

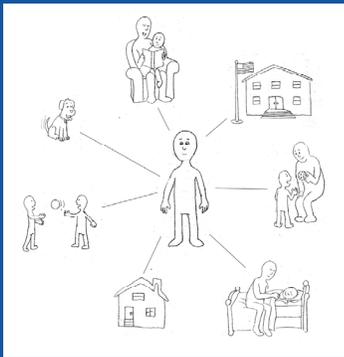
Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

Module 6: Connections and Healing

Learning Objectives

After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Identify at least three important connections in your child's life, and ways in which you can support and maintain these connections.
- Describe how trauma can affect children's view of themselves and their future.
- List at least three ways in which you can help your child feel safe when talking about trauma.



Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

Module 6: Connections and Healing

*When you feel connected to something,
that connection immediately gives you a
purpose for living.*

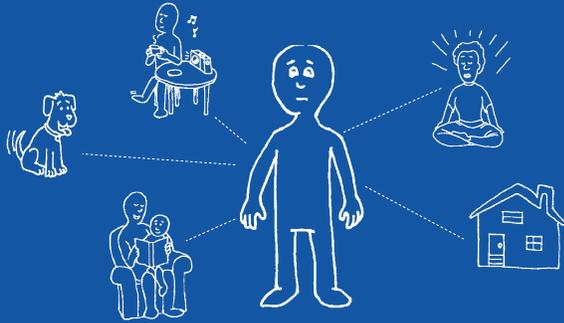
—Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

What keeps you connected?



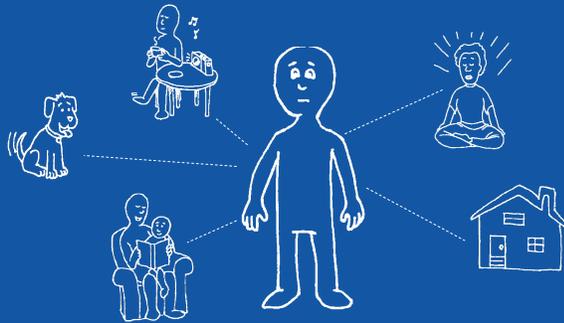
- Relationships
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Co-workers
- Life Stories – Past, Present, Future
 - Personal
 - Family
 - Cultural
- Places, things, rituals, and practices

Name Your Connections . . . (Group Activity)



(Continued)

Name Your Connections . . . (Continued)



Children Define Themselves Through Their Connections



- Who am I?
- What is lovable about me?
- What am I capable of?
- How can I survive and make sense out of what's happened to me?
- Who will I be in the future?

Being taken from my parents didn't bother me . . . but being torn away from my brothers and sisters . . . they were my whole life.

It was probably the most painful thing in the world. They told me I would be able to see them a lot, but I was lucky to see them at all.

—Luis

Hochman, et al. (2004). *Foster care: Voices from the inside*. Washington, DC: Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. Available at <http://pewfostercare.org/research/voices/voices-complete.pdf>.

Essential Elements 5 and 6



5. Respect and support positive, stable, and enduring relationships in the life of your child.
6. Help your child develop a strength-based understanding of his or her life story.

A Family Tale



- **Joey** (four), **Sandy** (nine), and **John** (14) have been in foster care for six months.
- The children were taken into care after their mother, **Jane**, left Joey and Sandy alone for several days while she went on an alcohol and cocaine binge.
- Joey is with **Thelma**, their maternal grandmother. Sandy and John are with **Rana**, a foster mom.

(Continued)

A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- Jane's father was an alcoholic who was sometimes violent
- Children often saw Jane passed out on the floor
- Once when Jane was passed out and bleeding from a head injury, Sandy feared she was dead
- Children witnessed violent fights between their parents
- Their father left two years ago without saying good-bye

(Continued)

A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- Jane has had periods of sobriety and many relapses.
- Sober for the last five weeks, Jane called the children every Thursday night and visited them every Sunday.
- On each visit, Jane told the children, "We will all be together again soon."

(Continued)

A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- **Joey** misses and worries about his mother. Is nervous and clingy just before her calls. Asks when he is going to see "my Sandy" over and over again.
- **Sandy** remembers having fun with her mother when she wasn't "loaded." Has nightmares about her mother passed out on the floor. Angry at her father for leaving and wonders if he is dead.
- **John** was close to his father. Blames his mother for the split. Doesn't trust women. Feels "old enough" to be on his own.

(Continued)

A Family Tale *(Continued)* (Group Activity)



On Thursday, Jane didn't call.

- What might each of the family members feel and think?
- How might they behave?
- How might their past trauma and Invisible Suitcases influence their reactions?

(Continued)

A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- **Joey**: worried, clingy, focused on how he would give Jane a present on Sunday
- **Sandy**: upset and angry, argued with Rana about going to the Sunday visit
- **John**: withdrawn, said he didn't care about Jane
- **Thelma**: worried, angry, ashamed; remembered her husband's drunken nights
- **Rana**: worried but judgmental

(Continued)

A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- On Sunday, Jane didn't show up for the visit.
- **Joey** threw a tantrum, insisting his mother would come.
- **Sandy** became upset and angry, tried to protect Joey, and lashed out at Thelma and Rana.
- **John** acted withdrawn and disinterested, but lashed out at Rana and Sandy in the car on the way home.

(Continued)

What can be done? (Group Activity)



- How can Rana and Thelma help the children cope with Jane's behavior and maintain healthy connections?
- How can they help themselves?

What about Jane? (Group Activity)



Trauma is intergenerational

- Grew up with an alcoholic and sometimes violent father
- History of abusive relationships
- Repeatedly tried to quit drugs and alcohol
- Loves her children even as she seems to "fail" them

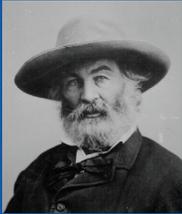
Lessons from Joey, Sandy, and John (Group Activity)



- Every child in a family has a unique relationship with his or her parents and siblings.
- Even children with the same trauma history will understand those events differently. They may have different trauma reminders and react differently to them.
- Caregivers must take care not to burden children with their own strong and complicated feelings toward birth parents.



Let's take a break!



*It takes two to speak the truth.
One to speak, and another to hear.*

—Walt Whitman

Making It Safe to Talk



- Makes the “unmentionable” mentionable
- Reinforces the message that the child is not responsible for the trauma
- Provides an opportunity to correct mistaken beliefs
- Teaches children that trauma does not have to define their lives

Harry: *I just feel so angry all the time. . . . What if after everything I've been through, something's gone wrong inside me? What if I'm becoming bad?*

Sirius: *I want you to listen to me very carefully, Harry. You're not a bad person. You're a very good person who bad things have happened to.*

From Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (Warner Brothers, 2007)

Talking About Trauma



- Expect the unexpected.
- Be aware of your reactions.
- Don't make assumptions.
- Be ready to listen and talk openly with your child, rather than avoiding the topic.

(Continued)

Talking About Trauma *(Continued)*



- Stop what you are doing and make eye contact.
- Listen quietly.
- Provide simple, encouraging remarks in a calm tone of voice.
- Avoid "shutting down" the child.

(Continued)

Talking About Trauma *(Continued)* (Group Activity)



- Offer comfort without being unrealistic.
- Praise the child's efforts to tell what happened.
- Provide constructive feedback.
 - Focus on the *behavior* of the caregiver, rather than making judgments.
- Be ready to share information with the child's therapist, and to report abuse or neglect that has not yet been reported.

Building New Connections



Build connections across the disruptions in your child's life:

- Document positive events and experiences (photos, scrapbooks, journals, etc.).
- Help "reconstruct" past experiences.
- Encourage your child to look forward to future goals and dreams.

Helping Your Child (Group Activity)



Think about the child in your My Child Worksheet. How can you help this child. . . :

- Feel safe when talking about trauma?
- Build connections across disruptions?
- Look positively towards the future?



Module 6: Wrap Up

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Module 6

Supplemental Handouts

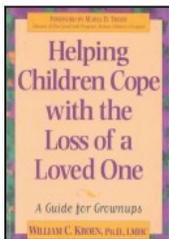
Module 6: Connections and Healing

Additional Resources

Books and Publications for Resource Parents

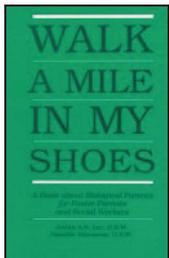
Rise (<http://www.risemagazine.org/index.html>)

Written by and for parents in the child welfare system, *Rise* helps birth parents to advocate for themselves and their children, and can help resource parents better understand the difficulties—and strengths—of their children’s birth families.



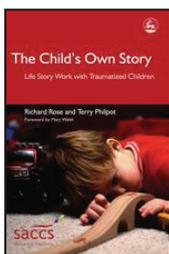
Kroen, W. C. (1996). *Helping children cope with the loss of a loved one: A guide for grownups*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Comfort, compassion, and sound advice are offered to anyone helping a child cope with the death of a loved one. Specific strategies are suggested to guide and support children of all ages.



Lee, J. A., & Nisivoccia, D. (1989). *Walk a mile in my shoes: A book about biological parents for foster parents and social workers*. Mt. Morris, IL: Child Welfare League of America Press.

This book can help foster parents and caseworkers “get into the shoes” of birth parents. Agencies will find it especially effective for use in the training of caseworkers and foster parents and for use by teachers and students in learning about birth families.



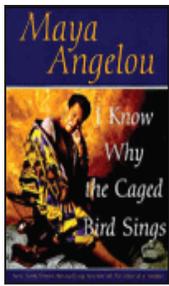
Rose, R., & Philpott, T. (2005). *The child’s own story: Life story work with traumatized children*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book provides a detailed introduction to life story work and how it can help children recover from trauma and make sense of the disruptions in their lives. It includes information on how to get needed information on your child’s life.

Books and Publications for Children

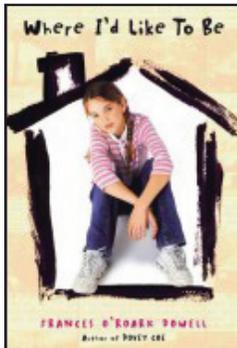
Represent (<http://www.youthcomm.org/Publications/FCYU.htm>)

(Teenagers) Written by and for young people in the foster care system, *Represent* provides an inside look at how teens cope with life “in the system.” This bimonthly magazine is an invaluable resource for any adult seeking to understand young people in care.



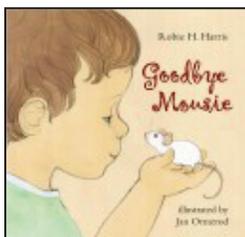
Angelou, M. (1997). *I know why the caged bird sings*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

(Grades 10–12) *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the story of acclaimed poet Maya Angelou's life from birth to young adulthood. Shuffled between homes with her best friend and brother, Bailey, eight-year-old Maya was physically and emotionally devastated when her mother's boyfriend raped her. She shut herself off to the world, speaking only to Bailey, until a kind and loving teacher pulled her out of her silence.



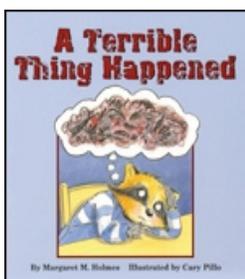
Dowell, F. O. (2003). *Where I'd like to be*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

(Pre-teens and teens) A ghost saved two-year-old Maddie's life when she was an infant, her Granny Lane claims, so Maddie must always remember that she is special. But it's hard to feel special when you're shuttled from one foster home to another. Now that she's at the East Tennessee Children's Home, Maddie keeps looking for a place to call home. She even makes a "book of houses," where she glues pictures of places she wants to live. Then a new girl, Murphy, shows up at the Home armed with tales about exotic travels, being able to fly, and boys who recite poetry to wild horses. Maddie shows Murphy her beloved scrapbook, never anticipating that this one gesture will challenge her very ideas of what home and family are all about.



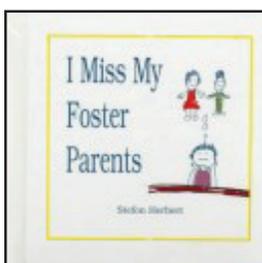
Harris, R. H. (2001). *Goodbye mousie*. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks.

(Ages 4–8) When a child learns that his pet mouse has died, at first he can't believe it. But it takes time for the young narrator to understand that Mousie is dead and he's not coming back. Beautifully told and illustrated, *Goodbye Mousie* is a perfect book with which to help children cope with loss.



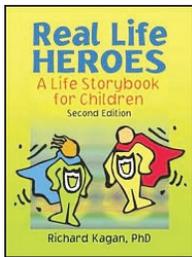
Holmes, M., & Mudlaff, S. J. (2000). *A terrible thing happened: A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

(Ages 4–8) This gently told and tenderly illustrated story is for children who have witnessed any kind of violent or traumatic episode, including physical abuse, school or gang violence, accidents, homicide, suicide, and natural disasters such as floods or fire. An afterword for parents and other caregivers offers suggestions for helping traumatized children, including a list of other additional resources.



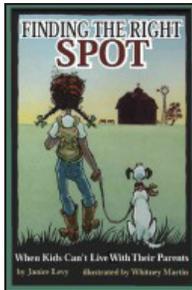
Herbert, S. (1991). *I miss my foster parents*. Mt. Morris, IL: Child Welfare League of America Press.

(Ages 4–8) Seven-year-old Stefon describes the fear and anxiety he feels when he and his sister leave their foster home and go to live with their new adoptive family. This realistic and honest book may help other children feel that they are not alone in missing their foster parents and depicts the relationship continuing with phone calls, cards, and visits.



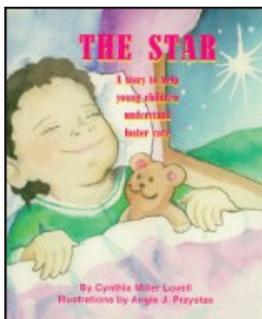
Kagan, R. (2004). *Real life heroes: A life storybook for children (2nd ed.)*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

(Ages 6–12) Designed for use by children who are receiving trauma-informed psychotherapy, this book helps children move from painful or fractured memories to a positive perspective by drawing strength from the supportive people in their lives. It encourages children to work with caring adults to develop autobiographies through a wide range of activities, including drawings, music, movies, and narrative.



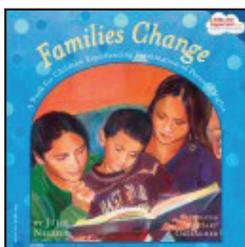
Levy, J. (2004). *Finding the right spot: When kids can't live with their parents*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

(Ages 6–12) A young girl living with her foster parent describes the ups and downs of being separated from her mother and living in unfamiliar surroundings. A story for all kids who can't live with their parents, regardless of the circumstances, it tells about resilience and loyalty, and love, sadness, and anger, too. A “Note to Caregivers” discusses the emotional experience of children who are in foster care, kinship care, or otherwise not living with their parents, and the vital support that the adults in their lives can offer.



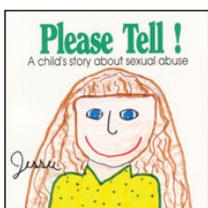
Lovell, C. M. (1999). *The star: A story to help young children understand foster care*. Battle Creek, MI: Roger Owen Rossman.

(Ages 4–8) *The Star* follows a fictional young girl, Kit, who is taken from her mother to the safety, and different world, of a foster home. On Kit's first night in foster care, she becomes friends with a star outside her bedroom window. The star tells Kit about other foster children it has seen. Through the story, the star is a source of comfort for Kit as she experiences many emotions and adjusts to all the new things in her foster home.



Nelson, J., & Nelson, J. (2006). *Families change: A book for children experiencing termination of parental rights (Kids Are Important series)*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publications.

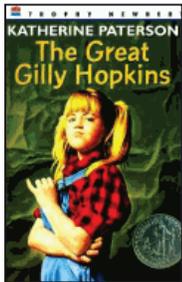
All families change over time. Sometimes a baby is born or a grown-up gets married. And sometimes a child gets a new foster parent or a new adopted mom or dad. Children need to know it's not their fault. They need to understand that they can remember and value their birth family and love their new family, too. Straightforward words and full-color illustrations offer hope and support for children facing or experiencing change. Includes resources and information for birth parents, foster parents, social workers, counselors, and teachers.



Ottenweiler, J. (1991). *Please tell!: A child's story about sexual abuse*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Foundation.

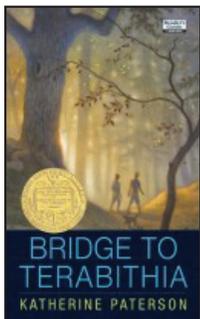
(Ages 9–12) Nine-year-old Jessie's words and illustrations help other sexually abused children know that they're not alone, that it's okay to talk about their feelings, and that the abuse wasn't their fault. *Please Tell!* is an excellent

tool for therapists, counselors, child protection workers, teachers, and parents dealing with children affected by sexual abuse. Simple, direct, and from the heart, Jessie gives children the permission and the courage to deal with sexual abuse.



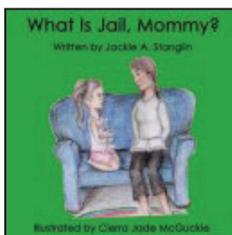
Paterson, K. (1987). *The great Gilly Hopkins*. New York: NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

(Pre-teens and teens) Eleven-year-old Gilly has been stuck in more foster families than she can remember, and she's disliked them all. She has a reputation for being brash, brilliant, and completely unmanageable. So when she's sent to live with the Trotters—the strangest family yet—Gilly decides to put her sharp mind to work. She devises an elaborate scheme to get her real mother to come rescue her. But the rescue doesn't work out, and Gilly is left thinking that maybe life with the Trotters wasn't so bad.



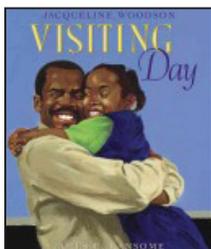
Porter, K. (2005). *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: NY: HarperCollins.

(Juvenile) Jess Aarons' greatest ambition is to be the fastest runner in his grade. But on the first day of school, a new girl boldly crosses over to the boys' side and outruns everyone. That's not a very promising beginning for a friendship, but Jess and Leslie Burke become inseparable. Together they create Terabithia, a magical kingdom in the woods where the two of them reign as king and queen, and their imaginations set the only limits. Then one morning a terrible tragedy occurs. Only when Jess is able to come to grips with this tragedy does he finally understand the strength and courage Leslie has given him.



Stanglin, J. A. (2006). *What is jail, Mommy?* Centennial, CO: LifeVest Publishing, Inc.

(Ages 4–8) This book was inspired by a much-loved five-year-old girl whose father has been incarcerated for most of her life. One day after visiting with friends who have both devoted parents in the home, this little girl blurted out to her mother in frustration, “What is jail anyway, and why can't Daddy be home with us?” *What Is Jail, Mommy?* not only explains why the parent is incarcerated but what his or her life is like as an inmate.



Woodson, J., & Ransome, J. (2002). *Visiting day*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

(Ages 6–8) As a little girl and her grandmother get ready for visiting day, her father, who adores her, is getting ready, too. The community of families who take the long bus ride upstate to visit loved ones in prison share hope and give comfort to each other. Love knows no boundaries, and here is a story of strong families who understand the meaning of unconditional love.

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