

Supporting Resilience in Families
Who Have Experienced Trauma in
Adoption or Foster Care
Through Narrative Expression



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Objectives/Overview

- Discuss traumas and losses adoptees and children in foster care experience
- Examine Narrative Identity and Narrative Identity Theory
- Explore two artist who use narratives as a way of healing
- Identify techniques to use with individuals or families that have experienced adoption and/or foster care

Trauma in Foster Care and Adoption

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Foster Care

- There are approximately 428,000 children in foster care at any time according to the National Children's Alliance.
- In 2015 over 670,000 spent time in foster care
- The average length of stay in foster care is two years
- In 2015 62,000 were waiting to be adopted as a result of their parents parental rights being terminated

Adoption

- *Approximately 135,000 children are adopted each year in the United States*
- *Approximately 59% of these adoptions are from the child welfare system*
- *15% are voluntarily relinquished babies*
- *26% are from other countries*



Adopted and fostered children experience trauma and multiple losses, no matter what age they were adopted or fostered.



Primary Losses

Family

Home

Friends

Pets

Secondary Losses

- Familiar smells, tastes and sounds
- Loss of clothes
- Changes in routine
- Changes in schools
- Changes in friendships
- Being comfortable with their lives



Intangible Loss

Safety

Security

Control

Hope

Ambiguous Loss

Person is physically absent, but
psychologically present.

The birth parent(s) is thought about often
and psychologically present in the mind of
the adopted/foster child

Attachment

- Attachment theory posits that secure attachments in infancy predict positive relationships in life.
- Bowlby described “attachment bond” as the “warm, continuous... relationship...” created between a parent and child.
- Close emotional bond between two people.

Challenges for Adopted and Fostered Children

- Adoptive and foster parents often view adoption and foster care differently than the child
- Adoptive parents often see the children's life as "starting" with them
- Adoptees and foster youth encounter language challenges around relationships
- Lost or fractured relationships are not socially recognized and are often hidden from others
- Adoptees and foster youth may feel the need to be perfect/test boundaries
- Grief is often overlooked and not discussed in foster care or adoption
- Medical history may be unknown or incomplete

Narrative Expression

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Narrative Identity

- “Narrative identity is the internal and evolving story of the self that one constructs to make sense and meaning out of [their] life.”
- Individuals start organizing their lives into narrative identities in their teens and young adulthood, however the process of developing narrative identities continues throughout life.
- “In constructing self-defining life stories, people draw heavily on prevailing cultural norms and the images, metaphors, and themes that run through the many narratives they encounter in social life.”

-McAdams, 2011

Brené Brown

**Owning our
story and loving
ourselves through that
process is the bravest
thing we'll ever do.**

Narrative Identity Theory

- Narrative Identity Theory posits that how people tell their stories may predict particular outcomes, including quality of life
- When children are able to hear and tell their stories, it gives them resources (resilience)

It is writing that truly
rescues, that enables us
to reach the shore, to
recover.

Bell Hooks

Expressive Arts

- Studies show art in any form can relieve stress
- Many cultures use artistic expression as a way of healing

Contemporaries Who Have Used Narrative Expression for Healing

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Yrsa Daley-Ward

- Jamaican and Nigerian, raised in England by her grandparents
- Actress, model, and poet
- Struggled with depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and addiction
- Attending a poetry reading in South Africa inspired her to begin writing poetry herself
- Published two books of poetry (On Snakes and Other Stories and Bone) and memoir (The Terrible).



Yrsa Daley-Ward

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If you're afraid to write it,
that's a good sign.
I suppose you know you're writing the
truth when you're terrified.

Trust the validity of your feeling.
It may be abstract, ridiculous,
irrational, absurd.
There's a root somewhere.

Yrsa Daley-Ward

There are parts of you
that want the sadness.
Find them out. Ask them why.

Yrsa Daley-Ward

And sometimes you meet yourself
back where you started, but stronger.

Yrsa Daley-Ward

Yrsa Daley-Ward

You will come away bruised
but this will give you poetry.

The bruising will shatter
The bruising will shatter into
black diamond.

No-one will sit beside you in class.

Maybe your life will work.

Most likely it wont at first

but that

will give you poetry.

Alexandra (Alex) Elle

- African American, experienced emotional and physical abuse as a child
- Writer, poet, storyteller, and wellness coach
- Hx of suicidal ideation and depression
- Began writing as a preteen as a way to heal
- Attended therapy and earned to use her words in a constructive way
- Believes that sharing stories builds communities and takes away shame
- Believes that sharing stories builds resilience
- Published two books of poetry (*Neon Soul* and *Love in My Language*), a book of affirmations (*Words from a Wanderer*), and two meditation journals. She also has a podcast (*Hey Girl*).



You're not a victim for sharing your story. You are a survivor setting the world on fire with your truth. And you never know who needs your light, your warmth, and raging courage. -Alex Elle

Listen to me when I'm losing it. Hug me when I'm hurting. Sit with me in silence when I'm sad. I don't want someone who is looking to mold me or repair the damage done. I want someone to love me for who I AM even at my lowest...

-Alex Elle

I no longer live in fear of
being judged or misunderstood,
because my story doesn't have
to be understood by everyone.

It belongs to me.

-alex elle

how do we rebuild
our brokenness?
day by day.
piece by piece. —alex elle

Techniques for Engaging Children and Families in Narrative Expression

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Poetry and Journaling

I aM poem	By,	I aM...
I uNderStand...	I Say...	I dreaM...
I try...	I HOpe...	

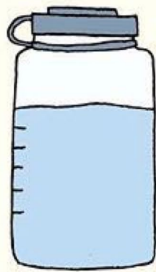
the story of _____

Story Boards

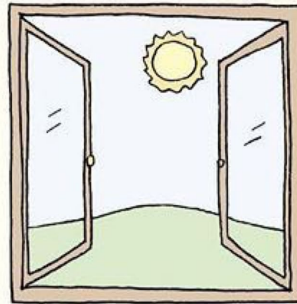
Cartoon Strips

DON'T FORGET

DRINK WATER.



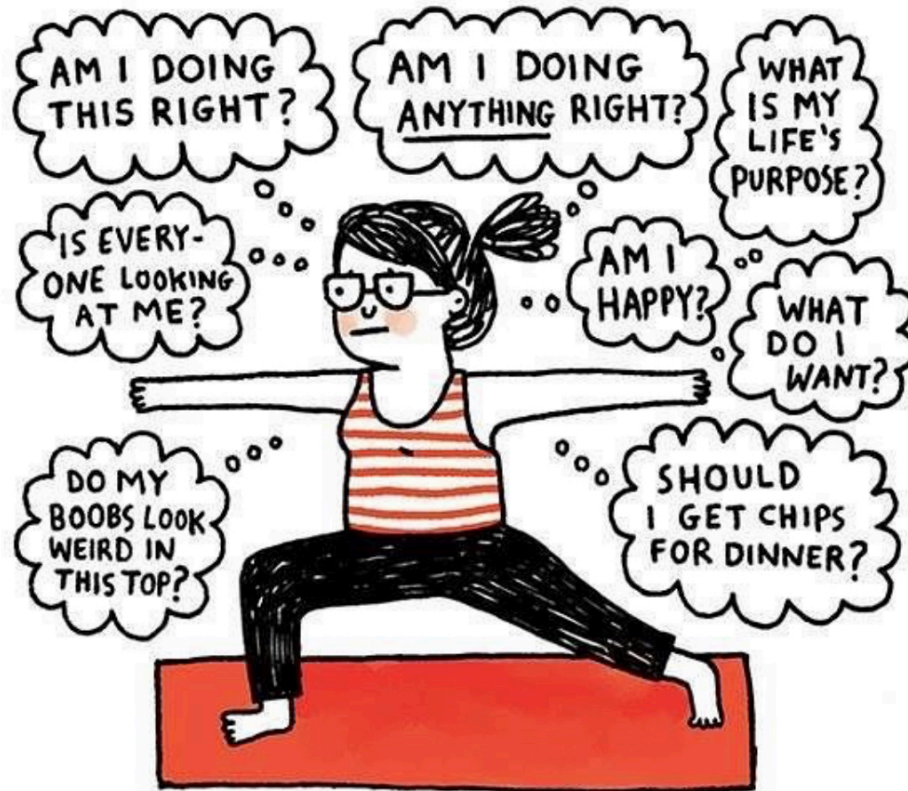
GET SUNLIGHT.



YOU'RE
BASICALLY A
HOUSE PLANT
WITH MORE
COMPLICATED
EMOTIONS.



Illustrative Narration



WORRIER POSE

Gemma CORRELL

Our Lives In Music



the hurt happened.
and, yes, it will always
be a reminder of what
i've been through.
but it will not be
my resting place.
it will not be where
i dwell or settle.
the healing is
what's most
valuable.
the growth.
the evolution.
the ability to
have control
over my life
and heart despite
what's knocked
me down in the
past. —alex elle

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