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

Brené Brown
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
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 African 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

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 peace. —alex elle
Techniques for Engaging Children and Families in Narrative Expression
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<th>By.</th>
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<td>I say...</td>
<td>I dream...</td>
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<tr>
<td>I try...</td>
<td>I hope...</td>
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Story Boards
Cartoon Strips

DON'T FORGET

DRINK WATER.
GET SUNLIGHT.
YOU'RE BASICALLY A HOUSE PLANT WITH MORE COMPLICATED EMOTIONS.
Illustrative Narration
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
References


Elle, A. (2017). Works retrieved from @alex_elle


