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Bridget's Taking a Long Time CD-ROM: A journey through adoption from the perspective of the birth child - Nicky Ball with Bridget Betts - Information Plus 2004 £34.00 plus £5.95 VAT

Reviewed by Jaqueline Turner

Bridget's Taking a Long Time is an interactive programme designed to provide 'a journey through adoption from the perspective of a birth child'. The CD is based around an animated story that can be printed as a book. It also contains a video of young people talking about their adoption experiences and worksheets for extra activities which can also be printed off. (In using the materials I provide each child with the worksheets bound in book style with their name written on the front, and a box of crayons.)

Bridget's Taking a Long Time has been a useful tool in my work with the children of foster families. For this review I have focused on the responses of one particular child, nine-year-old Emily,* whose family is to be joined by an older child in a long-term foster placement.

In the 21st century, using computers is a natural progression in how social workers work with children (who are often more adept than adults). I also feel that direct work needs to be done in an informal manner. The use of written literature can mimic a 'school setting', which in turn can induce children's 'switch off and sleep' mode.

Emily found the whole concept of using a laptop and CD to work with quite interesting and fresh. The first section of the CD we used was the video of other children's experiences. After approximately five minutes I could see that Emily was losing interest and starting to 'switch off'. I passed the controls over to her and invited her to fast forward, stop and skip at any time she felt necessary. This renewed her interest, although we did need to stop at the end of the second section and revisit it later. Emily enjoyed listening to the other children's views; she said it was 'really good because they said all the things she felt, and it was good to know that they felt the same as her'. Alongside the video we talked about the corresponding sections in the workbook.

Emily particularly enjoyed doing the worksheets as they enabled her to express herself and 'bring up things' that she 'hadn't wanted to talk about before'. They had also helped her to think about situations that might bother her, such as sharing her favourite toys, having her parents' attention taken from her and first introductions. The worksheets prompted Emily to reflect upon how the 'new person' would be feeling and how Emily might be able to help make her feel welcome and a little less anxious. Emily worked away on her booklet without prompting, showing an eagerness that allowed open discussion during our sessions.

One of the main benefits Emily found from the story was that it explained what was happening and the process that had to be undertaken by the family to enable them to become foster parents. She did comment that the main issue for her had not been that it had 'taken a long time' rather, it was the new systems and procedures that the family had to go through, such as 'hearings' and 'social workers always visiting the house', and not fully understanding why.

Throughout my sessions with Emily I have used the CD-ROM as a very successful tool to further discussions and opening up topics which children are often unable to verbalise. This has enabled me to broach subjects that might remain an issue for the child, such as 'Do I have to share everything with the new person?'

Unfortunately I have very little else to compare it with, as the market seems quite devoid of child-friendly tools other than literature written for these children. The story is also geared towards young children being adopted into families where older children are present and, although this is not always the situation, I was able to adapt it to suit.

Bridget's Taking a Long Time has been cleverly presented in four different complementary ways, meaning that it can be individualised to suit each child, focusing on either the video, book, worksheets or story via CD-ROM as necessary. On the whole, using it has enabled me to listen to children and communicate with them in a very focused, honest and open way about another child being part of their family.