



Real Life Heroes®



Resiliency-Focused Therapy for Complex Trauma

What is Real Life Heroes?

Real Life Heroes® (RLH) provides therapists with easy-to-use tools including a life storybook, manual, multi-sensory creative arts activities, assessment & psycho education resources to promote engagement with children and parents/caregivers in evidence-supported therapy for Complex Trauma/DTD. Therapists can use RLH to reframe referrals based on pathologies and blame into a shared ‘journey,’ a ‘pathway’ to strengthening (or building) emotionally supportive and enduring relationships and promoting development of affect self and co-regulation skills for youths, parents, extended family members and other caregivers. RLH is an integrative treatment model that incorporates components of attachment, trauma, CBT, family systems sensorimotor and neurobiological therapies to help youths and parents/caregivers recognize bodily sensations, reduce shame, and change behavior cycles. Creative arts (drawing, rhythm, music, movement, yoga, improv) mindfulness, movement activities, and shared life story work provide a means for youths and families to develop the safety, attunement and trust needed to increase resilience to cope with on-going adversity and for re-integration of traumatic memories.

What Are the Goals of Real Life Heroes?

- 1. To expand engagement and inclusion of children, adolescents and families in evidence-supported therapy that includes NCTSN-recommended components of treatment for Complex Trauma and Child Welfare.**
- 2. To help youths & parents/caregivers rebuild (or build) emotionally supportive and attuned relationships, increase self and co-regulation skills, develop and implement safety plans to manage ongoing adversity and re-integrate overwhelming traumatic memories into strength-oriented life stories.**
- 3. To increase children’s attachments with parents and other caregivers and pride in their abilities, family, and cultural heritage as ‘antidotes to shame’ (Herman, 2011).**

How Does RLH Help Youths and Families?

- ♦ RLH focuses on 'relational healing for relational traumas' which makes it easier to match interventions to primary goals and needs of**

distressed youths and parents/caregivers with complex trauma or DTD.

- ◆ **RLH engages children, adolescents and families from diverse communities around the world with principles of 'the hero's journey' (Campbell, 1968), tools that highlight youth, parent/caregiver, extended family and cultural strengths and by bringing out youths' and parents/caregivers' caring, strengths and yearning to make things better.**
- ◆ **RLH books, e.g. *The Hero's Mask* and *Wounded Angels*, engage children and parents/caregivers to expand perspectives about what can help them get past constricting fears linked to experiences of chronic traumas by using lessons learned from youth, family and cultural heroes.**
- ◆ **RLH focuses on the developmental needs of children ages 6-12 and adolescents with Complex Trauma and Developmental Trauma Disorder who experienced traumas beginning before age 12 and have delays in their social, emotional or cognitive development.**
- ◆ **RLH can be used with youths and parents/caregivers who have not been willing to participate in, or have been excluded from, trauma-focused treatments including youths with suspected traumas that have not been acknowledged or validated, youths who have had frequent hospitalizations or placements, youths with aggressive behavioral reactions to trauma reminders, youths whose parents or caregivers have not been able or willing to work in trauma-focused treatment or youths who lack the language or cognitive skills for cognitive-based therapies.**

Why Use RLH?

- ◆ **RLH provides therapists with tools to overcome what is often cited as the greatest challenges in trauma treatment with youths and families, to increase and sustain engagement with highly stressed youths and parents/caregivers. RLH provides strategies for therapists and programs to avoid common pitfalls leading to families not being able or willing to participate, not showing up, or dropping out of evidence-based treatments. RLH also utilizes messages and assessment-service planning tools that respect youths' and parent/caregivers' needs to protect themselves from chronic traumas and the importance of each family's cultural heritage.**

- ◆ **RLH helps programs expand inclusion since RLH tools can be used with youths who have not yet disclosed primary traumatic experiences or where suspected traumas have not been acknowledged or validated, and with youths living in placement programs (or at high risk of placement) who lack safe, non-offending caregivers who are able and willing to participate in trauma-focused therapy.**
- ◆ **RLH has been successfully utilized in a wide range of programs from home-based to intensive psychiatric hospitals in rural to urban environments, with justice-involved youths, with refugee youths, with youths living in birth, foster, kinship and adoptive families and residential programs and in school-based programs.**
- ◆ **RLH includes a workbook and session rituals which provide a flexible, easy-to-learn and transferable structure that allows youths, parents, and other caregivers to continue trauma treatment if they move between programs or therapists and includes primary roles for birth, foster, kinship or adoptive parents, residential counselors, mentors, and other caring adults, promoting family and team ownership and commitment to ongoing work to make things better.**
- ◆ **The *RLH* Toolkit and fidelity measures can be used to assure implementation of all ‘best practice’ components for treatment of Complex Trauma and trauma-informed child welfare services recommended by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).**
- ◆ **RLH core components (*REAL*: Relationships, Emotional Self and Co-regulation, Action Cycles, and Life Story Integration) provide an integrated, phase-based framework from referral and assessment through collaborative youth-parent/caregiver-practitioner service planning, skill and relationship-development sessions, life story integration, progress reviews and future planning.**
- ◆ **RLH provides ‘ready-to-go’ tools for hard-pressed therapists including step-by-step guides for developing self and co-regulation with slow breathing, yoga, mindfulness, movement, ‘improv’, and storytelling activities that promote youth-caregiver attunement and trust. Activities are especially designed for youths and parents/caregivers who have experienced chronic trauma.**
- ◆ **RLH guides flexible adaptation of tools to engage diverse families, match resource capacity for a wide range of programs, and adjust for changes in youths’ and parents/caregivers’ stability to maintain safety and progress in treatment.**

- ◆ **RLH tools can be readily used with other evidence-supported trauma treatment models to help strengthen interventions or overcome obstacles to treatment in diverse programs that would otherwise lead to drop-outs or lack of progress.**
- ◆ **RLH demonstrated efficacy in pre-post research studies with children and families in ‘real world’ child welfare, behavioral health and school-based programs with an ‘all practitioner’ training model that can be easily replicated in programs that do not utilize the selective inclusion and exclusion criteria for youths, parents/caregivers and therapists often found in EBT research.**
- ◆ **RLH is easily adaptable to match the needs and strengths of diverse children, families, and programs.**
- ◆ **RLH enables new therapists to readily implement trauma and attachment-centered treatment and offers advanced skill-building and tools for experienced staff.**
- ◆ **The RLH ‘Ready to Go’ toolkit promotes expedited training and implementation by therapists with little time for workshops or session preparation.**
- ◆ **RLH leads to high rates of implementation after initial training and high rates of sustained use promoted by program use of the RLH Toolkit and Life Storybook.**
- ◆ **RLH empowers parents and other caregivers and creates opportunities for parents/caregivers to increase their own emotionally supportive relationships, to strengthen self and co-regulation skills and to re-integrate traumatic memories.**

How Can RLH Help Home-based, School-based, Residential, Foster/Adoptive, Behavioral Health, Juvenile Justice and Refugee Service Programs?

- ◆ **RLH has been successfully implemented for 25 years in a wide range of child and family services, behavioral health, justice-involved, refugee and school-based programs and can be used to jumpstart development and implementation of trauma-informed and resiliency-focused services for youths and families.**
- ◆ **RLH training and consultation programs have successfully engaged and trained therapists and programs with limited time for training.**

- ◆ **Follow up surveys have found high rates of therapist use and sustainability after training abetted by use of the RLH Life Storybook and Toolkit.**
- ◆ **RLH is easily adapted for diverse families and can be used in home-based, clinic-based, school-based, residential, foster care and adoption programs.**
- ◆ **RLH was developed and tested in ‘real world’ and often highly stressed treatment programs with youths who did not meet the criteria for many treatment models or were not improving with other trauma-informed interventions which focused primarily on the child’s development of self-regulation skills and desensitization of traumatic memories.**
- ◆ **The *RLH On-Demand Training Program* helps programs provide training at times that best match therapists’ schedules any time during the year.**

For further information on Real Life Heroes®, RLH training programs, RLH books, RLH research and child, parent/caregiver, practitioner and supervisor/director feedback on RLH, please see: www.reallifeheroes.net

