

Therapeutic Story Prompts: Ideas for Creating Your Own Therapeutic Stories

by Susan M. Ward

Therapeutic stories are created to help individuals, especially children, develop an insight into themselves. These stories provide examples, ideas, and new perspectives on dealing with challenging issues. While therapeutic stories can use the child herself as the main character, often the characters are animals, objects, or other children.

Therapeutic stories should encompass the following aspects:

- Deal with only one main issue or challenge
- The main character should seem “surprisingly” similar to the child being told the story
- Provide solutions and examples of how to deal with situations
- End on a positive, successful note

There are therapeutic story books available, including *101 Healing Stories for Kids and Teens: Using Metaphors in Therapy* by George Burns. However, you may have a unique topic you wish to cover with your child, or you may want to be creative and design a story from scratch. Below are a few ideas as to characters, issues, and settings that might be used for therapeutic stories you wish to create for you and your child.

Traumatic early life

Once upon a time, there was a soft, gentle mouse that lived in a big beautiful forest. The forest had tall trees, bubbling brooks, and fun-to-climb rocks. However, this little mouse, named Squeaker, seldom noticed the nice things. Squeaker had lived through a horrible forest fire. A fire that had scared Squeaker very badly. Some of Squeaker’s friends had been hurt in the fire, and one had even died. Poor, sad Squeaker.

Squeaker stayed all alone and wouldn’t talk to anyone, or go out and play, or even eat the right foods. Squeaker had decided that the entire world was scary and horrible. Squeakers mom, however, knew what Squeaker needed.

The story could then go on to provide a list of things that the strong mom/parents do to help Squeaker to understand that while bad things sometimes do happen, most of the world is a good place. In the end, Squeaker would learn to trust and begin to enjoy life in the big, beautiful forest.

Abandonment issues

A long time ago, there was a soft, gentle cat named Colorado. This cat lived with a kind man and woman named Mr. and Mrs. Tuba. The Tubas took very good care of Colorado. Lots of healthy food, toys to play with, sunny windows to sit in, and comfortable laps to curl up in.

One day, as Colorado sat licking herself in the sun, she wondered, "Where are Mr. and Mrs. Tuba...? I think I've been here for four, maybe five days all by myself..." Suddenly, the door opened, in walked a tall woman that didn't look anything like Mrs. Tuba. This woman wasn't mean but she wasn't very friendly either. She scooped up Colorado, put Colorado into a cat carrier, and took Colorado out to a car. Colorado was taken to a place where lots of cats and dogs were. A big building with lots of cages just filled with big dogs, nice dogs, grumpy dogs, happy kittens, lonely cats, and even some rabbits.

Colorado was pushed into a cage. What was happening? Why was she here?

The story could develop into how no one tells Colorado what happened to the Tubas and she had been taken to an animal shelter. She's selected by a new family, but when she goes with them, she keeps worrying again, maybe this family will disappear. She worries and worries. But eventually, she learns that even if someone leaves you, because they die or get hurt, that doesn't mean that everyone is going to leave you. This new family might be different from the first one, but they're going to take care of Colorado forever and ever.

Other topics that might be covered in a therapeutic story include:

- Learning disabilities
- Being bullied
- Looking different
- Being homeschooled
- Having a physical disability

You can write down your story exactly and read it, or you can create an outline that guides you as you tell the story like a storyteller. Include prompts if you want such as stuffed animals or things that relate to the story. After you've told your child the story once, in future retellings stop occasionally and have your child tell what comes next. Keep in mind that part of telling your child a therapeutic story is the story itself, and part of it is the interactions that occur between you and your child, the bonding, the attachment, the connection.

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