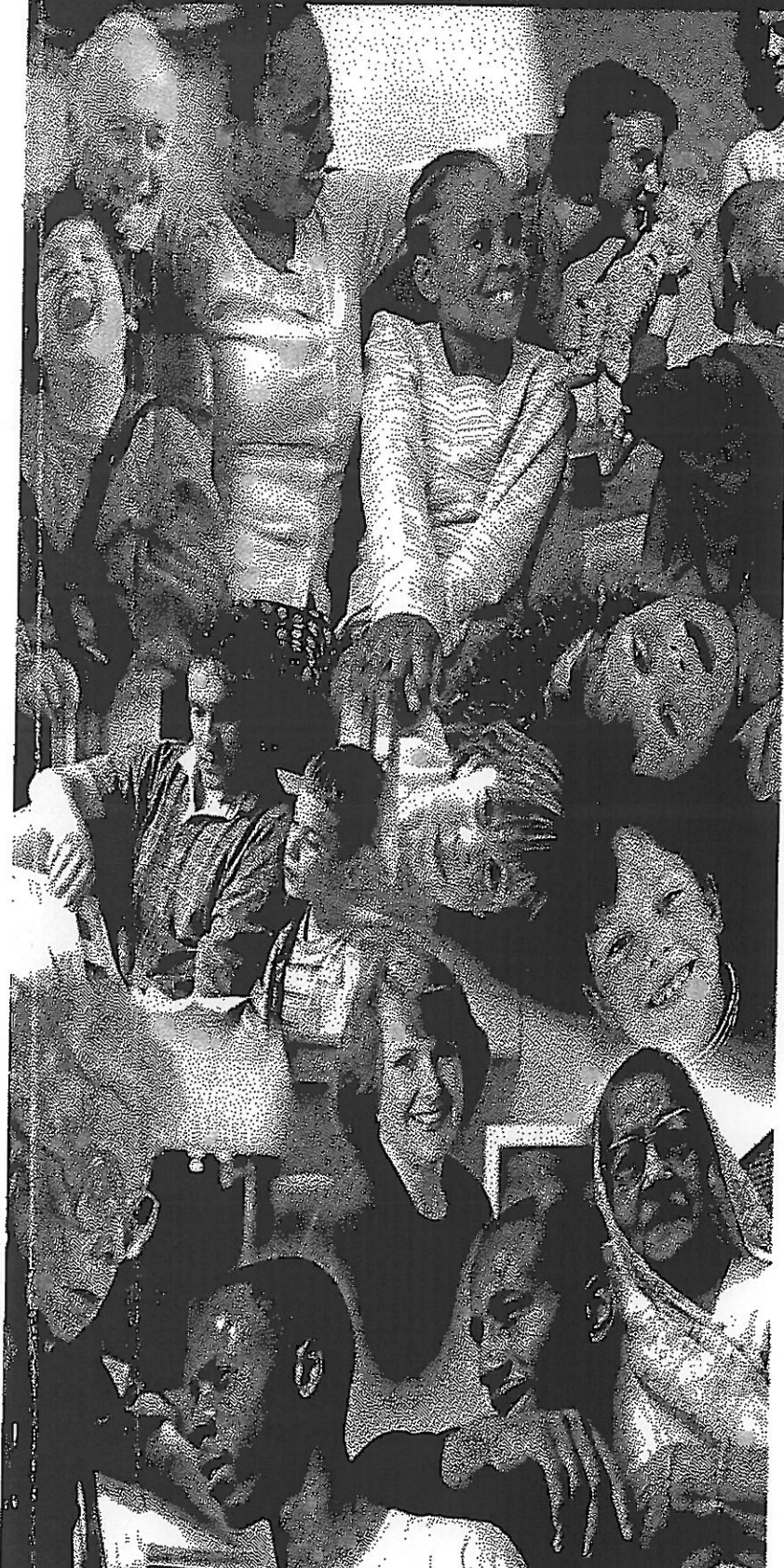




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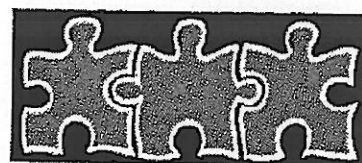
Learning & Development in Adoption

Annual Adopters Conference



Talking to children about being adopted

Led by
Pam Crossley



After Adoption
Yorkshire

Saturday 10th
November 2007



Support
After
Adoption

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT BEING ADOPTED

9.45 Welcome and start of the day

*Adoptive parents – ‘what would you like to get from today?’

*How many adopters feel about talking about adoption

*A useful framework for talking to children about adoption - ages and stages

*Adoptive parents – ‘do your children fit into these stages?’

LUNCH

*Difficult information – messages children need to hear

*Self esteem – what adoptive parents can do to help

*Ideas – tools to help parents explain adoption information to their children

*Making a telling plan for a child – lets do it!
What are your ideas?

4.00 Evaluation and end of day

Children's Understanding of Adoption

The psychologist, David Brodzinksky, bases this information on research. He found that children go through distinct phases in their understanding of adoption, and therefore need different information at each stage. He also outlines the tasks relating to these stages.

Birth to school age

(0-5yrs)

- Children have no intellectual understanding of adoption but notice physical differences such as black / white skin.
- Children pick up the attitude of adults and children around them. Although their language skills are limited, children are very aware of body language and facial expressions. Therefore parents need to make sure that anything connected with adoption is talked about in a positive way.
- Adoptive parents need to prepare their child for any questions at school and curriculum subjects which may raise issues such as family trees. Children are often asked to take in a photo of themselves as a baby.
- At the top of this age range, children are still unable to understand the difference between joining a family by adoption or being born into a family. They may say 'I'm adopted', but not understand what this means.
- A child may ask unexpectedly 'where did I come from?'

Tasks for children

- To develop a secure attachment to their adoptive family.
- To begin to learn about birth and reproduction.
- To adjust to the initial information about adoption.

School age to adolescence

(8-16)

- At around 8/9 adopted child is old enough to understand that adoption is different to living with a birth family

- Know that adoption lasts forever, but do not know why.
- Need information about being in an adoptive family, and how they are related to everyone, why parents wanted or needed to adopt, and why they were relinquished or removed from their birth family. They will need to be reassured that adoption is forever, and have explanations. Children will pick up on a parents attitude towards their adoption, so much care is needed.
- May worry that birth family will 'come and get them back'.
- May worry that adopters may divorce, die, or give them up.
- Some children can feel angry, sad or confused.
- This is normal, as child realises that to be in an adoptive family they have in some way lost another family
- Child may show great interest in birth family, or none at all

Tasks for children

- Understanding the meaning and implications of being adopted.
- Searching for answers regarding their origins and the reasons behind being relinquished or taken from the birth family.
- Coping with differences from others in the adoptive family
- Coping with the stigma of being adopted.
- Coping with peer reaction to adoption.
- Coping with adoption related loss.

Adolescence to early adulthood (10-18+)

- Child understands the legal element of adoption and may need detailed explanation of reasons for adoption.
- Should begin to feel more secure about the permanence of adoption.

Tasks for Adolescence

- Further exploration of the meaning and implications of being adopted.
- Connecting adoption to their own sense of identity.
- Coping with physical differences from adoptive family members.

- Resolving fantasies about birth family.
- Coping with adoption related loss, especially as it relates to their sense of self.
- Considering the possibility of searching for biological family.

Young adulthood - tasks

- Further consideration of the implications of adoption in relation to growth of self and intimacy.
- Further consideration given to searching.
- Adjusting to parenthood in the light of their own history of being 'given up'/taken away.
- Facing their unknown genetic history in the context of the birth of their own children.
- Coping with adoption related loss.

Taken and adapted from 'Being Adopted: the Lifelong Search for Self'

By David Brodzinsky, Marshall Schechter and Robin Marantz Henig

Anchor books 1993 ISBN 0 385 41426 9

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Adolescence and Attachments

[taken from 'A Child's Journey Through Placement' by Vera Fahlberg]

Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Teenagers continually remind parents that they are no longer children. Although this is true, adults must also remember that the adolescent does not yet have the skills necessary to be an adult in our complex society. An adolescent is neither child nor adult. Adolescence is accompanied by physical, intellectual and psychological maturation. Ideally, during this transition, the young person will gain the skills necessary to become a successful adult.

Although much of the focus of this section will be on the psychological tasks, it will be the intellectual gains which can help the young person and adult to work together to accomplish these undertakings. It is during adolescence that the individual takes the final steps to adult through processes. The adolescent becomes able to reason logically about things that he or she has never directly experienced. 'How might it have felt to have been born to a different family? To have different life experiences'. He or she is able to hypothesise and no longer needs an adult to lead him or her through the stages of complex inductive and deductive reasoning. Adolescents can do it on their own. That is not to say, however, especially in emotionally charged situations that adult guidance and collaboration in reasoning is not useful. It is.

The primary psychological tasks of adolescence echo the tasks of years one to five. The young person must once again psychologically separate, this time from the family, finding their place in society as a whole rather than solely as a member of a family. He or she is cutting emotional ties instead of seeking gratification within the family. A surge in identity formation once again accompanies the separation process. Blos comments that the adolescent separation occurs at two levels. Externally he or she withdraws some of his/her emotional energy from parents and reinvests it in peer relationships. Internally, too, the adolescent disengages from early childhood identification with the parents and internalises new models provided by a more diverse group, such as teachers, peers, and heroes. Blos points out that identity formation cannot progress without this disengagement.

Simultaneously the adolescent is expected to move on depending upon external controls supplied by adults towards relying on using internalised controls, thereby exhibiting both independence and self-control. The complexity of these tasks is compounded by the sexualisation that accompanies the rapid hormonal changes of adolescence.

In Western culture we value in children dependence, obedience and lack of sexual interaction with others. However, we expect adults to be independent, responsible for their own actions and able to form a meaningful sexual relationship with another adult. Adolescence is the process of changing from one set of expectations to another. It does not happen overnight. It does not happen easily. Not only the young person but the adults living with him find themselves caught up in this period of rapid change with its accompanying stress.

The adolescent is trying to answer four questions: 1. Who am I? 2. Where do I belong? 3. What can I do or be? And 4. What do I believe in? It is difficult to achieve these tasks without

THE DIFFICULT STUFF

Messages Children Need to Hear from Their Adoptive Parents

*Siblings remaining at home. 'Why did my parents not try extra hard to make improvements and keep me?'

Siblings remaining at home

*Sometimes people change and grow when they get help and support. Children cannot always wait long enough for this to happen.

*Not being wanted. Being 'relinquished' is often seen as 'straightforward' and positive by Social Workers.

Being relinquished

*It is never easy for a parent to choose adoption for their child. There are usually reasons why this difficult decision is taken. Such as lack of help and support, knowing they could not meet the needs of a child and wanting the best chance in life for their child.

*Sexual and physical abuse. 'Why was I so bad and worthless that my parents did this to me?'

Sexually abused children

*Sexual abuse is never the fault of the child, no matter what anyone said to you.

*The 'person' was very selfish when he/she did what they did to you. They were only thinking about themselves, to make themselves feel good.

*The person that touched you in ways that were wrong is responsible for what he did.

*It took great courage to disclose/tell what he did to you. You did the right thing. I'm proud that you knew how to keep yourself safe.

*Bad partner choices. 'Why could my mum/dad not put me first?'

*Drink and drug addiction Substance Abuse

*You did not cause your parents drink/drug problems.

*Your parents treated you how they did because they were controlled by alcohol/drugs.

*Just because they did not always treat you as they should doesn't mean they didn't love you.

*Your parents did not have control over their life and couldn't give you a safe happy and secure place to be.

*You need to grow up in a home where you can be safe from harm.

*Neglect – lack of food, routine, love, care, safety and protection. * Lots of people manage to learn how to be 'good enough' parents but some people can't do it without help & support – your parents couldn't.

Siblings Remaining at Home

*Sometimes people change and grow when they get help and support. Children cannot always wait long enough for this to happen.

*Mental illness. Will I 'get it?' Still a social taboo.

* Most Mental illness is not inherited.

* Often it develops in response to stresses in people's lives

Mental Illness

*Just because your mum and dad couldn't make good decisions doesn't mean they didn't love you.

*It became very important that you could finish growing up in a stable home where it is safe. *You did not cause this problem in your parents. They had the problem before you were born.

Ten Commandments of Telling

- 1 Initiate conversation about adoption**
- 2 Use positive language**
- 3 Never lie to a child about the past or a birth family member**
- 4 Allow a child to express anger towards a birth family member without joining in**
- 5 Omissions are OK until the age of 12. After that all should be shared**
- 6 If information is negative, consider using a 3rd party to tell the most troublesome details**
- 7 Don't try to fix the pain of adoption**
- 8 Don't impose value judgements on the information**
- 9 Child should have control of telling his/her story outside the immediate family**
- 10 Remember that the child probably knows more than you think**

LIFE WORK SHOULD.....

- play a significant role in the promotion of identity
- offers children a positive image of their birth family
- encourage the elevation of a child's self esteem
- give children information and explanation
- take an holistic view of the child's needs and the needs of others involved in their life
- empower those entrusted with the care of children to identify and continue their life work needs throughout their life
- be a priority in the care of children separated from their birth family
- be a quality service for all children separated from their birth family

By Edith Nicholls 2005

About Life Story Books

[taken from 'Telling the truth to your adopted or foster child' by Betsy Keefer and Jayne E Schooler]

Why children need a Lifebook

The lifebook is useful for all adopted children whether placed as toddlers or older children, and is helpful for all stages of child development. Records of a child's family, placement history, growth and development, feeling, ideas, hopes and dreams for the future. It is a vital resource, helping a child to understand the past and prepare for the future.

Denise Goodman, an adoption expert gives 7 reasons for Lifebooks:

It recreates a Child's Life History

This is important as many adopted children have complicated lives. They have been in and out of care and shuffled between family members. Each child's reaction to separation is unique. These painful feelings weave a common thread throughout the lives of older adopted children. For children whose memories of former relationships smoulder vaguely in their minds, themes frequently recur during the healing process. They need to have an accurate record of their past because it will help them look forward to the future without fear.

It gives a child information about his or her birth family

Many fostered and adopted children do not have much information about their birth families, they may not have any positive information at all. What did their parents look like, what talents did they have? What about their extended families. In fact some kids have no information at all. Everyone has a "genetic road map", which is their parents. This "road map" helps in identity development. Individuals decide what traits they like and keep them. The traits they do not like, they reject. Youngsters who have no information make it up, and usually fantasies are negative. Some children only have negative information about their birth parents from which to construct their own identity. Children need both positive and negative details about their birth families.

Pam Crossley training 3/06

It gives reason for placement

Frequently, children have the wrong idea about why they were removed from their homes. Many times they believe that it was their fault. This leads to feelings of guilt and sometimes children will try to punish themselves. Therefore, children must have accurate and honest information about why they came into care.

It provides photos and a pictorial history

Even when information is given in written form, kids generally want to know what their families look like. In addition, photographs also record family events such as holidays, birthdays and special times. Children need pictures of themselves to trace the changes that have taken place.

It records the child's feelings about his or her life

Too often, children are not given a chance to voice their feelings about their life and being in out of home care. The life book, in some ways, is a diary or log for children to use to keep a record of their personal thoughts or feelings.

It gives the child information about his or her development

How many people have baby books? If you are not the firstborn, you probably don't have one. How would you like a recording of all your important milestones – your first tooth, your first step, your first word – along with a record of all the other special things you've done. This is another special role that the lifebook plays.

[If a child is raised within their birth family, much of this information is available to children from their parents or carers and passed on in family discussions. This is not possible for fostered and adopted children. PC]

It is a useful tool when working with children

As a way to organise information, the lifebook is a helpful tool for foster parents, adoptive parents, caseworkers and therapists who must assist children who are struggling to cope with being away from their parents, siblings and homes.

Pam Crossley training 9/07

Encouraging Life Story Work [Caroline Archer]

It is perhaps even more important to encourage young children who have not have an easy, straightforward start in life to know as much as they can about themselves as early as possible. They cannot begin to make sense of what has happened to them, an essential element of healing from trauma if they do not know their own stories. **What a child does not know he or she may well invent and the fantasies are often far worse than the realities.**

There are several excellent texts on life storybooks, such as 'Life story Work' by Tony Ryan and Roger Walker, and Regina Kupecky's booklet for Rumania children, to which you can refer.

Sadly, we as parents often have very little information to work with. Details may not have been seen as important enough to record, or may have been subsequently overlooked in report writing. Suspicions of maltreatment are often left if they have not been substantiated, or minimised so as not to cause distress [to whom?] You, yourselves may have been so excited to know you were going to have a child, that, understandably you were unable to pay attention to all the information you were being given. Or you thought it would all come right once the child was with you. Later on, when you try to go back for further information, it may have been 'lost', the social workers may have moved on or it would involve you in another trip half way round the world. For children who were abandoned, including those from overseas, you will clearly have much less to go on.

Do not despair! It is still possible to re-create a meaningful life story for your child. Everyone's life narrative is a construction of personal memories, first hand accounts and expectations interspersed with guesswork. We all, to a degree, create our stories in retrospect and fill in the blanks. It is the same for your child, only more so: it will probably require far more lateral thinking, detective work and imagination on your part. **This can help your child feel he or she does exist - as long as you start from what you do know, do not intentionally create a false story and are able to let your child know that this is what you believe may have happened rather than absolute fact.**

You will have to suspend judgements and remain as objective as you can whilst handling this intensely personal issue. Try to thin yourself into the child's shoes and imagine what it would be like to be relinquished for adoption or neglected or intimidated or frightened all the time. Remember that for your child at the time it was her whole life, all he or she knew. Responses to it still may be very intense and unaltered by other experiences of life. He or she needs to hear over and over that it was not their fault. He or she needs to know that it is OK to feel angry, sad or mad.

Your child will not be able to keep two conflicting sets of feelings within simultaneously. So whilst she may be aware that she was hurt by her family, she may only hold on to the love she needed from them. Her underlying pain and rage may then be directed at you, particularly if you give critical messages about them. Being told that her parents loved her can also conflict with her deepest sense of abandonment and shame. If they had loved her, they wouldn't have 'given her away'. So she may conclude either that she was unlovable and bad, that you stole her away or a combination of both.

Emphasising the positive points about her birth family may invalidate her infantile feelings of abandonment and terror; emphasising the negative points may diminish her self esteem or challenge her previous ambivalent attachment. It is a question of balance, which you need to tread with great care.

As your child grows you will need to continue on her life story book. A loose leaf folder or file can allow you to add more information as you go. Soon there may be more of her life spent with you than before she came to you, both chronologically and in terms of content. You can give her some idea of time passing by drawing a time bar, vertically, on the side of each page. Your child can colour in blocks of time to represent how long she stayed in each place. **However, please remember that our sense of time and a child's are very different.**

The first few days, weeks and months of her life [including the pregnancy] were a lifetime to her, although to us they may sink into relative insignificance. Not only do these times seem lifelong, to her they are the foundations for making sense of her life. The feeling states she knew then may persist within her and influence her present functioning very powerfully even though she cannot consciously recall them. **Never minimise their power or assume, because your child is older and can begin to understand at a more mature thinking level, that she has let go of these infantile feelings deep within.**

In the earliest years you can begin by trying to obtain photographs of your child before she came home, or any keepsakes, such as the hospital wrist band. These are very tangible items which can help consolidate your little ones sense of self. Did anyone else keep copies of photo's, records, or even foetal scans?

Have you remained in contact with birth family members or previous carers, who may give you a more personalised account of your child before you knew her? You could try renewing old acquaintances, when this feels right.

If nothing else, you could visit or write to her hospital, birth place or previous home[s] and try to obtain photo's or descriptions however long it is since she came home.

You will have to become something of a social archaeologist digging for cryptic clues about your child and brushing off the dust and cobwebs to make inspired connections. **The trail becomes colder and more confused with time, so try not to leave it too long!**

Some children have a tendency to destroy their life story books or other irreplaceable documents – it is well worth making copies of everything. **Remember too that a child can easily become overwhelmed with feelings or [non verbal] memories whilst 'doing life story work'. Stay aware, play it by ear and don't over do it. Be ready to help your child feel safe again – perhaps with a cuddle, a drink or a funny story.**

TAKEN FROM 'FIRST STEPS IN PARENTING A CHILD WHO HURTS' BY CAROLINE ARCHER [See Book List]

Books about Talking about Adoption, and Life Story Books

Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child – making sense of the past. By Betsy Keefer and Jayne E. Schooler
Published by Bergin and Garvey 2000 £16.95
ISBN 0 89789 691 2

The New Life Work Model – Practice Guide By Edith A Nicholls
Published by Russell House Publishing 200? £19.95
ISBN 1903855810

Life Story Work – A practical guide to helping children understand their past. By Tony Ryan and Rodger Walker
Published by BAAF 2003 £12.95
ISBN 1 873868 10 3

The Child's Own Story – life story work with traumatised children
By Richard Rose and Terry Philpot
Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2005 £14.95
ISBN 1 84310 287 0

Being Adopted – the lifelong search for self. By David Brodzinsky, Marshall D. Schechter, and Robin Marantz Henig
Anchor Books 1993 £11.95
ISBN 0 385 41426 9

Draw On Your Emotions. By Margot Sunderland and Engleheart
Speechmark Publishing 2004 £?
ISBN 0 863S88 339 7

Adopted Children Speaking. By Caroline Thomas and Verna Beckford
Published by BAAF 1999 £9.95
ISBN 1 873868 78 2

First Steps in Parenting a Child Who Hurts, Tiddlers and Toddlers
By Caroline Archer
Jessica Kingsley Publications 2000 £?
ISBN 1 85302 801 0

Connecting with Kids through Stories

Using narratives to facilitate attachment in adopted children

By Denise B. Lacher, Todd Nichols and Joanne C. May

Jessica Kingsley Publications 2005 £12.95

ISBN 1 84310 797 x

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What Does Adopted Mean? By Edith Nicholls

Published by Russell House Publishing 2005 £15.95

ISBN 190385573x

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Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption

By Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek

Published by BAAF 2006 £24.95

Good chapter on LSB's and attachment

ISBN 1 903699 96 7

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A Child's Journey through Placement. By Vera Fahlberg

Published by BAAF 1996 £20.00?

Good section on LSB's

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Real Parents – Real Children. Holly Van Gulden

More detailed than the child's journey on developmental stages, the new 'bible' for moving children perhaps?

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Books to read with children

Our Twitchy by Kes Gray and Mary McQuillan Red Fox
ISBN 009 9434199 About a rabbit adopted by 2 cows. Twitchy
realises he is different from his adopted parents. 2003 £5.99

All About Adoption. How Families are Made and How Kids Feel
About It. By Marc Nemiroff and Jane Annunziata. Imagination
Press. 2004 ISBN 9781591470595 £6.95

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Twice Upon-a-Time Born and Adopted. By Eleanora Patterson.
1987. EP Press. ISBN 978 0960743216 £7.95 Good for children 5
plus and has drawings that could be coloured in.

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Zachary's New Home – A Story for Foster and Adopted Children. By
Geraldine and Paul Blomquist. Magination Press. 1990 £7.25 ISBN
0945354274 About a kitten who has some good times at home with
his mum and dad but is hurt and moves to a foster family. The kitten
has sad mad feelings, bad dreams and gets into trouble at school.

Tell Me Something Happy before I go to Sleep. By Joyce Dunbar and
Debi Gliori

**A Picture Corgi Book 1999 ISBN 0552 545066 £5.99 Nice story
to help worried children go to sleep.**

**Academy Books have a good selection. Type in Academy Book
Services Duffield Derbyshire on the internet.**

Many books are available on Amazon

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Pam Crossley training 10/07