



LIFE STORY PACK

Includes:

Introduction

The Important Conversations

Topics in order are: Mental Ill Health, Suicide, Death, Divorce and Separation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Rape and Sexual Abuse

[Helpful links to websites and books embedded into each subject area. Press image of book throughout document to get straight to Amazon for purchase].

General Therapeutic book list

Accessing Therapy and Counselling

Guidance for Parents doing Life Story Sessions

Example Life Story Session Plan

Your Toolbox

Access to helpful resources and materials to aid life story work

The Starter Sentence Game

Introduction

Important Conversations Guidance

Life story book creations offer your child the chance to connect with you in a focussed, fun and mutually enjoyable way to produce something that celebrates his or her life. In some cases, you will simply act as organiser, gatherer, and facilitator, there to stimulate, hold and witness your child's communications about their life. It also offers potential quality time together away from your screens. The terms 'life story' and 'autobiography' are used interchangeably in this document.

For some families there are no hidden topics to address and creating the book in itself is a valuable experience. Working on your child's life story using the arts can also be a focussed way of having fun with your child and learning more about them through this designated one-to-one time.

For other families in amongst all that there is to celebrate, there are also potentially disturbing complex stories and facts to explore. You may feel it important to ensure your child knows about them but are unsure how to discuss. The discussion may involve exposing a secret. And though secrets can be corrosive, placing the child at risk of finding out from someone other than you, it never seems to be the right time.

More often, the subject parents wish to explore is one that the child knows about already, but which is surrounded by silence. Parents in these situations may have concerns

about their child's emotional wellbeing and about approaching what might feel a toxic or distasteful subject.

Some reservations about conversations around a difficult topic and possible considerations might be any of the following:



Where your child knows something of the difficult subject already, it is possible that they may be left with the feeling that its content is too frightening to broach with you. I believe that if something of significance is not shared safely in childhood it can become a block to of self-confidence in later life. Your child may feel they need to protect you by not exploring the subject and this is a long shadow to walk in.

The aim of 'Important Conversations' is to encourage the sharing of feelings and thoughts attached to difficult topics and to address them constructively and safely. Undeniably there may be reasons for not sharing subjects but do be sure it is not just your own fear that is stopping you. If your child already knows something about the subject it is generally a great relief for them to have their experiences acknowledged and to be helped to understand and think about them. It will be up to both of you whether the important conversation that emerges is included in the book or not, but either way, working on it adds so much more value to the final joint creation.

Life story creations can also offer children the chance to address feelings and memories that they have buried away, feelings that may haunt them and manifest themselves in behaviour that is troublesome to themselves or to others. They offer children the chance to voice the unsaid and ask questions they have felt unable to ask. Through discussion, the child has an opportunity to create a distance between themselves and the memory or feeling, and in the loving company of a parent they may reach a new level of understanding and acceptance.

If you don't feel comfortable about embarking on the important subject with your child, then do seek further support to explore what complex or disturbing issue or facts in their background might be holding you back. You may want therapeutic support for yourself or indeed even for your child. See the list of organisations that can put you in touch with counsellors or therapists. There are also useful links in this guide to organisations of repute that offer further advice on sharing topics that concern you in a responsible and thoughtful way.

Your own thoughts and feelings are vital and sometimes just need acknowledging aloud to yourself and to your child. It is important to be mindful of not burdening your child with your own unexamined feelings in relation to the topic. Rehearsing directions a conversation might take is worthwhile to ensure you are addressing the child's thoughts and feelings above all.

The process of creating your child's autobiography can help to remove invisible burdens and result in improved behaviour and overall happier demeanour. A sense of relief may be apparent to the whole family. It does take time, energy and some effort but this is an investment worth making for its life-enhancing and confidence-generating potential.

The importance to your child of the finished creation, whether it is an online one or a physical 3D folder or book will show itself over time. It may be the means by which your child returns to reflect on happenings and achievements and may have a securing and settling effect on your child in future turbulent times. It also provides a wonderful way of viewing how your child experienced

themselves at the time of the creation of the book. Most importantly, it is your child's book, so they can find amusement and value in their life whether in the present or looking back as adults.

There are many ways to undertake a life story book and they will be of varying lengths (as long as is needed). It all depends on what is to be told and how your child reacts to the project with you. Their age, development, and concentration span will all be factors as well as the quality of your relationship. The 'special time' spent creating the autobiography using the stimulus material on this website might result in any one of a variety of formats. The finished product could be an online creation, an electronic document such as PowerPoint, or a paper folder, for example, with loose leaf pages that can be added or removed. Please refer to the example guide for details of how to get started and use the ideas below if they feel helpful. The structure provided may allow an entrance into the conversation.

Important Conversations

Here are some **suggestions** of words and phrases parents can use when discussing difficult topics with children. There are also notes on the words and meanings we use for ourselves. I want to emphasise that these are not set speeches. For a child to make sense of the relevant topic area, a two-way communication is essential. This is a process rather than a tick box monologue and the dialogue between you may go on for days, months or even years as with age and development the child's understanding deepens and grows.

It is likely you will have an intuitive feeling about what approach will work best with your child. A parent needs to

use examples that real life throws up to begin the conversation, whether it is a story, TV programme, a discussion, a work of art or even lyrics, poetry, music or dance that relate to the subject you know needs to be addressed with your child. Do not be afraid to use their artistic expressions as a forum to release feelings and thoughts in both of you, to deepen and develop your approach to the issue at hand. Please use the website www.lifestoryhub.com for inspiration.

Use the following Wikipedia summaries of the Western world's most famous psychological thinkers to familiarise yourself with their theories of child development. Read on for inspiration and see if they make sense to you.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bowlby

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melanie_Klein

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz_Perls

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Winnicott

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Berne

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erik_Erikson

General Thoughts

The words and phrases that follow may be helpful for using with children between the ages of 5 and 10. Of course, how they are used will depend on your child's individual level of development and understanding.

If you feel that it is unhelpful to give full details of any aspect of the difficult subject that you want to explore with your child, you can always say in a serious manner:

‘Some things you are too young to understand properly but when you are older, I will explain them to you in a way you can make sense of.’

It is important not to gloss over or make light of the questions as this may not prepare them for something that might be difficult to hear later.

Speaking to children about complex and disturbing issues either in the past or present can be uncomfortable for parents. Our ability to share painful truths can be in direct correlation with our own ability to face them. Only then will we be able to help a child with absorbing some of the implication of the matter in hand. We can feel anxious that our words may bring back difficult memories or arouse thoughts that might make the child feel insecure. Whilst recognising that parents are usually the best judge of what to say and when to say it and may imagine best what children’s reactions might be, this is not always the case as our own feelings and thoughts can cloud our judgement. You may feel you want to call upon the help of a therapist or counsellor for advice and there are links to useful sites to access and understand what might be involved at the end of Important Conversations.

It must be remembered that if the subject concerns a traumatic experience, the child may still be living through or have themselves lived through the trauma. Talking about ideas and feelings associated with these events and revisiting them on an ongoing basis can be a vital part of processing these imposed experiences and releasing tensions associated with them will draw you closer to your child. It can be an invisible load that the child is carrying

and opportunities for unburdening are created by those they are closest to.

The parents in the child's world play a crucial role. It is in their hands to decide whether and when 'difficult' subjects become acceptable conversation topics, and these decisions determine how far the past becomes embedded in the child's image in a healthy way.

In addition to conversations stemming from the examples below the life story book may be very useful for sequencing and understanding events in a way that does not result in the child blaming themselves or feeling unloved at some level.

Trigger points for conversations about the past can be anything in daily life but the creation of a book about a child's life is a fantastic way of helping the child to focus on experiences which have an impact on who they are in the present.

Take your cues from your mood as well as the mood of your child, listening out for anything they might say which could be a good opening to the conversation that you have already planned in your mind.

Below are some challenging and often secret topics. The suggested words and phrases are in mauve script. The notes to adults are in black.

At the end of most of the topic sections you'll find links to helpful websites. I have also included lists of relevant children's stories that may in some way bear resemblances to your child's experiences and help them to feel less alone.

Mental Ill Health

This is a huge topic and a complex one. It is also important to remember that our mental health care system can be culturally biased. Misdiagnosis can be made at any level in the system and labels given to children can change or vary in meaning over time. If the child is no longer living with an adult who was or is mentally unwell then these explanations will help to explain why this is so. Do check www.lifestoryworks.org for links relating to adoption and coming into care. Most parents reading this are assumed to have children who do not fall into this category, but in line with 2018 government statistics, 1% of the child population do.

What mental ill health can mean:

It can mean that the person in question (which could be yourself) is not very well. Even though there is no part of their body that hurts or looks painful they do not feel happy about their life or other people feel that all is not right with their mind. A doctor qualified in understanding the mind may be the official person who decides they are not well in their mind and may give them a title that describes their illness. Sometimes because of this illness they can seem strange to other people and it can be hard for them to keep up jobs and to look after children by themselves. They may behave differently to how they used to behave if they become mentally ill. Here are some labels to describe when we are not at our best and some of these are not a mental illness but feelings that we can all feel sometimes. These feelings only become an illness if they 'take over' a person's life and last for a long time.

Anxiety:

Irritability

Tension in body and face

Worry

Panic attacks are part of anxiety

Heart beating fast, shortness of breath, racing thoughts.

X used to get/gets anxious. That means she feels very frightened a lot of the time.

Check out that the child understands the meaning of nervous and explain that everyone feels nervous sometimes.

The trouble with X's nervousness is that it stops her from doing lots of things that children need their mummies/daddies to do. Perhaps s/he does not want to talk to people. Perhaps she doesn't want to visit playgrounds and parks or doesn't want to go outside at all.

Explain how the anxiety manifests in the person you are talking about with your child. Being specific and talking through what helps the person feeling anxiety will encourage the child not to think the manifestations in any way relate to them being naughty, wrong or bad themselves.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder can be part of an anxiety state.

Depression

Depression can manifest itself as quietness or silence. Remember that everybody is quiet sometimes when you explain this aspect of depression. A depressed person may stare blankly at things such as the TV and not 'see' them.

Someone may be in his/her or her own world of negative thoughts and out of touch with what's around them. These thoughts could be sad or angry ones that might be turned in on the person thinking them gathering force in their intensity.

A depressed person may have an inability to respond to or engage in a child's world. There may be an inability to feel positive emotion and they might be unable to show affection. If this state describes your own, try to explain it at the level you think your child needs to hear it. It is during this conversation you may find that they think they have done something wrong to cause these feelings in you or the person concerned. Be sure to challenge this; using the art materials on the website may open new discussions with your child.

Depression may lead to a failure in initiating activity such as helping the child with homework or inviting friends' round or deciding to go to the park or play centre. Depression can be temporary and can be relieved by therapy or a course of anti-depressants.

Depression is something that grownups can get. People who are depressed often feel sad about their life and don't have any energy. It can make people not want to get up in the mornings and not see the point in doing anything. Sometimes it stops people from wanting to talk to other people because they feel too sad to bother. It is nobody's fault, but it is like an

illness that just seems to happen to some people. There are many different reasons for it happening which the doctors who have seen the person understand best. Depression does not usually last for ever and people can get better from it. They can take medicine to help them feel better and talking to a specially trained therapist often helps too.

Children can also feel depressed though this is not a word that is used lightly to describe them. For addressing their feelings of sadness and low spirits the ideas in the life story guide might be helpful together with the links below.

Personality Disorder

In psychiatry this is a disorder characterized by disruption in relatedness. It is among a large group of mental disorders and is characterized by rigid, inflexible, and maladaptive behaviour patterns and traits that severely limit a person's adaptive potential, impairing their ability to function in society. Some kinds of personality disorders are described as 'antisocial', 'borderline' and 'passive aggressive' (Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 8th edition).

A personality disorder:

Does not respond easily to treatment
Usually involves anti-social ways of relating
Is unlikely to change

Although we can say that unfortunately the parent/person connected to the child is unlikely to change, personality disorders are not hereditary. Why they occur is not properly understood but early trauma features highly in the history of those with borderline personality disorders. It is highly unlikely that the person with the personality disorder really

believes they have one, and to expect them to communicate about it with a child could be unrealistic.

X finds making friends and sometimes just being nice to people very difficult. It is hard to bring up children when you don't get on with anybody. X was not/is not able to change as it is the only way she knows how to be. All mummies/daddies need other people around to help them (name others in the child's life who are there to help) to look after their children properly and make the children feel alright about life.

Schizophrenia

Seeing and hearing things that are not there. Very frightening. Voices telling you to do things. A sense that there is a radio or God's voice inside one's head.

These symptoms can be eliminated if people take the right medication. However sometimes they don't like the side effects. Side effects can be sleepiness, weight gain, feeling they have lost their spark or something essential that makes them who they are.

This is a lifelong condition that needs medication to control. According to the National Institute of Clinical Excellence schizophrenia affects one in one hundred people.

Schizophrenia is a word that describes people who are not well in their thinking and feelings. It is an illness that can be treated by taking medicine but if the person stops taking the medicine it comes back again. Someone with this illness can hear and see things that are not there and that nobody else can hear or see. It can be very frightening like having a radio in your head with voices speaking to you that are not your own.

X was/is not well, and she has this illness. She often does not like the way the pills for the illness make her feel. She sometimes stops taking the pills and then the illness makes her think that she does not need them anymore. If she takes her medicine, she is fine. Sometimes when people have this illness, they can think they have special powers, and this can make them dangerous to themselves and other people.

Someone who was ill might think that they did not need to wear shoes because the voices said that their feet were now made of concrete and could not be run over or hurt. Or they might think that the bus driver was about to hurt them which could make them try to fight him off the bus. What the voices in the person's head tell them is not the truth.

It can be frightening for children when their mummy or daddy has this illness as it might mean they can't look after them properly and keep them safe. The child might end up believing that the things that X keeps telling him are true. For example, you might believe you are bad because X told you this, or that you can fly because they said you could. Sometimes children get hurt who have mummies or daddies with this illness.

Bipolar Disorder (also sometimes called manic depression)

This has the symptoms of depression, but it also contains highs where the person affected feels they are out of harm's way. Sometimes they lose touch with what is going on around them and think they don't need to be careful, crossing roads dangerously for instance or not being aware of other people's needs. When they feel 'high' the person may not feel that they need to sleep or eat. They can be

very creative - writing or painting for hours on end, for example. However, it doesn't last and then they can feel 'low' again.

This is usually a life-long condition that needs medication to control.

This illness means that X can be very excited and full of energy all the time. S/he may not think s/he needs to sleep. S/he may not be able to look after you properly when she is like this because of all the other things she wants to do. Usually the things X wants to do are not important to other people, but her illness makes them seem important to her. Sometimes she can feel fed up and sad.

You can use the explanations of depression on earlier section.

The important thing is that it can be very frightening and worrying to see X being so different at different times, not knowing when they are going to be happy and when they are going to be sad. Just remember you have always got me (and name others) to talk to when you are feeling sad or scared or angry about X's behaviour.

Links to sites with helpful ideas:

The Guardian Top Teen novels that explore mental health
<https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/jan/15/top-10-teen-books-that-explore-mental-health-issues>

Article about an author trying to reach primary age children through a story on mental health

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/18/can-picture-books-meet-the-crisis-in-childrens-mental-health>

<https://www.thechildrensbookreview.com/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/0/22028518>

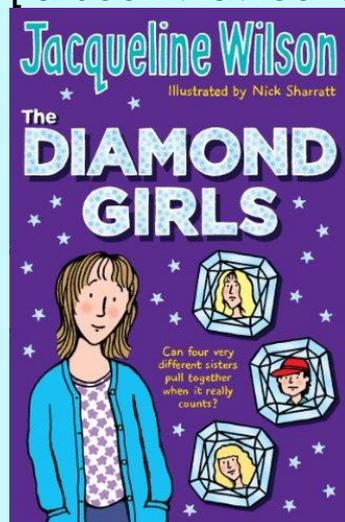
<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/>

[https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/40707.Children_un
derstanding_Mental_Illness](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/40707.Children_understanding_Mental_Illness)

Book

The Diamond Girls *Jacqueline Wilson*

[a book that looks beneath the surface of family life]



Suicide

Children may have to discover at some point that one of their parents or a close relative has killed themselves. It will be natural that they want to know how and why the parent killed themselves

This is a frightening subject as it invites children to contemplate the extremes of psychological suffering and (if the act was performed in a violent way) whether the person intimately connected to them experienced physical pain. Not only can it be seen as an act of ultimate self-negation and despair, but suicide can contain a reproach to anyone who cared about them. It could suggest to a child that they were not good enough or lovable enough to make the person stay want to stay with them. It is even possible that some children see it as a model of behaviour to copy when they become distressed or sad in the future.

People who commit suicide may or may not have mental health problems although one in five who kill themselves have seen a mental health professional in the previous year (UK statistics, 2018). Three times more men than women kill themselves in the UK.

We know that the beliefs and feelings about suicide vary widely from culture to culture. The causes of suicide will exist in relation to their social, political and cultural environments and in relation to the personal feelings of the individual. People's attitude to their lives can be circumstantial and they can be vulnerable to the influence of other people such as suicide pacts between friends and partners.

It is also important to remember that many people die in a way that might be accidental, that is, where suicide was not

intended, as in an addictive drug overdose or extremely dangerous driving with an unexplained collision.

X felt so low and fed up about his/her life (be specific about what you know was going wrong) that s/he wanted it all to stop hurting. S/he could not feel the part of him/her that loved people and enjoyed life. S/he could not think properly, and s/he did not have anyone s/he wanted to talk to so s/he just gave up.

If appropriate you could say: **It was because of X's illness (depression/bipolar disorder/schizophrenia) that s/he could not see that there were lots of important things and people to stay alive for.**

For a child under 10 it is best to keep it as simple as possible and then see what path the conversation takes. They will not have all the projections an adult has on the subject although they may have conscious memories of feeling despairing which the information you give them could tap into.

It is important not to underestimate the power of children's imagination and it could be a subject that you need to return to. The child may need reassurance that it is not something that is catching or that will happen to them too. Encourage them to feel that worries and feelings do not get so huge and overpowering and result in suicide if they are shared with other loving people as they come up.

Death and Dying

This will mean different things to children at different times and of course will depend on their relationship with the person who is dying or has died.

Most children go through phases where they become preoccupied by the idea and fact of death and will ask their parents questions on the subject. If the child has lost someone close, they may respond strongly to other sorts of loss and the thought that you could die as well may make them feel particularly anxious.

It is important not to shy away from the subject or seem frightened by it as your feelings it will easily be picked up by a child. Illness in either parent may become very alarming to children and reassurance that illness only rarely leads to death and that death mainly occurs when people get old may be needed. As with all these subjects, your own degree of grief and comfort around the subject of death will be influential on how the conversation occurs. Try not to prematurely close the subject or think of it as wrong to show tears and sorrow yourself, although if this seems frightening or overwhelming for your child then the conversation may cease to be healing or helpful. Be mindful about your timing and where extremes of feeling from you are best taken elsewhere.

Your own belief system will dictate to a large extent how you respond to questions about what happens after death, so it is hard to be prescriptive about what to say. Grief will not be something that can occur within a set period and can for a child it may involve grieving for future relationships they will never experience.

Talking about death through literature that features animals is a good way of approaching the subject. The Useful Books and Websites sections are useful to check out for more ideas. The website Winston's Wish (<https://www.winstonswish.org/>) is particularly recommended for details of how to talk to children on the subject and covers death by manslaughter or murder. It is a charity with a free help line number. Grief encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/> is also an excellent website for children and young people with lots on it that is very sensitive to what children might be going through.

Ideas for comforting children include helping them to see death as an end to suffering, that the person who has died lives on in their hearts, that it is natural and happens to us all, that the person who has died would want to be remembered but want them to be happy as well. Rituals or small ceremonies are also helpful to honour the person. This could involve lighting a candle or writing a poem or making a treasure box of all that symbolises that person with objects chosen by the child.

Links to sites with helpful ideas:

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/e-family-news/2011-talking-with-children-about-the-serious-illness-of-a-family-member>

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

www.childbereavementuk.org/

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8471304-you-are-the-best-medicine>

Books

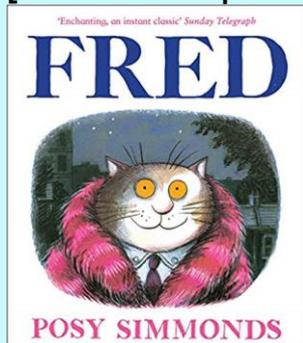
Goodbye Mog *Judith Kerr*

[Loss - about a celebration of a cat's life]



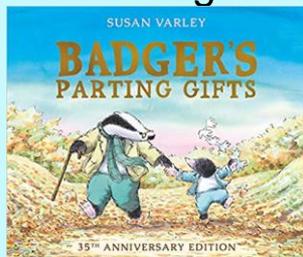
Fred *Posy Simmons*

[A beloved pet dies and what happens next]



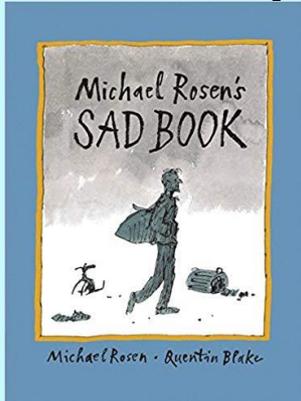
Badgers Parting Gifts *Susan Varley*

[Loss-about a badger reaching the end of his life- and how he is thought about by those who love him.]



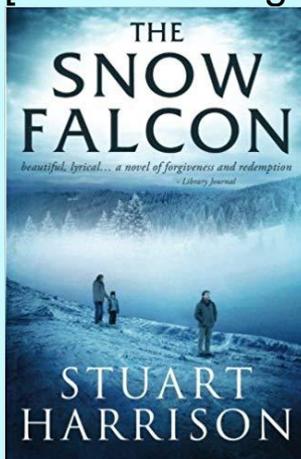
Sad *Michael Rosen*

[looks at feelings of grief, anger and despair when someone dies]



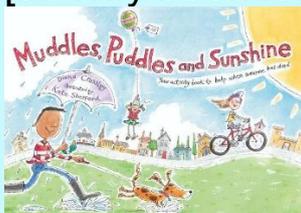
The Snow Falcon *Stuart Harrison*

[for children age 4-8 about a parent with cancer]



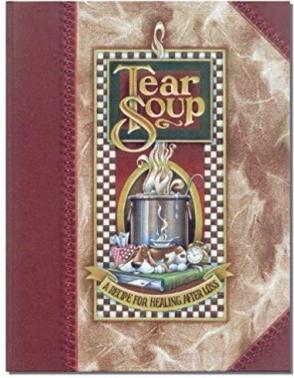
Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine *Winston Wish and Diana Crossley*

[activity book for helping children when someone has died]



Tear Soup A Recipe for Healing After Loss *Pat Schwiebert,
Chuck DeKlyen*

[for older children featuring a nine-year-old and deals with sudden death]



Domestic Violence

This is when one part of a couple behaves in a way that is threatening or violent to the other partner. This could involve hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, biting, stabbing or hitting any part of the body with an object.

On rare occasions domestic violence can result in the death of a partner. Whether or not this was intentional would be explored in court and a verdict reached. If murder rather than manslaughter was the term that was used, then the description below could still be useful in parts. Great emphasis could be put on any remorse displayed and how dangerous violence can be. Other more positive qualities of the birth father who killed (or unusually the mother) would need to be emphasised and advice sought from professionals experienced in sharing this information.

Sometimes X was very unkind to your mother and they shouted and rowed with each other. X could not manage his temper and even hit and hurt Y. It is very wrong when this happens and if the police get to hear about it, they know that the law has been broken.

When grown-ups hit and hurt each other it is very frightening for anyone who is there. Children love both their parents even if they don't like what is happening and it leaves them feeling muddled about what is wrong and right. It is wrong for a daddy to hit a mummy or a mummy to hit a daddy. It means that the grown-up who is so angry that they hit people needs help with their bad temper and must learn to be kind. Even so, it can be quite hard for grown-ups to change. Most grown-ups and mummies and daddies do not hurt each other like this. To shout and say mean, cruel things to another human being is also wrong and sometimes happens between grown-ups and children.

Links to sites with helpful ideas:

<https://www.thechildrensbookreview.com/>

<https://esme.com/resources/domestic-violence/five-childrens-books-that-discuss-domestic-violence>

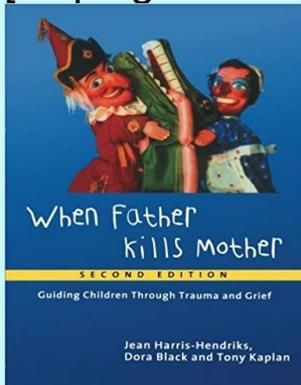
This site below lists 100 books that cover the topic of domestic violence and include books for adults

https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/16441.Domestic_Violence_in_Fiction

Book

When father kills mother *Jean Harris-Hendricks, Dora Black and Tony Kaplan*

[helping children through trauma and grief]



Domestic violence may link to discussions on smacking and hitting children. My belief is that smacking to hurt and harm a child is wrong since the child won't always be certain of your motivation. I would recommend in a calm moment asking a child that seems mature enough to express their own views about smacking. Then depending on how the conversation goes you might say:

It is wrong when grown-ups hit children even if the child has done something wrong. The grown up is

using their strength to hurt the child. Often this is because they have lost their temper. It usually does not sort out why the child did something naughty but if it does stop them doing it again it will only be because they are nervous of the smack. Smacking shows children that grown-ups are not very safe to be around when they can't control their feelings.

Divorce and Separation

With divorce and separation now affecting 1 in 3 children this is something that needs to be open for discussion in any household affected. Often it is protecting our own feelings of loss and devastation that stop us talking about what is happening or going to happen to our relationship. Once you have come to a decision about a break up the children need to be involved at some level before one of the couple moves out. Conversational openings might involve asking the child how they think everyone is getting on in the household. All will depend on what the factors are that have led to the break up. If there has been domestic violence, then the section above is relevant but if it has been not been acrimonious, verbally violent or physically violent then talking about the atmosphere within the home will be relevant. There may have been seething silences, sarcastic remarks, irritation and resentment between you and your partner that your child could not fail to notice or even more disturbing barely discernible signs that all is not well.

All these factors need acknowledging directly with children when informing them in simple language that your relationship has come to an end. Reassurance (if this is possible to give) that you still care about each other and want to be friends and that they will continue to see the absent parent is important. Again, if you are going to do shared care then letting them know exactly what to expect is important. Regularity and reliability in routines are also very important for children who have lost a parent through divorce or separation. Asking a child why they think people have children together and why parents live together will often produce the reasons that make sense as to why they are parting. Children will go on having more questions and feelings about a separation and a missing parent and you will need to take responsibility for creating the space and opportunities to talk. Even if your suggestions are rejected

it does not mean that they will not value knowing you are ok to talk about it.

On the other hand, the subject does not need to be over-emphasised. Wait for the right time to talk, for your own emotional readiness to approach the subject when you are not engulfed with fury or grief. Acknowledge with your child that your feelings have changed about your ex either because of his/her behaviour and actions or because of changes in you. Inform them of what is going to happen next and let them know that you have no expectation that their feelings should change just because yours have. Do be honest if the reality is that they are going to see far less of one parent or that you can no longer be in the same room as your ex. Try to acknowledge and name your child's possible emotions if they are not forthcoming as this may help them make sense of the confusing mixture of loss, hurt and betrayal that might wash over them at times. Use explanations from other subjects in 'Important conversations' to explain the very concrete reasons that can be the cause of breakups.

How do you think mummy and daddy (or dad and daddy, mum and mummy) have been getting on lately? Sometimes with grown-ups the reasons that made them get on so well and love each other so much when they first met gradually disappear. Sometimes they end up caring a lot about each other still but not really being happy together or loving each other like they used to. Sometimes they no longer like each other. This is very different to how a parent feels about their child who they will always love no matter what. Grown-up feelings about each other are different to their feelings about their children. Things are going to change because it is not making us a happy family to stay together but you will still see X and stay with X.

Links to sites with helpful ideas:

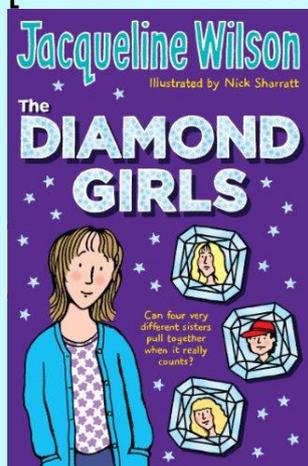
<https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/information/separating/support-for-your-child/>

<https://beanstalkmums.com.au/12-brilliant-books-to-help-your-children-cope-with-separation-and-divorce/>

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Fiction-dealing-divorce-separation-family-break-up/s?ie=UTF8&page=1&rh=n%3A69%2Ck%3AFiction%20dealing%20with%20divorce%5Cc%20separation%5Cc%20family%20break-up>

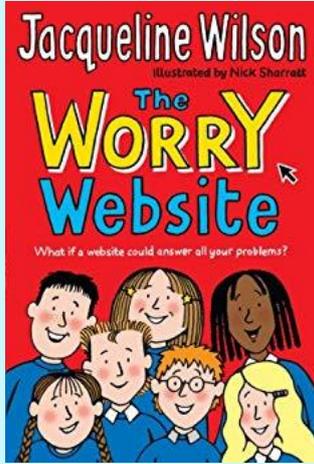
Books

The Diamond Girls *Jacqueline Wilson*
[a book that looks beneath the surface of a family's life]



The Worry Website *Jacqueline Wilson*

[a story about a class of children with anonymous worries that are shared on a website and who are helped]



Prison

It may be that you must explain to a child something about the other parent or someone close to them being in prison. All will depend on your attitude to the crime. Do you condemn it, or do you feel that there has been a miscarriage of justice? Do you feel that you have properly processed with a supportive outside person the enormity of what has happened? Bear in mind that your child is likely to google any press coverage or other information about the crime?

Friends and family are likely to know of this non-secret event much as you might wish otherwise. If you feel that their parent or other adult in question has done wrong, then do emphasise this to the child, talking about the effect of the crime on other people and how his/her thinking must have been muddled or wrong. Say that this does not make them a bad person and that it is ok to talk about their weakness/vulnerability in relation to the crime. Do not under-emphasise however how the crime of the parent or adult in question has hurt or harmed others. It may be relevant to talk about their upbringing to explain the circumstances, stressing that this does not excuse them but allows for some compassion. Use other parts of 'Important Conversations' to address what has happened if the crime involved drug pushing or sexual abuse or violence, for example.

You could ask your child to draw a picture of what they think happened if talking is too hard. You could ask them to play a song to you about how it makes them feel. You could ask them to say what they would like to say to the absent parent and talk it through before it happens, presuming visits are happening.

What do you think X has done? Do you know what that means? Can you play me some music (either using a real

instrument or singing voice or a track of music they love from YouTube or another source).

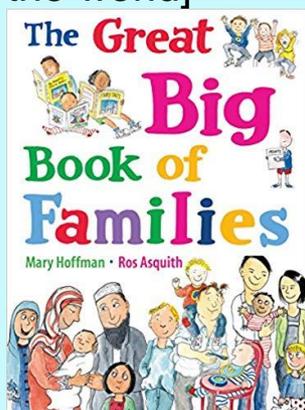
Link to site with helpful ideas:

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/about/our-services/action-for-prisoners-and-offenders-families/>

Books

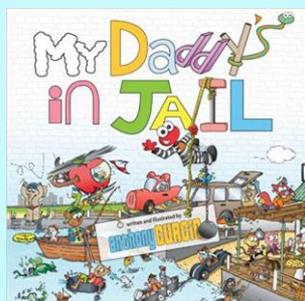
The Great Big Book of Families *Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith*

[a celebration of the diverse fabric of families throughout the world]

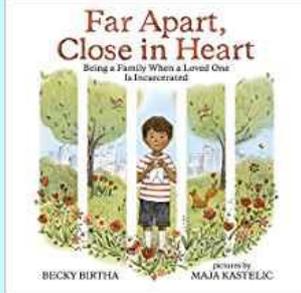


My daddy's in jail *Anthony Curcio*

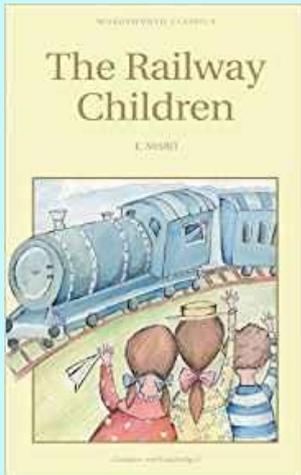
[full of comforting explanations and reassurance for children in this situation]



Far Apart, Close in Heart *Becky Birtha*
[explores the many emotions a child may have about a parent in prison]



The Railway Children *E Nesbit*
[looks at the yearning and confusion felt by children around a missing parent in prison]



Alcoholism

One dictionary definition of alcoholism is as follows:

The essential feature of alcohol abuse is the maladaptive use of alcohol with recurrent and significant adverse consequences related to its repeated use. Alcoholism is the popular term for two disorders, alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence. The hallmarks of both these disorders involve repeated life problems that can be directly attributed to the use of alcohol. Both these disorders can have serious consequences, affecting an individual's health and personal life, as well as having an impact on society at large.

When people need a drink (beer, lager, wine, vodka, gin, brandy, whisky, sherry) a lot of the time. Many people drink alcohol but if you drink too much too often it can be a problem. X drinks too much alcohol at the moment.

People can get better from alcoholism and stop drinking but they need lots of help and it takes time to know they are truly better. It can be very hard for them to stop too.

People often become alcoholics because they are not very happy about things in their lives. Alcohol can at first make them feel happy and relaxed. They can even be fun to be with for a while but too much alcohol is not good for a person or for children around them. All the person can think about is having more to drink. It can make them loud, angry and clumsy. They may fall over and hurt themselves or someone else accidentally. They may even knock themselves out, so they appear to be asleep or they may just sleep very, very deeply. When they are drunk, they often only care about what they want and not what anyone else thinks or says.

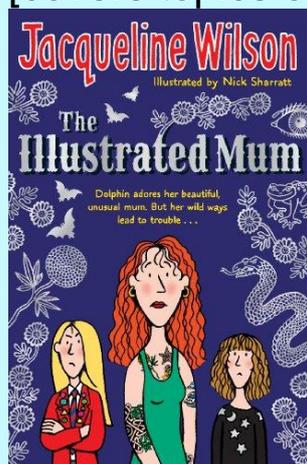
They can be boring, frightening and difficult to spend time with when they are drinking. It is sad for children whose parents drink like this and sad for all the people who care about the person.

Link to site with helpful ideas:

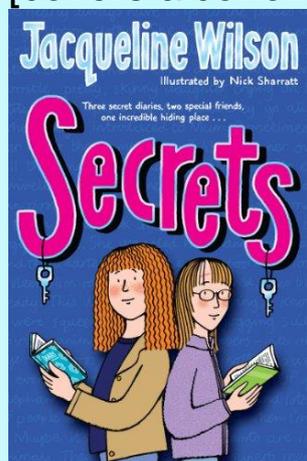
<http://alcoholrehab.com/alcoholism/explaining-alcoholism-to-a-child/>

Books

The illustrated Mum *Jacqueline Wilson*
[covers topics of alcohol and drugs within a story]



Secrets *Jacqueline Wilson*
[covers alcoholism, violence, class and so much more]



Drug Abuse

There are many types of drugs with different personal and criminal consequences attached to them. The drugs used by the birth family might have been cocaine, crack, heroin, marijuana, and amphetamines.

Drugs can make people behave in many ways depending on which drug is depended on. It is worth finding out about the drug known to have been used by the birth parent so that you can describe it in a calm and measured way.

Most drugs have the capacity to distort the user's perception of reality in both positive and negative ways. Their effects can range from feelings of euphoria, peace, calm, to aggression, paranoia, and isolation.

Understanding of social interactions and thought processes can become distorted and fragmented over time.

What is common to all who are dependent on them is a perceived need for the drug. Life seems unbearable without the presence of the drug. The chosen drug originally led to an enhancement of the birth parent's experience of life but over time, life for any length of time, is dominated by the need for the drug just to feel normal.

The feeling when not taking the drug is of imbalance, psychological pain and overwhelming need that can even become a physical pain. The person will go to great extremes to be calmed by the temporary peace the drug brings. The 'extremes' when living a life of poverty can manifest as stealing and prostitution as a way of obtaining money to finance the drug. This can then lead to the neglect of children as described above and result in them coming into care.

X loves you very much, but x has a problem with drugs, which sometimes means they can't manage life very well. We do not know why x took/takes drugs, but it could have been because people s/he knew did it or because s/he did not feel very happy about things. Once people start to take drugs it can be very difficult to stop, and people just want more and more. Drugs can make them do things that are not right and all they care about is the drug.

When people use drugs, they feel lots of different feelings. Sometimes they are happy sometimes sad, sometimes they are angry and sometimes worried. It is hard for children living with a mummy on drugs as they don't know what their mummy is going to be like. They might get ignored or shouted at even if they have done nothing wrong. Taking drugs can be a bit like taking the wrong medicine that makes you ill instead of making you better.

Drugs make it difficult sometimes for x to behave in a way that is safe for you and she is not able to always put you first. She loves you very much and gets other people to help with looking after you if she is not feeling able to manage. It is very important that you talk about it to x anytime you feel worried or upset about x.

Link to site with helpful ideas:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/parental-substance-alcohol-drug-misuse/>

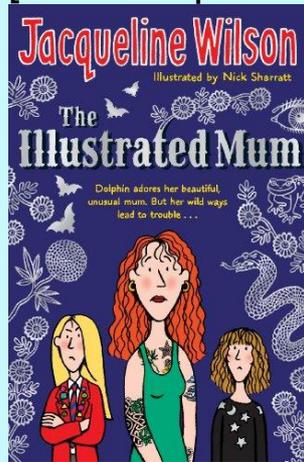
Independent best novels that cover hard hitting topics for young readers

<https://www.independent.co.uk/extras/indybest/arts-books/10-best-young-adult-books-teenage-kelley-armstrong-david-owen-10510688.html>

Book

The Illustrated Mum *Jacqueline Wilson*

[covers topics of alcohol and drugs within a story]



Rape: context sex and sexual awareness

The child may be going to read or learn that either their father has raped a woman/ women or that they themselves have been a product of rape. The child may be a product of rape and if it has not been proven in court then it becomes alleged rape. It is important to note that unfounded allegations are the exception rather than the rule so discrediting the mother's account may not be helpful. There is also a possibility that the child themselves may have been raped by their father or another relative or man.

This is a very difficult area and it would be worth talking to your local CAMHS service or an appropriate child care professional [such as a therapist] about your child and your fears/thoughts on how this information is going to affect them.

The issue of not knowing who the birth father is and only that he is alleged to have raped the mother is emotionally very laden for anyone and all involved. Please see section on unknown fathers.

Discussion of rape for a child under ten would need to come in the context of the child's understanding of how babies are made and what sex is. This will differ widely between families and between children depending on their interest in the topic, if they are the oldest in the family, their level of understanding and how the school approaches it. It is worth teaching them the anatomically correct words for sexual organs even if they use others as this can make the experience of talking about it less shameful.

Under the Sexual Assaults Act 2003 the legal definition of rape is that a man has entered his penis into a vagina, anus or mouth of another person with intention and without consent and involves the threat of violence. In law a child

who is under 16 can't give consent even if consent has been a fact. Children are judged in law as not being capable of giving consent. People who do not understand what is happening and therefore can't give consent are also included whether this is through drugs or alcohol or for someone suffering from a mental disability.

Usually when a man and a woman have sex with each other they do it because they enjoy it and love each other. Sometimes babies get born because a man and a woman have had sex.

When a man forces a woman to have sex through being mean to her and making her scared it is called rape. The woman has not wanted him to put his penis in her vagina. If a woman or man force their bodies on each other when either of them don't want this then this is called sexual assault. It is something that usually gets done by men against women and it is very wrong, and it is against the law which means men can go to prison for it. It makes the woman feel angry and sad and it can hurt her very much.

Men who rape women do so for lots of different reasons to do with being angry with women and wanting to feel more powerful in their lives.

Babies grow and get born from rape just the same as any other baby for they have done nothing wrong.

Link to article with useful statistics

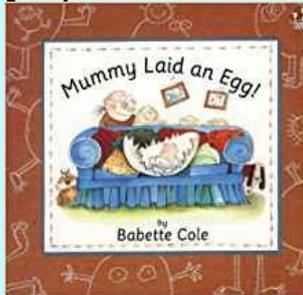
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=177648>

Sometimes these conversations need a basic awareness of the facts of life. For young children I recommend

Book

Mummy laid an egg *Babette Cole*

[explains the facts of life in a light-hearted cartoon style]



Sexual Abuse- context sex and sexual awareness

Sexual abuse is when a child or young person is pressurized, forced or tricked into taking part in any kind of sexual activity with an adult or young person. This can involve rape [penetration of a vagina, anus or mouth by a penis] or any other act without the consent of the other party is termed 'sexual assault' so this could include anal penetration by object, unwanted kissing, fondling, viewing of sex through pornography or in reality.

If sexual abuse occurs within the close family [grandparent/parent to child or sibling to sibling] it is called incest which is also a crime. Incest is sexual contact between people commonly regarded as too closely related to marry. For a child under 10 this additional term might well be unnecessary to explain or make points about in addition to those below.

Sometimes adults touch children in ways that are wrong.

It is fine for parents and other grown-ups that look after children to give children a hug, help them get their clothes on and, when they are very little, to wash their bodies for them.

It is not all right to touch children's private parts when you are not washing them or changing nappies or putting cream on them if they are sore. Adults who get good feelings from touching children and getting children to touch them are not being fair on the children. They are breaking the law and they can be called paedophiles. Don't get confused with the word 'paediatrician' who is a doctor qualified to help ill children get better. If a judge and the police are sure that the adult has done this, they may be sent to prison.

The children who have been touched or have touched the adult have done nothing wrong even if they have agreed to it or feel they enjoyed it. Sometimes it can be very scary for children who are touched by adults and they can feel dirty or disgusted about what has happened. Sometimes adults who do this are good at making it feel enjoyable for the children. Sometimes they give children sweets, ice creams and treats for doing what they ask.

However the child feels about it, it is not their fault and the adult has behaved in an unkind way. Adults are there to look after children and not to play with their bodies.

Adults who do this are using the fact they are bigger and more powerful than children to boss them and control them.

These adults often don't understand how to love people and sometimes they think what they are doing is all right. They want it to be kept a secret because they always know that other adults would not think it was all right.

Children do not deserve to be touched by adults in this way and it is very important that they get help to talk about it and to make it stop happening.

What the adults have done is wrong and needs to stop. If it was your mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, brother, or sister who did this to you then it is called incest.

X loves you very much in other ways but it is a very wrong thing they do. Sometimes they get help from

talking to a therapist or a doctor about it but for some, putting them in prison is the only way to stop it happening to other children.

It is important to remember that if anyone touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable and they are bigger than you that you tell someone you trust about it.

Please use the website www.lifestoryworks.org if the explanations and conversations are about why a child might have been taken into care.

Further ideas and reflections on parenting

It is important to say all parents will get things wrong quite a bit of the time but if such a thing as a perfect parent existed, it might not be such a good thing, as mistakes offer the chance of reparation, reflection and repair. We may all be neglectful at times or put our emotions first or say unkind words. When it comes to the subject of having to manage what we see as challenging behaviour or attitudes from our children, we are all affected by the influences within our culture, our past, our temperament and that of the child's. It is almost impossible to work out exactly what comes from where but being open to considering these subjects can be a vital start if changes need to happen or mistakes need to be recognised. As parents we need to be open to steering the family dynamics in new directions particularly if our children are giving us non-verbal messages in their behaviour.

If you have worries about your child's behaviour you might find some of these child care professionals interesting to google and watch on You Tube. I hope you will find them enlivening and thought provoking.

You Tube Research Ideas

Dan Hughes [emphasises the importance of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy [PACE] in conversations and interactions.

Dan Siegal [on empathy and mirror neurons]

Stephen Porges [particularly his talk on compassion]

Bruce Perry [helping children heal; trauma, brain and relationship]

Here are two parenting talks I found refreshing on You Tube:

Ted Talk by Julie Lythcott-Haims which talks about the idea of parenting as being about creating positive memories and not expectations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyElHdaqkjo>

This excellent documentary looking at the huge range of styles of parenting was shown in October 2016. It is available on You Tube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pY0gpAgYv_M

Literature

I believe that one of the best ways that children can learn about the subjects in important conversations in a safe non-threatening way is through literature and highly recommend the websites below for making your own informed choices on what books sound right for your family and situation: www.booktrust.org.uk

This gives you children's best books from the past 100 years and gives you a summary of the plot to help either your child or you judge whether it might interest them. There is also a facility to put in the child's age and the theme you are interested in exploring and up will come the book that covers this.

This website highlights books that are multicultural in nature : <https://amp.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/oct/13/50-best-culturally-diverse-childrens-books>

Poetry is often something children relate to as well if they are not big readers or just enjoy writing it so do check this site out below as well as Children's hub on poetry.

<https://achildrenspoemaday.wordpress.com/>

This is a website where a children's poet has written a poem a day specifically for children. It could be used to get your child in the mood for enjoying and writing poetry. She challenges children to write a poem a day for fifty days.

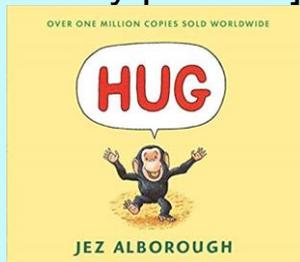
If there has been abuse in a child's life, then this link might be useful and although to a Canadian website, the resources should still be accessible.

https://www.parentbooks.ca/Child_Abuse_Resources_for_Kids.html

Book's that might encourage younger children through challenging Times- follow links for age range guidance

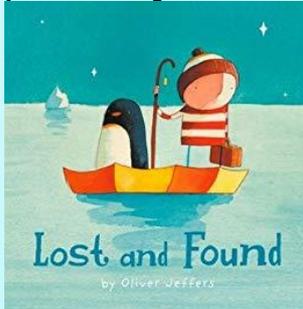
Hug *Jez Alborough*

[a chimp called Bobo in search of the right hug - few words mainly pictorial]



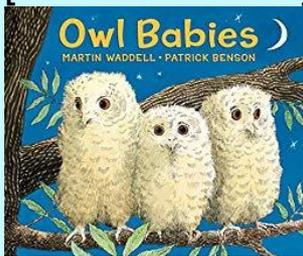
Lost and Found *Oliver Jeffers*

[a tale of loneliness and friendship - few words mainly pictorial]



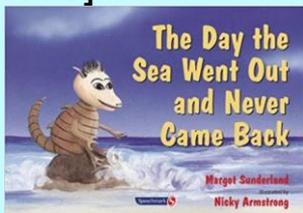
The Owl Babies *Martin Waddell*

[about a mummy who returns - few words mainly pictorial]

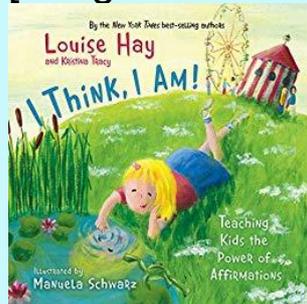


The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back
Margot Sunderland

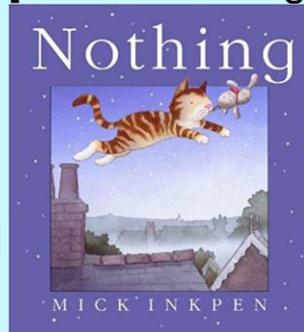
[a tale of loss for children who have lost someone they love]



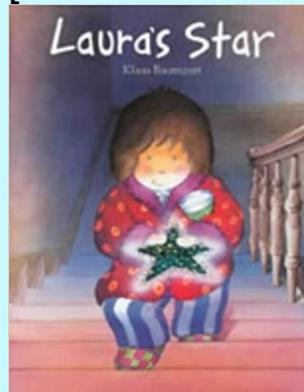
I think I am *Louise Hay*
 [brings the idea of positive thinking to young children]



Nothing *Michael Inkpen*
 [looks at feeling alone and forgotten]

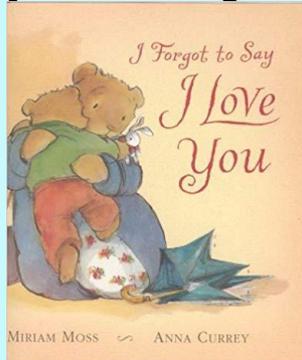


Laura's Star *Klaus Baumgart*
 [about loneliness and togetherness]



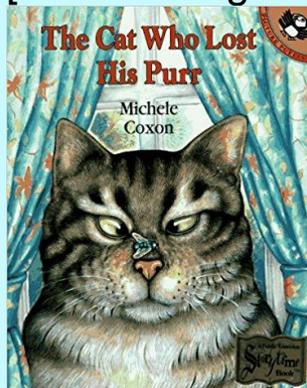
I forgot to say I love You
[about being reassured]

Miriam Moss and Anna Currey

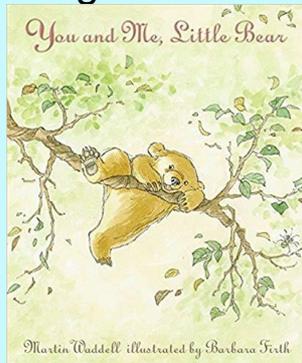


The Cat who lost his Purr
[about losing and finding purrs]

Michele Coxon

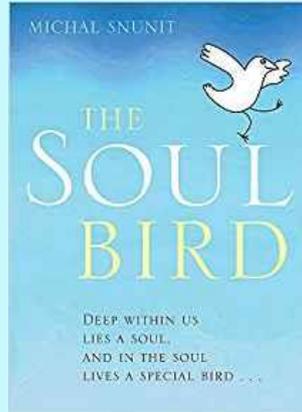


You and Me Little Bear *Martin Waddell*
[about playing alone and letting grownups do their own things but Daddy bear plays too when the time is right]



The Soul Bird *Michal Snunit*

[shows how encouragement and resourcefulness can be found inside the self]



Please see this site for a vast array of therapeutic books designed to reach children who might have emotional conflicts and difficulties

<http://hintonpublishers.com/>

Exploring Therapy and Counselling

Here are some sites in relation to finding therapists and counsellors that might be right for your child if you think this is something worth exploring.

The British Association of Play Therapists

The site below will help you find a play therapist in your area and clearly explains what play therapy is: <http://www.bapt.info/>

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy

This website also explains what the terms counselling and psychotherapy mean and allows you to input what sort of therapy you are interested in e.g. art therapy, music therapy, play therapy, drama therapy for children and your post code then gives you a list of local people in your area. This is the professional body that qualified therapists should register with as it attempts to promote high ethical standards and principles ensuring that there is a register of qualified police checked ethical therapists. It also provides the reassurance that there is a professional body to appeal to if high standards are not met and seeks to promote positive mental health through an underlying belief in the value and effectiveness of therapy when appropriate. Website: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/>

The Counselling Directory

This site also offers you the chance to explore what all the terms for therapy and counselling mean for children and allows you to input your postcode to see what is available near you.

<https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/>

Institute of Arts and Psychotherapy

Do read about an organisation that can connect you to therapists and counsellors who are trained in using the arts in their relationship with your child whether this be puppetry, drama, art, or clay. Read on and see if this sounds right for your situation. Website: <https://artspsychotherapy.org/>

CAMHS

This is the NHS organisation that stands for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services. It is free and involves meeting the criteria to receive a service. Referral can be via the school, the GP or a social worker. Some CAMHS accept self-referrals from parents or young people.

<https://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/mental-health-services-explained/Pages/about-childrens-mental-health-services.aspx>

The London child and Family Therapy Centre

<http://londonchildandfamilytherapy.co.uk/>

Guidance for parents doing Life story sessions

[Children between 5 and 12 in mind]

Ask yourself: *What am I hoping to achieve?*

[General ideas of what might be hoped for below]

I would like to create a life story book with my child. You may call this a biography or autobiography if this suits your child best or 'A book about me!'

I would like this book to be something of value to my child over time and possibly in the future for them as an adult or for their children.

I would like good quality time exclusively with my child with the additional benefit of getting to explore his/her likes and dislikes and feelings in more depth. I would like this book to help me get to know and understand my child even better.

I would like them to understand their family background further.

There is a difficult/ important story that I want to share with them in a sensitive and timely way.

It might be helpful to see the difficult story as an important conversation as this implies that a child plays a part in it and reminds you to tune into their reactions and needs. The discussion on feelings and which parts of the body they resonate in, is a good prelude to this session since as it may expand self-awareness making it more likely they will connect more closely to you through describing the mixed feelings the subject might evoke.

Think about possible games to begin and end and what the middle of the session will consist of. The middle is the heart

of the session but how the session goes may be enormously dependent on the physical and emotional state of your child.

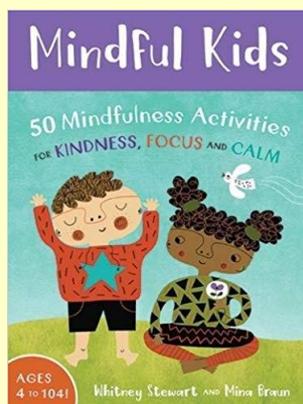
Make sure your child is not hungry. You could have a small snack beside you or drink whilst you work. Remember that thick milky drinks through a straw can be very calming because of the breath control and suction action for those who might have a lot of nervous energy to burn.

What games or movements has a relaxing effect on them?

What mood is it best to catch them in?

Have they got excess energy to discharge first before they will even be capable of concentrating?

Check out some physical movements/games that will increase their connection with you but also focus them. There are suggested ones here but see this book for further ideas.



Length of session This will be dependent on age, maturity, concentration span and what sort of day the child might have had. Be flexible but far better to start with short amounts of time – 20 minutes to half an hour - and never longer than an hour.

Post session After the session it is a useful exercise to jot some notes on any observations you make about your child. This will include their interest levels, what they engaged with well and what did not work for them and anything of significance that you felt they said. Include any ideas you get for further sessions or what you could return to again.

Each session will have a different aim. Decide how many sessions you think you need to create what both you and the child feel comfortable with and plan them in advance. Remember this is a collaborative endeavour and if it works you will be proud of what you have achieved.

This is no one way of structuring the sessions. The book itself can be structured any way your child wants or how you feel is best. Some will want it in the order of real-life events starting with the birth and covering holidays in order, houses lived in, friendships, schools, parties, events leading right up the present with some projections of wishes and hopes for the future. The shield might be best placed at the beginning to symbolise or they might feel it best describes them at the end of the book.

The first page might be a picture of them as a baby with thoughts about the design of the cover once all the sessions are completed.

All the vital birth statistics and the story of their birth are fun to record but it is also good to get other close family or friends to write some memories of your child as a baby or say something of the event of their birth.

This is a useful site about the child's day of birth which can help you provide information about their birth day:
<http://www.dayofbirth.co.uk/>

Life story work can also include activities which take place outside the child's home, for example, visiting the area the child used to live in, or looking through Google Street View if it is not possible to visit it.

Your child might be able to help you find information on line, Google maps street view, going online to listen to the songs that were popular when they were born, and perhaps making videos rather than books.

To find out more about the meaning of their name go to:

www.names.org

This site gives lots of details on names and their meaning, ethnic roots, popularity and gender of names.

For others they might find moving through history in timed order a little too predictable and more like a photo album. For those who have had a difficult beginning where perhaps they are not with the family of origin, it might be best to structure their book with present topics, past history [covering the difficult theme or beginning] and finishing again in the present with projections of the future (the 'protective sandwich approach').

You may want to draw a family tree and head it up like this:

Myself and my family!

You can draw a picture of a tree with your child or have them draw it. On the branches put all the family members you want. See the example life story book and you could add information about family members alive and those who have died. You could use the roots to cover those that are not alive, and this is a way of showing they are part of something much larger. Just a couple of sentences is fine

and let them write something appealing to them whilst trying to avoid offence. Keep it child friendly!

Put a circle in the middle of a piece of paper and ask them to put all those important to them on the paper with them. This can be pictorial or in writing. You can ask them to draw different coloured lines between people to show feelings if they enjoy doing the diagram. They can describe these to you if they want to.

Draw the outline of a castle for them and say it is theirs and they can put whoever or whatever they want in it. Give them colours and see what happens.

Whilst your child does any of these be present with them even if you are doing other things such as reading or looking at your phone , you are still conveying interest and attention which will make them more likely to engage with the activity.

On a final note, it might feel most adventurous and right for your child to create their own pages and choose the order. The following titles might be inspiring to your child to pick from to write about or draw about or make any sort of creation about:

What I remember about my favourite holidays

What I can tell you about my best friends and what we do together

What adventures I have had

The funniest thing that ever happened to me

When I feel happy

What I think of school

What I can tell you about my family

What I like to do with my mum/dad/brother/sister

What I believe in / What I don't believe in

What I am good at - A Can Do page!

What I hate doing!

The story of my week in the year of 2019 and the month of... and the season of ...

What period of history/the future I would like to live in

A drawing of my most exciting day/night/time

The scariest thing that has happened to me

My dream house/home/day/holiday/

My best music -a link to a play list and say how the music makes your child feel and what it says about them.

My favourite things

There could be a favourites page - a drawing or a collage including favourite meals and then foods that belong to the meal e.g. breakfast foods. Other favourites might be colours, pictures, spaces, seasons, objects, countries, stories, houses, places, and things to do.

They may want to stick in favourite poems, stories, books, or links if this is an electronic book to videos of self or music and dance clips. Be careful not to turn this into a photo album and select photos with them that reflect the years

and seasons they have lived through and ones in which they are doing something they enjoy. Feelings for your child will come up throughout this creation and you might find these cards useful if they need help to explore feelings in all their variety and richness.

The Feelings Cards:



These are brilliant illustrations of bears with no words showing but which convey the layers of meaning behind anger, sadness, jealousy, fear, happiness and others.

You might want to start a conversation between the two of you beginning:

If I was a Season I would be... Autumn

Then the other starting with the same sentence and giving their angle with both of you changing topics to anything else

If I was a chocolate bar, I would be... A Cadbury's Fruit and Nut bar

They might want to finish with a collage of what they want their future to look like!

See example children's Life Story Book on www.lifestoryhub.com

An example Life Story Plan.
[Six sessions with Ashley, 7 years old].

What you convey or want to create with your child is unique and much of what you produce will be dependent on their age, development, what they enjoy and concentration levels. See these examples and ideas as just one way to go. Options for games and activities are listed and explained at the end of this section. There are also titles for topics you may want to cover with your child either letting them write or talk freely as you jot notes or record them. All this will be of interest not just now but into the future for their adult selves!

SESSIONS

SESSION 1	WHAT WOULD I LIKE MY CHILD TO DO?	WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED TO HELP HIM DO THIS?	WHY AM I DOING THIS?
	<p>A description of my child by my child-</p> <p>A self-portrait – I will draw around Ashley and colour it in with him if he lets me.</p> <p>A picture showing all the people in Ashley's life important to him.</p> <p>To find out whether Ashley wants his life book to be in electronic form or in a folder. To choose folder colour if folder and buy one soon.</p>	<p>Some lining wallpaper</p> <p>Pens, paints, colours. Coloured A4 thick card sheets from supermarket [cheap!] for the hard copy book.</p> <p>Buy good quality new paints/colours if we are all out of them</p> <p>Go through possible pictures on PC and also in my collection - use no more than 10 as this is not a photo album</p>	<p>This book is about him so we want an easy way to make some descriptions of himself.</p> <p>I want him to be proud of himself and see himself in visual form throughout this book!</p>
	<p>Have a game of Jenga before and after but keep to ten minutes</p>	<p>Jenga</p>	<p>He loves playing Jenga so it is just me and him time to have fun!</p>

SESSION 2	WHAT WOULD I LIKE MY CHILD TO DO?	WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED TO HELP HIM DO THIS?	WHY AM I DOING THIS?
	<p>To make a family tree</p> <p>To find out how Ashley feels about the family</p> <p>Add to the self-portrait. We will discuss what effect feelings have on parts of the body e.g happy sad and angry. If feelings were colours what would they be...</p>	<p>Photos</p> <p>A pre-drawn diagram done by me using a tree image. Encourage Ashley to draw a tree - pastels again. Write something interesting to him about each family member going back a couple of generations</p> <p>Borrow some miniature domestic and wild animals from Ashley's collection and ask him about which ones the family members represent in his opinion. I will use a plain tray to put them in and let him go however he wants with this...</p> <p>Choose colours with him to represent arrows to words about feelings.</p>	<p>For Ashley to learn more about his family.</p> <p>To get him to understand the connections between people - those seen and not seen.</p> <p>I know this will be funny and I will learn something fresh about Ashley's vision. If he wants I will take a photo with my mobile and we can put this in the book.</p>
	<p>Have a game of Dobble before and after but keep to ten minutes!</p>	<p>Dobble</p>	<p>This will prepare Ashley for talking about feelings in adults as well as children - useful to explore our house move in next session.</p> <p>He loves Dobble and so do I though he always beats me.</p>

SESSION 3	WHAT WOULD I LIKE MY CHILD TO DO?	WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED TO HELP HIM DO THIS?	WHY AM I DOING THIS?
	<p>To talk about plan to move house again and our previous moves</p> <p>Get him to draw our houses and what he wants in a new house</p>	<p>Pictures of our previous houses</p> <p>A car from his old toy box to move on wall paper from house to house</p>	<p>I want to find out how he feels about moving and what he thinks the reasons are.</p>
	<p>Snakes and Ladders but keep to ten minutes before and after</p>	<p>Snakes and Ladders</p>	<p>We both like this and it shows him consequences and it symbolises lifes ups and downs, that you can win when you might not expect to if you don't give up!</p>

SESSION 4	WHAT WOULD I LIKE MY CHILD TO DO?	WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED TO HELP HIM DO THIS?	WHY AM I DOING THIS?
	To create a favourite things list and a collage of them.	Magazines that he will enjoy looking at and cutting out pictures from	To remind us both of who he is in terms of his feelings /likes/dislikes and that this really matters to me
	To talk about the beginning of my son's life – birth, weight, hospital, reason for his name and what he was like as a baby/toddler. Refresh myself about the birth story for the book-get some quotes and funny stories from friends and relations about the first two years. Talk about what star sign he is, what his lucky stone is, lucky number, Chinese year animal and make a colourful page.	Look through old pictures with him and select his favourites for the book. Limit it to 10. Internet and printer for more information and selection of imagery for book.	To talk about how lovable he is and was.
	Ask him about memories and jot them down as he speaks to type out and put in book.	Make a list of our holidays and look through photo album with my son to select highlights for books.	To consolidate and solidify happy memories by putting them in a book.

SESSION 5	WHAT WOULD I LIKE MY CHILD TO DO?	WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED TO HELP HIM DO THIS?	WHY AM I DOING THIS?
	Create a Shield session	Hard board from a box. Paints. Anything solid that is stickable onto it he chooses when we discuss it. I anticipate a football, a pair of wings, an oven and his initials!	To create a physical emblem - a protection as well as an identity - which shows in artistic and symbolic form all he holds dear. For the electronic or real life book take a photo of the shield and put it inside.
	Play Feel for the Object - eyes open and closed. Take it in turns and play together before and after session. I might time us if he enjoys this...	Empty Ice-cream box with lentils/white beans/soft sand in it and 10 assorted small objects eg conker, key ring, button etc.	Sifting through the material is calming and just relying on touch concentrates the senses and focuses the mind.

SESSION 6	WHAT WOULD I LIKE MY CHILD TO DO?	WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED TO HELP HIM DO THIS?	WHY AM I DOING THIS?
	To review everything we have done and decorate the front page to introduce himself with a photo or drawing.	Photos to stick in of favourite friends, ideas, holidays, family that we pre-selected together.	To reinforce his identity as part of a supportive community of people - family and friends.
	To project into the future and create a collage of wishes and dreams for his future.	Magazines. Working paints/pencils/acrylics/	I want to nurture his dreams and wishes if he shares them. This could go at the end of the book.
	To read aloud to me the poems/prose/drawings he has done in relation to any topics from Toolbox below . If he has anything from school or outside the session he wants to put in then that is fine.		
	Do the Finish the Sentence exercise A game or outing of Ashley's choice and I will play for as long as he wants as it is our last session!	Print out the sentence starters below	This gives me a snapshot of what is important to him right now and there might be something I am unaware of that comes up It will be interesting for him to know himself in the future and see how he changes

**Warm up /Cool Down Games to select from your
TOOL BOX for life story work!**

Your Toolbox is here.



The purpose of these games is to orientate and focus the child in the present and in their senses, to relax them so they can then engage better with other parts of themselves.

Dobble:



A simple and great game similar to snap about speed of recognition and observational power. Children are often quicker than adults at this game.

Jenga:



Snakes and Ladders:



Spillikins:



Box of hidden objects game - empty carton [big enough for little hands to rummage in]. Fill it with white kidney beans, lentils, and sand. Up to 7 small objects hidden under the surface. The game is about having fun with touch, feel and recognition. You can introduce a timer if they enjoy this to beat their own record of identifying objects, or ask them to close their eyes and see if they can still recognise what they have seen previously.

Cotton wool blow football for two - gentle and easy and finishes any time you want. You need cotton wool balls, four pebbles for goal posts, two straws and a table. First person to blow cotton wool through goal posts gets goal.

The Starter Sentence Game;

You start the sentence and let them finish it! Jot down how they finish the sentence and make it look nice another time.

These starter sentences that children may want to finish for you could be done in a playful interview style as if you are a respectful journalist who will take them at their word and they are the VIP. I was inspired by Mary Corrigan's starter sentence material and this is my version with the same underlying ideas.

You know your child best and will work out together how you want to do it. The child may say 'No Comment' if s/he does not want to finish the sentence. Accept whatever your child says and don't get involved in a discussion of their words whilst doing this exercise. The experience will then begin to bore or feel judgemental and become lifeless or argumentative. It is only a snap shot of their feelings, thoughts, likes and dislikes in a moment in time.

Its value is that it can be an insightful window into a new angle on how your child is thinking and feeling. The experience should not be one where the child feels criticised or analysed but just feels free to free associate.

20 Sentences I can finish...

When I wake up I

I like to eat

When I'm with my friends

I don't like to

Music makes me

I jump up when

What is most important to me is

If I have a bad dream I

If I lost

I sing when

If I was magic I would

I get excited when

I feel sad when

Sitting on a train makes me

If I was very tiny I would

If I was very tall I would

I had a wonderful dream

Lying down makes me

I feel grownup when

I'm warm and comfortable when

My heart beats fast when

Your child can say 'Pass' if they don't want to finish a sentence but saying the first thing that comes into their head can be revealing and say something about them at this moment in time. You are the sentence starter and they are the sentence finisher. They can write it if they don't want to speak it.

Please see template for you to print out for your creations below.

Go ahead and have fun!





TEMPLATE FOR LIFE STORY WORK SESSIONS



What do I aim to cover?	What materials do I need?	What did I cover?	How did the session go?
Session 1			
Session 2			

What do I aim to cover?	What materials do I need?	What did I cover?	How did the session go?
Session 3			
Session 4			

What do I aim to cover?	What materials do I need?	What did I cover?	How did the session go?
Session 5			
Session 6			

What do I aim to cover?	What materials do I need?	What did I cover?	How did the session go?
Session 7			
Session 8			

