



# Building Relationships through Storytelling

A foster carer's guide to  
attachment and stories

Steve Killick  
Maria Boffey

rhwydwaith maethu  
llais gofal maeth  
the fostering network  
the voice of foster care



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Written by Steve Killick and Maria Boffey  
email: maria.boffey@fostering.net

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# About the authors

## Steve Killick

Steve Killick is a Storyteller and Clinical Psychologist who works as a trainer and consultant with looked after children and foster carers. He is an associate consultant with StoryWorks at the University of Glamorgan and worked on several projects using storytelling with foster carers and children. He has written several papers on storytelling in education and therapy, including *Family storytelling and the attachment relationship* with Professor Neil Frude. His books include *Emotional literacy at the heart of the school ethos* and *Giving sorrow words: managing bereavement in schools*. He also wrote, with Taffy Thomas, (the first UK Storytelling Laureate), *Telling tales: Storytelling as emotional literacy* and they are currently working on a new project, *Home truths*, to promote the importance of family storytelling.

## Maria Boffey

Maria Boffey joined the Fostering Network Wales in 2002 and currently works as the project manager for the Big Lottery funded Fostering Communities project.

Maria has specific interests in social networking, men and foster care, storytelling and attachment, and working with the sons and daughters of foster carers. She is the editor of the Fostering Network Wales young people's magazine *Thrive*, as well as co-author of *Men who care: Experiences and reflections of male foster carers*. She is also the author of several guides, including *Don't you forget about me: A guide to developing a peer support group for the sons and daughters of foster carers* and *Men are good foster carers too: supporting male foster carers and inspiring confidence*. She also co-authored the chapter *Safer Caring in a digital world* in *Safer Caring: A new approach*.

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## About this guide

It might seem that storytelling is just a fun activity for very young children, something that they do before they learn to read for themselves. However, it can be one of the most powerful tools you can imagine. Stories and storytelling can make a significant impact on the development of a child. Stories can strengthen not only their language and imagination, but their ability to tell their own story and make themselves heard. Stories can give experience of the world, how it works, of strange places, the distant past and possible futures. They can particularly help a child to understand themselves and others; to gain insight into thoughts and feelings; to be empathic and build relationships with others. Stories can develop social and emotional literacy and social development.

It can be particularly useful for foster children and help strengthen their relationship with their foster carers. Storytelling in foster family settings can make those benefits even stronger. The process of telling and listening to stories can build attachments and relationships. The storyteller's own reactions, both in how they tell and talk about the story, can create an environment that brings well-being and playfulness to the relationship. Attachment theory helps our understanding of how foster carers can help children with emotional problems and storytelling can build these important attachment relationships.

This guide will help foster carers understand the link between storytelling and attachment. The guide begins in Part One with an overview of how stories and storytelling are helpful, especially to emotional, social and cognitive development. Part Two outlines attachment theory and how relationships can affect social confidence and emotional development. Part Three explores how storytelling builds attachment and describes a model for using stories to build relationships and skills. Part Four focuses on practical skills and, finally, the Appendices contain stories that can be easily learnt for storytelling, and also contains story-telling game card templates.

## Introduction

This might seem an odd book, telling foster carers that an important part of their role is to tell stories to the children they foster. Storytelling isn't that important is it? Aren't stories just a bit of fun? Something you might only do with young children before they can read for themselves?

It is hoped that after reading this guide you might think that telling stories, and also hearing children tell stories back to you, is one of the most rewarding things you can do for looked after children. We tell and listen to stories to those we are closest to all the time – in such as things describing our daily lives, jokes and anecdotes, memories and so on. More formal storytelling, such as telling remembered stories, perhaps fairy stories or events from our own lives, is something that many foster carers do naturally and spontaneously. But it can be so much more than just a bit of fun. Almost invisibly, storytelling builds relationships and develops minds.

This guide connects the value of storytelling with an understanding of the attachment relationship. Attachment theory has become highly important in understanding how children who are looked after might develop problems in learning and their social and emotional development due to their early experiences in life. It is about the enduring bond formed between an adult and child in the first years of life and the influence this has in later life. It also helps to understand what can help them to overcome these difficulties. By creating relationships where children feel safe and where they can learn how to manage feelings and relationships, often their difficulties can be overcome.

At first glance, storytelling may seem to have little connection with attachment theory, yet storytelling is often a feature of strong loving relationships. We all know children love to hear stories from their parents and foster carers. Storytelling is a powerful tool in building relationships and helping children develop emotional literacy. Telling, reading and sharing stories together all help build strong relationships.

Fun, play, creativity and imagination are essential for children. They are critical ingredients of a happy childhood and healthy development and need to be considered alongside factors such as providing a healthy diet or clean and warm surroundings. The importance of play and creative activities can lay the foundations for becoming more resilient and mature. These areas are too important to be neglected. Stories are a vital part of creative play and are a powerful tool for developing the minds of children. This guide will outline some of the reasons why.

The action of storytelling itself, actually telling and talking about stories with children, as opposed to letting children only hear stories through media such as reading or films and TV can really help the emotional, social and cognitive development of children. If this book makes you feel more aware of the value of telling and listening to stories and if it entuses you to tell more, especially those stories you remember from your childhood,



then it will have succeeded. If it gives you an understanding of how stories and storytelling can help children in their understanding of themselves and ability to relate to others, even better. Hopefully, it will give you ideas and skills for working with and playing with the children in your care. But don't tell stories for any particular outcome in mind, not to make children behave better or for them to learn something. Tell them because they are an enjoyable thing to do together, an activity to share and talk about. Storytelling in the family is about playfulness and togetherness.

**Steve Killick**



Chapter One:

# The importance of storytelling and stories

# 1 The importance of storytelling and stories

Telling stories is one of the oldest and most powerful forms of communication known. For children of all ages, it is a form of play which builds skills of imagination and language. In so doing, stories are a means of gaining new perspectives, exploring moral choices and gaining insight into character. It provides an imaginary environment to explore the nature of good and bad or the connections between actions and consequences. And, as it's play- it's fun. Most parents would instinctively know the value of nursery rhymes, simple action songs and games with very young children and how they build valuable skills. For toddlers, simple and clearly structured stories, often with plenty of repetition, become part of their repertoire of play. This would include familiar stories like *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* or *The Three Little Pigs*. These stories can be told with or without a book.

Storytelling remains an important way of continuing to build these social skills as children grow older. After all, we are engaged and captivated by stories throughout life and engage with them through films, fiction and drama as well as true-life stories. Many looked after children may not have had these valuable early experiences and stimulation of play and storytelling. For these children, the storytelling experience can help compensate for lost experiences and in so doing, build relationships. They will also be learning important language and social skills in a way that both the foster carer and child can enjoy.

Finding ways to read to children and share good literature and fiction is really useful and boosts educational attainment. But stories are also helpful on another level as well, stories are able to deal with all sorts of issues that affect children – difficulties in families, even trauma, loss and abuse.

*Harry Potter* is a great example, the story of a child who has lost his parents, now lives with in an abusive and neglectful family (the Dursleys), but he can travel to the magical world of Hogwarts where he is brave and loved. That world has its issues of good and evil too but Harry, who has to deal with his internal conflicts, becomes key in this battle. In a way, Harry's story is a metaphor for the imaginative world that fiction presents, a place where one can go to explore the difficulties that reality brings and to return stronger and more confident.

The process of telling stories is powerful in the way it echoes and stimulates healthy attachments. The eye content, emotional attunement and other aspects of non-verbal communication have many connections with building strong attachments, and in these safe secure relationships, ways of dealing with difficult feelings can be found. Storytelling is a special process of speaking and listening which is easy to do, engages children and is a natural way of learning about feelings and relationships. Storytelling is not a one-way process but one of reciprocity and interaction between teller and listeners; turn-taking, shared attention and other key aspects of attachment happen spontaneously as soon as someone starts to tell a story.

## Feeling safe and secure Teaching children about the world through stories in a safe, caring environment

Lynne, a foster carer, remembered the deliciously fearful images of the wolf in *The Three Little Pigs* that she had heard as a child and the satisfaction when the wolf was eventually boiled alive. The fear had the quality of excitement and was made safe by knowing the wolf was destroyed.

She also recalled the story of *Cinderella*, which she would tell to her own children. She found a way to tell it that she made her own . . .

*'Once upon a time there was a girl whose mother had died. When her father remarried, his new wife moved into their house with her two daughters. The girl's new step-sisters took an immediate dislike to her. While they were out gallivanting around, shopping and partying, they forced the poor girl to do all the cooking and cleaning. She lived in the cellar and wore only rags. Then one day a letter arrived from the prince who had planned a ball so he could find a bride . . .'*

So far, so familiar? Stories play such an important part in childhood that, well told, they can stay with us forever. But it's not just the plot and the characters that can remain embedded in our memories. It's also the feeling of safety and security that comes from spending time with a close and caring adult and talking about the experience you share when a story is told.

Folk tales, including fairy tales, which have been honed through generations, often contain themes of trauma and abuse, are often about living in families. Take *Cinderella* - there is bereavement, bullying, neglect, verbal abuse, sibling rivalry. Storytelling allows adults to teach children about the world and how to deal with it in a safe and caring environment.

## Storytelling in human history

Oral storytelling, since time immemorial, has been an important social experience. For most of human history, literacy was non-existent and for most of the last few thousand years it was a skill that belonged to a minority. We do not know when humans started telling stories as it was clearly in ancient history, preceding both writing and other forms of iconography. Storytelling is most likely one of the first practised art forms. Over our early history it was likely that storytelling was the major form of education as well as entertainment, a way of passing on traditions and information about the world. As humanity became more settled, it would have become a recreational activity. People would tell each other stories at home and while they worked. The phrase 'spinning a yarn' comes from the yarn spinners who would entertain themselves with stories whilst they spun. All cultures have their own storytelling traditions. Our folklore is full of stories that intrigue, excite and delight our imaginations – ghost stories, stories about the fairy folk, and magical, wonder tales of heroic adventure and supernatural delights. There are myths that tell us of a history that maybe never was but 'should have been', and our myths and stories shape cultural identities. The world's religions use stories to demonstrate human and spiritual values and virtues. The Bible, the Quran, and the Mahabharata are full of stories about the human condition and what helps us live together.

Many may remember from their own childhood stories such as *The Good Samaritan* with implicit teaching of kindness and tolerance. *The Sun and the Wind*, a story from *Aesop's Fables*, which shows how gentleness and warmth can achieve more than force or the story of *King Solomon and the baby*, which is about love, wisdom and how some things can't be cut in half. These stories cross histories and cultures.

Stories, of course, are not always compassionate. They can reinforce negative ideas or only present certain points of view. As they can bring us together, they can also hold us apart. We recognise that they may contain untruths when we might say to a child: 'Are you telling me stories again?' However, stories can teach us differently and be more than just a diet of facts and figures. We need stories to understand ourselves. And stories help us learn about what it is to be human by giving us insight into our internal world of hopes and dreams.

## The main benefits of storytelling

### Developing literacy and listening skills

Most foster carers are aware of the importance of reading to their children and how reading aloud develops children's literacy skills, positive attitude towards reading, and the love of books. However, many are not aware of the place and power of oral storytelling in the development of literacy skills.

### Storytelling develops literacy

Literacy development is not only reading. It includes the use of language and vocabulary as well as the skills of writing. Listening to and telling stories help children see the way in which a story develops, as well as its structure and sequence. They also learn the purpose and power of adjectives as they describe the settings and actions of the story. This bank of knowledge links the reading and writing processes, and frequent opportunities to tell stories help children build the linguistic skills required for both reading and writing. Often writing is introduced too early, inhibiting expressive language and children fear making spelling mistakes.

### Storytelling enhances listening skills

Much of the instruction in schools is presented verbally, and the development of strong listening skills is essential. Many children who have difficulty learning to read have weak listening skills. Storytelling allows children to practice these skills as they engage with both the teller and the story. Without the page to focus on and no pictures support them, the listener is required to interact with the teller, visualise the characters, the settings, the action and create mental images as they follow, feel and think about the message told. They become more in tune with the both spoken word and the story.

## Learning without teaching

Much communication with children often involves telling them what they can or can't do. It is part of a foster carer's role to provide direct instruction and, at times, clear boundaries. We often want to explain why it's important to do things by reasoning and explanation. That's important but it's not always effective. Much can be learnt about the world through stories. In many ways, stories can add to a child's 'stock of knowledge' about the world. A young child hearing *The Three Little Pigs* is gaining much experience about the world, learning about the stability of houses and the dangers of predators, amongst other themes, without specifically getting them to attend to these issues. They absorb information through the narrative. Older children can learn about the past, or other cultures, through the stories they read or watch. Stories work on multiple levels of meaning and we can take as much or as little as we want from them. Most importantly, we can learn about how people work through stories, and it can be a much more effective way of learning than explanation or direct instruction. We can learn about what people are thinking and feeling, whether they are being honest or not and what their motivation is. Much of the learning comes through symbol and metaphor, the natural way we learn about things. For instance, in *Hansel and Gretel*, the potent symbol of the witch's

gingerbread house demonstrates that things are not always what they seem and we can be enticed into danger. Stories give great insight into other people minds and what lies behind their actions. Stories are about thinking and feeling.

Stories are a powerful way of helping children learn because they are an indirect form of communication. Stories are not trying to make anybody do anything or perform or behave in a certain way. There is a part of most of us that resists direct instruction, and this can be particularly so in some children through temperament, because they have learned that adults don't always look after them or because they are learning to assert themselves as confident individuals. Stories, for both adults and children do not require people to act or think in a certain way. Rather they offer possibilities and information, which might influence choices and actions.

Stories can also work better than questions in communicating with others. When one person tells a story, someone often has a story that comes to them in response. Storytelling is reciprocal, reflecting the turn-taking nature of speaking and listening.

## Helping Dylan to talk about his day at school

When Alun, a foster carer, picked up Dylan from school, he never got more than a one word reply when he asked Dylan how his day had gone.

Alun would ask: 'How was school today, then Dylan?'

Dylan would simply reply: 'Fine' or 'Alright' and never go into any detail.

Instead, Alun began talking about the little stories and events that made up his day at work. For example, dealing with a difficult customer, the infuriating comments from his boss and so on.

Dylan began responding with events that had happened to him at school.

Stories are reciprocal - when we hear one we want to tell one back. This is often how we communicate with people we feel relaxed with.

## ***Crazy Charlie***

### **A way of learning without teaching**

Einir loved to tell the story about *Crazy Charlie* by Ruth Brown to her young foster children. First published in 1979, this story is about a ferocious crocodile called Charlie who wouldn't brush his teeth. Crazy Charlie made himself into an object of fear by eating everything in sight – till his teeth broke off and fell out, and a kind dentist took pity on him and made him some false teeth.

Einir said: 'I love telling this story to children, it really makes them laugh. But I also use it as a lesson in dental hygiene, by asking the children to look through the pictures to see if Charlie ever cleaned his teeth after eating all these things (he didn't!); we also laughed at the difference between the shape of crocodile teeth (triangles) and human teeth in Charlie's false teeth (squares), so a bit of Maths was there too'.

'And there was social learning too. Charlie was a terrible show-off – 'Is everyone looking at Charlie?' I'd say, and the answer would come back 'YES!' with smiles. 'Does anyone LIKE Charlie?' Silence... and then a quiet 'No...', and we'd talk about how show-offs and bullies LOOK popular, but actually people don't really like them at all.'



## A way of bridging reality and fantasy

When we hear a story we often start to visualise it, to see it in our mind's eye. Storytelling is about painting pictures in the imagination. We can then start to verbally describe those pictures so language and 'imaging' strengthen each other and build cognitive skills. The ability to imagine, to be able to visualise and to describe the things we can see in our mind's eye, is a much undervalued but extremely important skill. It is part of our human capacity to be able to problem solve and to create a better future for ourselves. Yet this skill is often ignored in education or is seen as something that means we are out of touch with reality. But our imagination helps us deal with reality and it is important to be able to enter and leave the imaginative world. It is true that some children can become over-involved with their fantasies and escape into their own fantasy world, often because it may seem safer than their actual experience. However, sharing stories together can be a way of bridging between reality and fantasy; it becomes a safe social experience. Fears can be addressed symbolically. In many stories, the 'monster' exists as a symbol of the thing that we most fear and must face up to be able to live our lives fully. Knowing monsters can be defeated is important for living life with optimism.

Often our imagination can be, for many, the source of much anxiety and worry. We may fear the worst will happen and catastrophise about the disasters we think might befall us. A child of any age may worry about rejection or humiliation in front of friends, a teenager may panic over exams. The imagination is the place of fears and nightmares. But it is also the place of hopes and dreams as well. We can imagine achieving our goals. Many stories contain the theme of overcoming adversity and achieving a desired goal. Stories develop the imagination because when we read or hear a story we instinctively start to imagine and visualise it. In developing the imagination, we also start learning to think about creative and imaginative ways to solve problems, often through ideas we heard in stories. We can strengthen this through the interest we take in children's imaginative response to stories. Stories also demonstrate helpful ways we can talk to ourselves in our imagination and use the transformative nature of imagination to see things differently.

## The positives of 'self-talk'

Harry, eight, was frustrated and upset. His foster carer, Jo, told him a story about the monkey and the crocodile . . .

### The monkey and the crocodile

There was a tree on which many monkeys lived. In the nearby pond, a pair of crocodiles lived. One day, the female crocodile fell ill. The doctor said that only eating the heart of a monkey could cure the crocodile.



The crocodile offered each of the monkeys to accompany him for a joy ride in the pond. None of them agreed. Lastly, an old monkey agreed. The monkey enjoyed the ride.

When they were in deep waters, the crocodile told him his purpose. He said that he wanted the monkey's heart. The monkey said: 'Please take me back. I have left my heart on the top of my tree. I can give it to you there'. The crocodile took him back to the bank. The monkey went up the tree and disappeared'.

When Jo finished the story, she and Harry chatted through what they understood by the story. She told Harry what she thought the story meant, that those who don't lose their cool, even in the worst of situations usually overcome all the adversities, even when situation is hopeless.

This story proved a great way of demonstrating the positive 'self-talk' that can help us overcome our fears. They can also distract from other worries and are a means of calming the mind when upset or distressed.

#### Please note...

Another version of the story can be found in the Appendices of this guide, demonstrating how a story can be changed and adapted in the telling.

## Reading as a way of self-calming

Molly, 12, was liable to get distressed and she found it difficult to calm down.

Her foster carers, Ed and Sian, found that the one thing that helped her to calm down was to softly read *Harry Potter* to her. Eventually, it would lead her to start listening and her strong disturbing feelings would pass. With time, Molly started reading parts of the book to herself and recognised she could use reading as a way of self-calming.

When she eventually watched the first *Harry Potter* film, after having read the book, she said: 'It just isn't as good as the pictures I've got in my head.'

## Stories teach us values

You can tell the values of any given society, culture or community by knowing the stories that they value. Stories hold values and in so doing gives life direction and meaning. They naturally help us learn about right and wrong, good and bad, in how we treat each other. Although there are differences it does appear there are universal human values, such as bravery in the face of danger, compassion, wisdom and ingenuity among others, that are repeatedly found in the store of the world's stories. This is why traditional stories can be so powerful in helping young minds learn about dealing with life.

Traditional folk tales are now known to many of us as fairy stories that have been kept alive in children's films and books. Many of them are known through Ladybird books, Walt Disney films or films such as *Shrek*. However, the motifs are deeply engrained in our culture - the evil step-mother or protective fairy spirit, the witch, the giant, the castle. The phrases '*Once upon a time*' and '*They all lived happily ever after*' are instantly recognisable bookends to the imaginative world of story. However, these versions are often sanitised versions for much younger children. Many of these stories were much darker and dealt with themes of sexuality, abandonment and violence (*please refer to the story of Ashputtel in Appendix One*). They would help children begin to learn about this adult world in a structured safer way. These modern adaptations show us how adaptable stories are, and it is the nature of storytelling that stories evolve and change with new tellings. They also have helped keep these stories alive in our imagination while more recently psychologists, historians and storytellers have been discovering how important these stories are. They are such an everyday part of a child's life and play that we might miss just how 'mighty and mysterious' stories are in how they develop the mind. They can give insights into how problems can be solved and begin to shape new realities and possibilities. They can shape new futures and new ways of seeing.

However, care should always be used when storytelling to watch how the children react and to talk about their experiences, and following their lead in what they want to hear.

## The development of the imagination

The human mind is a natural storyteller, we are always telling stories to ourselves, about who we are, what we are good and bad at, and what we should and shouldn't do. Our mind is very good at this kind of storytelling and like many stories they aren't necessarily 'true' or straight about the facts, but we have evolved this 'narrative mind' and we can't turn it off or stop it very easily. That's why a diet of good stories is important, to help influence these self-narratives and emphasise competence and consideration.

Good stories (which are very difficult to define, but most of us can instinctively recognise) always remind us of what we know, our values and what's important to survive. They help us to learn about the world and are packed with wisdom. Most importantly, stories help us tune into our feelings, joy, excitement, fear, sadness, anger and so on. It's our emotional life that most defines the experience of life and being human. And stories are the best way we have of talking about feelings and are a natural way for children (and adults) to learn about feelings. They engage us - a good story usually has somebody who has got a problem of some sort, a problem that we all recognise and feel. When we hear that in a story we are engaged. Something in our mind says: 'This is important, listen to this' and we do and we want to know what will happen next. Stories are about chains of events, about the consequences of actions. Many foster carers say they know a child who doesn't appear to think about the consequences of their actions. Stories are one of those natural and instinctive ways of learning about the causal relationships that can happen. We are engaged by wanting to know what will happen next and we seek out causality and meaning in the stories we hear. Finally, we need closure and resolution in wanting to know the end of the story.

## ***The Grinch***

### **A story that helps make sense of feelings and hurt**

Luke, 16, has Asperger's Syndrome.

He had been bullied at school and felt angry towards others about how he was treated. This made him isolated and aggressive especially in the run up to Christmas.

His foster carer, Pam, took him to the cinema to see the film, *The Grinch*.

In this Dr. Seuss book (on which the film is based), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, there's a lonely old character called the Grinch who hates Christmas. Every year, he sits on his hilltop and looks down on a town filled with seemingly happy, loving families who celebrate Christmas in happy, loving ways. One day, he decides he just can't take it any more and he devises a plan to stop Christmas from coming. The plan, of course, fails, but he discovers a sense of love inside himself that he'd never known before.

Many looked after children are estranged from their families, either through physical distance or trauma. Like the Grinch, some foster children can feel very alone when it appears that 'everyone else' has loving families with whom to spend Christmas. The media, neighbours and peers, often portray the idea that everyone will be with their family who love them, feed them and take care of them. There's a part of all of us that longs for this kind of experience, an experience which many looked after children have never had.

After talking to Pam, Luke described how seeing the film made sense of his own experience. The Grinch wants to steal Christmas. It is his revenge for having his childhood stolen from him through the bullying he had experienced in his childhood. The story helped Luke start to make sense of his own feelings and to see how his current feelings came from this hurt. The insight offered him new choices.

## Stories and healing

Stories speak a child's language. They can get to the core of the problem by speaking to the child on a deeper and immediate level. By using colour, images, action, fantasies and metaphors in a non-threatening manner the child is able to relate to the story. Stories are familiar to children and give them the opportunity to explore various issues without feeling as though the focus is on them. Stories can focus on specific issues, such as feelings of anger, anxiety, bullying, loss, abuse etc. They can validate feelings the child may be experiencing and provide coping skills.

Many therapies with children use stories and storytelling for therapeutic purposes and to assist healing and wellbeing. They are extremely valuable tools in therapy with children because of the very many levels on which they work, and that they offer a safe and natural way of exploring feelings. Using stories is a powerful way of helping children develop a coherent and positive story of themselves. Although the expertise for therapeutic storytelling is beyond the scope of this guide, everyday storytelling may prove very helpful ideas for children in their lives, as well strengthening relationships with children. Not least as it will lay the foundation for children who might need such work to be able to use it more readily. Stories are not something that should be experienced occasionally or only as treatment or therapy, but something that is readily available. They should be readily available in a child's life like healthy diet, toys and opportunities to play with friends. They are a laboratory for the imagination and the more familiar they are with them the more they will be likely to read fiction and literature and the more they will have to say for themselves. The best way to help bring the enjoyment of stories into their lives is not always through media such as TV, films and computer games, but the social experience of telling. This gives them a chance to learn about things that may already be pre-occupying them, and to find that they can be survived. Themes such as pain and death, jealousy, fear and family relationships occur in the made-up stories of all developing children and are a natural way of working through these concerns.

Storytelling has been used as a central part of therapies for children with attachment difficulties and some resources for finding out more are given at the end of this guide.

## ***Goodnight Mister Tom***

### Aspects of loss, yet a story full of hope and trust

Robert, a foster carer, and Ben, who is fostered, read *Goodnight Mister Tom* by Michelle Magorian. Set in England during World War II, it features a boy abused at home in London who is evacuated to the country during the Battle of Britain. In the care of Mister Tom, an elderly recluse, he experiences a new life of loving and care. They both enjoyed reading the book.

Robert said: 'William and his relationship with Mr. Tom showed us both the meaning of true love and what entails a family. It's a compelling story of an abused child finding comfort safety and love through this old man. This story can encourage and give hope to others similar to William.'

This book is not only entertaining, but powerful, displaying life events that many looked after children may face – starting a new life, making friends, neglect, and in Ben's case – death.'

## **A Book**

### – a child's most treasured possession

Books can become treasured possessions which children want to keep. Many adults keep books that they loved as children. However, such possessions can be easily lost, especially if a child has made multiple placement moves. Taking an interest in story-books they have particularly enjoyed, and ensuring they have access to them, can be important to some children. Helping children to love books can also contribute to developing literacy.

As children moved on, Mandy, a foster carer, would always give them a gift of a book. She gave Toby a copy of the book *The Snowman* and took care to write a message inside the book's cover. It was a book that they enjoyed reading together when Toby first came to live with her.

When given the book, Toby replied: 'I'm going to keep this book forever. I am going to give it to my children.' Mandy was overjoyed, this was the first time Toby expressed a positive belief about his future.

## ***The Huge Bag of Worries***

by Virginia Ironside and Frank Rodgers

The following book review was undertaken as part of the Fostering Network's Strengthening Families project, which set up a bibliotherapy library scheme for support carers . . .

'This story is about Jenny who wakes up to a growing 'bag of worries' that follows her everywhere. It contains worries ranging from her friend going away, to nuclear war. The bag grows bigger and bigger, and just when Jenny decides no-one can help, an old lady comes appears. They take the worries out one by one and sort them into groups. Now the worries are out in the open, they can be dealt with and the bag tossed away.'

'The lively comic-style, the beautiful illustrations and general nature of the 'worries' make this an excellent book for discussing any number of problems with children. It's especially helpful for helping children who worry a lot or have troubled minds. It explains to them that they're not responsible for everything that they're worrying about and gives you a way of encouraging them to share the load.'

The book is an excellent ice breaker, and is told in a way that is not preachy but warm. The 'worries' are shown in a physical way as 'monsters' but are drawn humorously so as not to upset the reader. My son, eight, has anxiety issues and after reading, we had a chat about the kinds of things that bother him. It struck me that it wasn't one problem but many, and that's why he found it so hard to talk about his anxieties. The book prompted a lovely discussion and was a great way for him to articulate his emotions.

### **Stories help to explain emotions**

Stories exist as metaphors for feelings and emotions that often can't be fully understood on a rational or conscious level. They speak to our unconscious of how the world is or might be.

The illustrated books, combined with the text, can be particularly powerful stories to share together. Illustration can help prompt the imagination in young children, as well being beautiful objects in their own right. Many of the books by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler or Anthony Browne are powerful and helpful stories that can help deal with troublesome thoughts or worries. Many of these books, often based on traditional tales, contain helpful ideas which are contained in the metaphor of the story.



*The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson is the story of a mouse who outwits some scary predators by inventing a terrible monster. In the language of story it sends a message that things may not be as frightening as you think they might be. The story has so many elements that are engaging to children from the rhythm of the words and rhymes, the illustrations and the metaphorical and reassuring meaning that lays beyond the words.

## ***The Gruffalo***

### **Keeping your wits about you when things get tough.**

Sophie, six, when faced with family disagreements reverted to hitting and kicking the older children who lived with her. David, her foster carer, told her the story of *The Gruffalo* . . .

This story, by Julia Donaldson, tells of a clever field mouse who is met by three predators – a fox, an owl and a snake. The mouse convinces them not to eat him as he claims to have a close friend in the dreaded gruffalo, who likes, it's said: 'roasted fox', 'owl ice-cream', and 'scrambled snake'.

After escaping death by wit alone, the mouse finds himself face to face with the mythical creature—who is not so mythical after all and looks, as it happens, just as the mouse described.

The gruffalo, rather bemused, agrees to walk with the mouse through the deep dark wood. They are met by the same predators to which we were introduced earlier – the fox, the owl and the snake. Each sees the mouse (and, really, the gruffalo behind him) and flees in fear. After the third animal is met and flees, the gruffalo agrees to leave the mouse alone when he says: 'Gruffalo, now you see, everyone is afraid of me! But now my tummy is starting to rumble, and my favorite food is . . . gruffalo crumble!'

After the gruffalo leaves, the mouse finds a nut, 'and the nut was good.' The story ends with the mouse pictured sitting alone, eating the nut in a peaceful forest.

David liked telling this story as it gave Sophie the idea that conflict can be reduced or avoided by means other than violence. In this instance, the mouse uses only words. David's message to Sophie was to keep her wits about her when things get tough, and to use creativity and cleverness to meet difficult situations.

## ***Where the Wild Things Are***

### A story to help with challenging behaviour

Allison read Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* to James. She had read in a book review that the story could help James with his challenging behaviour, in that he might identify with Max, the main character. In the story, Max has a desire to let loose and do whatever he wants with no respect for rules or order.

Max is sent to his room as a punishment for some unknown behaviour. However, his room transforms into a jungle and after a long journey he arrives at a land inhabited by 'wild things'. They soon recognise that the boy is the wildest thing of all and they combine in an energetic whirl of dance and singing before the boy realises he wants to be at home. He journeys back across land and sea to find there is a hot meal waiting for him.

This story is a metaphor for feelings that can be out of control, like those of untamed beasts and monsters, and in a dream-like world can dance and sing. Those feelings subside, there is still hot food. This symbolically represents the parents acceptance and love for him despite the wildness of the behaviour. This is metaphor working in all its powerful wonder. Is it what the story is about? Who knows? It is not something that should be explained or rationalised, it is there for the child to find the meaning that he needs to find. It may merely be an entertainment.

Sharing the story with James, who might be frightened by the ferocity of his own feelings, lets him know that feelings, however strong, will pass, yet love is constant.

There is no right or wrong way to understand a story and it can be engaged with on so many levels, from that of 'it's only a story' to that on which the possible meanings can be reflected on and shared, particularly as they grow older. Stories help children understand themselves and the nature of emotion. Stories can reflect both the emotional and actual situations of children's lives and help them make sense of it in a way that rationalisations and explanations often can't.

## ‘But I can’t tell stories!’

You might remember some of the stories that you read or heard when you were younger and remembering the impact they had on, you but also feel that you could never be able to tell a story well. You have the stories, but not the confidence to tell them. The belief that ‘I don’t know how to tell a story’ is a common one, and really just an example of a story we might have about ourselves which isn’t necessarily true or helpful.

Many people fear not being able to remember the basic events, or just feel they would not be any good at it as they are not natural storytellers. But storytelling is a skill that is remarkably easy to learn and improves considerably with practice, helping develop memory and imaginative skills whilst doing so.

The key thing is to practice and find your own style, to find what suits you rather than try and copy someone else’s style (although there is much to be learnt from watching others). You may find it hard to stand in front of a large group and talk, or you may be, like a teacher, used to that. But most storytelling at home will be with very small groups. The key thing is to try it out and have fun. In storytelling, enjoying the telling of the story enables everyone else to relax into the telling of the story and for a playful atmosphere to be created.

Your foster children may or may not be familiar with classic fairytales such as *Cinderella*, but, whether they are or not, they are likely to enjoy and engage with them. You too will know many great stories from your childhood that they are not familiar with.

### Things to think about . . .

Spend a few minutes remembering the stories that were told, read to you or that you read to yourself as a child. Even stories from film and TV may have left important memories . . .

**What parts of the story do you remember most vividly?**

**How did that story make you feel?**

**Can you still remember the whole story or have you forgotten parts of it?**

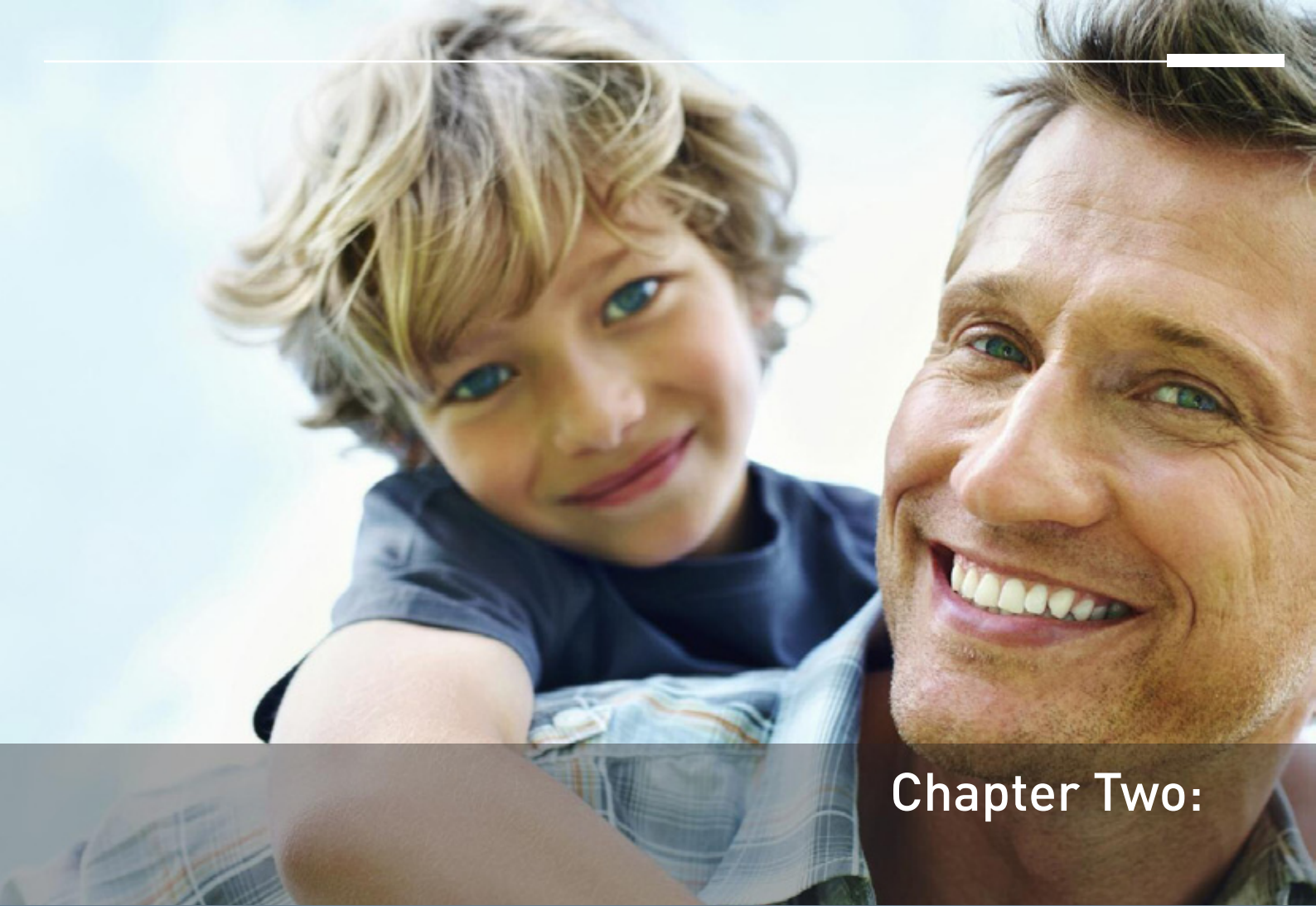
**Were there times you felt scared, sad or excited?**

**How did it influence you?**

**Can you tell that story now?**

### Key thought:

**This guide is full of ideas for trying stories out and you may know far more than you think you do. Give it a try and have fun with it. It is not as hard as you might think.**



Chapter Two:

# The relationship between attachment and storytelling

# 2 The relationship between attachment and storytelling

## Introduction

### What is attachment?

Babies and children need a secure emotional relationship with a main caregiver, usually a parent, in order to grow and develop physically, emotionally and intellectually. Babies and children need to feel safe, protected and nurtured by their caregivers, who identify and respond appropriately to their needs so that they can gradually make sense of the world around them. This secure relationship, or 'attachment', with a main caregiver is considered as very important for babies' and children's healthy development; they learn to trust the caregiver to meet their needs. This early experience helps the baby and child to recognise and develop the social and emotional feelings and skills necessary for making relationships with other people.

Unmet attachment needs may lead to difficulties socially, behaviourally or emotionally, which may impact on the child's physical and emotional development and learning. These are called attachment difficulties, which children will demonstrate in a variety of ways.

Attachment is certainly something that foster carers need to know about. It can explain so much about why children who are looked after can have difficulties in life, sometimes long after they have left neglectful, abusive or traumatic situations and why they might want to continue in relationships that can make them scared and unsafe. Attachment theory can help us understand the impact of early experience of children's development and guide us into understanding how to help children with difficulties in this area (Hughes, 2009, 2011, Gerhardt, 2004).

### Looked after children and attachment

It should not be surprising that looked after children would be more than likely to have difficulties in forming attachment relationships. Many will have been taken into care as their families will have been unable to meet their needs for a whole variety of reasons. Often, children who move to new families will have to work out the complexities of their feelings at the same time as losing access to the people they were previously attached to, even if that attachment was insecure. They may feel loss, relief, anger or maybe confused by the conflicting feelings. As well as facing these emotional challenges, which would be difficult for anyone, there may be other clues of attachment difficulties. These may include:

- ▶ Language difficulties.
- ▶ Unable to take perspective of others (empathy).
- ▶ Overwhelmed by strong emotions and unable to calm.
- ▶ Sometimes too trusting and prematurely open in relationships.
- ▶ Poor attention and concentration.
- ▶ Poor emotional regulation and impulse control that may lead to behaviour problems.

Many looked after children will be able to form healthy new attachments and start to overcome any difficulties they had. If children have a basic trust that people can help them then this will lay the foundation for strengthening secure attachments. Early difficulties can be remediated.

Some looked after children may have more complex difficulties that will not be so easily addressed in a new family situation. The Inner Working Model (see pg 30) provides a set of beliefs that may not be easily altered. Children who have been abused, be it sexually, emotionally or physically or who have been neglected, may have particular difficulties and be extreme in how they have learnt to protect themselves.

Many children who have attachment difficulties will need more than just 'ordinary parenting' to enable them to have confidence in themselves, trust others and learn how to manage feelings. They will need additional help in making sense of their experiences and foster carers play a vital role in doing this. The skills of a foster carer in attending to the needs of a child with attachment difficulties will help build the child's resilience – the ability to bounce back from difficulties and frustrations, and help improve well-being and emotional health. Sometimes, therapists and psychologists will work with foster carers to help them think about how to best help the child.

## The link between attachment and storytelling

Attachment theory is about how humans develop relationships, how we make the bonds of attachment with others and how our relationships affect how we see the world. Storytelling can be an important way of building and strengthening the affectional bonds. After all, what we do most often, with those that we are close to, is a kind of storytelling. We are always telling and listening to the on-going stories of our lives, our problems, obstacles, successes and failures. When we tell these stories and have them heard and 'validated' or accepted they become ways that we make sense of and affirm our experience.

If we want to know how storytelling can strengthen secure relationships with children and help their emotional development, then we need to know the basics of attachment theory, what happens in 'normal development' and what happens when there are problems.

## The basics of attachment theory

Our attachment system is something that has evolved over millions of years. It is a biological system existing in many species connected with how parents look after their offspring until they become able to look after themselves. Humans take the longest of any mammal for the brain to reach maturity and, therefore, need to be nurtured longer before we become independent of parents. Our offspring need to be nurtured and looked after to grow up and know how to survive themselves. They can't do it by themselves; they need adults to interact with, to look after them whilst they find their way in the world. We are biologically and socially 'programmed' to look after children and children are programmed to latch onto the people who will look after them. But this programme

doesn't always run smoothly, it needs a lot of thinking about- parents need to think about what their children need at any particular moment and help meet that need and help the child to find ways of meeting their needs for themselves. Of course, those needs differ for children at different stages of their development and what we have learnt about parenting comes from our own experiences. These can often be quite painful, parents are not perfect and don't always get it right, but if they care sufficiently well it can be good enough. Children with difficulties in making attachments can often bring up some difficult feelings in us and make us behave differently from normal. Attachment theory can help us understand what is happening.

### How the healthy baby develops a 'sense of self'

When a baby interacts with his primary attachment figure, they experience delight in their company. As the child smiles, the caregiver smiles, when he cries, the carer makes a sympathetic response, if the carer laughs then so does the child. There is a 'reciprocity', almost a dance, in which the infant begins to experience himself. These interactions are so important to early learning and the child developing a sense of their own identity as a separate being, as he 'sees himself in the eyes of others'. The adult responds to the baby, having little conversations, meeting his needs and sharing experiences. As they do this the adult communicates by both vocalising and exaggerating facial expressions, tone of voice to help the child understand. If what he sees is loving and caring, he sees himself as loveable. If the child receives communication that he is frustrating his carers it may distress him further, which may in turn further frustrate the adult.

One of the many ways he or she gains a sense of themselves is through the shared attention they have with the carer. Maybe the implicit message this gives the child is: 'I'm important; I'm worth spending time with'. This continues as the child grows older. For example, if a father chooses to watch football over spending time playing with the child in the park the child may learn he is not so important. Also, the child requires the adults shared attention to help his attention grow. Without shared attention, a child's attention will struggle to grow. This may contribute to problems often described as ADHD or poor impulse control.

Language also develops during these early years. A mother might comment and name something the baby is looking at. As the child grows, they are able to point at things, to begin to say words, the carer's responses here helps them in the process of learning about the world and the names of things. The baby quickly develops ideas about the relationships between things such as good-bad, or big-small which develops into more sophisticated thinking as the child grows. Over time these interactions grow more sustained. Telling nursery rhymes, reading, telling stories and singing songs are all examples of these shared interactions. Any instances of talking and interacting are helping the development of the mind, where important cognitive and social emotional skills are being learnt – for instance, how grammar works and taking turns in conversations.

The human brain needs to interact with other people to develop. It cannot happen without it. As the parent shares attention, emotion and activity together with the child, the child develops a sense of himself as lovable or not, and whether the world is safe or not. This process is known as *intersubjectivity*.

## The attachment and exploratory systems

The developing human has two innate systems that guides behaviour, the exploratory and attachment systems. The exploratory systems makes a young child want to go out and explore and interact with the world. They want to play with objects and with other people. When children do this they generally feel good, they want to play and it is through this play and exploration that they learn about the world, how things work, and when they play they learn skills and develop a sense of mastery, which further builds confidence in themselves. In short, they learn they can do things, and in doing things they learn how to do things for themselves and the rewards that brings. They learn about themselves and other people, they learn about motivation and emotions and how to deal with these impulses. But, the world is not always a safe place and there will be experiences that are unsafe or upsetting, beyond the child's ability to deal with safely by themselves. They will need an adult to help them. At moments such as this, the attachment system is activated, the child needs their foster carer.

*When we tell stories to each other we echo the characteristics of the carer talking to a young child, the exaggerated emotional expression helps make the feelings in our messages clear.*

*This is not to say we should tell stories in the same way as we would to an infant, rather that when we tell stories our communications echo those of a healthy baby-adult relationship in a way that is appropriate to the ages of the listeners. The use of gesture and exaggerated facial expression, as well as the tone of voice, helps convey the story. Stories captivate us because they engage us emotionally.*

## The attachment system

The attachment system is activated in the presence of some perceived threat or uncertainty. If something is perceived as dangerous in any way, the young child will want to get to a place of safety - usually with an adult whom they know and feel safe with, to whom they have become attached too. This person provides a secure base where the child can feel safe again. Without a readily available secure base it makes it harder for the child to feel that they can safely explore the world. Whilst playing, a child is often reading the adult's face to learn about how dangerous it is to do something. For instance, on a steep slide a child might look to the adult to see if they are smiling in encouragement or if they looked scared or worried. Such cues continually help the child learn about what is safe or not.

Strong feelings of anxiety or frustration can often trigger the need for attachment. With it a child feels they can cope, that there is someone to help them learn how to manage feelings. As adults we still have the need to find relationships where we feel we can 'be who we are', we can express our worries, fears and upsetting thoughts. We speak of feeling we have 'bonded' with people in terms of getting to know them and getting on well. As adults these relationships become more reciprocal than the carer-child relationship but, they are relationships of attachment nonetheless and it is through our earliest experiences that we often learn how to get on with others as adults.



## The doctor's waiting room

Imagine there is a two year old child in a doctor's waiting room. The only other person in the room is their mother, and in the corner there is a pile of toys. What would most healthy children do in that situation? Most likely they would want to go and play with the toys. However, if a stranger came into the room, the child, uncertain if this stranger is safe or a danger, then might go back to his mother. Their mother might say, being attuned to her child's worry: 'Don't worry, it's alright.' She might say this with words but the message is conveyed with eye contact, touch, tone of voice. The mother has attuned to the child's emotional state, acknowledged and transformed it. More than likely the child will go back to carry on playing.

It is through these little, seemingly insignificant, exchanges between carer and child that happens continually throughout the day that a child learns some very important things. They learn that their feelings, and therefore experiences, are taken seriously. The child feels validated and, with their feelings acknowledged, can allow themselves to be soothed.

The parent has tuned into and accepted the child's feelings and mirrored them back to the child. This is known as **shared affect** and it allows the child's feeling to be transformed; their anxiety dissipates. The child can continue with the important business of playing. The parent's recognition and acceptance of the child's emotion is called **affect attunement** and helps to give a child a sense of who they are, what they are feeling and to know it is manageable. It helps them to learn what feelings are and how to deal with them. As they grow older they will be able to do it for themselves.

It is the continual experience of little events like these, of upset, looking for 'Mum' (for it is usually, but not always, that the mother is the primary attachment figure) that a child develops a sense of themselves, that they are loveable, and that feelings can be managed. This is the foundation of future cognitive and social-emotional development. They develop a sense of security through the security that the carer has provided time and time again. The carer has provided what is called a **secure base** for the child has a **secure attachment** with the carer.

Together, these outcomes of a strong secure attachment contribute enormously to mental health and well-being. They develop the emotional literacy of the child, that is the child's ability to recognise feelings in himself and others, and to know how to effectively deal with them. Many children in care have levels of emotional literacy that are behind others of their age, leaving them vulnerable to isolation and frustration. It is this emotional literacy that contributes to good mental health and well-being, the child knows how to deal with 'life'. The skills of foster carers can greatly help children develop their emotional literacy through the quality of their relationships with children. Storytelling is also an activity that can help build the child's emotional comprehension, for stories are fundamentally about feelings.

## How attachment theory helps us understand why looked after children experience problems

Sometimes a parent or foster carer's responses to distress in a child are not so helpful. They don't help the child to calm and may even increase the child's distress. This may be due to what the adult does, but may also depend on the situation, the relationship or factors within the child. To return to the doctor's waiting room example. Imagine a parent who responded to a child by saying, in an angry tone lacking reassurance and showing frustration: 'Don't be stupid! There's nothing to worry about. Go back and play!' The child's emotion is dismissed as not important. The child who frequently experiences this kind of response may learn not to seek out a helper when they become frightened. Rather they might try and bury the feelings or ignore it in some way. They might learn that feelings are dangerous things and can lead to trouble. The child might then learn not to trust his own feelings and be dismissive of them as well. Alternatively, they may internalise them which develops a sense of self where one sees themselves as 'stupid' or 'a problem to others'.

Another possibility might be the parent or carer's usual response might be one that is overly anxious in itself and over-protective to the child: 'Stay close to me, it's not safe to play.' The child's anxiety is met with the carer's anxiety. This child may never learn how to effectively deal with anxiety and worries and become 'clingy' to the adult, never able to relax. The anxiety is never dealt with and the emotion is not transformed to something more positive.

Emotions are an extremely complex phenomenon and can be troublesome whatever the quality of our experiences. Yet it is this complexity that makes us most human. Emotions provide us with an impulse to act. Some are pleasant, some are extremely unpleasant and learning to be able to reflect and manage emotions, and deal with them in other people, is an important part of learning how to live well and happily. We can't learn about dealing with feelings in an academic or abstract way, rather we learn about them in our relationships and experience of life. Our primary attachment relationship is the place for the foundation of our learning about dealing with emotion. If children have not had a good start they often need much more additional help than other children in learning how to cope with feelings. The child might learn: 'I can't cope by myself' or 'The world is a dangerous place'.

Through the repeated interaction that foster carer and child have, especially when carer and child have their attention together on the same thing, like reading a story, or are trying to achieve something together (such as getting the child dressed or ready for school) or by the sharing of the many emotional moments that happen throughout the day, the child is learning important things. They are learning how about how they are seen by the foster carer, which will inform their judgment of themselves. They will learn about feelings, from being able to recognise them through to being able to calm and soothe themselves when they are upset. They will also be able to develop a pattern of attachment behaviour that will be either secure or insecure. Although, in some cases, the attachment behaviour may be so disrupted that it will cause problems whenever they get emotionally distressed.

## Attachment and loss

Another critical aspect, of the attachment relationship and emotional development, is what happens when the attachment figure is lost, even if only for a short while. The child is dependent on the attachment figure to be there and for the very young child it is important that the adult is physically close. However, life is full of moments of separation, which the child has to learn how to deal with. For a young child separating from their carers, at nursery or at school, gives them experience of separation and then reunion. If the adult is not there, the child may initially experience distress but then seems to forget about it. Upon reunion the child may then ignore the adult. They seem to push the adult out of their minds. Hopefully, the child learns that even if there are separations, they will be short, it does not mean they are abandoned to cope for themselves. The child needs to know they are being 'kept in mind' by the adult. Many parents recognise the feeling of wanting to stay in touch when they are temporarily separated from their children. Knowing we exist in the minds of others, and are being thought about is part of the process of attachment. Prolonged separation from attachment figures can elicit feeling of great loss, and grief and bereavement is part of the process when an attachment dies. The process of grief itself is one of adjustment to loss, where the reality of the loss must be accepted and the emotional pain of loss experienced before one becomes ready to function normally again. It again demonstrates the deep emotional ties that exist in attachment relationships. For children in care, separations and attachments from their parents, with which there are still attachment relationships, can cause upset and confusion.

### 'It's all my fault'

Sometimes, children will think they are responsible for adults leaving them and will believe that it is 'their fault' and that they are unlovable.

Joe was 13-years old and settled with his foster carers, but still experienced very severe separation anxiety when it came to going to school.

One day, he suddenly began talking about why he thought he had gone into care. He said it was because his parents didn't like him. His foster carer knew this was not the case, as she knew the mother had been ill and the father was a heavy drinker. The foster carer and social worker were unaware that Joe was unaware of this. They were then able to explain to Joe that his mother couldn't look after him, and helped him understand that it was not his fault.

Losses are a part of life and can evoke the emotion of sadness in response. Sadness as an emotion is healthy in response to loss and usually only temporarily. However, as children get older the complexities of their attachment increases. New attachments can be formed with others, such as friends or other adults in their life. The security of the early attachments helping in building new relationships and also help in dealing with the losses of relationships that life brings as well.

## How stories build secure attachments and help emotional development

Stories are a wonderful tool to help strengthen relationships and provide healing and growing opportunities to the looked after child. When we talk to each other and share experiences we are telling each other stories. Stories are a form of narrative by which we can talk about our day to day lives, our memories and also our hopes and fears for the future. This way we can learn, not only from our experiences, but from the experiences of others. The ability to use language is one of the many ways in which humans are unique. Language enables us to think and communicate effectively. Fictional stories help develop the skills necessary for the narratives of everyday life.

When we talk to children we help them learn not only to be able to talk and communicate themselves, but we are teaching them problem-solving skills, how to make sense of the feelings, the instinctual and intuitive impulses to act that feelings give us. Beyond the day-to-day speech and talk, stories help us all understand the world. Stories particularly convey our values and beliefs that we see as important in living together. Stories teach us about what we see as right or wrong. In many stories, the action of 'good' characters are usually unselfish, for the benefit of others and the rewards of these actions are happiness and well-being. 'Bad' characters, be they monsters or human, are invariably selfish, to meet their own needs at the expense of others, they want things for themselves whatever the cost to the community. Stories automatically direct us to our better or higher self. A wide range of stories helps build an understanding of the complexities of life.

Through stories children learn about how people think and feel and the connections that exist between thinking, feeling and behaviour. They learn about right and wrong, what is seen by the culture and community as good and bad. So stories are a very rich form of learning and they teach without directly instructing a child. This then avoids the natural resistance and defensiveness we have in being told what to do or how to behave. Stories circumvent our defences; they get under the 'radar' to help children learn important skills.

Stories are universal, all cultures tell stories. Our stories bring meaning and help organise our world. We also hold stories about ourselves, whether we see ourselves as good or bad, able to change things or powerless. In this sense, stories are very powerful. Stories can also, of course, be extremely negative in their judgments and prejudices. In talking about a person or a social group, that creates an image of them as dangerous or evil, it can create a representation that is misleading. By selectively taking events or attributing them selfish attributions we can build or strengthen a negative image. As stories can bring us together and build bonds between us, they can also they can also create and reinforce perceived differences.

Stories can help us reflect on our lives. They hold a mirror up to our life and in them we can see ourselves. If we can reflect and think about ourselves, to recognise our thoughts, our feelings and behaviours we give ourselves more choices. Stories provide that way of seeing in a way that is both personal and impersonal. This can make it safer to see ourselves.

Some researches have found that children brought up in homes where stories are frequently told are more resilient than children who had less exposure to stories and storytelling. It is, however, not known whether it was the stories that developed the resilience, or that homes where there is more frequent storytelling reflects homes where there is more communication and nurturing, and these are the qualities that develop resilience.

In a healthy relationship with an adult, a child expresses the feelings and issues that concern them. They can turn to the adult when they are distressed or agitated. The adult is able to attend and recognise the child's emotional experience and help transform it into something more positive. With sufficient experiences like these, the child learns to be able to do this for him or herself. In so doing, they become more self confident and able to deal with problems. The child learns to see themselves more positively, rather than to be terrified of being overwhelmed by shame or other negative feelings. They learn to regulate feelings and to be able to think before acting. This can be helped through the experience of listening, telling and talking about stories.

The process of attending to and transforming emotions is **affect attunement**, the foster carer notices the child's emotions, comments on it and helps the child make sense of it. Stories are rich experiences of emotional moments, which provide opportunities for the adult and child to tune into each other's feelings. By foster carers telling stories in a way that is nurturing, relationships are strengthened, and emotional development and healing facilitated. Thinking about the child's needs and seeing how they respond can give clues as to the kinds of stories and narratives that the child may best benefit from. Storytelling in a close and safe relationship creates an environment in which all the experiences of living can be experienced. Both the relationship and the narrative structure provide a safe place for playful exploration of the story world. Child and adult have shared affect, attention and intention in their engagement with story. By engaging in the fantasy together the child is learning how to better deal with the real world.

In storytelling, there is joint attention to the story, which strengthens the relationship and finally joint intention in sharing the story together. These three processes of healthy relationship work to help create an environment which aids development.

So, stories are very important way of helping children learn about themselves and relating to other people, the very skills necessary for getting through life. They are then very important for children who maybe having difficulties due to their attachment histories. These difficulties often mean that they can't deal with emotions, such as anxiety, anger or loss and these emotional problems may be out demonstrated by behavioural problems. Children who have not sufficiently experienced shared affect are often unable to regulate their own emotion. They are not able to read or contain their own feelings, they have never learnt how. This will also affect their ability to learn in school.

Many of these difficulties may come down to the child's internal working model, in which they may see themselves as bad or ineffective in a world that can be dangerous, sometimes unpredictably so. They may have difficulties managing strong feelings and being able to think through the problems they face. This means they might act instinctively and impulsively. The primitive brain that wants to 'fight or flight' takes control. Difficulties in making friendships and in learning may well then affect their life course.

However, many of these difficulties can be healed through the protective and secure relationship that other adults, such as foster carers, can have in a child's life. Foster carers can offer the kind of relationships which offer emotional and physical safety, through care and boundaries, that allows the child to develop healthily. However, this path is often not easy. Some looked after children's behaviour can be challenging and raise great anxieties for foster carers, however committed they are.

## The positive outcomes of a secure attachment

### Early attachment influences the cognitive and social-emotional development of children in a number of ways . . .

**The Internal Working Models.** Based on our early history of relationships, the mind creates what is called an Internal Working Model. This is like a guide in the mind that tells us what to expect in relationship. A child who has received a lot of criticism in the past comes to expect this in future relationships. Whether they receive this or not, it continues to be an expectation of how they will be treated.

**Narrative Competence.** This refers to our ability to tell a coherent story, especially when something upsetting has happened. Narrative Competence refers to the story we tell ourselves about ourselves. It is our ability to make sense and give meaning to the events in our life. Researchers have found a clear link between early attachment patterns and the stories that people tell themselves later about their childhood experiences; whether they contain both good and bad experiences that can be reflected on, or whether they are dismissive about the past, or bogged down in it.

**Emotional Regulation.** The ability to calm oneself when upset is known as emotional regulation. Getting upset is inevitable, but a securely attached child is more able to be able soothe themselves, having internalised the emotional attuned parents ability to comfort them. A child unable to do this is likely to stay upset and more vulnerable to meltdowns. Secure attachment is not the only factor that influences a child's ability to self-soothe as it can also be affected by temperament or learning difficulties.

**The Ability to Reflect.** The ability to reflect, or 'reflective function' is the capacity to understand behaviour, one's own and others, in terms of underlying emotions. It is to have insight into behaviour. Children of the same age can vary enormously in their ability to understand what motivates their own and others behaviour.

**The Patterns of Attachment.** Early experiences influence the kinds of relationships in which we feel most comfortable. A secure relationship may be intimate and allow for the expression of all feelings. Insecure patterns may either be dismissive of emotions or be overly anxious. Some patterns may be very chaotic and often known as 'disorganised attachments'. Healthy attachment enables the child to have a secure base from which they can explore the world.

Stories can help in all these areas of functioning. As in stories you can name the thoughts and feelings which underly behaviour and help children develop a language and understanding of their inner lives. Helping children in these areas will help develop them in other areas such as resilience, social competence, ability to play, empathise and problem solve, as well as communication and language.

## The role of stories in helping George to focus his concentration and attention

George, ten, was anxious and found it difficult to concentrate and focus his attention. Sue, his foster carer, felt as if he was continually on the look out for danger.

It was explained to Sue that George had difficulties with **executive function**, the part of his mind concerned with being able to concentrate and attend. This affected his ability to learn and became apparent with problems in the classroom. George was easily distracted, kept making frequent mistakes and, in turn, became more anxious in his learning. He was expecting failure and trying to avoid it through disruption.

For children such as George, who have difficulties concentrating for long periods of time, two basic principles can help:

**1. Working together with the child with an attitude of gentle encouragement and praise for what they achieve.**

A child can concentrate for longer with an adult than they can by themselves. Sue found that listening to and reading a story together was a great activity to build up the George's ability to concentrate. George learnt to regulate himself through **co-regulation** with an adult.

**2. Build concentration in small incremental steps.**

When introducing stories, Sue observed that George could manage five minutes, so she aimed to help him concentrate for seven minutes and finish the activity as a success, rather than say, 15 minutes, when his attention will inevitably be lost.

Attention, like emotional regulation, is learnt through shared attention. Here, with the support of his foster carer, a framework was provided to help George develop his ability to concentrate. Stories and storytelling may be particularly helpful for children with special educational needs.



## ***How to train your dragon*** how stories in films and TV can be helpful

Jill and Tony were struggling to help Adam, who was aggressive with his peers. He would continually be provoking fights, getting upset and then feel he was being treated unfairly. They tried reasoning with him but the conversations always got heated and felt unhelpful.

They noticed that he was repeatedly watching the DreamWorks film, *How to Train your Dragon*.

This was story of a boy who is 'an unpromising hero.' He was a disappointment to his father. He just wasn't good at anything, let alone the important skill of capturing and killing the dragons who would frequently attack the village. Whatever the boy does he messes up, the other children don't like him and reject him. He continually embarrasses his father. What he tries to do to put things right only make it worse.

He then finds an injured dragon and sees his opportunity. If he kills it he becomes a success in his father's eyes. However, he recognises this dragon is just like himself – vulnerable, scared and alone. His empathy for the dragon leads him to heal its wound and befriend it. He treats it kindly and the dragon becomes his friend. In so doing he learns that the dragons are only attacking his village because they are themselves scared themselves. He realises that these powerful creatures need not be enemies but allies. Of course, no-one believes his new ideas about dragons so he sets out to prove it. There are tests to be faced, he faces certain death and escapes through bravery and skill. In the end, he gets the girl, saves his people and wins the respect he wanted, particularly from his father.

Jill and Tony realised the film was reflecting Adam's predicament and offered hope to him in a way that was beyond reasoning and explanation. A dragon is seen by the characters in the film as a 'bad thing' - something that needs to be controlled. This reflected how Jill and Tony felt about Adam's temper that he couldn't control. In trying to help, they were being critical about something that Adam, as yet, did not have the power to control. They were telling him, and Adam was probably feeling it himself, that his temper was a 'bad thing' that needed to be controlled and fixed.

Jill and Tony would make sure they were there to sometimes enjoy the film with him. They also bought him a copy of the book by Cressida Cresswell on which the film was based, and also shared some of their memories of growing up themselves where they had felt 'lonely' or 'useless.' They did this with no intention to 'fix' Adam's temper, but rather to feel a sense of empathy and optimism that the monster can become an ally rather than an enemy. It felt a much more helpful response than the arguments that grew out of trying to reason with him.



Chapter Three:

# The Three T model of storytelling with children

– The telling, the tale and the talk

# 3 The Three T model of storytelling

## An introduction

There is a lot going on beneath the surface when a story is being told. The Three T model can help to analyse how storytelling can build attachments, shape learning and develop emotional literacy. It gives a way of thinking about what is happening when a story is being told, thought about and discussed. The three basic principles to the Three T model are:

### The 'Telling'

The **Telling** refers to the actual *process* of the telling of the story. It places emphasis on the non-verbal aspects of the communication taking place. This includes the physical closeness between teller and listeners, the facial expressions, the tone of voice and use of gesture and body language. Ideally, the listeners respond to the teller and the teller will respond to the listeners, creating an interactive dance that draws everybody into the story, creates moments of shared emotion and brings it to an appropriate conclusion. There is something particularly special that happens when a story is told face-to-face, that has been largely forgotten in our media rich world. This is the interpersonal aspect of storytelling.

**Storytelling is a playful activity.**



## The 'Tale'



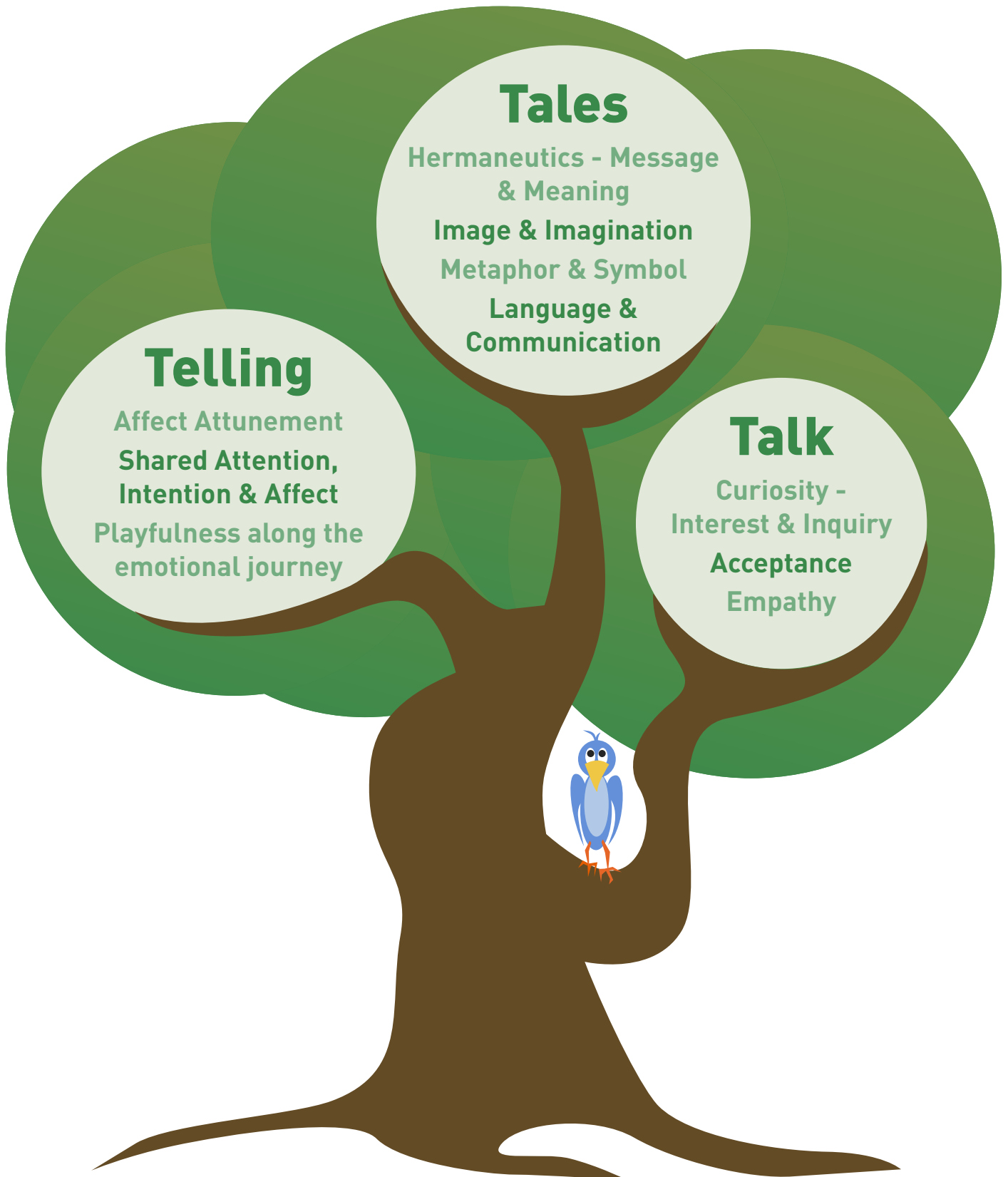
The **Tale**: This refers to the *content* of a story, be it told, read aloud or alone, or seen in a movie or TV. Whatever the story there is always a message that is conveyed. That message may be explicit and obvious in the case of: '*And the moral of the story is . . .*' or it may be more ambiguous. The story of *Cinderella* may say something about the right way siblings might treat each other. The film *Toy Story* conveys much about the meaning of friendship. Our values about what is right and wrong, good and bad, are transmitted through the stories we tell on both a personal and cultural level. A story also will say much about the characters motivations and emotions as well as their strengths that help them deal with obstacles. Listeners, often unconsciously, search out for meanings in the stories they hear. By giving children lots of stories with rich and multiple meanings, we offer them many possibilities to learn about themselves and the world.

## The 'Talk'



The **Talk** refers to the conversation that *may* happen between teller and listeners, where either might comment on the story either as the story is taking place, if a story is being told, or afterwards. It is like a conversation after a movie when people's reactions are thought about and discussed. These comments by both adult and child bridge both the process and content of stories and storytelling. Such conversations should have an atmosphere of acceptance, interest in the child's experience and empathy. They help a child to learn to reflect on their experience. These interchanges give the teller a chance to comment on what they think and feel and then offer the opportunity for the child to do the same. The adults acceptance of the child's viewpoint will help build the confidence that they have something worth saying.

## Exploring the three aspects of storytelling in more detail – the Telling, the Tale and the Talk



**Above:** An illustrative diagram of the Three T model

## The 'Telling'

If you were to observe a storyteller telling stories to children you would see a lot going on. The teller might be making many gestures and facial expressions, there would be lots of eye contact between the teller and the listeners. It is likely they would be in close proximity with each other. On the whole they would look relaxed and there would be laughter. You might also see a teller changing what they do depending on how the audience responds, repeating or getting more energetic if the audience is responding well, changing what they do if it too much for an audience. This interaction is the 'process' of storytelling and it echoes that, always in an age appropriate way, of the earliest secure attachment. The story either in imagination or in a material presence such as a book is an object of shared attention, and such objects are the building blocks of relationships. It is about doing something together. This is important in developing relationships with children and young people of all ages. It is especially important as a way of getting to know teenagers, you have something that you are 'doing together'.

In storytelling, there are often many different emotional moments. There is a closeness in the communication and not to mention a lot of talking, which is developing language, particularly for younger children. New words are easily learnt when they are heard being used in context. Stories with lots of repetition and or actions can be particularly useful for younger children, again invisibly building language and movement skills with in the context of an enjoyable experience. Children are learning through play and the adult is helping to provide a safe and enjoyable experience through the structure of the story. As the teller might evoke an emotion in the story – a scary moment, or a sad feeling, the child will also experience the emotion which the teller can then pick up on and either amplify or transform, as appropriate. These are moments of shared affect, again another key aspect of a positive attachment relationship where emotions are shared and experienced together. The emotion can be named which helps the child become more aware of the feeling. Often in the spontaneity of the storytelling moment there will be shared laughter, and this is a key way of building the bonds of attachment, laughter brings us together.

Part of the process of storytelling is the 'turn-taking' aspect; one person talks, the other wants to follow. With storytelling, the child wants to tell a story in response to what they heard. This might be something from their experience, something they have heard or made up. It's important for the teller to exchange roles and to become the listener. Helping children develop confidence in themselves as talkers, to experience that they have something to say that is worth hearing to, is an important foundation for social confidence and to be able to talk in front of a group.

These benefits do not come from one or two tellings, or when the teller is trying to get the child to 'behave' in a particular way. Rather they will emerge from the repeated experience of storytelling done for the pleasure of it, as a way of being together.

## Friday night is story-time at the Jones's

On Fridays, after tea, for about 30 minutes, it was story time. The story might be something good that happened to Sandra that week, or a story she knew or something shared from a book.

After her story, anybody in the foster family could also tell a their story. It could be anything they wanted – a joke, something that had happened to them or a story that they knew. There was always time just to chat about what had happened that week and what things were coming up to look forward to in the next.

Nobody had to do anything if they didn't want to, but with time the children would really look forward to it and plan what they wanted to say. When it was dark outside, Sandra would light a candle at the beginning and blow it out at the end of the session, a little ritual that helped to mark the beginning and ending of the story space.

## The 'Tale'

If you considered a story such as *The Lion's Reflection* (see Appendices) or *The Monkey and the Crocodile* (see both page nine and the Appendix), and then asked yourself what do these stories mean? You would have an answer. If you asked different people what the stories meant they would have as many different meanings as there were people. It is all part of being human that we are always searching for meanings, and stories are no exception. Indeed, stories have traditionally been a way of teaching ideas. Most religions have taught their values through stories. We are all familiar with the idea that stories have morals that may vary from being very clear to being ambiguous. In this way, stories contain a message which the listener will hear.

There are psychological meanings as well. Stories such as *Cinderella* are a 'restoration' story in which Cinderella (or Ashputtel as she was known in the first version of the Brothers Grimm – see Appendices) has fallen from grace and her life had become devalued and dangerous. However, through her perseverance and the help of animals and spirits, she rises and she gets to marry the prince. This structure is found in many tales and also many different meanings can be found in it. Is Cinderella a passive female with sexist values, or determined to get to the ball and win her man? Is this a story of abuse, sibling rivalry and grief? Stories have multiple dimensions of meaning. Sometimes the horror that can be found in fairy tales may match the experiences of children in foster care.

Stories reflect lived experience and offer a way of reflecting on our experience, whilst at the same time being available to be enjoyed as 'just a story'. Fairy tales can talk about such issues as parental loss, abuse and wish fulfilment in a way that is safe because it is so distanced from reality. They do not demand that listeners talk about their actual experience unless they want to. Often the very 'unreal' quality of a fairy tale helps create a distance between reality and story that makes it more possible to deal with the emotions.

With telling a story it is possible to adapt a story to the age, understanding and emotional maturity of the child. Some versions of *Cinderella* have the gruesome cutting of the step-daughters' feet to make them fit into the shoe (see Appendix One). The amount of detail given can be adapted to the audience, with older children more likely to be enthralled by the goriness of it all, with younger and more sensitive children it may be toned down. Our fascination with what might be seen as gory is often reflected in books popular with teenagers, such as *Twilight*, or a pre-occupation with horror films. Excitement is close to fear. Children and teenagers often like stories which worry adults. They can be told, but always with sensitivity.

Stories offer different perspectives. Aaron Beck, the creator of Cognitive Therapy, described how he used *Cinderella* to help guide a patient who saw herself as 'bad' as her mother ill-treated her as a child. He invited her to reflect upon the story of *Cinderella* to re-appraise her belief, and not see that it was 'her fault' (Beck, 2010). These different dimensions to *Cinderella* demonstrate how stories have many possible dimensions of meanings.

All stories offer this opportunity to find meaning in behaviour. On one level, it can be a simple tale of 'good and bad' to a more complex tale which often highlights the benefits of working hard, persevering, bravery or compassion. Traditional stories are particularly rich in having useful messages about wise conduct in life. Many of these stories have been crafted by many generations of tellings, they reflect different cultures and communities so can give a real sense of belonging. It is said that these stories tell us who we are, where we come from and where we are going. Such stories also provide the seeds from which much modern fiction and literature has grown. Two obvious examples would be the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* books and films which have many mythical and traditional elements. However, the moral messages in such stories are there to be discovered. Telling stories to directly influence thinking and behaviour in certain ways can sometimes be counter-productive.

All stories are about something. They may be funny, happy, sad or scary, they are full of information about the world, how it works, the kinds of things that people do. They often contain great wisdom in dealing with problems. All sorts of stories do this, from the earliest stories for children, to stories for young and old adults. *Harry Potter* is very helpful in talking about the qualities of friendship and bravery in overcoming threats. Sometimes the messages that are always contained in stories are clear and if you didn't get it, you get the moral proclaimed at the end, like in *Aesop's Fables*. Other times, it is buried deep in metaphor, we may not be aware of it at all. Stories are full of implicit advice on how to survive, how to find a partner and gain a livelihood (in fairy tales this is the metaphor of marrying the princess or finding a fortune). It may be through trickery or



cleverness that the hero succeeds against the odds, but more often than not it is through some universal human virtue through which success is gained. Somehow stories help elevate us to find the better parts of ourselves rather than the worst. However, many stories might be sad or scary but they are always instructive. There is, the content, of stories much to be learnt that is helpful in life.

It is important to have lots of stories that offer all sorts of possibilities to the child, rather than restricting stories to ones that you think might send the 'correct' message. If the child senses they are being manipulated they will resist and the teaching power of stories will be lost. The child learns that they can't relax with the teller, that they must keep their guard up.

## Choosing the right time to tell a story

Jade, nine, enjoyed reading and listening to stories. One of the stories she liked was *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, about a boy who falsely raised the alarm that a wolf was about attack some sheep. One day, this actually happened but the boy had raised so many false alarms that nobody believed him.

One afternoon Jade was crying out for help in her room when nothing was wrong. She had done this several times previously as a way of gaining attention. Her foster carer, Paul, was getting increasingly frustrated by this behaviour. He told her the story of the *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, but Jade burst into tears and became angry at Paul.

Paul reflected on Jade's reaction, as it initially had not made sense to him. He realised he had been too angry to tell that story and she was feeling humiliated. He never knew what she made of the story after that point.

So, the message of this section is let the story do the work, and offer lots of different stories and look to see which are enjoyed. There are many different types of story, some have unhappy endings or celebrate defiant behaviour, but they all offer something to think about and everybody will find their own meanings and if they don't, well, it's just a story.

## The 'Talk'

Stories can be talked about and reflected on and this provides opportunity for interaction and for both listener and teller to comment on what they think about the story. Children will ask questions during the story and the telling can be briefly suspended, without losing momentum, to answer those questions.

The short conversations that can be had about stories, whether they are told, read, seen on TV or film, are incredibly important for developing social and emotional understanding. They can be brief and informal and not 'educational' or interrogational. They are best if spontaneous and born out of curiosity and interest. The teller can be curious about what do the listener's think of the story? What do they like? What do particular parts of the story make them feel? What do they think the characters are feeling? What are their actions and thoughts making them feel? What are their feelings making them do?

### Storytelling as a two-way process

Gemma, eight was listening to Jenni, her foster carer, telling a story about a character who taken someone's hungry dog away to feed it.

Gemma said: 'I don't think he should have done that.'

Jenni paused and said: 'OK. Don't you? What makes you think that?'

They went on to briefly explore the characters thoughts and feelings. Jenny was gently curious about the Gemma's feelings and accepting of what she said. She had no intention of trying to change what Gemma thought, or try to teach her anything.

When Jenni felt Gemma had said all she wanted, she returned to the story with 'Hey, let see what happens next . . .'

Storytelling is not a one-way process, both the teller and listener can comment on the story both during and after. The foster carer can help the child express their thoughts and feelings about the story, exploring attitudes and events. This process can help build reflective skills in the child and help the child's confidence as they find their opinions are taken seriously. Indeed, these kinds of questions can develop critical thinking skills.

Open-ended questions might open up conversations. This can be a brief aside such as: 'What do you think of that?' or even a comment about the teller's own opinion, might open up a brief conversation. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions and it is not about checking to see if the child has correctly understood the story, rather to set a scene where there the story is usefully explored.

If there are two or more children, it may be important to set some ground rules for the process of telling and talking. This might include about storytelling generally: 'Let's not everybody talk at the same time. It would be better if we made sure everybody gets their turn.' It's also an opportunity to understand about social rules for groups: 'It's important to listen to other people's idea, it's hard if someone makes a joke when you are saying something important'. These situations allow for setting a scene, of respecting people's ideas and beliefs and creating a safe place to express them.

These conversations help build the link between listening and understanding. The child should feel safe enough to say if they don't understand something, maybe due to a loss of attention, and the story can be clarified. The exchanges can be brief or extended but the storyteller will need to gauge when it is right to return the story, with a brief: 'Let's see what happens next?' Too much conversation during the story can lose the narrative thread.

## Making the link between listening and understanding

Mel, a foster carer, was telling *The Talking Tortoise* story to Sam, seven.

After describing how the tortoise could go on and on, Melanie then made an aside: 'People who just talk all the time can be annoying. It's good to take turns in a conversation. Do you know anyone like that?'

Sam talked a bit about some children in his class and how he felt about them, Mel spoke about some people she knew. The story then continued.

Their conversation had itself mirrored the important social skill of turn-taking.

After the story has ended, it can be helpful to explore what the listeners thought of the story. This is never a test or a chore but a time for reflective thinking. It is a time for the kind of conversations that develop reasoning skills and 'thinking' skills that are creative, critical, collaborative and caring. The tone should be normal and playful not judgmental or prescriptive. It should be a safe place to talk.

### Exploring the story – questions you could ask:

- ▶ What do you think of that?
- ▶ What was your favourite part?
- ▶ What do you mean by that? Tell me more.
- ▶ Do you think he was being 'honest' when he said that?
- ▶ What would make this story better?
- ▶ Would you like to live in a castle like that?
- ▶ If you had one question about this story, what would it be?

Stories undoubtedly often contain stereotypes, which can often be unhelpful, misleading and sometimes offensive. A classic example maybe the 'evil step-mother' that exists in many stories. To some minds the repeated use of negative stereotype may reinforce prejudices. The conversation during and after a story gives a chance to comment on such stereotypes; step-mothers, like everybody, else come in all shapes and sizes. Talking about stories gives an opportunity to do some reality-checking, if necessary.

This conversation may make links with events in the story, reminding listeners of experiences in their own lives and then this gives an opportunity for sharing life experiences and stories. It may, however, lead the child to make a disclosure of some traumatic or abusive event that has happened to them. Responding positively and confidently is important and guidelines for this are given on pages 59-60. Whatever the content these comments about the story are helping the child develop a reflective function that helps them understand the links between thoughts, feelings, events, behaviours and consequences. Psychologist Dan Hughes has developed a model of helping children with attachment difficulties. He helps foster carers learn to respond to their children with an attitude of *playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy* (Hughes, 2011). This attitude can be taken in storytelling moments and particularly in exploring the story with the child.

## Using the Three T model

These strategies of thinking about the telling, the meaning of the tale and reflective talking can only be effective when storytelling is a shared and pleasurable activity. The adult is able to guide the child in reacting to the story. It is natural and spontaneous. Big things happen in stories – dangers, losses, separation from parents, betrayal and challenge. They are all common components of a good story for children (and also for adults). After all, part of the interest in stories, is that they deal with our hopes and fears, our desires and dreams, our secret terrors and wishes. They all deal with the question ‘What if?’ Perhaps that is why storytelling is such a universal human activity. So, although, getting stories through books, comics, films, TV and even computer games might be beneficial, it is when they are delivered in the timeless method of being told and heard that we can see them at their most powerful.

So, stories are a great way of talking about our most inner experiences in safe way. Stories and play are, of course, used by therapists in helping children with emotional problems. We are not suggesting foster carers become therapists in your storytelling, but that you give and share stories to help children gain emotional and social skills, and to develop their relationship with you. Stories are about our most personal, but they are not intrusive. We talk about the feelings of characters who existed a long time ago or never – they are just ‘made-up’ Because stories explore feelings ‘at a distance’ they are much safer than going into the private world, something that many children who have had damaging experiences can find frightening in itself.

It isn’t a one-off experience of storytelling that will make the difference, but short and repeated experiences that will help the child develop, especially if a child is lagging behind with social and emotional skills or maturity. No more than having a really good feast would make up for the deficits of a long-term inadequate diet, children will need to hear stories regularly for them to start to gain the benefits. We wouldn’t go so far to say they need stories five times a day, as they need their fruit and vegetables, but to find the opportunity as often as possible to bring in a story that will nourish the mind.



Chapter Four:

# Creating story worlds

# 4 Creating story worlds

## Telling stories orally or reading aloud?

Many foster carers spend time reading to younger children. There are many beautiful illustrated books, as the child grows older they can be introduced to the great stories in children's fiction and literature. There is evidence to show the beneficial effects of reading aloud to children, including developing language and imagination whilst building a strong relationship. This will have benefits in education, as well as introducing children to what may become a lifelong source of pleasure in reading. However, once a child reaches middle childhood they become more able to read for themselves and being read to seems 'childish.' This may all add up to the fact as the child gets older their only exposure to stories is through electronic media or, if they enjoy reading, then books.

Storytelling, that is telling a story without a text, is a more improvised affair. It is not recited word from word but recreated anew each time from memory. There is more direct eye contact and hands are free to gesture. This means that the story can be more easily adapted to the interest of the listeners. The actions can be livened up if the listeners are truly engaged or calmed down if they are overexcited. Storytelling may seem a difficult skill but it is easy to learn the basics through trial and practise and find all sorts of situations to tell stories, on walks, after a meal or when visiting certain places. The beach may be a great place for a story about pirates, or a castle for a story about a king, for example.

## Reading stories aloud

Reading stories to children, and reading them together, has as many of the benefits as storytelling. When children are young and learning to read, it is an essential activity. There are many excellent books for children and also there are schemes for looked after children such as the Letterbox Club by the Book Trust.

The Letterbox Club focuses on improving the educational outlook for children aged 7-13 in foster families by providing them with a bilingual parcel of books, maths activities and stationery items once every month for six months.



In February 2012, the Welsh Government announced three-year grant funding for Letterbox Club. Letterbox Club parcels aims to provide equal access in Welsh and English and are bilingual, containing Welsh and English books. Rob Lewis and Nicola Davies are two of the authors who have featured in the parcels.

Visit [www.letterboxclub.org.uk](http://www.letterboxclub.org.uk)

Looked after children often have difficulties in education, and anything that can encourage reading is going to help. Like storytelling, reading to and with children creates a safe, imaginative place where stories can offer another way of seeing the world. However, encouraging children to read for their own pleasure is sometimes not easy. Looked after children will often lack confidence, and sometimes ability, in educational activities. After all reading, and writing, are very difficult skills to master requiring effort and practice. Sharing books sends very positive messages about the pleasures of reading and can encourage reading non-fiction as well.

## Storytelling as a family experience

John, a foster carer, established storytelling time after dinner every weekend, setting it around the fireplace in the lounge. A clear rule was established that the TV was off, and if any of the children in the house wanted to, they could sit and listen. At first, only the younger children in the house would join in but as they began reading parts of *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, 13 year-old Joe sat with them and enjoyed the time together as much as the others. He then began to read the book for himself. However, Joe said: 'I can read my books anytime, but listening to stories together was special 'us' time.'

## Are you sitting comfortably?

### - telling stories one-to-one and to groups

We can tell stories to a child singly or in small groups, always creating an intimacy that is safe but where all sorts of emotions can be experienced in imagination. The structure of narrative (with a beginning, middle and end), with the safety of being with a trusted adult, such as a foster carer, make it safe to explore different emotions, both positive and negative. The child can check out their experiences and receive feedback from the foster carer. Stories, particularly traditional stories, deal with matters that concern children, such as sibling rivalry, fear of abandonment or terrifying monsters. They also deal with moral choices, magical powers and have, mostly, happy endings. The caring relationship makes it safe for the child to enjoy at the level they are at, with no social pressures to get it right or behave in prescribed ways. Within a one-to-one relationship the teller can adapt to the listener's developmental age and capacity to understand. In small groups, children learn to be sensitive to the needs of others learning to listen together and the adult can guide them in this.



## Stories that echo a child's predicament

Elaine, a short-term foster carer, was telling the story of *The Three Little Pigs* to five-year old Alex.

As she was telling the story, she suddenly realised that this story echoed Alex's predicament. He was one of three children who had all been placed with different foster carers with little certainty over their long-term plans.

She suddenly wondered if the story was appropriate but then, reassured by Alex's involvement and pleasure in the storytelling experience, continued confidently.

## The different kinds of stories you can tell

Stories give us experience of the world. They can tell us about the past, other places, how things, and especially, people work. Exactly what makes a story is very difficult to define. Although we all can recognise what a story is, there are many various forms and types of stories and many of these can be told to children. Stories can be unhelpful if they are used to reinforce negative attitudes and stereotypes, so what is important is to offer a range of different stories with different viewpoints about life, although taking care not to expose children to inappropriate material.

There is such a wealth of great writing for children and young people. There have been classics dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Modern classics include *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *The Wind in The Willows* and there are many great writers today such as Phillip Pullman, Jacqui Wilson and J.K.Rowling.

## Fairy tales and traditional stories

There are classics from the past such as the collections of The Brothers Grimm, *Arabian Nights* and *Aesop's fables*. There are also great collections from other countries not so well known in this country, such as *The Ocean of the Streams of Stories* from India. Many of these stories are traditional tales that have been handed down for hundreds, even thousands, of years and deal with important themes for children. We are used to these stories being sanitised, but they often deal with our hopes and fears as well as containing much folk wisdom. They offer a unique blend of fear and delight. They can work well for children of all ages especially teenagers. Stories from a child's own culture can be especially valuable. Traditional stories can be a particular rich form of storytelling as the stories, characters and messages have become so well crafted.

## Personal and family stories

From the little anecdotes that make up day-to-day living, to stories about your experience as a child, through to the history of your family and relatives. These stories can be very important to help a child learn important things about the world, from events in the world to the history of generations. Family histories can be very much tied to places and migrations. They might be about things, both good and bad, but still remarkable what their descendants did in their lives. These stories become another rich form of learning about the world. Also, such stories form an important part of our identity. It's important we know our family histories and pass it on. To not know these stories is to not know part of ourselves. Hearing your family stories may help the children in your care get to know you better and make them interested in their family histories.

### Helping foster children make sense of their own personal histories

**Mary Medicott observed that storytelling had a role to play in helping the boys she fostered understand their own personal history:**

'I really felt that we were trying to help them to make sense of the story of their lives and as part of that we would make a journal of the places we went to and the things that we did and we would stick in all kinds of stuff.'

'Last year, the elder of our two foster sons was here, and he really enjoyed looking back over the journals of our holidays. The stories of things that we did have become really important to them both, because they have provided them with stories of a five-year period in their lives which could have been a gap, as gaps that had gone before, so creating strong memories through telling stories about what we did was really important.'

The younger of our foster sons was having a chat with me recently and he was saying how all the stories that we had were the most important thing that he remembers about those five years.'

Mary Medicott,  
*Telling my story: a storytelling and reading guide for foster carers*  
The Fostering Network (2008)

## Will and his old, battered suitcase

Will, a foster carer, fostered two teenage boys. He had an old, battered suitcase, itself full of character. In it, he kept family mementoes and children's books from his childhood.

Every now and again, he would get the suitcase out and look through it. The teenagers were interested in it and asked about the items, such as a medal from the First World War belonging to a Grandfather in the Navy. Other times they might be interested in a book and they would start chatting about that and Will would retell the story.

This often led to the boys sharing their own memories, something just very normal and everyday. Will thought these sessions were very helpful to the boys. To share these positive memories together. Remembering a time when their family life was not at its worst.

Will would also keep another suitcase full of children's story books and he would sometimes bring that out too. Despite the boys being teenagers, they would look at the books and recount stories and memories from their childhood. They would recount with glee their memories of *The Hungry Caterpillar*, *The Owl Babies* and *Mo*. Will said: 'The books were another great way of showing the boys that there were happy times . . .'

## Remembering events in a foster child's life

You can be a storehouse of memories of things that have happened to a fostered child, both while they have been in care and, if appropriate and if you know about them, events that took place before they were placed with you. Children in care often lack central facts about their own life, for instance what happened on the day of their birth, their first steps or their first day in school. It can often be helpful to be (sensitively) curious about events like this. Remembering such events can help keep these memories alive in a child's mind.

Storytelling can play a central part in Life Story work. Life Story work can help looked after children describe what has happened to them and their relationships. This needs to be a continuing process throughout childhood and should address current relationships with foster carers, and record the joys and pleasures of their life as well as the sadness. Sometimes it is a method used to deal with trauma and abuse or to help children understand why certain contact arrangements exist.

However, there are some elements in which foster carers can play an active part in life story work. For this to happen, they need to offer the child a secure emotional base to explore the past, present and future. They need to be aware how the child can understand and deal with information, or have different coping strategies, at different stages of development.

Knowing things that happened to you, even if you can't remember them, helps form a personal identity. Who would you be if you didn't know the stories about yourself? One important example for everyone, is the story of the day of your birth, where was it? What happened? Who was there? Such stories are an important part of self-knowledge.

## Storytelling as a way of developing caring relationships and confidence

So many kids in the care system are storyless, there isn't anyone around to tell a story about them: 'Remember when you fell off your bike?' and so on. And sometimes their own stories are embargoed for legal reasons.

Engaging children through fiction allows you to talk about important issues without the risk or penalty of it being real. This is true of all children, but it's particularly important for children in care because of the experiences they have been through.

A story is a kind of mediator, a 'third element' that eases the tension of a one-to-one situation. It can also indicate to the child that reading isn't a gendered activity – if men are reading it puts a value on it, especially for children who are facing a number of challenges.

Hamish Fyfe, (2008)

*Men are good foster carers too: Supporting male foster carers and inspiring confidence*  
The Fostering Network

## Made-up stories

Stories can be easily made up and improvised around simple games and structures. You can make them up yourselves or together with children. The more you know about the structure of stories the easier this can become. Often the key components of a story are:

- ▶ The setting.
- ▶ Main character.
- ▶ A problem to face.
- ▶ How the problem is overcome with characters who either help or hinder.
- ▶ The resolution.
- ▶ Prizes gained.

Often, children really enjoy stories in which they are characters in the story. This next section discusses the ways of telling and creating stories, and ways of dealing with issues that might arise when telling them. It also gives some resources and ways to find more stories and more about the world of storytelling.

## Remembering a story

### - The story in your hand technique

It can feel daunting trying to remember a whole story. A technique, that many teachers use, is called *The Story in your Hand* to help remember the basics of a story. This involves breaking a story down into five key points, one for each digit on a hand. For each point, think of a key phrase that sums up what happens in the story. Imagine the scene to help you remember each part. Then run through the scenes, and do this by physically counting off the points on your hand. When you tell the story, you mentally count the points off on your hand. Running through this process of identifying basics of the story and linking it with the fingers and thumb on your hand, helps fix the story in the mind.

As an example, the Talking Tortoise (see Appendices) is here broken down to five points:

1. **A tortoise talks too much**, so much that all the other animals always leave when he goes to the water hole and no-one wants to talk to him.
2. **One day two geese arrive** who are passing through. When they leave the tortoise wants to go with them.
3. **Tortoise comes up with an idea** that he can go with them by biting onto a stick whilst they fly with it in their beaks.
4. **They fly over towns and villages** and people cheer the geese for being so clever to come up with the idea for carrying a tortoise.
5. **The tortoise can't keep his mouth shut** and shouts: 'It was my IDEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAA!'

Your story might not be the same as the version you read or heard. You may have embellished it in your own way. You may not always remember all the parts but by identifying the five key moments or parts you will identify the bits you have to tell to make the story work. When you tell it, especially with an audience that is really engaged, you may think of new ideas for the way you tell it next time.

#### The story in your hand technique



A tortoise talks too much, so much that all the other animals always leave when he goes to the water hole.



One day, two geese arrive, just passing through. When they leave the tortoise wants to go with them.



Tortoise comes up with an idea that he can go with them by biting on to a stick.



They fly over towns and villages and people cheer the clever geese.



The tortoise can't keep his mouth shut. 'It was my IDEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAA!'

Enabling children to create their own stories is one of the great rewards of storytelling. Hearing stories excites the imagination. Often children will need no help (other than an attentive and interested audience) to begin their own stories; It is, after all, a form of imaginative play, to create stories and the reciprocal nature of storytelling means after hearing a story you want to tell one. Stories can be a way thinking about anxieties, wishes or unresolved issues on a child's mind and may have a very beneficial aspect in helping children deal with, and work through, emotional issues.

## The narrative structure

Stories often follow a basic structure and being familiar with this can help in creating new stories. The most basic structure is that of 'beginning, middle and end.' The stock lines of 'Once upon a time' and 'They all lived happily ever after' are very clear examples of a beginning and end- they act as bookends to the imaginary space of story. However, these lines can be a bit too clichéd to stimulate creativity. However, questions help create some of the features and narrative thread of good stories.

**The Common features of story structures are such things as:**

- The setting.
- The central figure – a 'hero' or protagonist.
- Objects- some things might have particular significance in a story, or have magical properties – a golden slipper, a pair of glasses, or a telescope. Sometimes objects or toys can be used as props in a story.
- A challenge – a difficulty, threat or danger that faces the hero or his/her community. This is often the thing that brings a story to life and provides motivation for the hero.
- There may be helpers who assist the hero.
- A conclusion or ending in which the issues of the story are resolved often, but not always, happily.

## Other story making techniques

Stories can be developed using props, such as toys and objects. It can also be developed through games, such as asking the child to give you a title for the story or a character, place and object. By asking yourself the following questions you can develop a story. Don't struggle to think of the most brilliant or original ideas, rather let your spontaneous imagination do the work. Keep the story short, and if the child wants to take a turn then let him, although do not force the child if they resist. As the child hears more stories, they will have more ideas to incorporate into their story making and telling.

### Questions

- Where is the story take place?
- Who is the hero?
- What is the challenge or task that the hero has to accomplish?
- Who or what is the obstacle that stands in the way?
- Who or what helps the hero?

- How does the hero overcome the obstacle?
- How does it all end?

## Toys and other props

A small bag of exciting and stimulating objects can be another way of starting to make up a story. From the selection the child can choose, say, three objects for them or you to make up a story about. Again, asking the questions to yourself, or to the child, can help create story ideas.

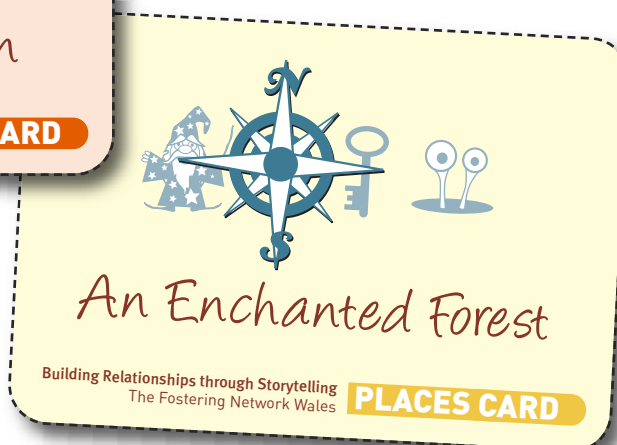
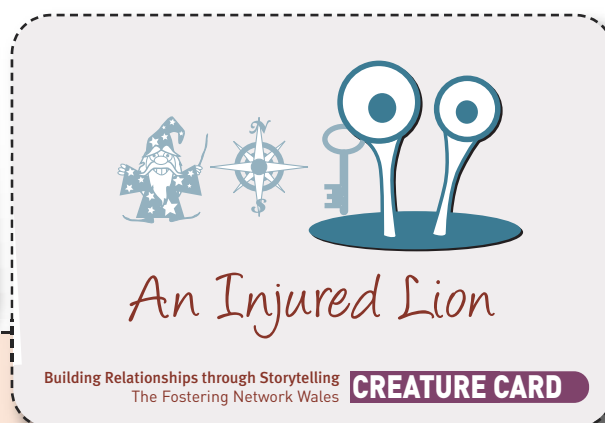
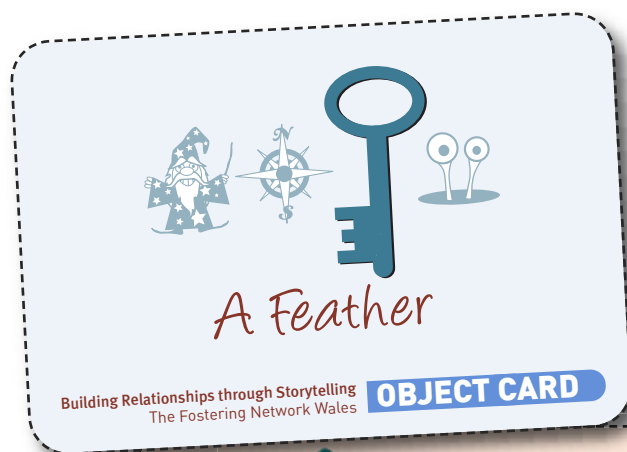
**Possible objects for a story bag that can be taken out at special times could include.**

- Items of doll's house furniture.
- A feather, stone or natural objects.
- Wooden blocks or shapes.
- Postcards with pictures of landscapes or settings.
- Small toys.
- Crayons or felt pens.
- Story making game cards (see below).

## The Story-making cards game

Traditional stories often contain many similar 'motifs' - that is, commonly repeating images, characters or objects, giving the story structure and meaning. Such characters as the witch, the beast, or the wise man / woman and places such as a forest, as a dark and mysterious place, or a wishing well, have both good narrative and symbolic uses. We can use such characters to help create stories, and in so doing, help children learn about narrative structure.

The story making cards, illustrated on page 55, can be cut up and used to help create stories using these motifs. A child can select a number of cards, perhaps one from each separate category of places, people, creatures and objects, and then the foster carer makes up a story using those cards. Then roles can be reversed and the child makes up a story from the foster carer's selection. Keep the stories short and fun with a playful atmosphere. It is not about getting it right or wrong - but having fun together. You could also create games together using the cards or write your own cards.

**Note:**

Please refer to Appendix Two where you will find a set of story making cards to print off and use.

## What is a good way of starting to tell a story?

If you say: 'Do you want to hear a story?', a child may simply say: 'No'. They might be concentrating on something else and find it hard to shift attention, or they just might not want to at that particular moment. Finding a right time can sometimes require skill, but there are always opportunities. A story on a walk can make the walk more interesting to the child, or on a car journey. A story can often make the journey pass more quickly. At the dinner table, during and after food can also be a great place and help children stay at the table longer. Often a useful way to engage them is to ask children what they think of a story. This works particularly well with older children and teens who may dislike being treated the same as younger children. For example: 'Hey, somebody told me this story the other day. What do you think of it?'

Sometimes, older children might protest at the beginning saying that 'it's boring' and so on, but often, if you pause, they may well want you to carry on.



## Keep trying!

'You might find yourself telling a story in the kitchen when the child is able to go away if they want to. It's important not to oblige people or force it on them. You can't say: 'You will listen to this story'.

Children can take these kinds of offerings in different ways, and sometimes a child will walk off in the middle of something and you think 'Oh, that was a failure'. And then they'll come back a day later and say: 'What was that you were saying' or 'Can you tell me about that again.'

'I think you have to be quite forgiving about situations and don't criticise yourself, just try it again.'

Mary Medlicott, (2008);  
*Telling my story: a storytelling and reading guide for foster carers*  
The Fostering Network

## A Bunch of Keys

David, a foster carer, used a trick that he had learnt as a child. It was something his grandfather did with him. He showed the children his bunch of keys, each key had a different story to tell. If they choose a key, he would tell them the story of that particular one. Over time, when they wanted a story they would ask to look at his bunch of keys.

Keys are seemingly mundane, commonplace objects and yet are also amazingly symbolic.

## Word play

Storytelling with children will always have an element of playfulness and as children grow, they become skilled and able to engage in more verbal forms of play. As adults, much of our playfulness is verbal through banter, humour and jokes. Storytelling helps in the essential life skills. Many forms of word play can help encourage this and form part of storytelling and our oral traditions. Riddles, jokes, rhymes and tongue twisters can all be great fun and activities to share together.

Here are a few to get you going:

### Tongue-twisters

Tongue-twisters can help with letter sounds and can be good for children experiencing language difficulties, especially if pitched at levels they can succeed at getting it right and achieve a sense of mastery.

*Round the rigged rock the ragged rascal ran.*

*I saw a saw that could out-saw any other saw I ever saw.*

*I wish to wish the wish you wish, but if you wish the wish the wicked witch wishes, then I won't wish the wish you wish to wish.*

The children's book *Fox in Socks* by Dr. Seuss consists almost entirely of densely rhyming tongue-twisters.

### Riddle me this

Riddles are puzzles that require us to think laterally, to become more aware of alternate meanings and different viewpoints. They warm-up the mind to visualise and imagine. Finding new ways of seeing things, not only wakes up the mind, it helps develop problem-solving skills.

Like brain teasers, they are also another form of word play. This means they are a great way into storytelling, and particularly good for adolescents who like the mental challenge (although sometimes individuals may be reluctant exposing themselves in groups). That there is often humour in them adds to how they can engage us, and we then relax enough to see things differently. Telling riddles to the whole family, or in group, can also help develop getting clues from other people's ideas. The great thing about them is that they use the mind only. They don't need pen, or paper or any other technology.

*continued overleaf*

**Riddle me this continued**

Here are some riddles, try and observe how your mind tries to answer the riddle if you don't know them:

- Q.** I'm always wet and I never rust. Go on and wag me if you must. What am I?  
**A.** *A tongue.*
- Q.** What do people make that no one can ever see?  
**A.** *Noise.*
- Q.** What can you break with just one word?  
**A.** *Silence.*
- Q.** What is it that you own that other people use much more than you?  
**A.** *Your name.*
- Q.** What is lighter than a feather yet no-one can hold it for more than two minutes?  
**A.** *Your breath.*

## Commonly asked questions

**Q:** *What if a child wants the same story told again and again?*

**A:** To know how to respond may depend on why a child is fixated on a particular story. Stories can offer a safe place, or the story might have some content that is intriguing or not fully understood. It may reflect a 'fad' or a special interest. If it is offering a place of safety, then that may not be a bad thing, as long as the child is still able to move between the real and the imaginative world of story. You can explore with gentle curiosity why they might like the story so much and what they get out of it, but they may not be always be able to tell you. It might be useful to offer other stories which are similar, but not the same, to gently introduce some difference. In most cases, there is nothing to be concerned about and the child will move on. If you are very worried that the child is stuck in a fantasy world that excludes reality, it may be worth discussing this with a professional, certainly before taking away what might be an important refuge for the child.

**Q:** *Is it safe to tell scary stories?*

**A:** Foster carers may feel apprehensive about telling scary stories, especially if the child has experienced trauma in the past. However, it doesn't mean they should be avoided. Rather that they should be approached sensitively and carefully. Stories can be a great way for the child to learn about scary and anxious feelings. The storytelling relationship becomes a place to gradually approach these emotions.

It is best to follow the child's lead. Often children aged six years upwards love to hear stories that are exciting and often scary. Watching *Dr Who* on the TV, and for older children watching horror movies or going on roller-coaster rides, is a way of seeking out

excitement in a way that is ultimately safe. Indeed, storytelling becomes a place to learn about dangerous things and experience fear in a safe way. The storytelling environment then becomes a laboratory for exploring emotions. But, as always, it is the adult's responsibility to make sure the environment is safe for excitement. Like watching 'Dr Who' together, the situation is made safer by the adult's reassuring presence.

Signs that the child is experiencing scary stories as exciting are the child's willingness to know more. Watch facial expressions closely to see that it is fun rather than frightening. If telling stories to children of different ages, always be mindful that one child may be experiencing the story differently to the others. Helping the other child be sensitive to that is a useful opportunity for practising consideration. Again, the structure of stories provides a sense of security, the wicked monster comes to a sticky end helps provide that safety. Stories always ask the question of the listener: 'Do you think this is real?' and so help the child to 'reality-test'. Be mindful and sensitive to how the child reacts.

**Q:** *What if a child makes a disclosure of abuse?*

**A:** The nature of storytelling means that sometimes a child or young person will make a disclosure of something that happened to them. This may include an incident of abuse or a series of neglect events. This may be traumatic, not only for the child or young person, but also for the foster carer or other members of the foster family who hear about it.

Knowing how to respond to a disclosure, sometimes without any prior warning, can be very challenging. You should consider how to:

- Deal on a personal level with what you have heard.
- Respond appropriately to the child or young person.
- Support other members of the fostering family, including children to whom the disclosure may have been made.
- Formulate a plan of action to confirm to the child/young person how you are going to deal with the disclosure.

In addition, it may leave you, as a foster carer, uncertain what to say. This can lead to nothing being said and an opportunity to support and respond helpfully is lost.

**Each situation is different but the following guidelines can help:**

1. Try and acknowledge what is said in a way that reassures the child that what happened is not their fault, and expresses that they are worthy of respect and being treated properly. In addition, you may wish to state clearly that under no circumstances should children or young people be treated like that.
2. In most cases, you can respond calmly and briefly. It would be inappropriate to probe or to ask further questions to find out more. Just listen to what is shared with you.
3. You should confirm to the child or young person, as 'personal' as this information is to them, that you as foster carer have a responsibility to pass this disclosure immediately to the social worker, who will no doubt wish to speak with them promptly about their disclosure.

4. As soon as possible, make a full and objective 'word for word' record of what the child said, when, the context, and other witnesses who may be present.
5. Make immediate contact with the child's/young person's social worker to confirm that a disclosure has been shared and a written record made.
6. You should not share this disclosure with anyone else, other than the social worker in the first instance, who may then ask you to share verbally and your written record with named professionals, such as a police officer.
7. In rare cases, there may be judicial hearings going on, in which case other professionals will need to make further inquiries.
8. The social worker should also be able to guide you in thinking about:
  - Is the child safe now?
  - What action needs to be taken, in light of the disclosure, to ensure the child/young person remains safer.
  - What the child may need.
  - How the social worker will work with you to work through the disclosure.
  - How to respond to any further disclosures.
9. If it is appropriate for the child to talk some more to their foster carer, because they want to, and there are no reasons in their care that might prevent it, it is important that the foster carer feels confident enough to hear it. Sometimes just to listen and respond briefly, and returning to the story, is all that is necessary.  
 If a foster carer gets very upset in listening to the disclosures, this can obviously be unhelpful to the child. If this does occur, you should positively bring the session to an end, with a promise that their social worker will be asked to come and sit with the child/young person to hear what they have to say.
10. You should consider your own needs and those of the foster family, therefore, ask the social worker to provide you with appropriate support in developing your skills, suitable training or emotional support.

It is always important to follow any child protection procedures. However, there may be times when, after discussing with your social worker, it will be apparent that the child is not at risk and it becomes possible to think about how to respond more therapeutically. With the support of a social worker it may be possible to explore ways to help the child talk more about his abuse and help them work through the trauma.

## ‘That happened to me . . .’

Just after hearing a story, Harry said: ‘Something like that happened to me. Only I was hit and put in a cupboard.’

Mike, his foster carer took, a breath, and replied: ‘That sounds horrible, Harry, I don’t think that was the right thing to do to you.’

Harry went on to say a little more.

Mike responded: ‘Well, if you had been with me I would not have treated you like that. I wonder have you ever told anyone about that? Some people find it useful to talk and some don’t. What would you like to do?’

Harry was happy to return to the story, having said his piece, and had his feelings validated.

Harry then asked for another story and they both moved on. The storytelling structure made it safe to move in and out of thinking about what happened together. Mike followed the guidelines outlined on page 59.

**Q:** *Are we giving children false ideas about the world?*

**A:** Some stories are true. Some are clearly fantasy, full of magical and supernatural events. However, even true stories are sometimes distorted or ‘edited’ versions of reality. The distinction between true and fantasy stories can sometimes not be so clear. Stories invite you to consider what is true and not true, and this is often a question that a listener has in their minds as they hear the story. In this way, stories help listeners reality test, in that they have to decide what is real and what is not. Stories can provide comfort and reassurance. In stories, the world is just, being good (usually) does pay off and wrong-doing is punished. In the real world, things are never that clear. In this way, stories are a consolation.

It is legitimate to ask what are we teaching children if we tell them that they all ‘lived happily ever after,’ or ‘if you work hard and don’t complain like Cinderella, you will get to marry a Prince (or Princess)’. Children are often well able to distinguish between what is real and what is not. And gentle inquiry about what they are thinking can help guide them. If you are worried about teaching ideas that are not real, imagine if children had no belief in Santa Claus. Often they gain real satisfaction from finding out the reality. Stories give hope and sometimes, even in the real world, hope can do magical things.

**Q:** *Where can I find stories about other cultures?*

**A:** A key task for foster carers is to help children and young people hold on to their cultural roots, while integrating into families and local communities. Through stories, children can explore their own cultural roots, experience diverse cultures, and learn to empathise with unfamiliar people, places, and situations. Knowing the stories of backgrounds, from our family to our cultural history, is very important in building a rich sense of who we are and where we come from. Not knowing these stories is a form of deprivation.

Countries, cultures and even local communities will have their own stories often that are associated with particular places. Often, these stories are unique, based on historical events and are part of local history. You may find the same story cropping up in different places, but with slightly different local variations. Many traditional stories turn up in different versions in cultures at opposite ends of the earth. Stories have legs and are great travellers. However, they also become very rooted in particular cultures. An example might be *Cinderella*, where versions of this story have been found dating back to Ancient Egypt, Medieval China and India, and there are many variations throughout Europe. Names and details may change, but themes of a heroine abused by her family, who loses her status, but her identity is rediscovered through an object and her position restored, are repeated many times.

Many family and cultural stories can be lost for all of us. But from children who may have lost much of their roots; this loss may be even greater. Your family and cultural stories may be of interest to them, and an interest in their cultural roots, including their stories and myths, may be of great interest to you.

The local library can be a useful source of stories from local history back to folklore and stories from around the world. There is a series of books from the History Press detailing local stories from different regions about the UK, visit [www.thehistorypress.co.uk](http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk) It can be helpful to know stories from the area in which you live, they can give you a sense of belonging to that community. Also, in the wonderfully ethically diverse world in which we live in, it can be good to know the stories of your own culture, again strengthening your sense of self identity. One website provides a source of stories from all over the world which can be great to learn and tell, visit [www.worldstories.org/uk](http://www.worldstories.org/uk). This website gives stories in both English and other languages.

A very useful book that collects folktales from many different cultures is *Favourite Folktales from around the world* edited by Jane Yolen (1986, Pantheon).



Chapter Five:

# Conclusion



# 5 Conclusion

Stories play an important role in promoting child development in a number of key areas – language development, experience of the world and particularly learning about the psychological world, how others think and feel. They benefit our abilities to empathise and imagine and provide social and moral guidelines for life. In short, they help us to learn how to live together.

Telling stories, live and spontaneously, can amplify these benefits and strengthen relationships. Foster carers, and indeed all those who work with children, can use this rich activity to help children of all abilities, but particularly those who might be experiencing emotional and social difficulties, to increase their well-being and learn new skills. These children can become storytellers themselves and learn how to get their voices heard.

Storytelling is a basic human activity and something that can bring us together and make us more understanding of each other. They tell us what it is like to be human and show us the nature and consequences of our actions.

We hope the ideas in this guide inspire foster carers to tell stories they find important to tell and to share them with the children in their lives, to help them make sense of the world and to maybe become the next generation of storytellers.

## Have Fun!



Chapter Six:

# Supporting resources

# 6 Supporting Resources

## Finding stories

As well as the many stories you probably already know, you only need to look on your bookshelves, at home or at the library, to start finding lots of stories for telling or reading.

Another resource is the internet, where thousands of stories from all over the world can be found. You can also find out about local storytelling clubs where there may be performances to watch or 'story circles', where you can go along and tell and hear stories in a small encouraging group.

## Stroytelling organisations

**The Society of Storytelling** is an organisation to promote storytelling and they have a website which has lots of information about stories and storytelling. It will also be able to tell you about storytelling clubs and events near you. Visit [www.sfs.org.uk](http://www.sfs.org.uk)

The Scottish Storytelling Centre will also help you find out more about storytelling, visit [www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk](http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk) and in Ireland there is the Storytellers of Ireland (Aos Scéal Éireann), visit [www.storytellersofireland.org](http://www.storytellersofireland.org)

As there are so many fantastic websites, *YouTube* clips and Apps that are available on stories and storytelling, it is difficult to single out any. However, some sites that are useful sources of stories are:

[www.worldstories.org/uk](http://www.worldstories.org/uk)

[www.storymuseum.org.uk](http://www.storymuseum.org.uk)

## Create a Storytelling Club

If you know some other parents or foster carers who are also interested in family storytelling, you could create a storytelling club. You could meet once a week or once a month at someone's home where adults and children can get together and share stories in a 'safe' environment. It can help to create the right atmosphere by making a special place for storytelling and having some nibbles to eat.

Once you have established a regular club, it might be possible to contact your regional Arts Council and get some funding to have a professional storyteller join you for a session, to tell some stories or teach storytelling skills.

## Story Collections

### *The collected stories of the Brothers Grimm*

Many versions are available but amongst the best is *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* edited by Jack Zipes.

### *Favourite Folk-Tales from around the world* edited by Jane Yolen (1986)

A great collection of stories from many different cultures and grouped in different themes.

### *The Fairy stories of Andrew Lang*

Scottish collector Andrew Lang wrote ten books all named after different colours. His stories are beautifully written and remain classics.

## Resources focusing on using stories to develop emotional literacy, use to help overcome trauma and other difficulties

Steve Killick wrote, with Professor Neil Frude, a paper '*Family storytelling and the attachment relationship*' in *Psychodynamic Practice* (2011, 17:4, 441-455).

*Telling tales: Storytelling as emotional literacy* Taffy Thomas & Steve Killick (2007, Educational Printing) This book is aimed at teachers and includes a collection of stories to help develop emotional literacy.

*Using storytelling as a therapeutic tool with children* Margot Sunderland (2001, Speechmark) Margot has written extensively on using stories to help manage feelings and also books for children that address different emotions.

*Storytelling for life - Why stories matter and ways of telling them* Josie Felce (2012, Floris Books) A lovely book with a great collection of stories and ways to tell them.

### *Using storytelling to support children and adults with special needs:*

*Transforming lives through telling tales* edited by Nicola Grove (2012, Routledge) This book will interest anybody who wants to use stories and storytelling with people with special educational needs, to support them both educationally and therapeutically.

### *Stories for young children and how to tell them* Mary Medlicott (2010, Featherstone)

This book focuses on telling stories to younger children. It is full of stories and ways to tell them.

### *Connecting with kids through stories: Using narratives to facilitate attachment in adopted children*

Denise Lacher, Todd Nicholls, Melissa Nicholls & Joanne May. (2nd edition 2011, Jessica Kingsley) This book is primarily aimed at children who have been adopted, but would also be useful for fostered children.

### *101 Healing stories for kids and teens: Using metaphors in therapy*

George Burns (2004, John Wiley) This book has lots of adaptations of traditional stories which can be useful.

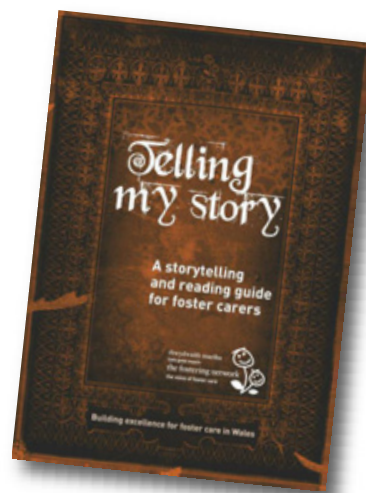
## Resources from the Fostering Network

### *Telling my story*

*Telling my story: A storytelling and reading guide for foster carers;* The Fostering Network (2008)

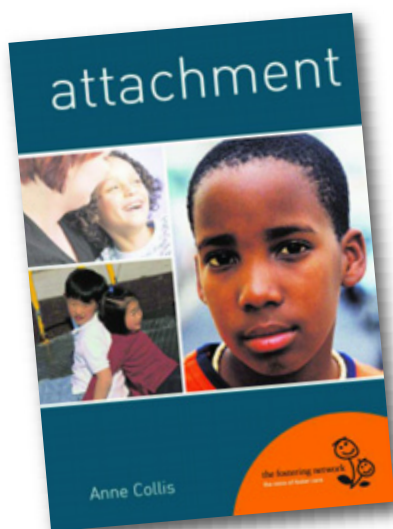
This free guide contains tips and hints to get you started in telling stories and reading with your foster children. The first section was written by professional storytellers with many years of experience telling stories to and with children. It was written for The Fostering Network Wales by The George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling at the University of Glamorgan. (*For more information about the George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling visit [www.glam.ac.uk/storytelling](http://www.glam.ac.uk/storytelling)*) Throughout the rest of the guide you find useful resources, including a story written by a foster carer, and reading tips to help encourage your foster child to read.

Download your free copy from [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)



### *Attachment*

Anne Collis (2008); The Fostering Network



Attachment is a key part of thinking surrounding modern foster care, and all foster carers will benefit from an understanding of the theory and its implications. This book offers a means to understand the challenges and difficulties foster carers can face with children and young people in their care and, through this understanding, identify ways in which these challenges can be more effectively overcome. This publication by Anne Collis de-mystifies the research surrounding attachment and offers practical advice on implementing its findings. This publication is part of the Fostering Network's *Pathways* series which includes: behaviour; contact; health; safer caring and education.

To purchase this book visit [www.fosteringresources.co.uk](http://www.fosteringresources.co.uk)

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# Appendices

# Appendix One

## A selection of stories to practise your storytelling skills

Here are six stories that can be easily learnt and are good examples with which to practise your storytelling skills. You don't have to learn them word for word, but identify the key points and bring them to life with your own voice and actions.

They are all quite short, making it easy to pick up the key events. When reading through, try and imagine how you might tell them differently to children of different ages.

The story, *Ashenputtel* will be familiar to you as the story of *Cinderella*. This version is based on that collected by the Brothers Grimm 200 years ago and contains some gory detail. This version will be more suitable for older children in their teens. For younger children, it will be more appropriate to tone them down, or even to leave some of these details out.

With practice it becomes easier to edit and adapt stories depending on the age and responses of the listeners.

Remember to always look to see how children are responding to guide you.



## The Talking Tortoise

There was once a tortoise and he just talked and talked and talked. At first he would seem very charming, but all he wanted to talk about was his own cleverness. All the other animals at the waterhole soon got very fed up with him. As soon as the tortoise arrived the other animals all made their excuses and left. Tortoise did not have anyone to talk to and as a talkative tortoise he became very unhappy. He didn't have anyone to tell how clever he was.

One beautiful day, as summer was changing to autumn, two geese flew down to the waterhole for a drink and a rest. As many birds do, they would migrate to faraway places as the seasons changed to find warmer weather. They were flying south for the winter and the tortoise started chatting to them. He told them how beautiful they were and he was very polite.

**'Oh you look so beautiful and the way you fly is so graceful. In fact I would say you are as pleasing to watch in the sky as I am on the ground'.** The geese were at first flattered, but they also noticed that the tortoise did go on about himself quite a lot. After they had drunk their fill and rested, they started to make their farewells. But the tortoise said, **'Take me with you, there's nothing here for me and we get on so well.'**

The geese politely explained that they were flying and that didn't seem to be something that tortoises were known for. But the tortoise replied **'Nothing is impossible. Let me think of how it could be done. I'm clever that way.'** He thought for a moment. His face lit up, **'Yes, I know what to do. If you get a stick and you take each end of it in your beaks, then I will bite hold of it in the middle. That way you can fly and carry me at the same time.'**

**'Well,'** said one of the geese, **'I'd say you'd have some good muscles in your mouth from talking, but can you keep it closed for very long?'**

**'Give me a chance to prove it'** said the tortoise.

Eventually the geese decided that they would give him that chance but he would have to take responsibility if it went wrong.



## The Lion's Reflection

There was a lion out hunting with his tribe in the Savannah. Yet somehow he became separated from the others and lost in the hot, dry bush. Soon he became both hungry and very, very thirsty.

The senses of the lion were very keen and he could smell water although it was far away. He followed his nose and eventually came to some small hills. He knew he was close to a source of cool fresh water. He saw a tall rock overlooking the land and quickly jumped up to the top. There, on the other side, he could see a pool of clear water. It looked good. But then he saw, there in the pool, a lion looking straight back at him. He was clearly guarding the lake. The two lions looked at each other.

The thirsty lion wanted water, but didn't like the look of this creature. He growled, so did the other lion. He bared his teeth and so did the other. He edged forward and the other did too. His thirst was so great it overcame his fear. The lion thought, **'I may die or I may live but I must drink. I will have to fight'**. He edged forward until he was face to face with his opponent. He lunged straight towards his adversary.

The other lion lunged at him straight back, but as they touched, the guardian of the lake disappeared in a thousand fragments and rippled over the lake. It was, of course, the lion's own reflection that was staring back at him. And having faced it, he was now free to drink as much as he wanted.



## The Cracked Pot



Once, a young man and woman got married and they lived in a small house on the top of a hill. The land where they lived was dry and hot, and it was rare that they saw a drop of rain. They had no running water, so twice a day the man would walk down a little dusty track that led to the river. Across his back he carried a pole from which two large clay pots hung for carrying water, one on each side of him. So it was that he carried water each day as he grew from being a young man to becoming older, he had children and they themselves had grown.

But all the time he carried the same two pots, only one pot had a small crack in it. Through this crack water would leak out and by the time the man had reached home there were only a few drops of water left. The perfect pot would taunt and tease the cracked pot. As the two pots would swing behind the old man's back the perfect pot would say to the cracked pot, 'You're rubbish you are. I don't know why the old man keeps you, you can't keep any water in you, you're good for nothing. You are useless.' The cracked pot said nothing.

This taunting happened on every trip the man made, up and down the hill, twice a day, day after day. Then one day the cracked pot could bear these hurtful words no longer. When the old man had returned home after fetching water and he had put the pots on the ground, the cracked pot said to him, 'Man, why do you keep me? I'm useless! I can't keep any water in me. Why don't you throw me away and get a new pot? Haven't you realised I've got a crack and I'm not perfect like him.'

'Oh pot, of course I know you have a crack,' said the man 'and you, you really don't know that is what makes you special to me. You see your water leaks out and waters one side of the path as I walk up the hill. A long time ago I planted some seeds of flowers and fruit along the path and everyday the water you drip waters them. Turn around and look and see how beautiful the flowers are.'

The pot turned and saw that down the hill, along the path, were flowers of every colour, and they beautiful to see, like a rainbow across a cloudy sky. So every day from then on when the so-called "perfect" pot taunted him, the cracked pot just took a deep breath and smelled the flowers, and they smelled good. So, if ever you feel less than perfect and wonder what you're there for, just remember that there is no one who is truly perfect and it's our cracks that make us who we are, and, if your feelings ever get so much that you can't bear it, take a breath to appreciate the beauty that's around you.

## The Monkey and the Crocodile

There was an old monkey who lived in an orange tree that grew next to a river. Although he enjoyed oranges he dreamed of being able to eat other fruit. But the jungle was a dangerous place and the river was even worse. It would never be safe to leave his tree, not even for the beautiful mangoes that grew on the other side of the river.

And on the other side of the river lived two crocodiles, a mother and her son. They both use to hide in the dark bushes and watch the old monkey. One day, the mother said to her son, **'Hmm, I really fancy some tasty monkey heart. Why don't you swim across and bring him over here and we can eat him together.'**

**'That monkey is not that stupid. He won't come with me'** said her son. **'Well,'** said the mother crocodile, **'if you really love me you would think of something.'** The crocodile realised he had better come up with a plan to trick the old monkey or his mother would just keep going on about it. Eventually an idea came to him. He was not sure if it would work but he thought it was worth a try. Silently, he slipped into the water and swam over to the monkey's side of the river.

When he was underneath the orange tree he shouted out, **'Friend monkey. You must be fed up with all those oranges. Why not come over to my side and share some of our mangoes. We have more than we can eat.'**

**'That's a kind offer, friend crocodile, but I can't swim and you might eat me.'**

**'You've got me all wrong. I don't eat monkey any more. I've turned vegetarian and if I give you some mangoes you might give me some oranges.'** When Monkey heard this he thought to himself, **'well, it's true I've never seen a crocodile eat a monkey and I sure would like some of those mangoes.'** So Monkey convinced himself it would be safe to go and eat those tasty mangoes that he dreamed about.



He climbed down and went and sat on the crocodile's back. The cunning crocodile started swimming across the wide river towards where his mother was hiding. When the crocodile was halfway across, and thought that the monkey couldn't swim back, he couldn't stop himself from gloating.

**'I'm sorry, friend monkey, but the only treat in store is for my mother. She loves to eat a monkey's heart so I'm bringing her to you.'** Monkey realised that the crocodile was not his friend and if he ever wanted to get back to the safety of his tree he would have to think quickly. **'I can do this'** he told himself, **'I can do this, all I've got to do is put my heart into this, and then I....'** An idea had suddenly come to him.

**'Oh no!'** shouted Monkey, **'I wish you'd told me. I didn't bring my heart with me. It would be a shame to eat me and not even get to taste the best bit'**

**'What!'** exclaimed the crocodile, **'you mean you haven't brought your heart with you?'** crocodile suddenly became worried that if he did not have the heart his mother would be very cross with him.

‘No, a monkey always leaves his heart at home when he ventures out.’ said the monkey, his confidence in his plan rising, ‘We could go back to my tree and I’ll get it for you.’

Crocodile turned round and swam back to Monkey’s tree. As soon as they got there Monkey shouted, ‘I’ll be right back’ and scampered up into the branches. There he found the biggest orange he could and threw it with all his might to hit Crocodile right between his eyes.

‘Oh Crocodile, you think us monkeys can take out our hearts when we want? More fool you. It’s here all the time’ he said, beating his chest, ‘and if you want it, come and get it.’ But Crocodile knew he was defeated and there was nothing for it but to return home empty handed.

Well, if you could take your heart out is there someone you could trust not to eat it?

### Sources of the Stories

Both *The Talking Tortoise* and the *The Monkey and the Crocodile* are Jataka tales first recorded in India over 2000 years ago, but both have travelled widely and are found in different versions all over the world. These versions are retellings of these old traditional tales. *The Talking Tortoise* is based on retellings, including *The Talkative Turtle in Wisdom Tales from Around the World* by Heather Forest (1996, August House) and a translation of the original Buddhist text *The Jatakas*; or, *Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births* (Cowell et al, 1895).

*The Monkey and the Crocodile* was based on retellings in *The Hungry Tigress* by Rafe Martin (2001, Yellow Moon) and *Kalila and Dimna-Fables of Conflict and Intrigue* by Ramsey Wood (2011, Medina). *The Cracked Pot* is an old Chinese Tale. This retelling was inspired by hearing this story told by Storytellers Taffy Thomas and Peter Chand. Another version can be found in *Telling Tales: Storytelling as Emotional Literacy* (Taffy Thomas & Steve Killick, 2007, Educational Publishing).

Steve Killick



## Ashputtel

The wife of a rich man was gravely ill. In her last hours she wanted to speak to her only daughter.

**‘Be good. Be good, my daughter, and I will look over you from heaven.’**

And the girl’s mother died as the first snows of winter began to fall. And yet by the time those snows had melted the rich man had taken another wife. And this wife had two daughters both of whom were beautiful. Well, at least in face but not in heart. And the young girl’s life took a turn for the worse.

The two sisters mocked her. At first it was **‘Oh look at the little Princess. She thinks she is better than us with all her fine dresses.’** And the young girl stopped wearing her fine clothes and her sisters took them for themselves. Then it became. **“‘Oh look at this little girl in her old dresses. She thinks she is as good as us. If she is to sit with us, she should serve us our food.’** She began to serve her sisters their food before she sat down. But then it became, **‘Wait, the kitchen maid thinks she can sit at the table with us. Be gone.’**

One day the rich man said to his wife’s daughters, **‘I am going to the city and will bring you a gift. What would you like?’**

**‘Oh I would like jewellery’** said one.

**‘And I would like beautiful dresses’** said the other.

The father turned to leave but at the door he remembered his other daughter. **‘And you, Ashputtel, what can I get you?’**

**‘Father,’** said the girl, **‘if your head should knock against the branch of a tree, then please break it off and bring that sprig to me as a gift’** said Ashputtel.

The rich man went to the city and at the market bought jewellery and dresses for his daughters, but forgot about Ashputtel’s request.



But as he rode home through the forest he accidentally knocked his head against the branch of a rowan tree. He remembered Ashputtel's wish. He broke off a branch and brought it home.

When he gave his gifts to the girls, Ashputtel took the branch to her mother's grave. There she plunged the stick into the earth and she cried tears of grief for her mother. Each day she would return and her tears would fall and water the branch. And it began to grow and over time it grew into a fine tree. One day a white dove came and landed in the tree and began to sing to Ashputtel and Ashputtel listened. Each day more birds came and sang to the girl and Ashputtel learnt the language of the birds and she began to sing back to them.

One day, it was announced that the King was having a festival. It would last for three days and each evening there would be a grand ball and there would be dancing to midnight. The King wanted to find a wife for his son, the Prince, and he was sure that such a grand ball would attract the most beautiful girls in the land.

There was great excitement in the house of Ashputtel. The two sisters could think of nothing else, but Ashputtel knew she would have to ask her

stepmother for permission. As the festival grew close she plucked up her courage and asked her. But her stepmother said,

**'You, Ashputtel, go the festival? Look at you. You have no fine clothes and you cannot dance. You cannot go.'**

But Ashputtel would not relent and she kept asking until the woman said **'Very well, Ashputtel, I will set you a task.'** And she emptied a pot of lentils out into the ashes of the fire and mixed them all together.

**'If you can separate these lentils from the ashes and put every one back in the jar within an hour, then I shall allow you to the festival.'** The task was impossible and the woman knew it. Ashputtel began but soon began to cry. Then she had an idea, she went to the window and began to sing in the language of the birds. A moment later a white dove landed on the window sill, followed by a turtle dove, followed by many more. They flew over to the fireplace and began to peck all the lentils out of the ashes and put them into the jar. Within the hour the task was completed and Ashputtel presented the jar to the girl's mother. Her face turned to shock, but then she said, **'Ashputtel, you are a fool if you think that we can allow you to go. Look at you. You have no fine clothes and you cannot dance. You will bring shame upon the family.'**

Ashputtel knew she would not be allowed to go and when the first night of the festival arrived she watched her sisters and her parents leave to take the road through the forest to the palace.

And as soon as the family was out of sight she washed her face of the kitchen ashes and ran to the tree at her mother's grave. She began to sing to the tree and then a flock of birds flew up and out of the tree, pulling with them a beautiful linen dress and a pair of white linen shoes. She took off her rags put on the dress and ran through the forest. She was going to the ball.

When she arrived the party was in full swing but as she entered everyone turned to look at her for she was beautiful. Even her own family admired

her, but they did not recognise her in the dim light of the thousand candles that lit the ballroom. The Prince came up to her, bowed before her, and asked for the pleasure of a dance with her. And they danced for the whole evening. And she was surrounded by suitors who wanted to dance with her, but the Prince refused them all saying, **‘This is my partner and she will dance with no one else but me.’**

But as the time drew near to midnight Ashputtel knew she must leave early to return home before her family, or she would be discovered and punished. She slipped away from the Prince who searched for her. He followed her through the forest but Ashputtel slipped away. She returned the dress to the tree, put on her rags and went home.

By the fire she rubbed ashes into her face and lay down as if she was sleeping. She heard her family return and talk of the evening’s events, of the beautiful woman whom the Prince had followed through the woods, where they had found him hopelessly searching for her outside their house. Who was she? Would she win the Prince’s heart? They had no idea that it was Ashputtel and the sisters vowed they would win the Prince’s affection the following night.

And the next night was the same as the first. After the family had left, Ashputtel went to the tree, this time a dress of silver thread was given to her with a pair of solid silver shoes to match. She put them on, ran through the forest and when she reached the ball, the prince again danced with her all evening. Again, she managed to slip away from the Prince before the end of the evening. He pursued her through the woods, but again she returned the dress and went home unseen. The family met the Prince outside their home looking for his love. Again the sisters vowed they would use all their powers to woo the Prince on the final night of the ball.

And for the last night of the festival Ashputtel was given a dress of golden thread more beautiful than before. And with it a pair of shoes made of gold. Ashputtel was more beautiful than ever and the Prince danced with her all night and refused all other suitors saying, **‘This is my partner and she will dance with no one else but me.’**

As midnight approached Ashputtel slipped away a third and final time. But the Prince was prepared. Whilst everyone was inside his servants had covered the steps to the palace with tar. Anyone walking on them would be stuck to the substance. And as Ashputtel placed one foot on it and realised that she was trapped. She removed her foot from the shoe, jumped the steps and ran home through the forest. She returned the dress, put on her rags and covered her face with ash then fell asleep by the kitchen fire.

The Prince found the shoe, he picked it up and went to his father and said, 'I will find the girl whose foot fits this shoe and I will marry her. And I have a very good idea where to find her.'

The next morning he set out for the house of the rich man close to where he had lost Ashputtel after his midnight pursuit. He was greeted at the door by the mother. He said he was looking for the woman he wanted to marry and asked if there were any young women in the house. He showed her the golden shoe and declared, '**This is the shoe of the woman I love and I will marry the one whose foot fits it.**'

The mother saw the opportunity for one of her daughters to become a princess. She bid the Prince enter and took the shoe from him, saying she would see if it would fit one of her daughters. She went to her oldest daughter and told her to put the shoe on. The daughter tried her best but it would not fit. Her mother said, '**If you were a Princess, you would have no need to walk for you would have servants to do everything for you.**' She went and got a knife and said, '**cut off your toes and make the shoe fit.**' With her own mother looking over her, the young girl sobbed as she cut off her toe to make the shoe fit. She was then presented to the Prince.

The Prince looked at the shoe and rejoiced, '**I have found my Princess**' and he picked her up and carried her to his horse and led her back through the forest to the palace. The mother dreamed of a royal wedding and becoming a member of the Royal household. But as the prince led the girl through the woods, he became aware the birds were singing more loudly than he had ever heard before and it seemed they were singing to him.

**‘Turn and look, the shoe is too small, this is not your bride at all.’**

The Prince looked again at the shoe and could see blood oozing out of the shoe. He turned straight around without a word and returned to the house, **‘This is not the one I seek. Is there another here?’**

The mother took the shoe to her second daughter. She could not make the shoe fit and again the mother handed her own daughter a knife telling her that **‘when you are the Princess you will have no need to walk.’** The daughter sliced off her toes to make the shoe fit. The Prince placed this daughter on his horse and set off for the forest. And the birds sang out

**‘Turn and look, the shoe is too small, this is not your bride at all.’**

He turned and saw the blood on the girls leg and returned straight to the house.

**‘Have you any other daughters?’** he demanded.

**‘No, said the mother, ‘there are no others.’**

The Prince, feeling he had lost his love again, turned away. But then the father who had been watching all said, **‘Well, there is Ashputtel, the kitchen girl, But she would not be the one you seek.’**

The Prince asked her to be brought and Ashputtel was called. She went and washed her face and presented herself to the Prince. He placed the shoe upon her foot himself and saw the perfect fit. And he looked at her and recognised the girl he had danced with.

He lifted her upon his horse and for a third time they passed through the forest as the birds sang out in harmony

**‘This shoe it fits, the true bride rides with you’**

And a white bird flew down from the heavens and landed on Ashputtel’s shoulder as she rode towards the palace with her prince.

## The Snow-Tiger's Whisker

There was once, long ago, a young boy who lived with his mother and father. But his mother died leaving the boy and father to look after each other. Then, after a while, the father remarried and again there were three in the house.

The boy did not want this woman. He had lost his mother and now he felt he was losing his father as well. The woman said. **'I know I cannot replace your mother but I can look after you and we can love and respect each other.'** She tried to take care of him, she would talk to him, prepare him for school and cook his meals on his return. But the boy remained hostile. He would be sullen, never looking at this intruder. The woman tried harder, but the harder she tried the more the boy turned away. In time she became angry.

One day she cooked a special meal but the boy just pushed the plate away. He was not hungry. In her frustration, she pushed the plate back, he pushed it away again, then she pushed him and the boy stood up and pushed her to the floor. He then ran out.

The woman spoke with the boy's father. **'There must be something I can do. I know he is in pain for the loss of his mother but I am not her and should not suffer this. There may be a medicine that will help. I will see the medicine man.'**

So she set off for the town and went to the house of the medicine man.

**'Please, there must be a potion that would make him love me'** she cried.

**'There is,'** replied the old medicine man, **'but I lack one vital ingredient. I need a whisker from the head of a snow-tiger. Not at all an easy thing to get. Tiger's do not give up their moustaches. It is a dangerous animal that must not be killed. No one is brave enough to risk getting a whisker from a living snow-tiger.'**

'I am not brave, but this is a thing that must be done and if no one else will do it for me then I will do it myself.' With that the woman prepared some supplies and set off for the high mountain, the home of the snow-tiger. The journey was hard, her clothes were ripped and her shoes were wrecked but she climbed up the slopes of the mountain. It began to snow hard, and she took cover under some trees at the edge of the forest just below the tree line. There she collapsed, exhausted, and she slept.

When she awoke the storm had passed. The sun shone down on the snow which was white, fresh, pure. The air was sharp. And she could see paw-prints; a sign that the snow tiger was close. She followed them up the mountain until she saw the prints disappear into a cave. This was the lair of the snow-tiger. Outside the entrance she took from her bag a piece of meat and placed it upon a plate. Then she retreated as far away as possible where she could still watch. And she watched and she waited and, at last, the tiger emerged. It was magnificent, crossed with white and black stripes; it was beautiful and also ferocious, muscular and majestic in movement. The tiger looked around and saw the woman in the distance. It sniffed the meat and then ate it. Then it went back into the cave.





The next day the woman again went and placed a piece of meat on the plate outside the cave. This time she went only as half as far away. Again the tiger came out, looked about, sniffed the meat, ate it then returned to his cave. On the third day she did the same, again going only half the distance away. Again the tiger came out, looked and ate the meat. She carried on like this, halving the distance she retreated each day until on the seventh day she was only one foot away from the plate. The tiger came out, looked at the woman, then ate the meat. When he finished, the woman bent over and stroked the tiger. The tiger looked at her again, and then he spoke.

‘Well,’ said the tiger, ‘what do you want?’

‘I have fed you these last seven days and you have eaten my food. I would ask in return that you might give me one of your whiskers.’

‘What you say is true and you have been patient and brave. What you ask is not unreasonable and is fair exchange. You may pluck one.’

The tiger lay on the ground and the woman selected a whisker, the longest she could find, and twisted it around her finger. Then she pulled quickly, the tiger flexed and growled, and then relaxed. The woman thanked the tiger and stroked his coat. He stood up, bowed his head and walked away. The woman, with the whisker still twisted around her finger, ran all the way down the mountain and did not stop until she came to the house of the medicine man.

‘Here it is, the ingredient you require to make the medicine for my boy.’

‘How did you get this?’ asked the medicine man and the woman told him exactly what she had done. The healer, slowly, took the long hair and, holding it between finger and thumb, held it up to the light of the fire and looked at it carefully. Then he just let it go. It fell slowly, but too fast for the woman to catch, towards the fire. It burst into flame and, in a second, vanished.

‘What! What! What have you done? That was the ingredient. It was so hard to get. You have thrown it away!’

'You no longer need it' said the healer. 'What you have done with the tiger is what you must do with your son. Have patience, wait. Give him time. You need no other medicine.'

The woman went home and she did what she had learnt. It did not take seven days, nor seven weeks, but after seven months, the boy responded to the woman's gentle care. He never forgot his birth mother, but he could accept the love of another.

#### **Source of *The Snow-Tiger's Whisker* story**

There are versions of this story in South-East Asia and in Africa. The Asian versions feature a husband who is traumatised and depressed after fighting in a war. The theme is of patience overcoming anger and of facing the fear gradually. It also presents a positive step-mother story in contrast to other tales which, seemingly, may present such a negative image. Step-parents, like foster carers, are not biological parents but take on the parental functions of caring, setting boundaries and creating opportunities for growth.

My retelling blends several versions and adds something of my own. I was inspired by Clarissa Pinkola Estes (*Women Who Run with the Wolves*) in her version it is the tiger's eyelash that must be found. Len Cabral's version in *Ready-to-Tell Tales* (edited by David Holt & Bill Mooney, August House, 1994) and Heather Forest in 'Wisdom Tales from Around the World' (August House, 1996).

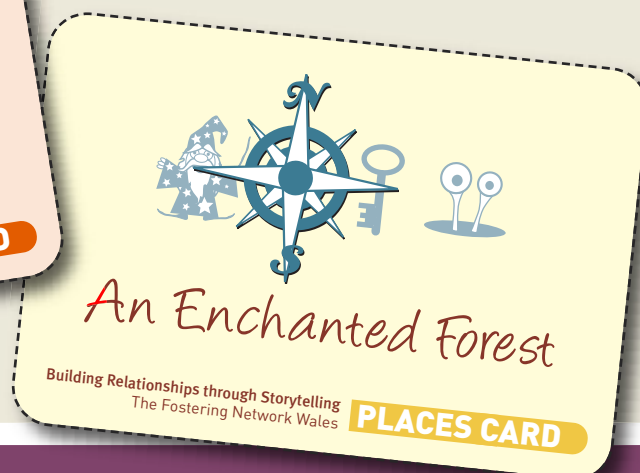
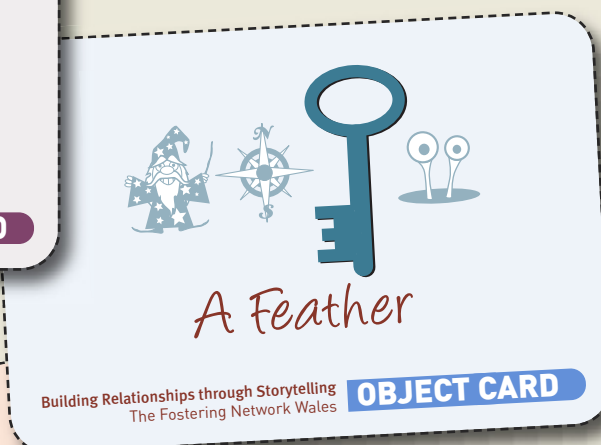
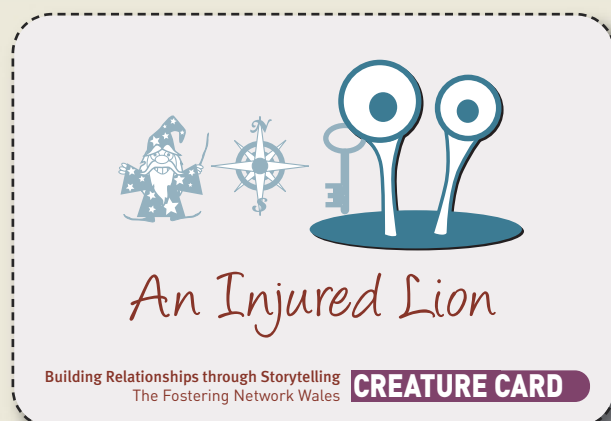
Steve Killick

# Appendix Two

## The Story-making cards game

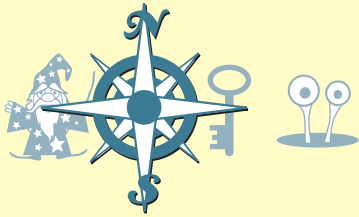
Traditional stories often contain many similar 'motifs' - that is, commonly repeating images, characters or objects, giving the story structure and meaning. Such characters as the witch, the beast, or the wise man / woman and places such as a forest, as a dark and mysterious place, or a wishing well, have both good narrative and symbolic uses. We can use such characters to help create stories, and in so doing, help children learn about narrative structure.

The story making cards, illustrated in this Appendix, can be printed out, cut up and used to help create stories using these motifs. A child can select a number of cards, perhaps one from each separate category of places, people, creatures and objects, and then the foster carer makes up a story using those cards. Then roles can be reversed and the child makes up a story from the foster carer's selection. Keep the stories short and fun with a playful atmosphere. It is not about getting it right or wrong - but having fun together. You could also create games together using the cards or even write your own cards.



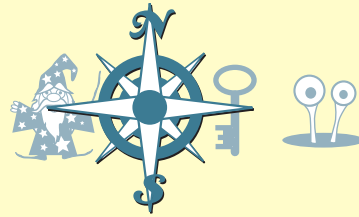
# Appendix Two: Storytelling Cards

## 'Places Cards' to print and cut-out



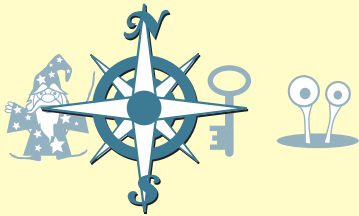
*A Secret Garden*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**



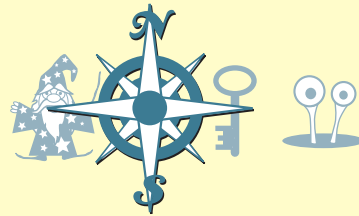
*An Enchanted Forest*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**



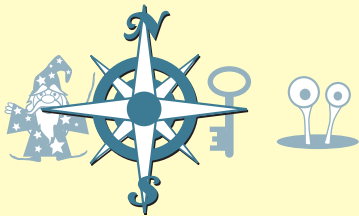
*The Sky*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**



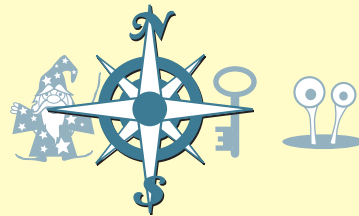
*A Castle*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**



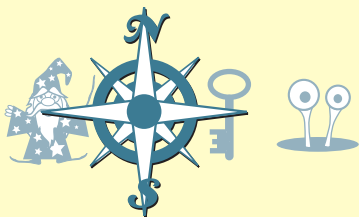
*A Muddy Puddle*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**



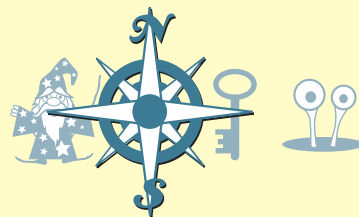
*A Mountain Top*

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The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**



*A Farm*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**

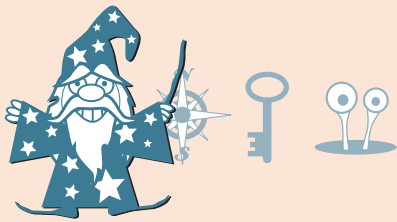


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The Fostering Network Wales **PLACES CARD**

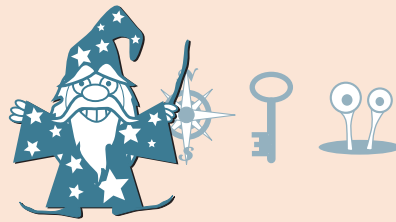
# Appendix Two: Storytelling Cards

## 'People Cards' to print and cut-out



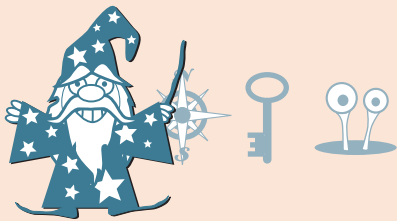
*The Youngest of Three Sons*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PEOPLE CARD**



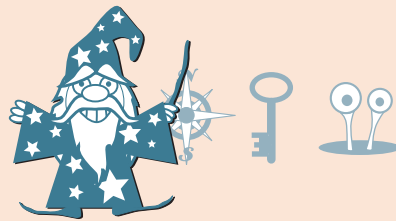
*A Miller's Daughter*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PEOPLE CARD**



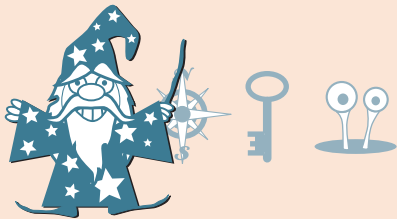
*An Old Magician*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PEOPLE CARD**



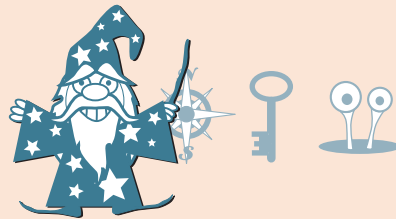
*A Queen*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PEOPLE CARD**



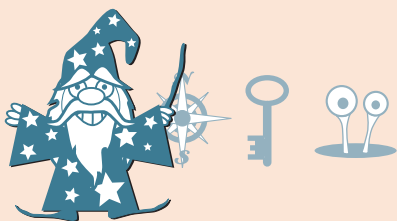
*A Farmer*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PEOPLE CARD**



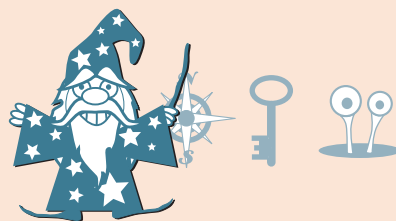
*A Shape-Shifter*

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*A White Witch*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PEOPLE CARD**

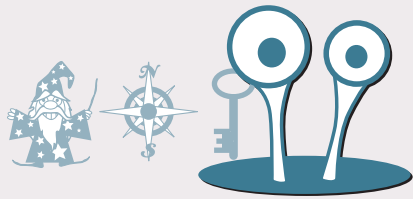


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Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **PEOPLE CARD**

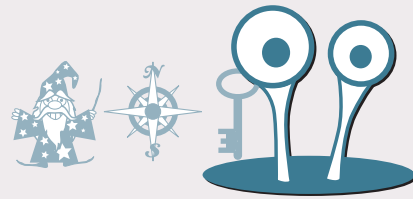
# Appendix Two: Storytelling Cards

## 'Creature Cards' to print and cut-out



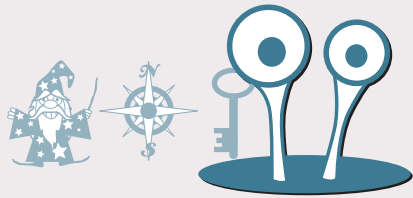
*A Snake*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**



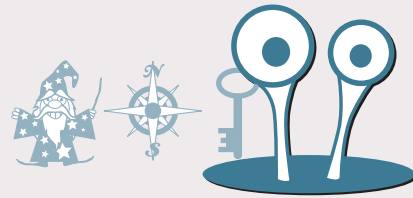
*An Injured Lion*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**



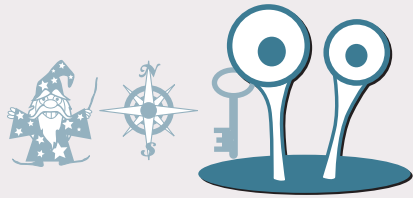
*A Black Stallion*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**



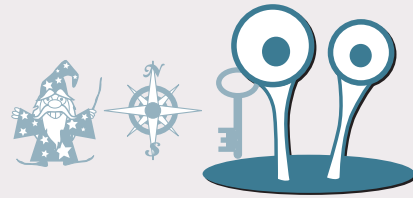
*A Raven*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**



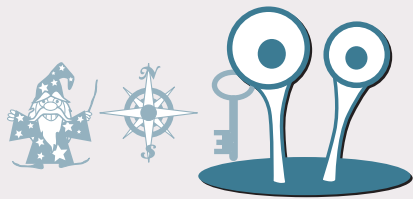
*A Werewolf*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**



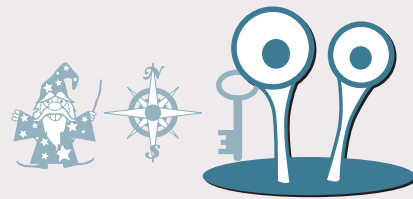
*A Sly Fox*

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The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**



*A Talking Cat*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**

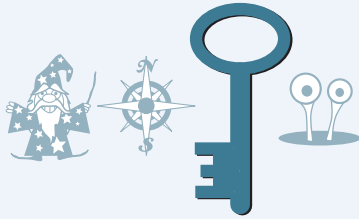


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The Fostering Network Wales **CREATURE CARD**

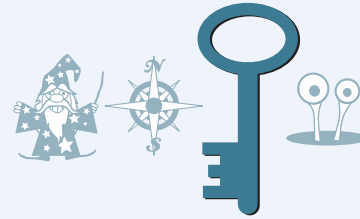
# Appendix Two: Storytelling Cards

## 'Object Cards' to print and cut-out



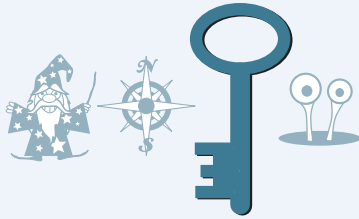
*A Feather*

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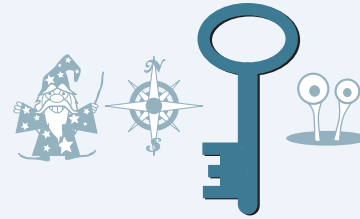
*A Treasure Chest*

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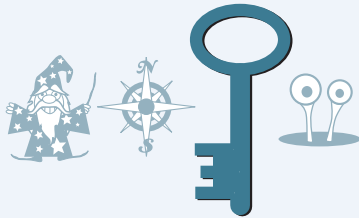
*A Pair of Old Muddy Boots*

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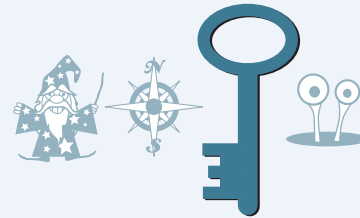
*A Bunch of Keys*

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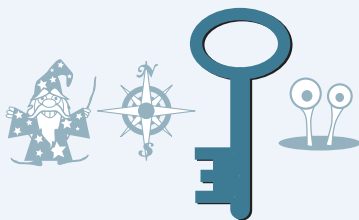
*A Pearl Ring*

Building Relationships through Storytelling  
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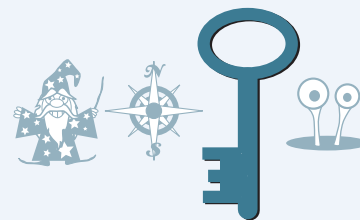
*A Golden Apple*

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*A Mirror*

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(write your own idea here)

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The Fostering Network is the UK's leading charity for all those involved in foster care. As the UK's voice of foster care, we are committed to raising the standards of care for children and young people who are fostered throughout the UK. We work with our members to share knowledge and best practice, promote fostering and campaign for positive changes in foster care.

[www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

To find out more about our work in Wales,  
please contact:

**The Fostering Network Wales**

One Caspian Point, Pierhead Street

Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

t: 029 2044 0940

e: [wales@fostering.net](mailto:wales@fostering.net)



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llais gofal maeth

the fostering network

the voice of foster care

