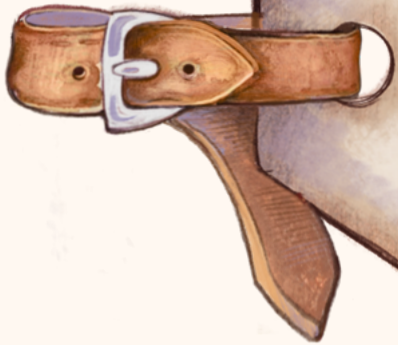




A Therapeutic Professionals Guide to **LifeTales**

Life Tales is a series of therapeutic children's books developed to support children living in foster care. The stories explore experiences common for children in care, including uncertainty, identity, belonging, trust, loss, and big emotions.

For therapeutic professionals, Life Tales can be used as a supportive clinical tool that helps children explore complex feelings and experiences in a developmentally appropriate way. Stories create a safe narrative distance, allowing children to engage with difficult topics through characters rather than feeling pressured to speak directly about their own experiences.

The books are designed to complement trauma-informed, attachment-focused, and child-centred therapeutic approaches.

Therapeutic Foundations

Life Tales draws on principles from bibliotherapy, narrative therapy, and play-based approaches.

Stories allow children to project thoughts, feelings, and experiences onto characters. This process can support emotional expression, increase insight, and reduce the anxiety that sometimes accompanies direct questioning.

Through shared storytelling, children may:

- Develop language for emotional experiences
- Externalise difficult feelings
- Explore alternative perspectives and solutions
- Increase self-understanding and resilience
- Experience validation of their inner world

Because the stories model supportive adult responses, they can also reinforce concepts of safety, trust, and relational repair.

Using Life Tales in Non-Directive Therapy

In non-directive or child-led therapeutic approaches, the story can be introduced as an optional resource within the play or therapeutic environment.

The therapist may place the book among other materials and allow the child to choose whether to engage with it. If the child selects the book, the therapist follows the child's pace and interest while reading or exploring the story.

Possible therapist responses may include reflective statements such as:

- "It looks like that part felt really big for the character."
- "I'm noticing the character feels worried here."
- "You're paying a lot of attention to that page."
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In this context, the story becomes another expressive medium similar to drawing, symbolic play, or sand play. The therapist focuses on emotional reflection and attunement rather than interpretation or teaching.

Children may relate the story to their own experiences spontaneously, but there is no expectation for this to occur. The therapeutic value lies in the child's freedom to engage with the narrative in their own way.

Using Life Tales in Directive Therapy

In more structured or directive therapeutic approaches, Life Tales can be used intentionally to explore particular themes or therapeutic goals. The therapist may select a story that aligns with the child's presenting concerns, such as anxiety, anger, transitions, or trust.

The therapist might:

- Read the story together with the child
- Pause to explore key emotional moments
- Discuss the character's thoughts, feelings, and choices
- Connect themes from the story to coping strategies or therapeutic skills

Example prompts may include:

- “What do you think the character might be feeling here?”
- “What helped the character feel safe again?”
- “What could the character do if those feelings come back?”

These discussions can help children identify emotions, develop problem-solving skills, and explore supportive relationships.

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Supporting Emotional Safety

When using stories that reflect real-life experiences, therapists should remain attentive to a child’s emotional regulation and readiness.

Some children may respond strongly to certain themes. Therapists may support emotional safety by:

- Pacing the story and taking breaks if needed
- Focusing on regulation strategies during sessions
- Emphasising themes of safety, support, and hope
- Allowing the child to shift away from the story at any time

The therapist’s attunement and responsiveness remain central to the process.

Integrating Life Tales into Therapeutic Activities

Therapeutic professionals may incorporate additional activities to deepen engagement with the story.

Examples include:

Feelings mapping

Invite the child to identify and label emotions experienced by the character throughout the story.

Story re-telling

Ask the child to retell the story using toys, puppets, or drawings.

Alternative endings

Encourage the child to imagine a different ending or solution for the character’s challenge.

Character perspective

Ask the child what advice they might give the character.

Connection to real life

If appropriate, explore whether the child has ever experienced similar feelings.

These activities can support emotional expression, narrative processing, and reflective thinking.

Life Tales as a Collaborative Tool

Life Tales can also support collaboration between therapists, carers, and caseworkers.

Therapists may:

- Recommend specific stories to carers for shared reading
- Use the stories to reinforce therapeutic themes between sessions
- Support carers to respond to children’s emotions in trauma-informed ways
- Create shared language between the child’s therapeutic and caregiving environments

This collaborative use can strengthen consistency in the child’s support network.

A Tool to Support Therapeutic Connection

Life Tales is not intended to replace therapeutic interventions or clinical judgement. Rather, it provides an accessible narrative tool that can support emotional exploration, connection, and understanding within therapeutic work.

Through storytelling, children are offered a gentle way to approach difficult feelings while experiencing validation, empathy, and hope within the safety of the therapeutic relationship.



Therapeutic Frameworks Informing Life Tales

Life Tales is informed by several well-established therapeutic approaches used when working with children who have experienced trauma, loss, or significant life changes. While the books are not designed to replace therapeutic intervention, they align with key principles commonly used in child and family therapy.

Child-Centred Play Therapy

Life Tales reflects the principles of child-centred play therapy developed by Virginia Axline (Axline, 1947), where children are supported to explore feelings and experiences through symbolic expression rather than direct questioning. Stories, like play, provide a safe medium for children to project emotions, make meaning of experiences, and process difficult feelings within the safety of a supportive relationship.

Narrative Therapy

Drawing on narrative therapy approaches (White & Epston, 1990), Life Tales uses storytelling to help children externalise problems and view their experiences through the lens of a character. This can allow children to explore challenges, identity, and resilience without feeling personally exposed.

Attachment-Focused Practice

The stories also reflect attachment-informed approaches that highlight the importance of safe, responsive relationships in supporting children's emotional development (Bowlby, 1969; Hughes, 2011). The adult figures in Life Tales model attuned responses, emotional validation, and relational repair.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Life Tales is grounded in trauma-informed principles that recognise how early adversity can affect children's emotional regulation, behaviour, and relationships (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006; Bath, 2008). The stories emphasise safety, connection, and emotional understanding as key components of healing.

These therapeutic influences support the use of Life Tales as a gentle narrative tool that can help children explore emotions, build self-understanding, and strengthen relationships within therapeutic and caregiving contexts.

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