**Here are the steps you need to get started:**

1. Print off the Story Starter(s) that you want to use.
2. Have your child read the story that is started – the Story Starter.  (For non-readers, read the Story Starter to them.)
3. Next, have your child use the lines below the Story Starter to finish writing the story in their own words.  (For non-writers, let the children dictate to you what they want to put down while you stay *quiet* and don’t offer ideas.  Remember, you want to get *their* interpretation.)  Feel free to encourage your child to change the names of the characters in the Story Starters to make them even more personal.  The way they *finish*the story is the glimpse into your child’s mind that you may not normally get.
4. Then let your child illustrate the story they just finished writing.  Some pictures will be just for fun.  Other pictures may give you another way to talk to your child about their stories.  **You may** **want to do step 5 *as* they draw.**  This will help them and you be more relaxed instead of just staring at each other.
5. The last step is to talk to your child about what they have just written.  Remember when you ask questions, seem interested, but not concerned or fearful.  You want them to feel relaxed, open and honest when they talk to you.  When you ask them questions about their pictures don’t say, “What’s that?”  To them it is very obvious what they have drawn.  Instead say, “Tell me about your picture.  What is going on in this part of your drawing?”  (See a general list of questions below.)

The easiest way to help you understand how Story Starters work is to give you an example.

Story Starter 1

**Dealing with Mistakes**

Shawna was over at her friend Abigail’s house one day after school.  They were in Abigail’s room throwing a ball around and having a great time.  While they were playing, they got a bit careless and the ball they were tossing hit Abigail’s lamp.  With a loud crash the lamp fell to the floor and broke.  The girls knew they were in big trouble when they heard loud footsteps coming down the hall.  The door swung open and there stood Abigail’s dad and he looked really mad.  Before they could say a word, Abigail’s dad…

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Illustrate your story below.

When your child fills this out, either with your help or on their own, you will be able to see their perspective on this situation.  If your child fills this out and ends the story with a calm scene of cleaning up the mess and forgiveness, you and your child can just enjoy this time of creativity.  But, if your child fills this out with an ending talking about the dad walking over and hitting, shaking or screaming at the child, then you know you have something deeper to talk about.  You now have the perfect opportunity to talk to your child about what they wrote and why.  **Remember to act calm and in control here.**  Your child will not open up to you if they feel like they or their friend will get in trouble by telling the truth.  If you want truthful answers, your child can’t see you looking worried or scared.  **If you are relaxed, they** **will be relaxed.**  So, with a calm voice, here are some questions you might want to ask them:

1. Did the dad have a right to feel angry?
2. How do you think Abigail felt when her dad said/did that to her?
3. Have you ever seen anyone get in trouble like what happened in this story?
4. (If yes) How did you feel when you saw this happen?
5. What did you say to your friend when you were by yourselves again?
6. How could this dad make better choices next time?

You would be surprised by how many children see and/or experience things and don’t tell anyone.  Maybe they are feeling guilty over what they have seen/done, or maybe they don’t want to betray a friend’s confidence.  Whatever the reason, we need to stay in tune with what is going on in our child’s life.  If a child has seen something that they are having a hard time dealing with, then turn to the Bible and show them what God’s Word says.  You may not find a similar story example, but you will find passages that deal with fear, anger, imperfection, and worry.

As a mom, we want to protect our child from harm.  How can we do that if we don’t have a true understanding of what goes on in their life?  Story Starters will help you see if your child is as sheltered and free of pain as we all aim for, or if there are any issues that need to be dealt with.  We can’t change what we don’t know.  **Ignorance IS NOT bliss!**  Let these Story Starters start you on a path that helps you know more about what is going on in your child’s world.  You may be surprised what you discover.

**Questions to use after they have finished writing:**

1. Have you ever had any problems like the child in this story?
2. Have you seen anyone get picked on like this before?
3. How do you think the child in the story felt?
4. Have you ever been afraid of the same thing happening to you?
5. Has anyone ever told you to keep a secret for them?  Have you ever had anyone keep a secret for you?
6. Why do you think the character was acting like that?
7. Is acting the way that character did okay?
8. Did the child get what he/she deserved?
9. Do you know anyone like the child in this story?
10. Have you ever faced any hard choices like this before?
11. Is it ever okay to lie/cheat/bully (etc.)?
12. Have you ever been afraid of the same thing happening to you or one of your friends?
13. What would you do if anything like this ever happened to you?

This list is more general, but you can make it more specific for each Story Starter you use with your child.  Ask questions as the Holy Spirit leads you.  Take your time.  Relax.  Remember, this is a tool to get your conversations about harder topics started.  If you make a mistake, or forget something, no one will know.  With each Story Starter you use, you will get better and better at asking the tough questions in a non-threatening manner.  Remember, any conversation about a tough subject is better than *no* conversation at all.

***Bonus:***

[My Dad is Going to War: Nick’s Story](http://journeytojoy.tv/WordPress/my-dad-is-going-to-war-nicks-story/)

Hear one’s child’s perspective on dealing with a parent away from home serving in the military.