

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is a way of using books or stories to help children explore particular issues. You can use story books written about specific issues or behaviours. There are now available a wide range of story books written about specific issues which carers and workers can use with children. Some of these have additional sections or accompanying handbooks to guide carers and/or professionals and help them think about issues to be aware of and how to further open up areas for discussion following the story. ‘

Example from a story specifically written about an issue

A useful story for children in care might be *The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back: A story for children who have lost someone they love* (Sunderland et al. 2003). This is a story about Eric the sand dragon who loves the sea very much and watches it going out and coming back every day. When, one day, the sea goes out and does not come back, Eric falls on the sand in terrible pain. It feels to him as if he has lost everything. After a while, Eric is able to save a wild flower by giving it some water. He is encouraged by this and starts to make a beautiful rock pool garden. As he does so, he is able to feel contained enough to experience the full pain of his loss, instead of closing his heart.

The story can be read at a surface level, staying with the metaphor, allowing children to just think about Eric. Empathically engaging with Eric’s experience can allow them to begin to experience their own through the containment of the story. This follows the belief that children’s inner worlds will do their own symbolic work.

Children might more consciously make the connections themselves between their experiences at the characters in the story. This helps them to recognise that others have the same kinds of feelings and experiences that they do and can make them feel less alone. They can also see how others struggle with and manage similar experiences. As their worker you can support them in these reflections and perhaps even actively encourage them to make some of these connections.

(This example was previously discussed in Lefevre (2008))

Using stories and characters from other kinds of books or media

Workers might also use general story books or novels to help facilitate conversations with children about their feelings and experiences. This might be a book you have recommended that a young person read because you are aware a character has a similar experience, e.g. Harry Potter’s experience of grief (see Markell & Markell, 2008, below). The ‘Tracey Beaker’ stories (e.g. Wilson, 2006) which are about a young girl

coming into care are a good example of these. As these are also televised they can be used with young people who aren't interested in reading or find reading difficult. It is also worth paying attention to the books the young person is reading and getting them to tell you about what appeals to them. You could discuss how they are similar or different to the characters or how they would manage the key dilemmas in the book.

Resources

- The British Association for Adoption and Fostering is one of several publishers who have a range of useful story books e.g.

Bagnall, S. (2008) *The Teazles' baby bunny*. BAAF, London.

This is a colourful picture book for young children, telling the story of the Teazle rabbits and their adoption of a baby bunny.

See: <http://www.baaf.org.uk/res/pubs/books/index.shtml>

- Sunderland et al. (2003) have written a sequence of storybooks for children with particular difficult experiences or behaviours each with its own guidebook, e.g.

The story

Sunderland, M., Hancock, N. & Armstrong, N. (2003) *The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back: A story for children who have lost someone they love*. Speechmark Publishing Ltd, Brackley.

The guidebook

Sunderland, M., Hancock, N. & Armstrong, N. (2003) *Helping Children with Loss: A guidebook*. Speechmark Publishing Ltd, Brackley.

- Markell, K & Markell, M. (2008) *The Children Who Lived: Using Harry Potter and Other Fictional Characters to Help Grieving Children and Adolescents*. Routledge, London.

Uses the grief experiences of Harry Potter and other fictional characters to help children and young people deal with their own loss issues. Included in the text are a number of activities, discussion questions, and games that can be used.

- Wilson, J. (2006) *The Story of Tracy Beaker*. Corgi Yearling Books; New Ed edition
- Some more academic articles for further reading

Pardeck, J.T. and Pardeck, J.A. (1987). Bibliotherapy for children in foster care and adoption. *Child Welfare* 66(3): 269-78.

Pardeck, J. T. and Markward, M. J. (1995). "Bibliotherapy: Using books to help children deal with problems. *Early Child Development and Care* 106: 75-90.