

BOOK REVIEWS

The Hero's Mask and The Hero's Mask Guidebook; Helping Children with Traumatic Stress (Routledge, 2020)

"*The Hero's Mask* tells the story of children becoming heroes! It will inspire all who read it to face and overcome challenges with courage and bravery. *The Hero's Mask* is not about what has happened to you but who you can become. *The Hero's Mask Guidebook* combines research on the impact of trauma with a magical unfolding of the individual uniqueness and beauty of each child. It integrates theory, knowledge, and evidence-based practice with a soul depth that transcends the moment and calls us to be our 'best' selves to children. It provides a sacred pathway for child, parent, and adult healing."

James Henry, Ph.D. Professor of Social Work and Project Director, Children's Trauma Assessment Center, Western Michigan University.

"In the tradition of Joseph Campbell, George Lucas, and J.K. Rowling, Dr. Kagan uses the stories of heroes to illustrate how children can go through difficult times, learn from past mistakes, find strength in friendship, cope with the fear, discomfort, and paralysis of traumatic reminders, and become heroes in their own lives. He also illustrates in very practical ways how adults can nurture a child's inner resilience by showing grace and compassion, guiding them to shape their own narrative and make heroic choices.

In *The Hero's Mask*, Dr. Kagan tells a story that children will love, full of mystery and friendship, bullies and heroism. Through that story children can relate to a hero in Carrie, whose relationships help her to overcome her fears and understand the strength she and her friends have to make a difference in other's lives. Through Carrie's story, children can understand the power of connection and engagement as paths towards healing and heroism."

Jane Halladay Goldman, Ph.D., Director, Service Systems Program, UCLA-Duke University National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

"*The Hero's Mask* is an engaging and timely novel about the impact of traumatic loss on children and much of what it takes for them to heal: good friends, nurturing adults, cultural wisdom, personal courage—and the power of storytelling itself. The companion *Guidebook* is a rich resource for

caregivers, teachers, and counselors wanting to engage in deeper understanding and the difficult conversations that can support children through these toughest times."

Martha B. Straus, Ph.D., Professor, Antioch University and author of *Treating Trauma in Adolescents: Development, Attachment, and the Therapeutic Relationship*.

"In his novel, *The Hero's Mask*, Dr. Kagan beautifully demonstrates the profound power of connection in promoting healing and resilience. Through his characters and the theme of a hero's journey, he is able to bring the thematic of loss, human stress and the role of relationship to life in a context that is relatable to young people and the caregivers who support them. This novel along with the practical guidebook for parents and professionals is a unique tool written by someone who has clearly dedicated a career to understanding trauma, attachment, resilience and young people! Youth serving systems, families and children alike will benefit from this approach."

Kristine M. Kinniburgh, LCSW, Director of Trauma Services, Justice Resource Institute Connecticut, National trauma trainer and consultant, The Trauma Center at JRI. ARC Co-Developer and Co-author of *Treating traumatic stress in children and adolescents; How to foster resilience through attachment, self-regulation, and competency* (Guilford Press).

"*The Hero's Mask* is a very engaging, age-appropriate, and inspiring novel for middle grade children, especially for those who have experienced traumatic losses, bullying, disengaged parents and harsh authority figures. The central characters are multi-dimensional and relatable, and the narrative moves forward in an adept, fast-paced manner that will engage most young readers. *The Hero's Mask* and the accompanying *Guidebook* represent a significant contribution to an understanding of children's trauma and actions that can be taken to reduce and resolve trauma."

Cheryl Lanktree, Ph.D., Adolescent Trauma Training Center, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California.

"For children and young teens who are feeling a lot of big emotions and are struggling to be understood, follow Carrie, the "hero" of *The Hero's Mask*, as she puts the feelings shared by so many others into words. This novel beautifully describes the way stress and trauma can show up in our bodies and affect our relationships with family and peers. Young readers learn with Carrie as she begins to connect the dots between her thoughts,

feelings, and behaviors--to change the direction of her own story for the better.

The Hero's Mask is a great resource for schools that illustrates what students are really experiencing, how this affects their ability to learn and their behavior in the classroom, and the transformative role that educators can play. The accompanying Guidebook provides educators with a framework for understanding trauma-informed schools, as well as a structured approach for using *The Hero's Mask* with students in the classroom."

Jenifer Maze, PhD, Deputy Director, UCLA-Duke University National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

"In writing *The Hero's Mask* and *Helping Children with Traumatic Stress*, Dr. Kagan offers a gift to children and families who have experienced trauma and to the caregivers, educators, and therapists who support these families. *The Hero's Mask* works as a standalone piece of literature with its well-developed characters and salient themes of interpersonal, community, and cultural adversity, trauma, and loss. Through 11-year-old Carrie and the other children and adults in her life, many readers will identify with the somatic, emotional, and behavioral experiences associated with trauma and will gain a narrative of hope, possibility, and healing through connection. *Helping Children with Traumatic Stress*, a companion resource to *The Hero's Mask*, offers accessible evidence-informed tools to support children and families in their journey of healing from trauma. Caregivers, educators, and therapists will find the curriculum guide with its specific objectives and activities invaluable in supporting connections with children and in providing developmentally-appropriate, culturally-sensitive, trauma-informed care."

Mindy Kronenberg, Ph.D., IMH-E®, Clinical Psychologist and Adjunct Professor, University of Memphis, Co-Editor of *Treating Traumatized Children: A Casebook of Evidence-based Therapies*.

"Brilliant psychoeducation on trauma, resilience and the power of relationships disguised as a middle grade novel. Reading *The Hero's Mask* together should stimulate supportive and healing discussions between middle schoolers and their adult mentors. Overall a wonderful therapeutic resource!"

Laurel J. Kiser, Ph.D., M.B.A., Associate Professor, Division of Psychiatric Services Research, Department of Psychiatry, University of Maryland School of Medicine.

"*The Hero's Mask*, written by a national expert in child traumatic stress, creatively addresses important ways educators, professionals, and caregivers can support a child dealing with pain from trauma and adversity.

The *Guidebook* follows along with the novel as Carrie, our middle school role model, engages us with her courage and personality in facing overwhelming feelings, trauma triggers, and broken connections with family and peers that often occur when trauma and grief impact our youth. Kagan's text offer guidance and inspiration to important adults in children's lives to use the power of their relationships in informed, healing, and transformative ways."

Lisa Amaya-Jackson, MD, MPH, Deputy Director, UCLA-Duke National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

"*The Hero's Mask* books go beyond the growing awareness of ACES and provide practical tools that concerned parents, teachers, counselors and therapists can use to rebuild the emotionally supportive relationships children need to thrive after experiences of hardship and trauma. The novel engages children and caring adults to experience adversity through the eyes of a child including what can help and what can hurt a troubled child.

The *Guidebook* provides a curriculum for exploration of heroes that can help children, classrooms and schools to take steps to prevent or reduce traumatic stress. Together, these books provide essential resources for trauma-informed schools and programs."

Heather Larkin Holloway, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Social Welfare, State University of New York at Albany.

"Richard Kagan weaves together story with trauma-informed principles and interventions. As the reader learns about Carrie, her history, her challenges, and her strengths, they are learning important lessons about stress and trauma that they can apply to themselves or those around them. His metaphor of the mask is powerful, and through story, he offers dialogues about heroes, fear and how it affects us, the importance of taking a stand, reaching out for support, and showing up as your authentic self. These dialogues are core to both trauma treatments and trauma-informed systems, and it is refreshing to see them embraced in a story. Children, parents, and teachers will benefit from reading *The Hero's Mask*, and I strongly believe it will help them open doors to important conversations that lead to healing."

Chandra Ghosh Ippen, Ph.D., Associate Director, Child Trauma Research Program, University of California, San Francisco.

Wounded Angels; Inspiration from Children in Crisis, 2nd Ed.**(Routledge, 2017)**

“*Wounded Angels* embodies resiliency. The stories within are testimonies that despite adversity and trauma, children can heal and recover. A convincing hopefulness, despite the enormous pain that the stories reveal, emerges which inspires readers to believe that change, healing, and success are possible. This book is for children and adults who seek to be transported to a timeless dimension where human potential is realized through the heroic journeys of those who demonstrate that anything is possible when you believe in yourself and/or others believe in you.”--Jim Henry, PhD, Professor, School of Social Work and Director, Western Michigan University Children's Trauma Assessment Center

“Kagan, a sage collector and interpreter of life stories, leads us beneath traumatized children’s challenging behaviors to find within a unique wellspring for healing. Through attending to the unspoken and compelling metaphors of angels and heroes, he shows us how to listen to children with greater compassion and courage. This masterful book is both heartrending and uplifting, offering valuable resources and insights—not the least of which is a sense of restored optimism for its readers.”--Martha B. Straus, PhD, Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, Antioch University New England, and author, *Treating Trauma in Adolescents: Development, Attachment, and the Therapeutic Relationship*

“Richard Kagan shares a masterful testament to the depth of his understanding of traumatized children and the messages they have for those who can help them heal. These stories guide therapists and parents alike to take a step back to look for strengths and vulnerabilities in children and ourselves - attributes that together become vehicles for change. *Wounded Angels* reminds us, as well, that reciprocal learning is so very much a part of the helping process.”--Sarah B. Greenblatt, MEd, MS, ACSW, Manager/Founder S.B. Greenblatt Consulting, LLC; formerly Director, the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice

“*Wounded Angels* serves as a call to action to any adult who interacts with children impacted by trauma. Through a series of insightful and inspiring case vignettes, Dr. Kagan illustrates that by slowing down, listening, and asking the right questions, caring adults can understand the messages children convey through angry, disruptive, and fearful behaviors. *Wounded Angels* provides practical resources to aid therapists and caregivers in joining with children on the path to healing.”--Mindy Kronenberg, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist and Affiliate Member, National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Real Life Heroes Toolkit for Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Families, 2nd Ed. (Routledge, 2016)

““This amazing compendium of a complex trauma treatment guide, its adaptations for special trauma populations, tools, and handouts, facilitates RLH as both a stand-alone treatment and as a supplement for other EBTs, with any of Kagan’s toolkit components able to be used to assist in meeting the trauma-

specific needs of youth. With an empiricism and solid conventional frameworks used in the NCTSN for meeting the needs of childhood trauma, this second edition is a wonderful resource for clinicians at all levels of experience.”--Lisa Amaya-Jackson, M.D., MPH, Professor and Associate director, UCLA-Duke National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, Duke University School of Medicine

“This revised edition of Dr. Kagan’s highly acclaimed book provides an exciting expansion of his innovative approach, *Real Life Heroes*. A comprehensive and practical guide, it offers an important toolkit for clinicians working with traumatized children and their caregivers. It provides invaluable material from the resiliency-focused assessment to practical guidelines and structured session activities that make it a unique addition to the field of complex trauma interventions with children. I strongly recommend this book.”--Cheryl Lanktree, Ph.D., [Research Assistant Professor and Project Director, University of Southern California Adolescent Trauma Training Center](#)

“Richard Kagan knows how to have a relationship that supports trauma recovery. With the *Real Life Heroes Toolkit*, he gives therapists, not just an intervention model, but the scaffolding to build therapeutic relationships with the children they treat and those who love them. Grounded in the science and art of psychotherapy, the RLH Toolkit helps therapists and clients navigate through tough times, find their strength, and create the future.”--Brad Stolbach, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Chicago and Clinical Director, Healing Hurt People, Chicago

Real Life Heroes Life Storybook, 3rd Ed. (Routledge, 2016)

“*Real Life Heroes* is a resiliency masterpiece. Built on the historical hero archetype, Dr. Kagan invites traumatized children and caregivers to acknowledge their courage, express their sorrow, and embrace the hero’s path to healing. *Real Life Heroes* provides creative resiliency based interventions that guide traumatized children and families through their pain into recovery by discovering and utilizing their internal strengths and significant personal relationships to overcome adversity and become the real heroes of their own lives.”--Jim Henry Ph.D., Professor, School of Social Work and Director, Children’s Trauma Assessment Center, Western Michigan University

“The third edition of the *Real Life Heroes Life Storybook* is an impressive continuation of Dr. Kagan’s already long list of contributions to supporting stronger, healthier, and more resourced outcomes of young people who have experienced traumatic stress. Through the use of ritual, psycho-education, expressive strategies, skill-building, narrative, and relational engagement, the workbook provides a powerful tool to promote healing in trauma-impacted youth. The language in the workbook is child, caregiver, and provider-friendly, and the facilitated process of self-examination is empowering rather than pathologizing. Dr. Kagan truly believes that every child and every caregiver has the potential to be a hero—and that ‘heroism’ is often found in every day actions—and this vision shines through in his work.” --Margaret Blaustein, Ph.D., Director of Training and Education, The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute and Co-author, *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents*.

“*Real Life Heroes Life Storybook* and *Toolkit* provides an effective step by step process for clinicians and caregivers to guide children and family members

in making sense of the pain in their lives that is due to past trauma. The process provided in RLH is comprehensive in its treatment components. However what strikes me most is how it very tenderly and carefully enables the survivor to recognize that their memories and the subsequent resulting emotions move/fluctuate and will need some anchoring based in the reality of their innocence. In addition, RLH enables practice for survivors in how to effectively handle the sensory-based triggers that will assault them in the future. As the lead developer of the Family Centered Treatment® model of home base treatment that has provided treatment for over 30k families, most of whom came with trauma histories, I can unequivocally recommend both *RLH Life Storybook* and *Toolkit* for practitioners.”--William E Painter Jr., M.S., Senior Director of Clinical Practice, Child and Family Center of Excellence, Institute for Family Centered Services / The Mentor Network

Real Life Heroes Practitioner’s Manual (Routledge, 2007)

“*Real Life Heroes* both inspires and enlightens, helping traumatized children and the caring adults in their lives to find the inner strengths that are essential in order to heal the wounds caused by trauma. The model fills a crucial unmet need in the field for a technically sophisticated yet extremely accessible "real life" way to restore an inner sense of safety and control to children who have suffered trauma.”--Julian D. Ford, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, Connecticut

“The *Real-Life Heroes Practitioners Manual* is an excellent resource and supplement to the *Real-Life Heroes* workbook . . .offering information on topics

such as supporting children and families on their journey, assessment of child and system needs, engagement of “caring adults”, pacing of treatment, and trouble-shooting, with a recognition of the real-world dilemmas often facing clinicians working with this complicated population. Prominent throughout the manual is a tone of respect for the children, families, and caregiving systems impacted by complex trauma.”--Margaret E. Blaustein, Ph.D., Director of Training and Education, The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute, Brookline, Massachusetts

“*Real. Life. Heroes* is a sensitive guide through hard and often overwhelming trauma. practice –work that is necessary to help children have caring adults with whom they can learn to trust, safely tell their stories, and move forward with the developmental business of childhood. With this trilogy, Kagan. makes it more possible for committed practitioners to increase the odds of favorable developmental outcomes for traumatized children through safe, planned, and trauma-informed interventions.--Sarah B. Greenblatt, MEd, MS, ACSW, Director, The Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice – Casey Family Services, New Haven, Connecticut

Real Life Heroes; A Life Storybook for Children, 2nd Ed. (Routledge, 2007)

“... *Real Life Heroes* is a real lifesaver for therapists searching to find helpful techniques to work with children who have experienced multiple traumas. . . . This book is a must have for every therapist or psychologist who works with

traumatized children.”--Arlene Fisher, MA, LPC, LMFT, Director, Child Welfare Services, DePelchin Children's Center, Houston, Texas

“This newest edition of the *Real-Life Heroes* workbook expands Dr. Kagan’s contributions to the complex work of building resiliency in children who have been terribly hurt. *Real-Life Heroes* recognizes the essential foundation of relationships in healing—including the child’s relationship to him- or her-self—with the recognition that everyone has the potential to be a hero. . . . The workbook is carefully paced, with a great deal of attention paid to child safety. Throughout the workbook, children are given the opportunity to actively construct their own story, using both narrative and non-verbal methods. The multisensory nature of workbook exercises allows children with a range of comfort zones the opportunity to achieve mastery. . . *Real-Life Heroes* offers a frame within which to work, and allows the child and the therapist’s creativity the space in which to take over.”--Margaret E. Blaustein, Ph.D., Director of Training and Education, The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute, Brookline, Massachusetts

“. . .The *Real Life Heroes Life Story Book* is a workbook that helps children develop self-esteem and overcome difficult experiences in their lives. . . Each chapter engages children in activities to help them learn more about who they are, what has happened to them, and the people that they have been connected to and consider special. Through the carefully designed questions asked throughout each chapter, children and the adults who care about them begin to value themselves and who they can become – how as real life heroes, they can take care of themselves, be taken care of safely and can also take care of

others in their families and communities. . . ”--Sarah B. Greenblatt, MEd, MS, ACSW, Director, The Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice--Casey Family Services, New Haven, Connecticut

Real Life Heroes; A Life Storybook for Children (Routledge, 2004)

“An excellent therapeutic resource. I am certain that it will be read and re-read by those professionals engaged in improving the lives of at-risk youngsters.”--Robert Brooks, Ph.D., Faculty, Harvard Medical School; Author of *The Self-Esteem Teacher*; co-author of *Raising Resilient Children*

“Provides insightful examples of how parents (birth, foster, and adoptive) can help children become ‘their own heroes’ by providing a safe space to tell their stories and make the burden of past trauma more bearable.”--Sarah B. Greenblatt, MEd, MS, ACSW, Director, the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, Casey Family Services, New Haven, Connecticut

Rebuilding Attachments with Traumatized Children; Healing from Losses, Violence, Abuse and Neglect (Routledge, 2004)

“Dr. Richard Kagan, a recognized expert in working with traumatized children, has written a truly impressive book. Not only does it contain a wealth of information for understanding the complex issues often faced by these youngsters , but it also offers specific interventions that can be used to help them and their caregivers become more hopeful and resilient. Dr. Kagan’s compassion and empathy are apparent throughout the book.”--Robert Brooks, Ph.D., Faculty,

Harvard Medical School; Author of *The Self-Esteem Teacher*; co-author of *Raising Resilient Children*

“...provides hope where there is to often none—enlightening parents, social workers and therapists to increase the odds of favorable developmental outcomes for children through safe, planned, collaborative intervention. . . . A much-needed compilation of the most current theory and practice related to understanding and working with traumatized children and the families raising them”--Sarah B.

Greenblatt, MEd, MS, ACSW, Director, the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, Casey Family Services, New Haven, Connecticut

“... this sensible and thoughtful book is a welcome (and needed) addition. . . . He even details an exercise . . . in which colleagues can engage to help them understand better their own role in the impasse. and how to plan a way out. To my knowledge, there is no other text anywhere that takes this on, and it is an essential component of working with such emotionally challenged and challenging children. . . Kagan's careful and thorough book offers us a well-reasoned methodology for how we might proceed. Better yet, he provides a glimmer of hope for us, too, because he truly believes that we can make a substantive difference, even in the lives of the most intractable cases: traumatized and attachment-disordered children. ”--Martha Straus, Ph.D., Antioch University, Putney, Vermont (from *Contemporary Psychology*: APA Review of Books).

“Clear and compelling. . . . Perhaps no other author communicates better than Dr. Kagan the conviction that severely abused and neglected children can be helped to overcome the impact of earlier trauma. All who work with these children

should be grateful to Dr. Kagan for sharing his melding for relevant knowledge and creative technique.”--Kenneth W. Watson, MSW, Former Assistant Director, Chicago Child Care Society

Wounded Angels: Lessons of Courage from Children in Crisis (Child and Family Press, 2003)

“Richard Kagan’s stories of wounded children and families are heartfelt, filled with insight into their pain and hope for their healing. Beautifully written and deeply honest. . . . Essential reading for anyone who is involved in helping people resolve trauma.”--Terry M. Levy, Ph.D. Co-author, *Attachment, Trauma, and Healing: Understanding and Treating Attachment Disorder in Children and Families*

“It is as if *Wounded Angels* is from heaven . . . This book is written with a rare combination of love, compassion, intelligence, and real-life experience. If you care about children, you will want to read this gem of a book.”--Edward M. Hallowell, MD. Author, *Driven to distraction* and *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*

“*Wounded Angels* reminds all of us to never give on a child, and that foster parents certainly earn their ‘wings’ too!”--Arline McGraw Oberst, Co-author, *Chicken Soup for the Volunteer’s. Soul*

Turmoil to Turning Points; Building Hope for Children in Crisis Placements (W.W. Norton, 1996)

“The author’s compelling case studies bring life to this book. . .an excellent source of new ideas and inspirational accounts. . .This book is a joy to read and will keep its readers captivated until the end.”--Stacy Hernandez, Purdue University,. cited in the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*

“This unique and outstanding book is passionate, authoritative, and inspiring. Throughout the text, Richard Kagan winds messages of hope, implicit respect, and compassion for the natural strength of families facing turmoil.”-- Judith Landau-Stanton, M.B., Ch.B., D.P.M. University of Rochester School of Medicine

“In this moving account, Richard Kagan demonstrates the stubborn determination it takes to break the cycles of abuse and neglect that trap families in chaos.”--Michael Nichols, Ph.D. Professor of Psychology, The College of William & Mary, Author of *The Power of the Family*

“Valuable insight for the lay reader and practical advice for the advocate or child-services professional.”-- cited in *Booklist*

“Through heartrending case histories, Kagan. . .offers a compelling, close-up look at troubled children and adolescents in families seemingly locked in a cycle of traumas and crises, torn by alcoholism, physical and sexual abuse, drug addiction and severe neglect.”-- cited in *Publishers Weekly*

“Written for the front-line practitioner and more forward-looking administrator, Kagan uses a series of personally encountered experiences of trauma and change in young people to show how practitioners working on a one-to-one basis bring improvement into the lives of these unfortunate families. . .The

author is clearly a compassionate and concerned human being as well as a competent psychologist.”-- cited in *Child and Family Behavior Therapy*

***Families in Perpetual Crisis* (W.W. Norton, 1989)**

“. . . this book makes an important theoretical and practical contribution to the fields of child welfare and family treatment. . . a valuable resource for frontline practitioners, their supervisors, advanced students, and university faculty.”-- cited in *Social Work*

“. . . this book is interesting, challenging, and exciting. It could easily function as a bible for less-experienced family workers, but will certainly contribute to anyone’s understanding of effective ways to work with dysfunctional families.”-- cited in *Child Welfare*

“. . . a valuable contribution to the field.”--Paul Steinhauer, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry, University of Toronto

“. . . provides a rich source of strategies for making therapeutic use of the difficult, disturbing and sometimes frightening situations in which home-based workers may find themselves.”-- cited in *The British Journal of Psychiatry*

“The articulation of a systematic, pragmatic, and sensitive approach to working with crisis-driven, fragile families is the hallmark of Richard Kagan and Shirley Schlosberg’s book.”-- cited in the *JCPN*

“*Families in Perpetual Crisis* is a moving and inspiring book, chock-full of the best insights of systems thinking applied with a sustained and passionate commitment to working with families in child welfare agencies. Agency workers, tired of hearing easy answers to hard questions, will find here a remarkable

combination of practical advice and realistic thinking about treating the troubled and troubling families who live with--and cause--so much heartbreak.”--Michael Nichols, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, The College of William & Mary