

100 STORIES

TOOLKIT

2026

A practice-based resource for using storytelling to understand what matters to young people to improve public services.



Rosa Robinson and Helen Wales

Frame.

In partnership with:



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board

Prifysgol Wrexham
Wrexham University



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	3	6. Insights from Research and Practice.....	20
Quick Start Guide	4	Storytelling with Children and Young People	20
1. Introduction.....	5	Storytelling with Looked-After Children.....	22
Introducing the Storytelling Toolkit	5	Storytelling with Children with ASD, Neurodiversity and ALN	23
Purpose of the Toolkit	5	Storytelling in Early Years Services	24
Project and Policy Context.....	6	Key Themes, Benefits and Outcomes	24
2. The Storytelling Approach.....	7	Spotlight: 100 Stories Project.....	26
Impact on Three Levels	7	7. Using Storytelling in Practice	27
Storytelling Processes	8	Using Storytelling.....	27
Core Elements of Storytelling.....	8	Story-Ready Service Culture	27
Foundations.....	9	Planning for and Understanding Change	28
3. Why Storytelling Matters	10	Gathering and Using Feedback	28
For Children and Young People	10	Evaluating Through Stories	28
For Practitioners	10	Taking a Staged Approach.....	28
For Services and Systems.....	11	Storytelling, Complexity and Responsibility	29
Storytelling as Process	11	8. Practical Tools.....	29
4. Principles for Safe and Meaningful Storytelling (TrACE).....	12	Practical Facilitation Considerations.....	30
What is TrACE?.....	12	Reflective Questions for Practitioners	30
Core Principles of a TrACE-Informed Approach.....	12	Using the Tools.....	30
Storytelling in TrACE Contexts	13	End Note.....	30
5. What is Storytelling?	14	Appendix 1: Storytelling Planning and Facilitation Guide	31
A Wide Range of Storytelling Methods	14	Appendix 2: Storytelling Project Checklist (full)	33
Structured Storytelling Methodologies	15	Appendix 3: Further Reading, Frameworks and Resources	35
Stories and Story Outputs	18	Policy and Framework Contexts.....	35
Collaborative Storytelling.....	18	Storytelling Projects and Practice Examples	35
Methods and Considerations.....	19	Participation and Reflective Practice Resources	35
		Storytelling Frameworks and Approaches.....	36
		References.....	37

Stories shape systems. They reveal what's working, what isn't, and what needs to change. This toolkit is an invitation to use storytelling to see more clearly and act more humanely. This resource has been developed through practice, reflection and collaboration across health, education, social care and community settings. It has grown out of conversations with practitioners, children and young people, researchers, and organisations seeking to understand how storytelling can be used more thoughtfully, ethically, and meaningfully within public services.

The toolkit is intended as both a practical and a reflective resource. Storytelling is often spoken about enthusiastically, yet used superficially or, at times, unsafely. Stories can easily become extracted, simplified or reduced to communications outputs. This toolkit takes a different position. Here, storytelling is understood as relational work. It is a way of understanding experience, building connection, exploring complexity and creating opportunities for reflection and change.

The approaches included here are not presented as fixed formulas. They are intended to be adapted carefully and thoughtfully in response to different contexts, groups and needs. We hope the toolkit supports practitioners not only in using storytelling methods but also in thinking more deeply about what stories are, how they function, and the ethical responsibilities that come with inviting people to share them.

The toolkit was developed by Frame in partnership with Wrexham University, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Flintshire County Council. Originally developed through the Leadership, Learning and Storytelling project in 2024, this revised edition was published in 2026.

Robinson, R., & Wales, H. (2026). Storytelling Toolkit: Using storytelling to understand what matters to children and young people to improve public services. Developed by Frame in partnership with Wrexham University, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Flintshire County Council.

© Frame 2026. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY–NC–SA 4.0). You are free to share and adapt the material for non–commercial purposes, provided appropriate credit is given, and any adaptations are distributed under the same license. Full license terms: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>



*The Storytelling Toolkit is designed to be used flexibly.
You do not need to read it from cover to cover in one go.*

If you are new to storytelling in practice, a useful route through the toolkit is:

- Start with the Introduction and The Storytelling Approach to understand the overall purpose, context and core model.
- Read Why Storytelling Matters to understand the value of storytelling at the individual, service and system levels.
- Read Principles for Safe and Meaningful Storytelling before planning or facilitating any storytelling work with children and young people.
- Use What is Storytelling? and Insights from Research and Practice to explore different methods and understand the wider evidence base.
- Then move to Using Storytelling in Practice, Practical Tools and the Appendix to support planning, implementation, reflection and evaluation.

Some practitioners may wish to begin with the practical sections and return to the evidence and conceptual sections later. Others may move between sections depending on the needs of a project, team or group of young people.

This practical, evidence-informed toolkit is designed to be both robust and easy to use in real-world settings. The following sections will guide professionals through a comprehensive understanding of storytelling, explaining not only what it is, but also how to implement it safely, thoughtfully, and meaningfully.



Introducing the Storytelling Toolkit

This toolkit is part of the Leadership, Learning, and Storytelling (LLS) project, an initiative from Wrexham University's civic mission to reduce inequalities across North Wales. Created in collaboration with Flintshire Council, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, and local community organisations, the LLS project aims to amplify the voices of children and young people, especially those whose perspectives are often underrepresented in decision-making processes.

The toolkit has emerged from a recognition that children and young people often experience services in ways that are not fully visible through formal systems, data or professional processes alone. Stories can help make those experiences visible and compelling.

Storytelling is not understood here as a nice-to-have activity or communications exercise. It is a serious relational practice that can support understanding, reflection, participation, learning and change.

Purpose of the Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed primarily for professionals working across health, social care, education and community settings who want to use storytelling in more thoughtful, collaborative and meaningful ways.

Rather than being treated simply as a way for young people to share experiences or provide feedback, storytelling is approached here as an interactive and co-creative process through which children and young people can reflect on their experiences, communicate what matters to them, and play a more active role in shaping the services and systems they rely on.

The toolkit encourages approaches in which young people and professionals can explore experiences, relationships, and needs together, rather than treating storytelling as a one-way process of consultation or information-gathering. It encourages approaches that move beyond consultation alone, supporting deeper reflection, stronger relationships and more responsive forms of service design and practice.

In particular, the toolkit aims to support practitioners to:

- Create conditions where children and young people feel heard, respected and meaningfully involved
- Develop a richer understanding of lived experience, particularly where experiences may otherwise remain partially hidden within formal systems and processes
- Use storytelling to support reflection, participation and co-production
- Strengthen understanding across services and systems through relational and experience-based insight

Throughout the toolkit, storytelling is positioned not just as a method for gathering experiences, but as a relational practice that can deepen understanding, support learning and contribute to meaningful change.

Project and Policy Context

Leadership, Learning and Storytelling aligns with key policies that prioritise children's rights and well-being. The New Curriculum for Wales places strong emphasis on supporting the holistic development, participation, creativity and well-being of children and young people, while Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines every child's right to express their views on matters affecting them freely.

Despite these commitments, many young people — especially those from vulnerable or marginalised groups, those with complex needs, or those whose experiences sit outside formal systems of participation — are rarely included meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. Their experiences may be partially understood through data, assessments or professional interpretation, but the emotional, relational and everyday realities of navigating services often remain less visible.

The Leadership, Learning and Storytelling project emerged in response to this gap. The project aims to empower young people whose voices are often overlooked in service design and improvement processes, while also helping professionals and organisations develop a richer understanding of lived experience.

Through storytelling, children and young people from diverse backgrounds — including Early Years children and families, neurodivergent young people, those with additional learning needs (ALN), and Looked-After Children (LAC) — are given opportunities to express their experiences, insights, and aspirations in ways that feel meaningful and accessible to them.

While each group brings unique perspectives and experiences, storytelling's impact remains consistent. It allows young people to articulate lived experience, reflect on relationships and systems around them, build confidence and resilience, and play an active role in shaping the services they depend on.

The toolkit encourages professionals to work alongside children and young people as equal partners, valuing their insights not simply as feedback, but as important forms of knowledge that can support learning, reflection and change.

In this sense, storytelling is positioned not only as a participatory activity but as a relational and reflective practice that can deepen understanding between young people, practitioners, and systems. Through shared storytelling, young people become active contributors to how services are understood, shaped and improved.

2. THE STORYTELLING APPROACH

Storytelling is a powerful approach because it positions children and young people as experts in their own experiences.

In this toolkit, storytelling is not understood as a one-way exchange, but as a dynamic, shared dialogue in which professionals and young people learn together, identify areas for change, and collaborate on solutions.

Rather than treating stories as outputs to be collected, this approach understands storytelling as a process that can generate insight, build relationships and support change.

Impact on Three Levels

Storytelling can create impact at the individual, service and system levels. Diagram 1 (page 9) illustrates these interconnected levels alongside the core storytelling processes of Listening, Sharing and Reflecting, and the key elements that shape storytelling practice: Storyteller, Audience and Story.

Individual Level

Research consistently suggests that storytelling may help young people process experiences, reflect on emotions and relationships, and develop confidence in expressing themselves.

For example, Australia's Batyr Programme supports young people in sharing their mental health journeys. These personal stories help reduce stigma and build resilience by allowing participants to connect with others who have faced similar challenges. In this context, storytelling becomes more than self-expression alone. It provides opportunities for recognition, connection and participation.

Storytelling can also help young people communicate experiences that may otherwise remain hidden, develop language around difficult experiences, and feel heard and validated in contexts where they may have felt unheard. In this sense, storytelling can itself become a meaningful experience of participation and agency.

Service Level

For professionals, storytelling provides a powerful way to understand young people's lived experiences more deeply. It can strengthen empathy, build trust and support more person-centred approaches to care and support.

The 100 Stories Project in Wales, for instance, encouraged neurodivergent and learning-disabled young people, parent carers and service providers to share stories about navigating service transitions. The insights generated through these stories highlighted gaps in support and communication, helping services better understand how transitions were experienced in practice.

Stories can reveal emotional and relational dimensions of services that may remain less visible through formal reporting or quantitative data alone. They can help practitioners understand how systems feel to navigate, where trust is built or lost, and how experiences accumulate over time across different services and relationships.

System Level

On a broader scale, storytelling can help surface systemic issues and contribute to policy and service change.

When collective experiences are shared, patterns begin to emerge that can help organisations and policymakers understand where systems are not working well for children and young people.

2. THE STORYTELLING APPROACH

For example, the Coronavirus and Us Stories project (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020) used child-led storytelling to explore children's experiences during the pandemic. The stories highlighted emotional well-being concerns, inequalities in experience and the importance of relationships, play and connection, helping to inform policy and practice discussions across Wales.

By connecting individual experiences to wider patterns, storytelling can help systems understand complexity. It can contribute to organisational learning, service redesign, systems reflection and more preventative approaches to support and care.

Storytelling Processes

Across these levels, storytelling involves three core processes:

Listening

Listening involves engaging fully with stories and creating conditions for understanding.

Good storytelling practice requires more than simply hearing information. It requires curiosity, openness, reflection and attention to emotion, meaning and context. Listening well also involves recognising power dynamics and understanding that stories may be shaped by trust, safety, audience and previous experiences of being heard or ignored.

Sharing

Sharing enables experiences to be communicated in ways that feel meaningful and appropriate.

Stories may be shared privately, collectively, creatively or publicly depending on the purpose of the work and the preferences of those involved. Some young people may wish to communicate through speech or writing, while others may prefer creative, visual or collaborative approaches. Sharing stories can help create understanding between young people, practitioners and organisations, particularly where experiences may otherwise remain partially hidden within formal systems and processes.

Reflecting

Reflection involves making sense of stories and considering their implications for practice, relationships, services and systems.

Reflection may happen individually or collectively, formally or informally, during storytelling itself or afterwards across teams and organisations. These processes are rarely linear. Listening, sharing and reflecting often overlap and repeat, forming an ongoing cycle of learning and adaptation.

Core Elements of Storytelling

Each storytelling approach is shaped by three interconnected elements: the Storyteller, the Audience and the Story itself.

The Storyteller

The storyteller is usually the child or young person, though professionals and caregivers may also share stories to support mutual understanding and reflection.

Storytellers bring their own experiences, emotions, identities, memories and sense of safety into the storytelling process. What feels possible to share may shift depending on context, relationships and audience.

2. THE STORYTELLING APPROACH

The Audience

The audience includes the people who hear, see or respond to the story.

Audiences shape how stories are experienced and interpreted. Their responses may influence how safe storytelling feels, what remains unspoken and how stories are understood. This means storytelling is never entirely neutral or detached from relationships and context.

The Story

The story itself may be shared through speech, writing, artwork, photography, digital media, creative activities or collective processes.

Stories are not fixed objects. They are shaped by relationships, memory, interpretation and meaning. Different storytelling methods allow young people to communicate experiences in ways that feel authentic and accessible to them.

These elements interact with one another throughout the storytelling process. For example, audience responses may influence how a storyteller reflects on their experiences, while the process of storytelling itself may reshape how experiences are understood and communicated.

Foundations

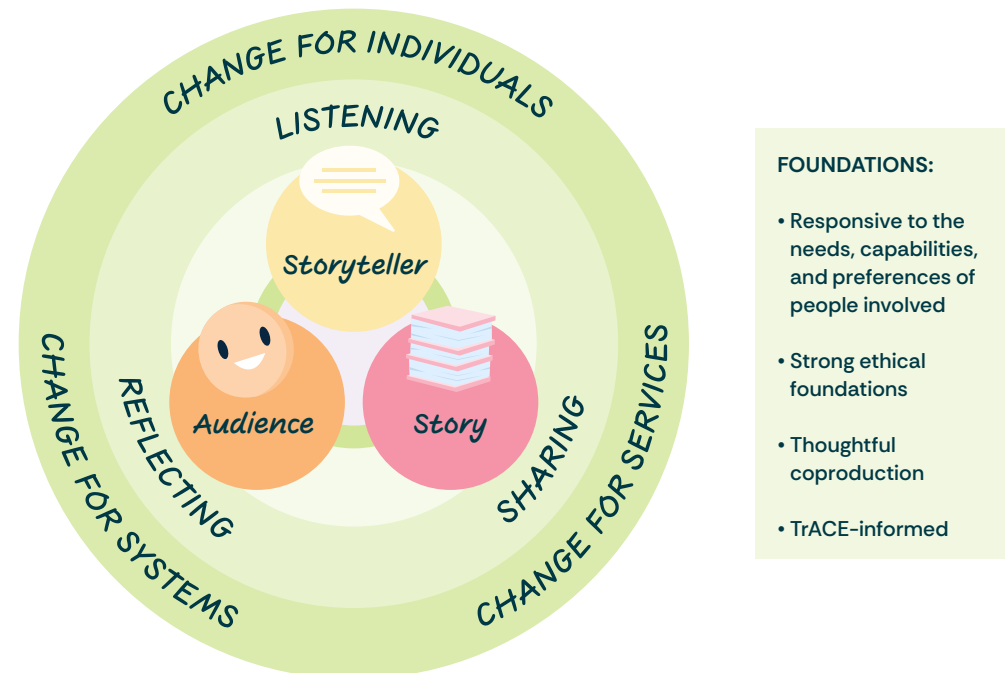
Underpinning this approach are a set of foundations that should be present in all storytelling work:

- Responsiveness to the needs, capabilities and preferences of those involved
- Strong ethical foundations

- Thoughtful co-production
- Emotional safety
- Reflection and learning
- A TrACE-informed approach

These foundations are not additional considerations. They are integral to how storytelling is understood and practised throughout this toolkit.

Diagram 1: Storytelling components, elements and processes



3. WHY STORYTELLING MATTERS

Storytelling matters because it creates opportunities for experiences, perspectives and relationships to be understood differently. It can help children and young people communicate what matters to them, while supporting practitioners and organisations to engage more fully with lived experience and complexity.

For Children and Young People

Storytelling can create opportunities for young people to communicate experiences, feelings and aspirations in ways that feel meaningful and authentic to them. It can help young people reflect on what matters to them, make sense of experiences and relationships, and feel listened to and understood.

For some young people, storytelling may also support confidence, agency and participation by creating opportunities to contribute more actively to conversations about their care, support and futures.

Storytelling can also help young people:

- Communicate experiences that may otherwise remain difficult to articulate
- Challenge assumptions and stereotypes
- Recognise strengths, relationships and sources of resilience
- Feel recognised and validated

For some young people, particularly those who have experienced instability, exclusion or trauma, storytelling may also support emotional processing and meaning-making by helping experiences feel less fragmented or isolated.

For Practitioners

For practitioners, storytelling can create opportunities to reflect on assumptions, perspectives and practice, while engaging with new and sometimes challenging insights about how services and systems are experienced.

It can help professionals build stronger, more trusting relationships with children and young people, and better understand how services and support are experienced in practice.

Storytelling can also support practitioners to:

- Work collaboratively with children and young people to identify priorities for change
- Reflect on how systems and relationships are experienced in practice
- Engage with different forms of knowledge and understanding
- Create more participatory and responsive approaches to service design and support

Importantly, storytelling can shift the practitioner's role from interpreting experiences on behalf of young people towards listening, reflection and collaborative understanding.

3. WHY STORYTELLING MATTERS

For Services and Systems

At a service and system level, storytelling provides a way of making experience visible. It offers qualitative insights that complement traditional data, helping organisations understand emotional, relational and contextual dimensions of services that might otherwise remain less visible.

When stories are brought together, they can help identify patterns, reveal gaps in support, surface unintended consequences and highlight barriers and enablers within systems. Stories can also strengthen understanding across organisations by helping practitioners and decision-makers see how services are experienced in practice and how experiences accumulate across systems over time.

This makes storytelling a practical tool for reflection, service improvement and organisational learning. Storytelling becomes more than a method for gathering experiences. It can support a deeper understanding of complexity through reflection, learning and relationship-based insight.

Storytelling as Process

These impacts are not abstract. They are experienced through the storytelling process.

Through listening, sharing and reflection, storytelling can create opportunities for children and young people to explore what matters to them, communicate experiences in meaningful ways and contribute to understanding and change.

Whether through collaborative processes or individual expression, storytelling can support personal, relational and systemic learning.

4. PRINCIPLES FOR SAFE AND MEANINGFUL STORYTELLING (TRACE)

It's vital to recognise that children and young people involved in storytelling work may have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences (TrACE). Storytelling approaches, therefore, need to be trauma-informed. This is not a separate layer added to practice, but a foundational condition for doing this work safely, ethically and meaningfully.

A TrACE-informed approach prioritises emotional safety, supports autonomy and choice, recognises power dynamics and values consent, boundaries and appropriate support throughout the storytelling process. It also requires practitioners to think carefully about how to avoid storytelling becoming extractive, overwhelming or harmful.

These principles should inform every stage of storytelling work, from planning and facilitation through to sharing, reflection and follow-up support.

What is TrACE?

TrACE refers to trauma and adverse childhood experiences, which can significantly affect young people's emotional well-being, trust and sense of safety. A TrACE-informed approach emphasises emotional safety, aiming to prevent re-traumatisation and create supportive conditions for reflection and sharing.

Although storytelling is often emotionally significant, it is not the same as therapy. Practitioners therefore need to think carefully about emotional readiness, consent, pacing, safeguarding, boundaries and the support structures available before, during and after storytelling work. This may include follow-up support, opportunities for debriefing, referral pathways or access to additional well-being support where appropriate.

Core Principles of a TrACE-Informed Approach

Collaboration and Control

Professionals and young people make joint decisions about how and when stories are shared. Young people should have meaningful control over the storytelling process, including:

- What they share
- How they share it
- Who hears it
- Whether stories are edited, recorded or retained
- Whether stories remain private or become public

Supporting choice and collaboration helps build trust and reduces the risk of storytelling becoming extractive or disempowering.

Empowerment and Ownership

Young people should be able to maintain ownership of their stories and have opportunities to shape how the stories unfold. Creating conditions where young people feel respected, listened to and able to influence the process is an important part of trauma-informed practice.

Storytelling may also invite practitioners to reflect on their own experiences, assumptions and responses, helping create a more mutual and reflective process.

4. PRINCIPLES FOR SAFE AND MEANINGFUL STORYTELLING (TrACE)

Respecting Power Dynamics

Storytelling almost always takes place within relationships shaped by power. Professionals, therefore, need to think carefully about who controls the process, whose voices and interpretations carry authority, how stories are used, and how consent is maintained over time. This may involve reflecting on:

- Who feels able to speak
- Whose voice is prioritised
- Who makes decisions about sharing and interpretation
- How stories may affect relationships or future interactions
- Whether young people feel able to change their minds or withdraw consent

Addressing power imbalances helps storytelling remain a more mutual and respectful process rather than a one-sided exchange.

Practical Support Mechanisms

When stories touch on sensitive or emotionally difficult topics, appropriate support is essential. This may include:

- Opportunities for debriefing and reflection
- Emotional check-ins throughout the process
- Pacing, breaks and flexibility
- Clear safeguarding processes

- Referral pathways and additional support where appropriate
- Counselling or well-being support
- Clear expectations, boundaries and follow-up arrangements

These support structures are important not only for young people but also for practitioners facilitating emotionally complex storytelling work.

Storytelling in TrACE Contexts

Trauma-informed storytelling involves creating conditions in which participants feel safe, respected, and able to participate voluntarily. This includes building trust through transparency, consistency and clear boundaries, while recognising that trust may develop differently for different young people and groups.

Flexibility is also important. Young people should be able to pause, skip, revisit or reframe parts of their story and should never feel pressured to disclose more than they want to. Storytelling processes need to adapt to people's emotional readiness, communication preferences and changing levels of comfort.

Trauma-informed storytelling should not focus only on harm, difficulty or adversity. It is equally important to recognise strengths, survival, relationships, creativity, agency, hope and resistance. Stories are often complex and layered, and young people should not be reduced solely to difficult experiences or trauma narratives.

Used thoughtfully, storytelling can become a way of sharing experiences, as well as a respectful and affirming process that supports reflection, understanding and participation.

S. WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

Storytelling is widely used across education, health, social care and community settings. It can support reflection, communication, learning and connection by creating opportunities for people to share experiences and perspectives in different ways.

Storytelling may happen informally through everyday conversations or more intentionally through structured activities and projects. It can involve spontaneous exchanges as well as carefully developed story outputs such as written narratives, digital stories, films, artwork or collective storytelling pieces.

In this toolkit, storytelling is understood as a flexible, collaborative practice that enables children and young people to communicate experiences in ways that feel authentic and accessible to them.

A Wide Range of Storytelling Methods

Storytelling can take many forms, and the methods used should reflect the needs, preferences, communication styles and abilities of each child or young person.

Stories may be expressed through words, images, sound, movement, objects, creative activities or collaborative processes. Different approaches may feel more accessible, comfortable, or meaningful to different individuals and groups, particularly when age, confidence, language, neurodiversity, or emotional readiness shape how experiences are communicated.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling uses video, audio, photography or other digital media to create multimedia narratives. This approach may work especially well with children and young people who prefer visual, auditory or creative forms of expression.

Digital storytelling may support reflection, creativity and communication, while also producing story outputs that can be shared more widely where appropriate and with consent.

Written Stories

Writing can provide a reflective, structured way for young people to explore and communicate their experiences.

Written storytelling may include creative writing, journals, poetry, letters, scripts or personal narratives. For some young people, writing creates space to reflect carefully and communicate thoughts or experiences that may feel more difficult to express verbally.

Oral Storytelling

Oral storytelling involves spoken sharing and may be spontaneous, conversational or more structured and planned.

It can be particularly valuable in group discussions, peer settings or relational work where dialogue and interaction are important. Oral storytelling can create immediacy, connection and opportunities for shared reflection.

Art-Based Storytelling

Drawing, painting, collage, puppetry, modelling, and other creative activities can provide accessible ways for children and young people to express experiences, emotions and ideas.

Creative methods may be particularly valuable for younger children, neurodivergent young people, or those who communicate more comfortably through visual, sensory or non-verbal forms of expression. They can also help communicate experiences that may feel difficult to articulate through words alone.

S. WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

Collective Storytelling

Collective storytelling involves developing stories collaboratively within a group. This can create opportunities for children, young people and professionals to explore shared experiences, identify common themes and build understanding together.

Collective storytelling may support:

- Dialogue and shared reflection
- Co-production and participation
- Peer connection and mutual support
- Relationship-building
- Shared ownership and meaning-making

Structured Storytelling Methodologies

Some storytelling approaches are relatively informal and flexible, while others are more structured and methodologically defined.

The approaches below come from a range of therapeutic, participatory, evaluative, community and organisational traditions. They are included to help practitioners understand the wider landscape of storytelling practice and consider how different approaches may be suited to different purposes, groups and contexts.

Some methods may require additional training, supervision, ethical oversight, or organisational support, particularly where the work involves trauma, mental

health, safeguarding, or therapeutic practice. Practitioners should therefore think carefully about whether a particular approach is appropriate for their role, setting and level of experience.

Together, these approaches illustrate the different ways storytelling can support participation, reflection, communication and organisational learning.

Public Narrative

Public Narrative is a method developed by Marshall Ganz to help individuals craft personal stories that inspire collective action and change. It encourages participants to share personal experiences that connect their individual stories with broader, shared values and goals.

Public Narrative consists of three main components:

- Story of Self: The individual shares their personal story to express their values, motivations and reasons for engaging with the issue.
- Story of Us: This links the individual's experience with the larger community, highlighting shared values, identities and aspirations.
- Story of Now: This is a call to action, urging collective response to an immediate challenge or opportunity.

Public Narrative is widely used in social justice movements, nonprofit organisations, community leadership training and, more recently, parts of the NHS in the UK to mobilise groups around common goals.

By connecting personal narratives with collective aspirations, Public Narrative fosters a sense of urgency and commitment, encouraging collective understanding, commitment and action.

S. WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling combines the traditional art of storytelling with digital media, allowing participants to create short multimedia narratives using voiceovers, images, video and music.

Originating from the Center for Digital Storytelling (now StoryCenter) in the 1990s, this structured approach enables individuals to share personal stories that can become powerful tools for communication, reflection and advocacy.

In healthcare and social care settings, Digital Storytelling is often used to help capture and communicate lived experience. For example, patients or service users may create digital stories about their experiences of care, which can then be used to support reflection, learning and service improvement.

Digital Storytelling often emphasises co-production, with facilitators working alongside participants to shape and edit stories in ways that feel meaningful and appropriate to the storyteller.

Community of Enquiry

Community of Enquiry (CoE) approaches are widely used in reflective, participatory and organisational learning contexts.

A Community of Enquiry is a collaborative, workshop-style approach that enables participants to explore ideas and questions together. Community of Enquiry approaches have roots in philosophical enquiry, participatory learning and reflective dialogue traditions.

Unlike facilitation methods that begin with predefined questions or outcomes, CoE sessions usually start with a shared prompt — such as a piece of research, a film, an image, or a personal story — designed to stimulate reflection and discussion.

A key strength of the CoE approach is its open-ended and exploratory nature. Participants share perspectives, listen to different experiences and reflect together on ideas, values, practices and challenges. This can help create a deeper understanding across different roles, backgrounds and experiences.

Rooted in trust, dialogue and curiosity, CoE can be particularly valuable in organisational and cross-sector settings where there is a need for shared reflection, collaborative learning and exploration of complex issues.

Most Significant Change (MSC)

Most Significant Change (MSC) is a participatory evaluation technique that gathers and analyses stories to understand the most significant changes people have experienced as a result of a programme, service or intervention.

Developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart in the 1990s, MSC is widely used in monitoring and evaluation, particularly within social and international development work.

The MSC process usually involves:

- Collecting stories of change from participants
- Reviewing and selecting stories collectively
- Analysing why particular changes are considered significant

MSC is valued for its ability to capture complex qualitative insights that may be missed through traditional metrics or outcome measures alone. It can be particularly useful in programmes where outcomes are varied, personal or difficult to quantify, as it prioritises lived experience, meaning and perceived impact.

S. WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

Narrative Therapy

Narrative Therapy is a therapeutic approach developed by Michael White and David Epston that uses storytelling and narrative exploration to help individuals understand and reframe experiences.

The approach encourages people to view problems as external to themselves rather than as defining features of identity, helping create space for alternative narratives rooted in strength, resilience and agency.

Narrative Therapy is based on the idea that people make sense of their lives through stories and that relationships, systems, culture and power shape these stories.

The process is usually facilitated by trained therapists or practitioners with appropriate supervision and support. It is included here not as a general facilitation technique, but because it has significantly influenced broader thinking about storytelling, identity, reflection, and meaning-making across health, social care, and community practice.

Some principles associated with Narrative Therapy — such as externalising problems, recognising strengths, and supporting people to describe experiences in their own words — may also inform non-clinical storytelling work in thoughtful and ethically grounded ways.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory storytelling method that combines photography with narrative, allowing individuals — often from marginalised or underrepresented groups — to document and share experiences visually.

Participants are invited to take photographs that represent aspects of their lives, environments, experiences or concerns, and then share stories and reflections connected to those images.

By combining visual and narrative storytelling, Photovoice can help participants communicate experiences that may be difficult to express through words alone. It can also help practitioners, organisations and decision-makers engage more directly with lived experience and everyday realities.

Life Story Work

Life Story Work is a structured storytelling approach commonly used with children and young people in care to help them understand and make sense of their personal histories, relationships and experiences.

This work often involves creating a life story book or similar artefact in collaboration with a caregiver, social worker or other trusted adult. These may include memories, photographs, family information, important relationships and significant life events.

Life Story Work can be particularly important for Looked-After Children and Care Experienced young people, especially where experiences of separation, trauma, loss, or placement changes may have disrupted continuity, identity, or understanding of personal history.

Because this work can involve emotionally complex experiences and sensitive information, it requires careful, trauma-informed and ethically grounded practice. Done thoughtfully, Life Story Work can help support understanding, connection, identity and continuity over time.

S. WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

Story Circles

Story Circles have been widely used in participatory, community and social justice contexts. They are facilitated group storytelling sessions in which participants take turns sharing personal stories in a structured, respectful space.

The Story Circle approach places as much emphasis on listening as storytelling, encouraging participants to engage with one another's experiences without interruption, debate or judgement.

Story Circles are often used in community-building, participatory and social justice contexts to support dialogue, reflection and shared understanding across different experiences and perspectives.

Stories and Story Outputs

A key feature of many storytelling approaches is the creation of story outputs: tangible products that capture, communicate or reflect aspects of people's experiences. These may include digital stories, written narratives, artwork, photographs, spoken recordings or collective storytelling pieces.

The flexibility of these formats allows children and young people to communicate in ways that feel appropriate to their preferences, communication styles and comfort levels.

Story outputs can support reflection and self-expression, help communicate lived experience in accessible ways and create opportunities for dialogue, learning and service improvement. They may also help bridge understanding between young people, practitioners and organisations by making experiences more visible and easier to engage with.

Importantly, the process of developing stories is often just as valuable as the final product itself. Reflection, conversation, relationship-building, and meaning-making frequently occur during the creation process, not only in the finished story.

Collaborative Storytelling

Many storytelling approaches involve collaboration between children, young people, practitioners, and communities, rather than treating storytelling as an individual activity.

Collaborative storytelling may involve developing stories together, reflecting collectively on experiences, or creating shared understanding through dialogue and creative processes. This can support trust, relationship-building, co-production and mutual learning.

Because stories are explored collectively rather than in isolation, collaborative storytelling can also help services and organisations identify shared experiences, recognise patterns, and develop a richer understanding of how systems and relationships are experienced over time.

Importantly, collaborative storytelling encourages professionals to participate in more reflective and relational processes of listening, interpretation and meaning-making rather than gathering feedback or data.

S. WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

Methods and Considerations

When choosing a storytelling approach, practitioners should think carefully about the needs of the group, the purpose of the work and the context in which storytelling is taking place.

Important considerations may include:

Format

Different methods, including voice, text, video, images, movement, objects and creative activities, offer different possibilities for communication, reflection and participation.

Level of Structure

Some storytelling approaches are highly structured, while others are more open and emergent. The level of structure should reflect the purpose of the work, emotional safety, confidence and communication preferences of those involved.

Ownership and Control

Children and young people should retain meaningful control over how stories are developed, shared and used, including opportunities to revisit consent and boundaries over time.

Audience

Who will hear, view or engage with the story? Audience shapes how stories are communicated and may influence openness, emotional safety, consent and the overall storytelling experience.

6. INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Storytelling is a flexible and powerful approach that can help children and young people share lived experiences, reflect on identity and relationships, develop emotional resilience, and contribute to learning and change across services and systems.

The following section brings together evidence and examples from research and practice across a range of contexts.

Rather than presenting a single model or outcome, this section highlights the different ways storytelling has been used in practice, the forms of impact it can have, and the conditions that help it work well.

Storytelling with Children and Young People

Storytelling can help young people reflect on experiences, process emotions, build confidence and participate more actively in conversations about their lives and the systems around them. Research consistently shows that storytelling can support self-expression, challenge stigma and contribute to both personal and social change.

Importantly, storytelling is about more than simply allowing young people to “have a voice”. The process can help young people organise experiences, reflect on identity, communicate complexity and develop a sense that their experiences matter and are worth listening to.

Building Emotional Resilience and Confidence

Storytelling can help young people process emotions and develop resilience by creating opportunities to reflect on experiences, reframe difficulties and recognise strengths.

White and Epston’s work on Narrative Therapy demonstrated how storytelling can support people to separate themselves from problems and develop a greater sense of agency over their narratives. This can be seen in programmes such as Batyr, an Australian initiative in which young people share stories about mental health experiences with peers and wider audiences.

The impact is not only in the act of sharing the story itself, but in the relational experience surrounding it. Young people hear experiences that resonate with their own; stigma is reduced through shared understanding, and conversations that may have previously felt difficult or isolating become more possible.

In this context, storytelling functions not just as awareness-raising, but as a form of reflection, connection, solidarity, identity work and public conversation.

Reflection, Support and Collective Understanding

In a study by Gibrium and colleagues exploring digital storytelling with young Puerto Rican women, participants engaged in collaborative storytelling processes that allowed them to examine and reflect on difficult experiences and past trauma.

The process strengthened social support and solidarity while also generating emotional and psychological insight.

Importantly, the stories also informed how services adapted responsively. Practitioners gained richer insights into the experiences and needs of the young women involved, challenging deficit-based assumptions and reshaping conversations about them and their lives.

This highlights an important aspect of storytelling practice: stories do not only affect storytellers. They can also influence how professionals and systems understand the people they work with.

6. INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Self-Advocacy and Reducing Stigma

Autobiographical storytelling can help young people challenge stigma and advocate for themselves, particularly within marginalised groups.

Ralston's work highlights how sharing personal stories may reduce self-stigma and support confidence and self-understanding, particularly for disabled young people.

Similarly, the St Mungo's Storytelling for Mental Health project in Glasgow used storytelling activities to help young people explore emotional well-being through reading, discussion, performance and reflection.

The value of this work extended beyond therapeutic benefit. It also created language and space for conversations that many young people had previously struggled to have. In this sense, storytelling can help make difficult experiences more discussable.

Challenging Dominant Narratives in Service Design

Research at the University of Hertfordshire explored how young people involved in NHS mental health services used storytelling to resist narrow medicalised interpretations of their experiences. Through storytelling, young people were able to assert individuality, complexity and identity beyond diagnostic labels.

This shifted storytelling from being merely descriptive to something more active and political. Stories became a way of challenging dominant narratives within services and influencing how experiences, needs and support were understood.

Similarly, the I Am Digital Stories project enabled autistic young people to communicate needs, emotions and experiences during educational transitions.

The project demonstrated how storytelling can support more personalised and responsive practice when professionals are willing to listen differently and engage more fully with lived experience.

Connecting Personal Experiences to Collective Action

Storytelling may also help connect personal experience to collective action and wider social change.

Public Narrative approaches have been used in advocacy contexts to help young people understand how their individual experiences relate to broader social issues, systems and movements. By linking personal stories to shared values and collective challenges, storytelling can help create a sense of connection, visibility and common purpose.

Projects such as Youth Storytelling for Social Change enabled young people from marginalised communities to share stories of adversity, resilience and injustice in ways that informed advocacy and policy conversations. In these contexts, storytelling was not only about expression or reflection, but also about influencing how issues were publicly understood and discussed.

These examples highlight an important distinction: storytelling is not only reflective. It can also influence public conversations, challenge assumptions and support collective responses to social issues and inequality.

6. INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Storytelling with Looked-After Children

Looked-After Children and Care Experienced young people may experience disruption, instability, loss, and fragmented histories that can affect identity, relationships, and a sense of continuity over time.

Storytelling approaches have been used in a range of care and therapeutic contexts to help children and young people explore experiences, make sense of personal histories and communicate feelings and perspectives in ways that feel manageable and meaningful.

The following examples highlight some ways storytelling has been used to support reflection, emotional well-being, identity, and understanding in looked-after and care-experienced contexts.

Narrative Control and Empowerment

Research by Cody exploring digital and arts-based storytelling approaches with vulnerable young people highlighted the importance of allowing young people to describe experiences in their own words and participate more actively in how their stories are understood and shared.

Storytelling approaches can help create opportunities for children and young people to reflect on identity, relationships and personal history, particularly where experiences of disruption, separation or instability may have affected continuity and sense of self.

Arts-based and collaborative storytelling approaches may also support relationship-building and create opportunities for young people to move beyond solely deficit-focused interpretations of their experiences.

Supporting Emotional Growth

Storytelling approaches with Looked-After and Care Experienced children can help create supportive spaces where children and young people can express feelings, reflect on experiences, and communicate aspects of their lives that may otherwise be difficult to discuss.

Through storytelling, children and young people may develop a stronger understanding of relationships, personal history and identity, while also building confidence in expressing themselves and feeling more listened to, recognised and understood.

Practice Example: Life Story Work in Action

Life Story Work is used not only to support children and young people in making sense of their personal histories and experiences, but also to inform and improve care practice.

For example, North Ayrshire Council developed Life Story Work programmes that helped children reflect on difficult experiences while also providing valuable insight for carers and social workers.

Similarly, UK Fostering has worked with local authorities to train foster carers in Life Story Work approaches, helping professionals develop a richer understanding of children's emotional and relational needs.

Research from Staffordshire University has also explored how Life Story Work can be embedded more consistently across services to support more responsive and relationship-based care environments.

6. INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Storytelling with Children with ASD, Neurodiversity and ALN

Children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) or neurodivergence may communicate, process and express experiences in different ways.

Storytelling can provide flexible and accessible opportunities for young people to communicate feelings, preferences, experiences and needs in ways that feel more comfortable, meaningful and appropriate to them.

Inclusive and Nonverbal Approaches

Visual and creative storytelling methods such as Photovoice can support communication through images, photographs and other non-verbal forms of expression.

These approaches may be particularly valuable for autistic young people, non-verbal children and young people, or those who find direct verbal communication difficult. By allowing experiences and preferences to be communicated visually and creatively, storytelling can create more inclusive opportunities for participation, reflection and understanding.

Facilitating Communication and Self-Expression

Research by Goodall (2020) and MacMahon (2018) suggests that digital storytelling approaches can be particularly helpful for autistic children and young people during transitions and periods of change, including movement between educational settings.

Structured yet flexible digital and creative storytelling approaches can help autistic children and young people communicate experiences, preferences and emotions in ways that feel more manageable and accessible. They may also support shared reflection and understanding between young people, families, practitioners and peers, particularly during periods of transition and change.

Co-Creation and Advocacy

Collaborative storytelling approaches can help neurodivergent young people communicate needs, preferences and experiences in ways that feel meaningful and manageable to them.

By involving parents, carers and professionals alongside young people, these approaches can support more responsive, person-centred support while also challenging assumptions about communication, behaviour and identity.

Collaborative storytelling may also create opportunities for shared reflection and dialogue, helping young people participate more actively in conversations about support, relationships and everyday experiences.

Challenging Deficit Narratives

Research by Ralston (2019) and Morrison (2021) suggests that autobiographical storytelling can help challenge deficit-focused understandings of neurodivergence by creating space for young people to describe experiences, identities and strengths in their own words.

Storytelling approaches may support self-acceptance, confidence and social connection, while also encouraging more neurodiversity-affirming perspectives within services, education and wider society.

6. INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Practice Examples

I Am Digital Stories

The I Am Digital Stories project supported autistic young people in communicating feelings, needs and experiences during educational transitions through collaborative digital storytelling. The approach helped professionals, families and peers develop a richer understanding of young people's experiences, contributing to more responsive and personalised support during periods of change.

Mencap Cymru: Our Social Networks Project

Mencap Cymru's Our Social Networks Project (2017–2021) collected oral histories from people with learning disabilities, focusing on friendships, relationships and social connections. The project highlighted the emotional and social dimensions of people's lives and contributed to changes in how support and care relationships were understood within services.

Storytelling in Early Years Services

Storytelling in early years settings is much more than a tool for language development. It can help young children express feelings, communicate experiences, explore identity and participate in meaningful ways appropriate to their stage of development.

Creative and play-based approaches such as drawing, puppetry, imaginative play, role-play and digital storytelling can provide accessible ways for children to express thoughts, emotions and experiences that may not yet be easily communicated through language alone.

For younger children, storytelling is often relational, sensory and embodied rather than purely verbal. This means practitioners need to pay attention not only to spoken stories, but also to play, gesture, imagination, repetition, interaction and creative expression as important forms of communication and meaning-making.

Research and practice suggest that storytelling approaches in early years settings can support emotional expression, communication, social connection and stronger relationships between children, families and practitioners. Involving families in storytelling activities may also help practitioners gain insight into children's experiences, relationships and emotional worlds.

Approaches such as Storycrafting and digital storytelling platforms, including Storypark, have been used to support collaborative storytelling between children, families and practitioners, helping bring children's perspectives and experiences more fully into everyday practice.

Key Themes, Benefits and Outcomes

Across research and practice, several key themes emerge consistently.

Storytelling Supports Agency and Participation

Storytelling can help children and young people describe experiences in their own words and participate more actively in conversations about their lives, relationships and support. Rather than having others entirely interpret their experiences, storytelling can create opportunities for young people to shape how their experiences are understood and communicated.

6. INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Storytelling Builds Connection and Understanding

Storytelling can strengthen relationships between young people, families, practitioners and organisations by creating opportunities for listening, reflection and shared understanding.

Projects such as the 100 Stories Project highlighted how collaborative storytelling between young people, parent carers and professionals could provide richer insight into experiences of transition to adult services and support improved communication across services and relationships.

Storytelling Creates Different Forms of Knowledge

Stories can reveal emotional, relational and contextual dimensions of experience that may not be visible through traditional forms of data collection. In this way, storytelling can complement quantitative evidence by helping practitioners and organisations understand how systems are experienced in everyday life.

Storytelling Supports Reflection, Learning and Change

Stories can support reflection at individual, organisational and systems levels. They may help practitioners reconsider assumptions, identify patterns, recognise unintended consequences and develop more responsive approaches to support and service design.

When stories are listened to seriously and connected to learning and action, they can also influence policy, practice and wider systems conversations. For example, Coronavirus and Us (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020) used child-led storytelling to highlight children's experiences during the pandemic and contributed to policy and practice discussions across Wales.

Conditions that Support Effective Storytelling

The evidence suggests storytelling is most effective when it is:

- Relational
- Ethical
- Participatory
- Reflective
- Flexible
- Appropriately supported
- Meaningfully connected to learning and action

6. INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Spotlight: 100 Stories Project

The *100 Stories Project*, developed by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, illustrates how storytelling approaches can be used at the individual, service, and systems levels.

The project brought together neurodivergent young people, young people with learning disabilities, parent carers and professionals to explore experiences of transition through a range of storytelling methods, including Public Narrative, Community of Enquiry and Most Significant Change.

The storytelling process created opportunities for young people and families to communicate experiences and perspectives that were often difficult to capture through formal service processes alone. Participants described increased confidence in expressing needs and experiences, while professionals reported a deeper understanding of the emotional and practical realities of navigating transitions.

Importantly, the project also helped surface wider patterns and barriers across services. By bringing stories together, the project supported reflection on communication, coordination, and support gaps across health and social care systems.

The project illustrates how storytelling can function not only as a form of individual expression, but also as a way of strengthening insights, informing service improvement and supporting systems learning.



7. USING STORYTELLING IN PRACTICE

Using Storytelling

Using storytelling well requires more than selecting a method or activity. It requires careful attention to relationships, trust, purpose, consent, emotional safety, context, audience and power, as well as thoughtful consideration of how stories may contribute to learning, reflection and change.

Storytelling works best when stories are genuinely listened to, considered, explored and responded to, rather than simply gathered and moved on from. Creating the conditions for this requires time, care, openness and a willingness to engage meaningfully with what stories reveal.

Story-Ready Service Culture

A story-ready culture is one where listening is valued, reflection is encouraged, and lived experience is treated as an important source of insight. It is also a culture in which emotional safety, curiosity and honest conversation are supported rather than rushed or dismissed.

Before launching a storytelling project, it is essential to consider whether a service or organisation has the conditions needed to support meaningful storytelling practice. This means ensuring that systems are in place to listen to stories, reflect on them and respond meaningfully to what is shared. This requires time, space and capacity for stories to contribute to learning and change.

Without these foundations, storytelling risks becoming performative or tokenistic rather than meaningful. Organisations must think carefully about how stories will be used, whether there is a genuine willingness to learn from what is shared, how feedback will be communicated, and how children and young people will know their contributions were heard, valued and taken seriously.

Table 1: Factors Supporting Change Through Storytelling at Different Levels

For Individuals	For Services	For Systems
A storytelling process that resonates with the individual	Time and space for the service to reflect on stories and understand their meaning	Systems that allow time and space to gather stories from various sources for broader insights
A safe space to tell stories that feel authentic	Capacity to act on stories and make service improvements based on them	Opportunities to reflect on stories across multiple roles and services, encouraging systemic change
Trust in the storytelling process	Acceptance that stories are valuable evidence for service improvement	Systems that accept stories as crucial evidence for influencing policy and setting priorities
A supportive, respectful listener who values the storyteller's perspective	Capacity within the service to make changes based on the insights gathered from stories	The ability to use stories to influence policy or adapt existing structures for greater impact

Storytelling is more likely to support meaningful learning and change when the right conditions exist at individual, service and systems levels. This includes emotional safety, trust, organisational willingness to listen and reflect, and the capacity to respond meaningfully to what is shared.

7. USING STORYTELLING IN PRACTICE

Planning for and Understanding Change

Before beginning storytelling work, it is important to think clearly about purpose, intended outcomes, audiences, ethical considerations, practical constraints and the support structures that may be needed throughout the process.

Consider what change might realistically look like within the context of the work. It is also important to consider whether storytelling is appropriate for the context and whether the methods used align with the needs, experiences, and aims of the people involved.

Not all storytelling projects aim for large-scale systems change. Sometimes the most meaningful outcomes may be increased confidence, stronger relationships, emotional expression, improved understanding, or simply creating opportunities for children and young people to feel listened to and taken seriously.

Stay open to unexpected learning and outcomes. Storytelling processes are often complex, relational, and difficult to measure straightforwardly.

Gathering and Using Feedback

Feedback should be an ongoing part of storytelling work rather than something added at the end. Children and young people should be kept informed about what happened after stories were shared, what people learned, and whether anything changed as a result.

It is also important that young people feel acknowledged and understand that their time, experiences and contributions were valued and taken seriously.

Evaluating Through Stories

Stories can also play an important role in evaluation. Story-based approaches such as Most Significant Change can help organisations understand experiences of change, unintended outcomes, emotional and relational impacts, and the complexity of people's journeys over time.

Qualitative stories should not be viewed as weaker forms of evidence. They offer rich insights into how people experience services, relationships, and change, often revealing details and meanings that numbers alone cannot capture.

Taking a Staged Approach

Stage 1: Choosing an Approach

When selecting a storytelling approach, think carefully about the purpose of the work, the age and developmental stage of participants, communication preferences, emotional readiness, accessibility needs, available support, and the time and resources available.

The approach should meet participants' needs rather than expecting them to adapt to a particular method. Different groups and individuals may respond differently to different storytelling approaches, so flexibility and responsiveness are important.

Stage 2: Creating the Stories

Creating stories requires careful and responsive facilitation. Practitioners should think about consent, pacing, emotional safety, accessibility, trust, flexibility and the level of support that may be needed throughout the process.

7. USING STORYTELLING IN PRACTICE

Young people should be able to pause, revisit, edit or stop the storytelling process if they wish. They should also have a choice over the formats they use and control over what is shared, with whom, and in what ways.

Stage 3: Sharing the Stories

Stories may be shared privately, within groups, with professionals, publicly, digitally or through creative formats. Decisions about sharing should always be guided by consent, safety, purpose, audience and ownership. Practitioners should think carefully about what sharing a story may feel like for the storyteller and how to create conditions in which people feel supported, respected and in control throughout the process.

Stage 4: Reflecting: Making Sense and Sparking Change

Reflection is an essential part of storytelling practice. Without reflection, stories risk simply being gathered rather than meaningfully understood and learned from.

Reflection may involve identifying themes, discussing emotional responses, recognising patterns, exploring implications and considering what may need to change as a result.

Where possible, young people should be included in processes of reflection and interpretation. They should not simply contribute stories and then be excluded from the meaning-making and learning that follows.

Storytelling, Complexity and Responsibility

Storytelling can create powerful opportunities for reflection, insight, participation and change. However, storytelling is not neutral, uncomplicated or automatically beneficial.

Stories are shaped by context, relationships, memory, interpretation, culture and power. What is shared — and what remains unspoken — may be influenced by audience, safety, trust, timing and previous experiences of being listened to or ignored.

Storytelling can generate valuable insight, but it can also oversimplify complexity if experiences are reduced to neat narratives, organisational messages or individual case studies detached from wider context.

There is also a risk that storytelling becomes transactional or tokenistic, particularly where experiences are gathered without meaningful participation, dialogue, feedback or action. Practitioners and organisations must think carefully about why stories are being gathered, how they will be interpreted, who benefits, and what support or follow-up may be needed.

Stories should not be treated as neutral evidence or straightforward representations of truth. They are relational, partial and shaped through interaction. Different people may experience the same situation differently, and stories may contain ambiguity, contradiction and uncertainty.

Not all storytelling leads to change. Sometimes stories are listened to respectfully, but systems remain constrained by resources, structures or competing priorities. In other situations, the storytelling process itself — creating space for reflection, recognition, dialogue or connection — may be the most meaningful outcome.

For these reasons, storytelling works best when approached with humility, reflexivity and care. The aim is not only to gather stories, but to create thoughtful and ethical processes that deepen insight and support more responsive relationships, services and systems.

8. PRACTICAL TOOLS

The tools in this section are intended to support thoughtful, ethical and flexible storytelling practice. They are not designed to replace professional judgement or responsiveness. Good storytelling practice always depends on context, relationships and careful facilitation.

Before beginning storytelling work, practitioners may wish to consider:

- Purpose
- Participation
- Emotional safety
- Consent and ownership
- Accessibility
- Support structures
- How stories will be shared and responded to

For more detailed reflective planning and facilitation questions, see the Appendix.

Practical Facilitation Considerations

Different storytelling approaches will require different forms of preparation and support. Practitioners may need to think about:

Emotional safety and support

- Accessibility and communication preferences
- Pacing and flexibility
- Environment and group dynamics
- Creative materials and formats
- Safeguarding
- Recording, storage and confidentiality
- Opportunities for reflection and feedback

Reflective Questions for Practitioners

Storytelling practice also requires ongoing reflection. Questions practitioners may wish to consider include:

- What assumptions am I bringing into this work?
- How might power be shaping this process?
- Whose voices are being heard most clearly?
- Who may still feel excluded?
- What emotions are emerging?
- What am I learning?
- What needs to change?

Using the Tools

These tools are intended to support reflection and discussion rather than provide fixed rules or procedures. Different groups, contexts and purposes will require different approaches. Flexibility, responsiveness and care remain essential throughout the storytelling process.

End Note

Storytelling is not a quick fix for gathering insights, but used thoughtfully, it can create deeper understanding, stronger relationships and more meaningful change.

At its heart, storytelling is about listening differently. It is about recognising that lived experience matters, that stories contain insight, and that understanding people more fully can help relationships, services and systems respond more humanely.

APPENDIX 1: STORYTELLING PLANNING AND FACILITATION GUIDE

The following questions and considerations are intended to support thoughtful, ethical and flexible storytelling practice. They are not designed to replace professional judgement or provide a fixed process to follow.

Different groups, contexts and storytelling purposes will require different approaches. Some projects may be highly structured, while others may evolve more organically through relationships, participation and shared learning.

The questions below are intended to support reflection, discussion and planning throughout the storytelling process. Not every question will apply in every context, and practitioners may need to adapt approaches in response to the needs, preferences and experiences of the children and young people involved.

Good storytelling practice depends not only on methods, but also on trust, emotional safety, responsiveness and the willingness to listen carefully to what emerges.

Area	Reflective Questions
Purpose and Focus	Why are we using storytelling? What are we hoping to understand, explore or change? Is storytelling the most appropriate approach for this context? What outcomes are realistic and appropriate?
Participation and Involvement	Who needs to be involved? How will children and young people shape the process? How will participation be supported throughout the project?
Context and Relationships	What contextual factors may influence the work? How might relationships, trust, group dynamics or previous experiences of participation affect the process?
Accessibility and Inclusion	Does the approach support different communication styles, needs and preferences? Are there barriers to participation that need to be addressed?
Choosing Appropriate Methods	Does the storytelling method suit the age, developmental stage and emotional readiness of participants? Does it allow sufficient flexibility, choice and control?
Consent and Ownership	How will consent be understood and revisited throughout the process? Do participants understand how stories may be used, shared or edited? How will ownership and control of stories be respected?

APPENDIX 1: STORYTELLING PLANNING AND FACILITATION GUIDE

Area	Reflective Questions
Emotional Safety and Support	What support may be needed if difficult emotions emerge? Are facilitators appropriately skilled? Do participants know they can pause, stop or change direction at any point?
Facilitation	How will facilitators support trust, listening, inclusion and participation? How will power dynamics be recognised and responded to?
Audience and Sharing	Who are stories being shared with, and why? Is sharing necessary? What level of visibility feels appropriate and safe?
Reflection and Learning	How will stories be reflected on and interpreted? Who will be involved in meaning-making and learning? What opportunities exist for discussion, feedback and adaptation?
Action and Change	How will insights from storytelling be responded to? What may need to change as a result of what is heard? How will participants know whether their contributions influenced anything?
Practical Considerations	What practical arrangements need to be considered, including environment, pacing, timing, safeguarding, recording, confidentiality, creative materials and follow-up support?

APPENDIX 2: STORYTELLING PROJECT CHECKLIST (FULL)

1. Planning for Change

- ☐ Have you clearly defined the purpose of the storytelling project?
- ☐ Have you communicated the project's purpose to all participants to ensure a shared understanding?
- ☐ Have you identified who needs to be involved and how you'll engage them throughout the project?
- ☐ Have you considered whether storytelling is the most appropriate approach for your goals?
- ☐ Have you identified the practical resources (time, skills, expertise) needed to meet your project's goals?

2. Thinking about Practicalities

- ☐ Have you reviewed existing literature or similar projects to inform your approach?
- ☐ Have you ensured you have the resources and capacity (time, skills, support) to implement your storytelling approach fully?
- ☐ Have you planned how to explain the outcomes you hope to achieve to participants and stakeholders?
- ☐ Are there alternative methods you should consider if storytelling is not the best fit?

3. Considering Ethics

- ☐ Have all participants given informed consent to share their stories? Do they know they can withdraw at any time?
- ☐ Have you explained to participants how their stories will be used, who will hear them, and what might change as a result?
- ☐ Are privacy and confidentiality being safeguarded, especially when stories include others who haven't provided consent?
- ☐ Have you managed expectations by ensuring participants understand the limits of what storytelling can achieve?

4. Fostering Collaboration and Co-Production

- ☐ Have children and young people actively participated in shaping the storytelling approach?
- ☐ Are you addressing power dynamics to ensure all participants feel comfortable contributing?
- ☐ Have you created opportunities for mutual decision-making to ensure a balanced collaboration between professionals and young people?

5. Being Trauma-Informed (TrACE)

- ☐ Have you ensured the storytelling environment is emotionally safe, allowing participants to proceed at their own pace?

APPENDIX 2: STORYTELLING PROJECT CHECKLIST (FULL)

- ☐ Have you taken trauma histories into account, ensuring that the storytelling process does not re-trigger trauma?
- ☐ Are there support systems (e.g., counsellors, social workers) in place to offer emotional assistance throughout the project?

6. Creating and Sharing Stories

- ☐ Are participants fully prepared for the storytelling process, with enough time to reflect and share their experiences?
- ☐ Is the storytelling environment safe, welcoming, and free from distractions?
- ☐ Have participants been given the flexibility to choose the storytelling method (oral, digital, visual) that feels most comfortable to them?
- ☐ Are participants allowed to pause, modify, or withdraw their stories at any point?
- ☐ Is the audience prepared to engage respectfully with the stories shared, with privacy and anonymity measures in place?

7. Gathering and Using Feedback

- ☐ Have you established regular opportunities to gather feedback from children and young people throughout the project?

- ☐ Have you tailored feedback methods (written, visual and oral) to suit participants' communication preferences?
- ☐ How will you adapt the storytelling project based on participants' feedback?

8. Evaluating Through Stories

- ☐ Have you identified how you will measure the storytelling project's impact on individuals, services, and systems?
- ☐ Are there indicators to track personal growth, service improvements, or policy changes resulting from the storytelling process?
- ☐ How will you use stories as evidence in evaluations to drive meaningful change across the project?

9. Reflecting on Stories

- ☐ Have you created space for meaningful reflection on the stories shared?
- ☐ Are participants supported emotionally during the reflection process, especially if sensitive or traumatic topics are involved?
- ☐ How will feedback and reflections lead to action or improvement at individual, service, or system levels?

APPENDIX 3: FURTHER READING, FRAMEWORKS AND RESOURCES

Policy and Framework Contexts

- **ACE Hub Wales** — trauma-informed and adverse childhood experiences resources.
<https://acehubwales.com>
- **Curriculum for Wales** — guidance and framework supporting holistic development, participation, creativity and well-being in education.
<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** — international children's rights framework, including Article 12: the child's right to express views on matters affecting them.
<https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights>
- **Trauma and ACE (TrACE)-Informed Practice Framework, Wales** — guidance supporting trauma-informed approaches across services and systems.
<https://traumaframeworkcymru.com>

Storytelling Projects and Practice Examples

- **Batyr** — youth mental health storytelling and peer education programmes.
<https://batyr.com.au>
- **100 Stories Project** — storytelling and lived experience work exploring transitions, neurodivergence and systems change in Wales.
<https://bevancommission.org/the-100-stories-project-to-inspire-and-influence-systems-change/>
- **Mencap Cymru** — Our Social Networks Project.
<https://www.mencap.org.uk>

- **The I Am Digital Stories Project** — storytelling approaches supporting autistic young people. <https://iamdigitalstories.org.uk>
- **Youth Storytelling for Social Change initiatives and participatory advocacy models**
- **StoryCenter** — digital storytelling methodologies and facilitation resources.
<https://www.storycenter.org>

Participation and Reflective Practice Resources

- **Iriss (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services)** — Community of Enquiry resources.
<https://www.iriss.org.uk>
- **SCIE** — co-production and participation resources for social care.
<https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production>
- **Humanity Before Bureaucracy** — A Storytelling Framework for Social Care in Wales A Wales-based framework exploring ethical foundations and approaches to storytelling within social care contexts.
- **Mencap: Storytelling Guide for Health Professionals** — A resource focused on ensuring the experiences of people with learning disabilities inform service development and professional understanding.
- **Storyworks** — storytelling approaches for healthcare learning and improvement. <https://www.storyworks.org.uk>
- **SCIE: Co-production in Social Care** — Guidance exploring storytelling and lived experience within co-production and participatory practice.

APPENDIX 3: FURTHER READING, FRAMEWORKS AND RESOURCES

Storytelling Frameworks and Approaches

- **Community of Enquiry** — collaborative and reflective dialogue approaches for shared learning and discussion.
<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/tools/community-enquiry>
- **Life Story Work** — approaches supporting children and young people in making sense of personal histories.
- **Most Significant Change (MSC)** — participatory story-based evaluation approach.
<https://mande.co.uk/special-issues/most-significant-change-msc>
- **Narrative Therapy** — storytelling-informed therapeutic approach developed by Michael White and David Epston.
<https://dulwichcentre.com.au>
- **Photovoice** — participatory visual storytelling methodology.
<https://photovoice.org>
- **Public Narrative** — storytelling approach developed by Marshall Ganz for leadership, advocacy and collective action.
<https://marshallganz.usmblogs.com/public-narrative>
- **StoryCenter** — digital storytelling methodologies and facilitation resources.
<https://www.storycenter.org>
- **Storycrafting Method** — participatory storytelling and listening approaches with children.
<https://storycrafting.org/en>
- **World Café** — conversational and participatory group dialogue methodology.
<https://www.theworldcafe.com>

Projects, methods and authors are referred to directly throughout the toolkit to support readability. Full references are listed alphabetically below.

- Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
<https://www.theworldcafe.com>
- Children's Commissioner for Wales. (2020). *Coronavirus and Us*.
<https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/coronavirus-us>
- Cody, C. (2025). 'Nothing geeky about photography': Engaging and supporting girls and young women accessing a specialist child sexual exploitation service through photography and digital storytelling. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740925000283>
- Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use*.
<https://mande.co.uk/special-issues/most-significant-change-msc>
- Ganz, M. (2011). "Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power." In S. Odugbemi & T. Lee (Eds.), *Accountability Through Public Opinion* (pp. 273–289). Washington DC: World Bank.
<https://marshallganz.usmblogs.com/public-narrative>
- Goodall, C. (2020). *Digital storytelling and autism transitions research*.
- Gubrium, A. (2019). *Digital storytelling as a critical narrative intervention with adolescent women of Puerto Rican descent*.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6531859/>
- Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community (4th ed.)*. New York: Routledge.
<https://www.storycenter.org>
- MacMahon, S. (2018). *Collaborative digital storytelling with autistic young people*. <https://limerick.academia.edu/JennyMcMahon>
- Morrison, A. (2019). *Biographic Mediation of Neurodivergence in Autobiographical Narrative*.
<https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/bitstreams/029ba804-c00f-4c56-8611-2b89a64dc3b1/download>
- Ralston, K. (2019). *Storytelling, disability and self-advocacy*.
<https://at2030.org/storytelling-workbook/>
- Ryan, T., & Walker, R. (2016). *Life Story Work: A Practical Guide to Helping Children Understand Their Past* (4th ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). "Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment." *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369–387. <https://photovoice.org>
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. New York: Norton. <https://dulwichcentre.com.au>
- Wright, S. (2020). *Storytelling, dramas and creativity in early childhood education*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257556602_Storytelling_Dramas_as_a_Community_Building_Activity_in_an_Early_Childhood_Classroom