

Di's Story

Throughout my childhood, I had a great desire to tell stories. I did not understand their significance, and I did not recognise them as an attempt to communicate with the world. I knew they fascinated me, and I knew they gave me a sense of purpose and satisfaction. I told my stories through my play, through my artwork and through my endless conversations with beloved toys. I did not know that I was searching for answers and that with the help of a skilled listener, they would transform my life.

I trained as a Nursery Nurse, determined to understand the ways that a child develops and the crucial role of play and attachment in shaping a child's view of the world and, with it, the answers to many of life's challenges. From this base, I undertook support roles for children struggling with mental health issues and childhood abuse. I began to understand the diverse ways that children communicate their distress, their confusion, and their desires. I also began to understand how crucial it is for the adults around them to interpret these communications with nurture, love, compassion, and skill. I began to deepen my knowledge with training in Transactional Analysis, which opened my eyes to the wounds caused by miscommunication and the strategies that can overcome these. I trained as a Play Therapist, applying my existing knowledge and skills to provide interventions and resources to help children notice, explore, and understand their situations and to provide them with helpful life skills.

Working in the field of Child Protection for around 23 years, I also trained as a Social Worker in order to extend the breadth of my knowledge to include social policy and legislation. This helped me develop training and professional support packages for front-line staff and residential workers. I worked with colleagues to write a book about ways of working with children and how to understand their needs and delivered training and conference speeches to share my learning with others. My interactions with other professionals and key adults always seemed to point to the same struggles; that children are seen and judged for their behaviour and not as a representation of the life they have lived. It drew me more determinedly to write these experiences down, and I began using stories to aid children in expressing their lives, their worries, and their beliefs, hoping that this would help adults make sense of the child's experiences and highlight the courage taken to communicate their struggles to the world.

The stories began as collaborations; for example a child describing a play scene, and me encouraging them to introduce new layers, or chapters, to the scenes to open up awareness of sensations, emotions, thoughts, relationship needs, and possible new endings. The stories gave me insights into how children make meaning of their world through limited understanding and often with adults unskilled in how to deepen or widen the communications that children use.

The stories also provided deep therapeutic messages for children, which could be harnessed and repeated to provide new perspectives on the world and teach new life skills to aid their recovery. The stories teach self-compassion, self-care, communication, relationship skills, and how to form effective habits. They introduce vital concepts such as mindfulness, rest, movement, and interaction with the world.

In 2013 I began my own company; The Chapters Therapy Services and shifted my focus to children in specialist education settings and post-adoptive families. Often children were referred to me because of a set of behaviours or emotional struggles. My role became the translator, retelling the story of the child to the key adults with new insights linked to development, attachment and trauma. There can be challenges here, as hearing the child's worldview can be painful, demoralising, and lead to self-criticism or guilt for key adults. However, I recognised that these were all essential chapters in learning to meet the true needs of each child. The Chapters has continued to develop resources and strategies to support families and key carers in understanding the overlap between the child's lived experiences and their own, to reduce the challenges and celebrate the progress made.

Given the demand for such support, I began recording some stories for use in specific settings or for individual families. These stories are now being re-developed for use on this website, and I will continue to write them in response to the individual needs and enquiries that come along. I hope you enjoy reading and engaging with them. Encourage others to read them also, as this strengthens their understanding and communicates the key messages more widely. Strengthening such positive interactions will help the child resolve their challenges. The brain learns best through repetition, so each time you read a story, the brain is being offered a generous gift



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