

An introduction to *The Storm* – a therapeutic fairy tale For Children Growing Through Parents' Separation

The Storm is part of Speechmark's *Therapeutic Fairy Tales* series, designed to offer children a safe space to explore and get in touch with feelings arising from their experience of parents going through separation or divorce.

Children grow up with storybooks. Their familiarity can help children feel safe. In presenting resonant themes and feelings through story and image, therapeutic storybooks can provide some much-needed distance in a time of crisis. By exploring other characters' similar yet not the same situations, children may feel safer to engage with their own feelings.

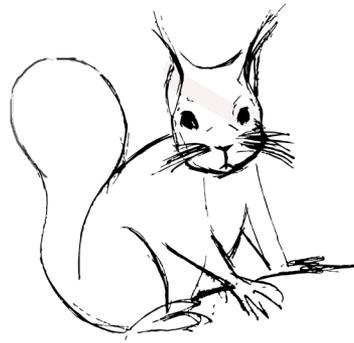
Often important and necessary conversations do not happen in times of loss and crisis, as children attempt to manage strong feelings and/or feel that they must behave in a certain way. Some children may find it hard to express emotions, and some emotions can just feel too big. Adult caregivers are also suffering from these life changes. Yet, not having an opportunity to voice real feelings, fears and worries, can block children and families from connecting with inner resources, to help process life changes going on outside and often inside them. Children need a safe space to make sense of difficult life experiences.

To help practitioners who are not familiar with using storybooks in a therapeutic and/or creative setting, we've included a page of therapeutic prompts relevant to *The Storm*'s subject matter and themes, as well as two example taster creative exercises.

Upfront, three core principles when working with children are the following:

- Create the right conditions for a safe, trusting relationship to be built;
- Pace the work appropriately so children don't feel overwhelmed;
- Model a creative mindset so any creative activities with children are process-based rather than about technical skill and end products.

For more specific details on how to work with story and image, please go to the *Storybook Manual: An Introduction To Working With Storybooks Therapeutically And Creatively*.



Therapeutic prompts and questions for working with *The Storm* storybook

The Storm storybook is a therapeutic fairy tale aimed to help children explore their experience and feelings around family separation and divorce.

To keep in mind:

- 1) Try to keep any questions/observations open-ended, giving children space and freedom to engage with the story in their own way. Most children are sensitive to adult expectations. Try to turn any enquiry into one of mutual curiosity.
- 2) Keeping the storybook open for visual reference can help facilitate a more natural discussion and take the pressure off a child of feeling under scrutiny.
- 3) Follow the natural interest of the child you are working with – often it's the pictures!

Examples of therapeutic prompts and ideas for discussion around *The Storm* storybook:

1) *Immediate responses to the story*

- What do we see this family going through?
- What different feelings do the children have during the story?
- What pages/pictures really jump out to you about this family?
 - Any expressions on the characters' faces or actions?

2) *Looking at the pictures of the treehouse through the story*

- How does their home change through the story?
 - At the beginning, middle and the end?
- What kind of colours and images do we see in different moments of the treehouse?
- Where do you think the safe places might be in this home?

3) *Family conflict*

- What's it like for the children in this story to hear their parents arguing?
- What kind of feelings, fears and/or worries might these children have?
- What do you think these children would like their parents to know?

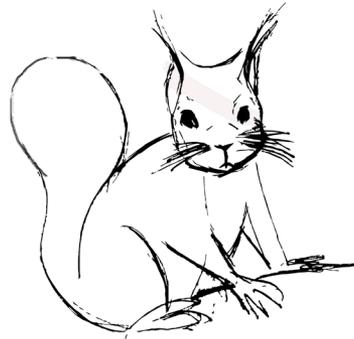
4) *Falling down into the deep pit and meeting the Firebird*

- What do you think the children learn by meeting the Firebird?
 - What messages does the Firebird or any other characters give them?
- What other objects have also fallen into the pit?
- What other questions might the children want to ask the Firebird?

5) *Building a new family shape*

- What is the new shape and colours of this family?
- Who will be connected with who?
- What connects the whole family, even if they are not going to be living together?

TASTER ACTIVITY worksheet for process-orientated story activities



Changing Views: Retelling the Story from the Squirrel's Point of View

Aim: To help children explore themes of family separation in *The Storm* from different perspectives, and a little more distance, by inviting them to step into the witness role.

Creative media: Creative storytelling, role-play and dramatic enactment – can be expanded to other arts materials such as drawing, painting, clay, puppet-making, depending on resources.

STEPS and INSTRUCTIONS

Stepping into the Squirrel's paws

- Can you spot this little animal which is often hidden in *The Storm*?
 - Where is the squirrel on the different pages?
- I'm going to invite you to imagine being this Squirrel
- What might be the story of this Squirrel?
 - What name might it have, how old is it?
 - How long has this Squirrel lived near this family?
 - Which is its favourite part of the treehouse?

Retelling the story as the Squirrel Storyteller

- Let's turn the pages of the book and imagine what the Squirrel sees, hears?
- Let's retell the story from the Squirrel's point of view
 - Beginning, middle and end
 - Turning the pages, "Once Upon a Time..."
 - Let's hear from the Squirrel as Storyteller

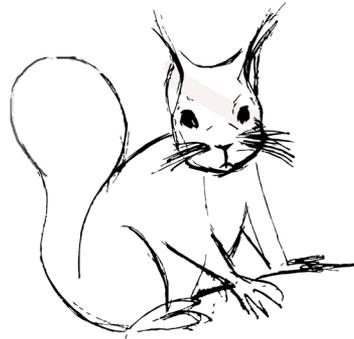
What's going on for the Squirrel

- What does the Squirrel feel over the pages?
- What kind of fears, worries might the Squirrel have?
 - How might these change through the story?
- What does the Squirrel wish for the children and parents in this family?

Reflections and discussions together

- What was it like to step into the Squirrel's paws?
- Any surprises, anything else different in how you felt, what you noticed or learnt?
- Any other messages that the Squirrel might have for the characters in this story?
- Practitioner also to share their reflections of what the Squirrel saw, heard, etc...

TASTER ACTIVITY worksheet for process-orientated creative art-making activities



Designing and Making a Safe Place for the Children in *The Storm*

Aim: To help children explore themes of safety and retreat in a reflective, creative way.

Creative media: Drawing, painting, sculpting, construction, role-play, dramatic enactment.

Arts materials: Pens, pencils, pastels, paints. Can be expanded to 3D materials: cardboard boxes, tissue papers, wools, natural objects, found objects, clay, depending on resources.

STEPS and INSTRUCTIONS

Today we're going to make a safe place for the children in this story

- At the beginning of the book, the children are making dens
- If you were going to build them a den to help them feel safe, what would it be?
- It can be anything, anywhere ... feel free to travel where you'd like, in the woods, underwater, underground, by the sea, or a specific place, anywhere you like
 - What would this new safe place look like?
 - Where would you place it?
- What would it be built of?
 - On the outside, on the inside?
 - What would the children keep inside it, or keep out?
- I wonder how the children might make their den weather-proof

Making the safe place

- Using any creative materials you like, build these children their safe place, their den
- Take your time ... you can decorate it any way you want, inside and outside
- You can also include the child characters if you'd like, or any other characters

Let's tell a story about these children in their safe place

- Let's tell a story about this safe place, this den
- Starting with Once Upon a Time ..., can you tell me about this special place
 - What does it feel like to be in here?
 - What makes it safe?
 - What's it like to leave, and come back again?

Reflections and discussions together

- Share together any reflections, surprises, what you notice about this safe place
- Discuss and normalise how we all need sometimes to retreat into a safe space, especially through times of difficulty and change – safe places need to be found inside us too

