



A Teachers

Guide to

Life Tales

Welcome to Life Tales...

What is Life Tales?

Life Tales is a series of therapeutic children's books designed to support children living in out-of-home care and other children who may have experienced difficult life events. The stories explore themes such as big emotions, trust, belonging, identity, friendship, and feeling safe.

For teachers and school staff, Life Tales can provide a gentle and accessible way to support children's emotional understanding while creating opportunities for meaningful classroom conversations.

Many children bring complex experiences into the classroom. Some may have experienced trauma, instability, or significant life changes. These experiences can affect how children regulate emotions, build relationships, and engage with learning. Life Tales offers a supportive way for educators to acknowledge children's feelings and experiences while reinforcing the importance of safe, caring relationships.

Why Therapeutic Stories Matter in Schools

Stories can be powerful tools for emotional learning. Through characters and narratives, children can explore feelings and experiences without feeling personally exposed.

When children read stories about characters facing similar challenges, they may:

- Recognise their own emotions
- Feel less alone in their experiences
- Develop language to talk about feelings
- Build empathy for others
- Learn healthy ways to cope with difficult emotions

Stories can also help teachers introduce conversations about wellbeing in a developmentally appropriate and non-threatening way.

Supporting Students Who Have Experienced Trauma

Children who have experienced trauma may respond differently to everyday situations in the classroom. They may appear anxious, withdrawn, reactive, or easily overwhelmed.

These behaviours are often linked to a child's sense of safety rather than intentional misbehaviour.

Using stories like Life Tales can help teachers:

- Normalise emotional experiences
- Help students understand their feelings
- Reinforce that safe adults are available to support them
- Strengthen relationships between students and teachers
- Encourage compassion and empathy among peers

Teachers do not need to know a child's full history to support them. What matters most is creating a classroom environment where children feel safe, understood, and valued.

How Teachers Can Use Life Tales

Life Tales can be used in flexible ways within classroom settings, wellbeing programs, or small group work.

Some practical ways to use the books include:

Shared reading

Teachers may read the story aloud to the class or to a small group of students.

Class discussions

Pause during the story to ask reflective questions such as:

- "What do you think the character might be feeling?"
- "Why do you think the character reacted that way?"
- "What helped the character feel safe again?"

Wellbeing lessons

Stories can support lessons about emotions, relationships, empathy, and problem-solving.

Small group support

Life Tales can be used with smaller groups of students who may benefit from additional emotional support or discussion.

Quiet reflection

Students may also choose to read the story independently and reflect through drawing, writing, or journaling.

Classroom Activities Linked to the Stories

Teachers may wish to extend the story through simple classroom activities that support emotional literacy.

Feelings identification

Ask students to identify different emotions the character experiences during the story.

Drawing feelings

Students draw a scene from the story and describe how the character might be feeling.

Empathy discussion

Invite students to think about how they might help a friend who was feeling the same way as the character.

Problem-solving

Discuss what choices the character made and what other choices might have helped.

Kindness and support

Ask students to identify how the adults in the story helped the child feel safe.

These activities help students build emotional awareness and strengthen social understanding.

Supporting Students Safely

When discussing emotional topics, it is important that teachers create a supportive and respectful environment.

Teachers may wish to:

- Remind students that everyone's feelings are valid
- Allow students to share only if they feel comfortable
- Avoid asking children to disclose personal experiences
- Focus conversations on the story and characters

If a child becomes upset or shares something concerning, teachers should follow school wellbeing procedures and seek appropriate support from school counsellors or wellbeing staff.

Strengthening Relationships in the Classroom

Positive relationships are one of the most powerful protective factors for children.

Life Tales can help teachers create moments of connection by:

- Showing curiosity about students' feelings
- Validating emotional experiences
- Reinforcing the message that adults are there to help

These small moments of connection can significantly support a child's sense of belonging and safety at school.

A Tool for Emotional Learning

Life Tales is designed to support conversations about emotions, relationships, and wellbeing in ways that feel safe and accessible for children.

For educators, the stories can act as a simple but meaningful tool to support social and emotional learning while strengthening the relationships that help children feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

Recommended Reading for Teachers

Berry Street Education Model – Strategies for Trauma-Informed Classrooms

Brannigan, M., & Fogarty, M. (2019).

A practical guide to creating safe, supportive learning environments for students affected by trauma.

The Whole-Brain Child

Siegel, D., & Bryson, T. (2011).

Explains how children's brains develop and offers strategies to help children manage emotions and behaviour.

Beyond Behaviors

Delahooke, M. (2019).

Helps educators understand behaviour as communication and respond with compassion and neuroscience-informed strategies.

What Happened to You?

Perry, B., & Winfrey, O. (2021).

An accessible introduction to how early experiences shape behaviour and emotional development.



Helpful information!

Links to Social and Emotional Learning and the Australian Curriculum

Life Tales supports the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills that are widely recognised as essential for children's wellbeing, relationships, and learning. Through storytelling, discussion, and reflection, the books help children build important skills such as recognising emotions, understanding others, managing challenges, and seeking support from trusted adults.

The themes explored in Life Tales align closely with the Australian Curriculum: Personal and Social Capability, which focuses on helping students develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills.

Using Life Tales in the classroom can support students to:

Develop self-awareness

Students can identify and name emotions by exploring how characters in the stories feel and respond to different situations.

Build self-management skills

Stories provide opportunities to discuss healthy ways to manage big emotions such as worry, anger, or sadness.

Strengthen social awareness and empathy

Students can consider how others may feel and develop compassion for people experiencing different challenges.

Build positive relationships

Discussions about supportive adults and friendships in the stories can reinforce the importance of kindness, trust, and seeking help.

Understand help-seeking and safety

Life Tales highlights the importance of safe and supportive adults, helping children understand that they can reach out for help when they need it.

By linking storytelling with social and emotional learning, Life Tales can support teachers to create classroom environments where children feel safe, connected, and ready to learn while also strengthening key wellbeing capabilities within the curriculum.

Trauma-Informed Classroom Tips

Children who have experienced trauma may respond to situations in the classroom differently from their peers. Their reactions are often connected to feeling unsafe, overwhelmed, or unsure rather than intentional misbehaviour. Small, consistent responses from adults can make a significant difference in helping children feel secure and supported at school.

Teachers can support trauma-informed classrooms by:

Prioritising safety and predictability

Clear routines, gentle transitions, and predictable expectations help children feel more secure and reduce anxiety.

Responding with curiosity rather than punishment

When behaviour becomes challenging, it can be helpful to wonder what the child might be feeling or needing rather than assuming the behaviour is deliberate.

Focusing on connection before correction

Children are more able to regulate their behaviour when they feel understood and supported by adults.

Using calm and supportive language

A calm voice and steady presence can help children regulate when emotions become overwhelming.

Recognising that behaviour communicates needs

Children often express stress, worry, or fear through behaviour. Supportive adults can help children identify feelings and find safe ways to manage them.

Even small moments of understanding, patience, and encouragement can strengthen a child's sense of safety and belonging within the classroom.



Helpful information!

Signs a Child May Need Extra Support

Children express distress in many different ways. While occasional emotional reactions are a normal part of development, some children may need additional support if they are experiencing ongoing difficulties.

Teachers are not expected to act as therapists, but they are often in a position to notice when a child may benefit from further support.

Some signs that a child may need additional help include:

Ongoing emotional distress

The child frequently appears very anxious, sad, withdrawn, or overwhelmed.

Strong or frequent emotional outbursts

The child has difficulty regulating emotions and may become very angry, upset, or distressed over small situations.

Significant changes in behaviour

A noticeable shift in behaviour such as withdrawal, aggression, or loss of interest in activities they previously enjoyed.

Difficulty concentrating or engaging in learning

The child struggles to focus, appears constantly on edge, or disengages from classroom activities.

Challenges with friendships or relationships

The child may have difficulty trusting others, connecting with peers, or responding to adult support.

Talking about feeling unsafe or alone

The child may express worries about safety, belonging, or whether adults will help them.

If a teacher notices ongoing concerns, it is important to follow the school's wellbeing procedures and seek support from appropriate staff such as school counsellors, wellbeing coordinators, or leadership teams.

Early support can make a significant difference in helping children feel safe, understood, and supported both at school and beyond.

Further Resources for Teachers

The following organisations and resources provide practical information for educators who want to better understand children's emotional wellbeing, trauma-informed practice, and strategies for supporting students in the classroom.

Emerging Minds

Emerging Minds is Australia's National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health. Their website includes excellent resources for teachers supporting children experiencing adversity, trauma, or family stress.

Website: www.emergingminds.com.au

Be You – Mental Health in Education Initiative

Be You supports educators to promote mental health and wellbeing in early learning services and schools across Australia. It includes professional learning modules, tools, and classroom strategies.

Website: www.beyou.edu.au

Raising Children Network

A trusted Australian parenting and child development website funded by the Australian Government. It includes helpful information about children's behaviour, emotions, and wellbeing.

Website: www.raisingchildren.net.au

Berry Street Education Model

Berry Street provides widely respected training and resources for trauma-informed teaching practices and positive classroom strategies.

Website: www.berrystreet.org.au

Australian Childhood Foundation

Provides resources and professional learning focused on understanding childhood trauma and supporting children in educational settings.

Website: www.childhood.org.au

