

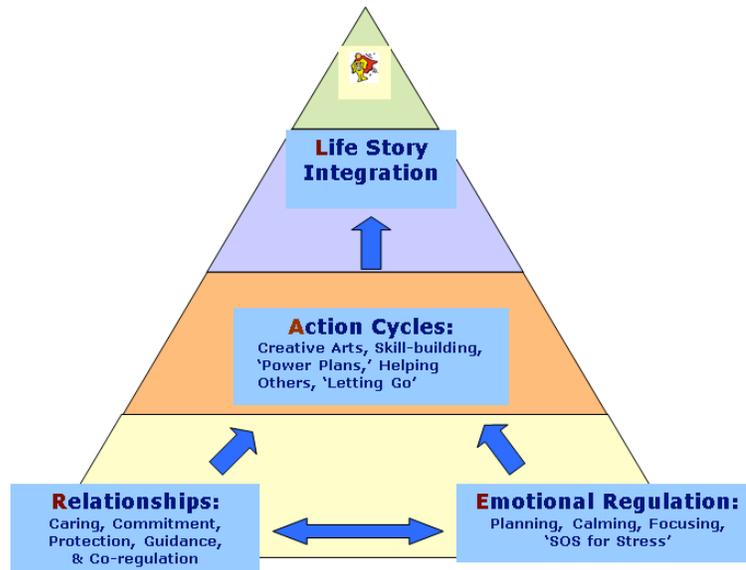
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Real Life Heroes® (RLH) provides practitioners with easy-to-use tools including a life storybook, manual, multi-sensory creative arts activities, and psycho education resources to engage children and caregivers in evidence-supported trauma treatment. Tools and procedures were developed and tested with children and adolescents¹ in a wide range of child and family service programs including children with Complex PTSD who lacked stable relationships with caregivers they could count on to provide a safe home and work with them in therapy and children referred for high risk behaviors that threatened the safety of children, families, organizations and communities. *RLH* helps practitioners reframe referrals based on pathologies and blame into a shared ‘journey,’ a ‘pathway’ to healing and recovery focused on restoring (or building) emotionally supportive and enduring relationships and promoting development of affect regulation skills for children and caregivers. To do this, the model utilizes the imagery of the ‘heroes journey’ and stresses the importance of engaging caregivers and a collaborative team of caring adults working together with an integrated trauma and resiliency-centered framework to help children with Complex Trauma. Creative arts and shared life story work provide a means for children and caregivers to develop the safety and attunement needed for re-integration of traumatic memories coupled with development of increased security and affect regulation.

Engages Hard-to-Reach Children
Adaptable for Diverse Families & Programs

Real Life Heroes focuses on four primary components for strengthening resiliency skills and resources: *Relationships, Emotional Regulation, Action Cycles* and *Life Story Integration*. These components frame developmentally-based assessments, service planning, session structure, fidelity, and evaluation measures.



Learning about heroes includes sharing stories of how family members and people with the child’s ethnic heritage have overcome hard times and encouraging children to develop their own strengths, resources and

¹ Tools and activities are designed for use with children ages 6-12 and have also been adapted and used successfully with adolescents with Complex PTSD functioning at a latency level of social, emotional, or cognitive development.

Adapted from Kagan, R. (2016). *Real Life Heroes Toolkit for Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Families*. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge. ©2016

coping skills, building on strengths in their family and cultural heritage. In each session, children learn to recognize clues in their own bodies and how to share these safely. Sessions include sharing feelings nonverbally on thermometers for stress, self-control, and feeling mad, sad, glad, and safe. Magic and centering activities utilize movement, sensory-motor integration, focusing, and mindfulness activities to engage children and caregivers to learn and practice skills and to reduce stress. An activity-based workbook helps to engage children and promote the safety needed in sessions for children to work with practitioners and caregivers to build the skills and interpersonal resources needed to re-integrate painful memories and to foster healing after serial traumatic experiences. The workbook helps children share experiences and develop affect modulation skills with art, rhythm, music, movement and theatre arts. Practitioners help children (and caregivers) transform their drawings into ‘three- or five-chapter’ stories (or movies) with a beginning, middle, and an end so children learn they can *move through* ‘tough times’ and make things better in their lives with the help of emotionally supportive caregivers, instead of feeling helpless, stuck, ashamed, or overwhelmed.

Chapter by Chapter, practitioners help children and caregivers strengthen skills and resources to reduce the power of multiple and serial traumas that have afflicted their past, impaired attachments, and shaped high risk behaviors. Shared activities help children and caregivers grow stronger than their fears and to change old ways of coping that got them into more trouble. The workbook helps children change how they see themselves from feeling hurt, unwanted, damaged, or hopeless, to experiences of attunement and security with emotionally supportive adults committed to helping children and preventing re-traumatization.

Real Life Heroes® incorporates the ‘Core Components in Evidence-Based Trauma Treatment’ and the ‘Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare’ developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Center (NCTSN). Chapters in the *Life Storybook* match the phase-based components outlined by the NCTSN Complex Trauma Workgroup (Cook et al, 2003) and recommended practice guidelines (Ford & Cloitre, 2009) for treatment of Complex PTSD in children. Core components include strategies and step by step procedures and worksheets outlined in the *Practitioner’s Manual* and training curricula to ensure: (1.) psychological, physical, and emotional safety for the child and child’s family, (2.) strength *and* relationship-focused assessments and service planning; (3.) self and co-regulation development in all phases of treatment for the child and caregivers; (4.) trauma memory re-integration matched to the child and caregivers’ capacity incorporating components from TF-CBT (Cohen, Mannarino & Deblinger, 2006), EMDR (Shapiro, 1995), and Progressive Counting (Greenwald, 2008); and (5.) Prevention and management of disruptions of primary relationships and crises including trauma reactions using *Youth and Caregiver Power Plans*. Interventions and activities are prioritized based on the child’s level of self-regulation and the strength and availability of emotionally supportive relationships.

**Practitioner-
Developed**
**Research-
Tested**
**Supervisor-
Endorsed**
**Works Well With
Other Trauma
Treatments**



Chapter by Chapter, Stronger and Stronger



Chapter One: The Heroes Challenge; *Understanding Trauma and Promoting Healing*

- ❖ Children and caregivers read about how stress can build up inside our brains and our bodies to point that we feel out of control.
- ❖ Workbook pages show children how they can build self-control power and relationships to help them grow stronger and reduce traumatic stress.

Chapter Two: *Recognizing and Expressing Feelings (Affect Power)*

- ❖ Children and caregivers begin to use workbook pages to develop stories with feelings expressed through rhythm, music, and movement.
- ❖ Chapter pages encourage children to develop skills and safety to recognize a range of feelings, express feelings appropriately, and change how they feel so they can remain safe.

Chapter Three: Heroes; *Restoring Hope, Inspiring Change*

- ❖ Children and caregivers identify heroes they see in media, popular culture, politics, their cultural heritage, and their family and learn what helps their heroes succeed including how heroes get help and help others.
- ❖ Workbook pages encourage children and caregivers to share stories of overcoming ‘tough times’ by family members and highlight the

importance of caregivers for helping children learn essential skills and developing courage.

Chapter Four: Power Plans; *Developing Resiliency-Centered Safety Plans*

- ❖ Children and caregivers build on their awareness of how heroes use skills to look at what has helped them, ‘tough times’ in their lives, typical reactions to stress, and how they could use skills and support from caregivers and other caring adults to make things better.
- ❖ Children develop *Youth Power Plans*, strength-based worksheets that focus on helping children share what helps them cope, what doesn’t help, and developing a shared safety plan with caring adults to prevent or reduce traumatic stress reactions.
- ❖ Caregivers are also encouraged to develop *Caregiver Power Plans* that identify their child’s triggers, reactions, and interventions that can prevent or reduce traumatic stress reactions.
- ❖ Power plans are condensed into pocket power cards children can carry with them.

Chapter Five: My Family; *Remembering People Who Cared*

- ❖ Children and caregivers work together as detectives to learn about who helped children in the past and to record memories of caring.
- ❖ Children’s skills and talents are linked with achievement of parents, grandparents, other relatives, and stories of overcoming that are part of the child’s cultural heritage.

Chapter Six: Important People; *Promoting Emotionally Supportive Relationships*

- ❖ Children and caregivers explore a broad range of people in their lives and identify mentors, protectors, and emotionally supportive relationships.
- ❖ Memories of support are strengthened to expand the child’s sense of security and confidence.

Chapter Seven: Mind Power; *Self-regulation Skill Development*

- ❖ Children (and caregivers) develop resources within themselves and with the help of supportive adults to calm down through slow breathing, reminders of caring, comforting images, mindfulness, and movement.
- ❖ Activities strengthen skills for self-regulation by developing the child’s ability to become aware of signals in their body, how feelings and thoughts can come and go, how the child can re-direct attention, and how they can open up possibilities for making things better.
- ❖ Children and caregivers develop skills that help them accept fears and negative thoughts, elicit positive images of feeling cared for, and try out new behaviors to solve problems.
- ❖ Children and caregivers increase development of skills to manage situations that can often trigger traumatic stress reactions including how to stay safe in relationships, develop positive friendships, and learn from teachers, coaches, clergy and other safe and supportive adults.

Chapter Eight: Changing the Story; *The ABC’s of Trauma; Cognitive Reprocessing to Achieve Goals*

- ❖ Worksheet questions help children and caregivers recognize how stress works in the body and mind and how changing beliefs about themselves can help children achieve their goals and make things better for themselves and their families.
- ❖ Children and caregivers are invited to become the directors of their own ‘life’ movies as a way to engage them to take control of what happens when they are triggered with reminders that have, in the past, led to problem behaviors.
- ❖ Activities include breaking apart what happens leading to distress and getting into trouble and how the child can become a ‘Thought-shifter to Succeed.’
- ❖ Working on this chapter with supportive caregivers helps children feel safe enough to share how they felt and acted in the past and feel safe again with caring adults committed to protecting and guiding the child to maturity.

Chapter Nine: Timelines and Moves; *Making Sense of the Past*

- ❖ A roadmap and timeline help children and caregivers remember important people and places from the past and to organize what happened in their lives by the years of their lives, from birth to the present time.
- ❖ Chapter pages encourage children to share how they remember places where they lived, the people who cared for them, how they felt in each place, and how the child understands what led to the child moving to a new home now that they are older (and wiser).
- ❖ Chapter Nine helps caregivers and practitioners understand the child’s experiences (feelings and beliefs) and develop a list of traumatic events in chronological order to help the child re-integrate traumatic experiences with a renewed sense of safety.

Chapter Ten: Through the Tough Times; *Reintegration of Traumatic Memories*

- ❖ Workbook pages help children and emotionally supportive caregivers to safely share what they experienced, what was most difficult, and what they learned can make things better.
- ❖ Movies and ‘Five-Chapter’ stories help children share traumatic experiences stressing how the child and supportive adults have developed skills and supports so they can escape feeling trapped in recurrent traumatic experiences.
- ❖ Activities encourage use of evidence-supported desensitization techniques to help children share undisclosed details and *move through* traumatic memories to places and times where they felt safe and cared for.
- ❖ Children are encouraged to share experiences of loss and also shame for what they feel they have done wrong and to find ways to make amends for hurting other people.
- ❖ Before completing Chapter Ten, practitioners and caregivers help children practice ‘moving through’ their worst memories so that reminders of what happened and other hard times will not lead to traumatic stress reactions.

Chapter Eleven: Into the Future; *Identifying Goals and Important Relationships*

- ❖ Workbook pages encourage the child to broaden their sense of time by sharing how they see themselves developing skills and relationships through adolescence and into adulthood.
- ❖ Activities encourage children to share who they would see as important in their lives and provide opportunities for practitioners and caregivers to build or strengthen positive, supportive relationships with family members, mentors, and other supportive adults.

Chapter Twelve: ‘My Story;’ *Integrating a Stronger Identity with a Past, Present & Future & Helping Others*

- ❖ ‘My Story’ provides an opportunity for the child to integrate what they have learned into a life story of overcoming shared in words with photos, drawings, or video.
- ❖ Children are invited to share what they have learned in a letter to other children who experienced similar ‘tough times’ as the child did, building the child’s sense of themselves as a hero, helping others.
- ❖ Children are then urged to rip off the *Real Life Heroes* cover page and substitute their own book cover and dedication to make this book truly their own.

Real Life Heroes® is listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the SAMHSA National Center for Trauma-Informed Care "Models for Developing Trauma-Informed Behavioral Health Systems and Trauma-Specific Services," and as one of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s (NCTSN) Empirically Supported Treatments and Promising Practices. RLH is also listed as ‘High’ in Child Welfare System Relevance by the California Evidence-based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. The model has been successfully pilot-tested in home-based and placement child welfare services (Kagan, Douglas, Hornik, & Kratz, 2008) and utilized in a wide range of child and family service agencies in the U.S. and Canada. The *HEROES Project*, a SAMHSA-funded community practice site of the NCTSN, evaluated use of *Real Life Heroes* in seven child and family service and behavioral health programs and found significant reductions in traumatic stress and behavioral problems on standardized measures; children receiving RLH did not have placements or psychiatric hospitalizations (Kagan, Henry, Richardson, Trinkle & Lafrenier, 2015).

For more information on *Real Life Heroes*® research, training programs and consultation, please see: www.reallifeheroes.net or e mail: richardkagan7@gmail.com. To obtain *Real Life Heroes Toolkit for Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Families*, *Real Life Heroes Life Storybook 3rd edition*, *Wounded Angels; Inspiration from Children in Crisis*, and *Rebuilding Attachments with Traumatized Children*, please see: www.amazon.com, www.bn.com or www.routledgebehavioralhealth.com. Discounts for large purchases are available from Routledge Press.

