WE DON'T STEAL BABIES

A peer reflection on a novel

One diary entry, one colleague, five questions. A free sheet for social workers.

We Don't Steal Babies by Maisie MacDonald is a novel. Billy, his file and everyone around him are invented, which is the point: two of you can talk honestly about a child's file without anybody's real case being on the table.

> **Read first.** Tuesday 15th September, from page 24 of the paperback. On Kindle the pages are different, so find the entry by its date. Maisie reads Billy's case transfer summary, then meets him. Then sit down together for half an hour.

TALK IT OVER

1. The transfer summary is accurate. What does it leave out, and whose job is it to find that out?
2. "Flight risk." "Challenging behaviours." What do words like these do to the next worker who opens the file?
3. Billy gives Maisie his toy car "so it doesn't leave". What is he testing? What could she have done in that moment that would have failed the test?
4. Without naming anyone or describing a case, what do files tend to get wrong about the children in them? Which of those habits are yours?
5. What is one thing either of you will write differently from next week?

Keep real children, families and colleagues out of the conversation. Talk about Billy and about habits, not about cases.

WRITE IT UP

- What did I read, and who did I talk it over with? Their role is enough, not their name.
- What did the conversation change, or confirm, in how I think about recording?
- What will I do differently, and how will I know if it has made a difference?

One more thing to try. Take a case summary you wrote in the last month and read it as the child might at eighteen. What would you change? That part stays with you. Leave out anything that could identify a child, a family or a colleague in anything you write down.

Notes

About CPD. Social Work England's registration renewal closes at 11:59pm on Monday 30 November 2026. Its CPD guidance (socialworkengland.org.uk/cpd/guidance) asks for at least two pieces of CPD each registration year, with a peer reflection in at least one of them. Read it there, in their words. This sheet is not connected with Social Work England in any way. Whether it fits your CPD is your call, not ours.

If it stirs something up. The book is about child protection, and it carries grief. If the reading or the conversation brings something up, stop there. Your employer's staff support line and your union are there for this. Samaritans answer any time, day or night, on 116 123, free. More people who can help: secretsocialworker.com/help.

This is the first of six sessions in the free discussion guide at secretsocialworker.com/for-teams. Free to copy and share.