



## 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 the adults who care for them. Each story follows a child navigating experiences that many children in care face — big emotions, uncertainty, trust, belonging, identity, and connection.

The books provide a gentle way to introduce complex topics that children in care may struggle to talk about directly. Through relatable characters and supportive adult responses, the stories help children recognise their feelings, build emotional language, and begin to make sense of their experiences.

Life Tales can also support the adults around the child — including carers, caseworkers, and educators — by modelling trauma-informed responses and strengthening understanding of children's emotional needs.

At its core, Life Tales aims to create safe entry points for connection, conversation, and understanding.

### **Therapeutic Foundations**

Life Tales draws on principles from bibliotherapy and play-based therapeutic approaches.

Through storytelling, children can explore emotions and experiences at a safe distance. Talking about a character's feelings or choices can feel much safer than talking about their own. This allows children to process difficult experiences indirectly while still feeling understood and supported.

Like play, stories create a symbolic space where children can express thoughts, explore possibilities, and build meaning without feeling pressured or exposed.

### **How Life Tales Can Support Casework**

Caseworkers often need ways to build trust and engagement with children and carers, particularly when conversations involve difficult topics. Life Tales can act as a bridge for relationship building.

Using stories can help caseworkers:

- Build rapport and connection with children
- Introduce conversations about emotions and experiences in a non-threatening way
- Support children to develop emotional awareness and language
- Explore worries, fears, and hopes in a safe and indirect way
- Model therapeutic responses for carers
- Strengthen collaboration between children, carers, and professionals

Stories can also help shift conversations away from problems and toward understanding the child's inner world.

### **Supporting Relationships with Children**

Many children in care have experienced adults who did not listen to them, believe them, or respond safely to their feelings. Because of this, children may initially be cautious or guarded in professional relationships.

Reading a story together can reduce pressure and help children feel more comfortable.

Instead of asking direct questions, the caseworker and child can explore the character's experiences together.

For example:

- "I wonder how the character felt when that happened."
- "What do you think helped them feel safe again?"
- "Has anything like that ever happened to someone you know?"

These conversations allow children to share as much or as little as they want, while still feeling heard.

### **Supporting Relationships with Carers**

Life Tales can also be used as a tool to support conversations with carers.

Caseworkers may use the stories to:

- explore trauma-informed responses to behaviour
- help carers understand what a child may be feeling internally
- model therapeutic language and emotional validation
- introduce strategies that support regulation and safety

Reading the stories together or discussing key moments can help carers reflect on their caregiving approach and strengthen their confidence in supporting children who have experienced trauma.

### **Integrating Life Tales into Client Work**

Life Tales can be used flexibly within casework, home visits, or therapeutic support sessions. Some practical ways to use the books include:

#### **Shared reading**

Reading the story together with a child during a visit can create a relaxed and safe environment for conversation.

#### **Exploring feelings**

Pause at key moments and ask the child what they think the character might be feeling.

#### **Connecting story to real life**

Invite the child to think about times when they may have felt similar emotions.

#### **Carer reflection**

Use the story to discuss with carers how the adult in the story responded and what helped the child feel safe.

#### **Preparing children for experiences**

Some stories can help children prepare for events such as transitions, visits, school challenges, or new experiences.

### **Activities to Use with the Stories**

Caseworkers may find that simple activities help children engage more comfortably with the story.

#### **Feelings detective**

Ask the child to spot moments where the character might be feeling worried, sad, angry, or brave.

#### **Draw the story**

Invite the child to draw their favourite moment from the book or how they think the character felt.

#### **What would help?**

Pause during the story and ask the child what they think the character might need to feel safe or supported.

#### **Create a different ending**

Ask the child to imagine a different ending or solution for the character's problem.

#### **Story connections**

Ask the child if the story reminds them of something they have seen, felt, or experienced.

These activities can help children engage with the story in ways that feel natural and safe.

#### **A Tool for Connection**

Life Tales is not intended to replace professional interventions or therapeutic supports. Instead, it provides a practical tool that can strengthen engagement, communication, and understanding within the care system.

For caseworkers, the books can support conversations that might otherwise feel difficult to start. For children, they offer reassurance that their feelings are valid and that caring adults are there to support them.

Ultimately, the goal of Life Tales is to help children feel seen, heard, and supported, while strengthening the relationships that help them grow and heal.



# Using Life Tales during a home visit



Life Tales can be used during home visits to help build connection with children and carers while creating opportunities for meaningful conversation.

## 1. Introducing the Book

During a visit, the caseworker might bring one of the Life Tales books and introduce it in a relaxed way. For example:

"I brought a story today about a child who sometimes feels worried. I thought we could read it together if you'd like."

This keeps the interaction informal and gives the child the choice to participate.

## 2. Reading Together

The caseworker and child can read the story together, either sitting with the carer or in a comfortable space in the home.

While reading, the caseworker may pause occasionally to notice what is happening in the story.

For example:

- "I wonder how the character might be feeling here?"
- "That looks like a really big feeling."

The goal is not to question the child, but to gently explore the character's emotions.

## 3. Encouraging Reflection

After reading part of the story, the caseworker might invite the child to share their thoughts.

For example:

- "What was your favourite part of the story?"
- "What do you think helped the character feel better?"
- "What do you think the character needed from the grown-up?"

If the child chooses to share their own experiences, the caseworker can listen and validate their feelings. If the child does not wish to share, that is also respected.

## 4. Including the Carer

The story can also create opportunities to involve the carer in the conversation.

For example:

- "I really liked how the grown-up in the story stayed calm when the child was upset."
- "Sometimes kids have big worries like this. What helps when that happens at home?"

This can help carers reflect on strategies they already use and reinforce trauma-informed caregiving.

## 5. Simple Activity

The caseworker might finish with a short activity connected to the story.

Examples include:

- asking the child to draw how the character felt during the story
- choosing a favourite moment in the book
- identifying helpers or safe people in the character's life

These activities can help children process the story in a way that feels natural and engaging.

## 6. Linking Back to Support

Before finishing the visit, the caseworker may link the story back to real-life supports.

For example:

"Just like the character had people helping them, you also have people who care about you and want to help when things feel hard."

The caseworker may also encourage the carer to continue reading the story together at another time.

## Why This Approach Works

Using stories during visits can reduce pressure for children who may feel uncomfortable answering direct questions. The story becomes a shared focus, allowing conversations to develop naturally while helping children feel safe and understood.

For caseworkers, Life Tales can help transform routine visits into meaningful opportunities for connection, reflection, and relationship building.