



# An introduction to *The Island* – a therapeutic fairy tale For Children With A Parent Living With Depression

*The Island* 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 experiences of a parent who lives with depression.

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 often feel safer to engage with their own feelings.

Often important and necessary conversations do not happen in times of difficulty, as children attempt to manage strong feelings and/or feel that they must behave in a certain way. Some children may not have learned how to express emotions, and some emotions can just feel too big. Adult caregivers are inevitably also suffering. Yet, not having an opportunity to voice real feelings, fears and worries, can block children and caregivers from connecting with inner resources, to help deal with difficulty. Children need a space to make sense of their 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 Island's* subject matter and themes, as well as two example taster creative exercises.

Upfront, three core principles to remember 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 Island* storybook

*The Island* storybook is a therapeutic fairy tale aimed to help children explore their experience and feelings around having a parent who lives with depression.

### 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 Island* storybook:

#### 1) *Immediate responses to the story*

- What do you think is going on for this Girl and Mum at the start of the story?
- What changes for the Girl through the story?
- What pages/pictures really jump out to you about this Girl's story?
  - Any expressions on the characters' faces or actions?

#### 2) *Looking at the pictures of landscape – where the Girl travels through the story*

- Let's look at where she starts at the beginning, middle and the end of the story
  - E.g. Home, the rock, the sea, running across the causeway
- What kind of colours and images do we see on and around the island?
- What kind of feelings and thoughts does the Girl have in these different places?

### 3) *Meeting the Turtle*

- What do you think the Girl learns by meeting the Turtle?
  - What messages does the Turtle give her?
- I wonder what other questions the Girl might have for the Turtle
  - What answers might the Turtle give her?
- Let's look at the Girl's different feelings when she is with the Turtle?
  - How do they shift and change?

### 4) *The Girl's decision*

- Let's explore the Girl's reasons for staying and leaving the island
- What's it like for the Girl in this story to leave her Mum?
  - What kind of feelings, fears and/or worries might she have?
- I wonder why it might be important for this Girl to leave the island?
  - What might she be able to bring back to the island with her?
- Explore and discuss the idea of self-love being as important as loving and caring for others

## TASTER ACTIVITY worksheet for process-orientated story activities



### Making Your Own Magical Journey

**Aim:** To help give children a taste of freedom and adventure, also exploring themes of freedom and separation, and the idea of return.

**Creative media:** Guided visualisation, creative storytelling, role-play, dramatic enactment.

**Arts materials:** These can be expanded to other materials such as drawing, painting, clay, puppet-making (depending on resources).

### STEPS and INSTRUCTIONS

**Turn to the page where the Girl sits on the Turtle's back – now it's your turn to take a journey to a special, magical place**

- I'd like you to imagine that a magical sea creature invites you onto its back for a ride
  - It might be a turtle but it might also be something else ... you choose
  - How does it feel sitting on this sea creature – what do you see, hear, notice?
- Now, you can direct this sea creature to take you wherever you want to go
  - A trip to a special place
  - Underwater, overseas ... or maybe to a place where you need to walk for a bit
  - Wherever you'd like to go ... you're in charge

**Now you're going to retell your own story from the back of the magical sea creature**

- What do you notice as you travel on this magical sea creature's back?
  - Explore sensations and feelings of travelling (on the water, underwater)
- What do you see on your travels?
  - Other places, sea animals, pirate ships, anything you like
- Tell the story, Once Upon a Time ..., of where you go

***The magical sea creature takes you to your destination – this special place***

- As you arrive, what do you see in this special place?
  - What (or who) is around you?
- Take some time getting to know this place
- Before leaving, you can take one thing, something precious with you – what is this?
- How are you going to carry this precious thing home with you, to keep it safe?

***The return home***

- As the magical sea creature takes you back, what do you notice about the return journey?
- When you get back, what are you going to share about your journey?
- Where will you keep the precious thing?

***Remember that you are free to travel in your imagination – you can go back to the special place, or other places.***

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



### Creating Your Own Map for The Island

**Aim:** To help children to engage with map-making as a way to navigate difficult places.

**Creative media:** Drawing, painting, art-making, role-play and enactment.

**Arts materials:** White or brown craft paper and a clean re-cycled plastic bottle, coloured pens or pencils, collage materials.

### STEPS and INSTRUCTIONS

*Through-out this story, we travel through an island that sometimes gets foggy and it's hard to see the landscape. To help us travel more easily here in the future ...*

- I'd like you to invent your own map to help the Girl travel around the island and the mainland
- For inspiration, you might want to think about what pirate or secret treasure maps look like
- You can include names of key places, and add marks and arrows to create your map

***Feel free to create your map anyway you'd like. Here are some ideas to help you:***

- Which colours and shapes you'd like to use to show the different areas?
  - Steep mountains, home, the rock where the Girl meets the Turtle, etc
- What names would you like to give the different places on your map
  - You can call them whatever you like
  - The foggy forest ... the spiky hills, for example
- Feel free to invent some new places on and off the island that aren't in the book
  - Maybe there are other magical creatures that live around the island
- What might connect your island to the mainland
  - Maybe it's a different kind of causeway or path

***Mark the way of how you would travel around and off the island***

- Using a pen, show the path to travel around the island
- There may be many different paths that you'd like to show
- Feel free to experiment with different colours

***Let's explore this map together – the different paths and any new stories***

- Together let's see what kind of island and places you've made
- Are there new stories to be told?

***Now you've created this special map, keep it safe for whoever might need it next – a message in a bottle***

- Your map is a special object, keep it safe for next time you might need it
- Carefully roll your map and tie it in the middle with a piece of string or a ribbon
- You could keep your map safely in a bottle – carefully roll your map tightly so it fits into the bottle you have chosen. Place your rolled-up map into the bottle and keep it somewhere safe
- If you decide not to put it into a bottle, still roll it safely and tie – who knows what adventurer might need it next?

