



Real Life Heroes



**Resiliency-Focused Treatment
for Children and Families with Traumatic Stress**

What Is Real Life Heroes?

Real Life Heroes® (RLH) provides practitioners with easy-to-use tools including a life storybook, manual, multi-sensory creative arts activities, and psycho education resources to engage children and caregivers in evidence-supported trauma treatment. *RLH* helps practitioners reframe referrals based on pathologies and blame into a shared 'journey,' a 'pathway' to healing and recovery focused on restoring (or building) emotionally supportive and enduring relationships and promoting development of affect regulation skills for children and caregivers. Creative arts, movement activities, and shared life story work provide a means for children and caregivers to develop the safety, attunement and trust needed for re-integration of traumatic memories.

What Makes RLH Different?

Real Life Heroes® focuses on the developmental needs of children ages 6-12 and has been successful with adolescents with Complex PTSD who have delays in their social, emotional or cognitive development, intellectual deficits or disabilities. RLH is a relationship-focused treatment that counters the effects of interpersonal traumas and works to increase children's attachments with caregivers and pride in their abilities, family and cultural heritage as an 'antidote to shame' (Herman, 2011). The RLH format includes a workbook and session rituals which provide an easy-to-learn and transferable structure that allows children and caregivers to continue trauma treatment if they move between programs or practitioners and includes primary roles for residential counselors, parents, resource parents, mentors, and other caring adults. *The RLH Practitioner's Manual* and toolkit integrate core components of treatment for Complex PTSD (Relationships, Emotional Self and Co-regulation, Action Cycles, and Life Story Integration) from referral and assessment through service planning, treatment sessions, treatment reviews, three-month outcome evaluations, and discharge from group care with fidelity tools to support supervisors. RLH provides 'ready-to-go' tools for hard-pressed practitioners including step by step guides for developing self and co-regulation with slow breathing, yoga, movement, improv, and storytelling activities that promote child-caregiver attunement and trust. The model guides flexible adaptation of tools to engage a wide range of families and adjust for changes in a child and caregiver's stability to maintain safety and progress in treatment. RLH can be used with children often excluded from trauma-focused treatments including children with suspected traumas which have not been acknowledged or validated, with children who have had frequent hospitalizations, and with children whose caregivers are not able or willing to work in trauma-focused treatment.

**Engages Hard-
to-reach
Children**

**Builds Safety &
Stability Needed
for Trauma
Reintegration**

Why Use Real Life Heroes?

- ❖ Research-tested for efficacy with children and families in child welfare, behavioral health and school-based programs
- ❖ Integrated framework and easy-to-use fidelity tools keep treatment focused on National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) recommended 'best practice' core components of treatment for Complex Trauma, trauma-informed child welfare services and effective treatment of traumatic stress
- ❖ Easily adaptable to match the needs and strengths of diverse children, families, and programs
- ❖ Enables new practitioners to readily implement trauma and attachment-centered treatment and offers advanced skill-building and tools for experienced staff
- ❖ 'Ready to go' toolkit promotes expedited training and implementation by practitioners with little time for workshops or session preparation and has demonstrated sustainable implementation after initial training
- ❖ Empowers caregivers and creates opportunities for caregivers to resolve their own traumatic stress
- ❖ **Works well with other trauma treatments**

Adapted from Kagan, R. (2016). *Real Life Heroes Toolkit for Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Families*. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge. © 2016

❖ It's fun.

How can *Real Life Heroes*® Help Child Welfare and Behavioral Health Programs?

RLH treatment has been successfully implemented for 17 years in a wide range of child and family services and behavioral health treatment programs and can be used to jumpstart development and implementation of trauma-informed and resiliency-focused services for children and families with Complex Trauma. RLH training and consultation programs have successfully engaged and trained practitioners and programs with limited time for training. Follow up surveys have found high rates of practitioner use and sustainability after training. RLH is also easily adapted for diverse families and can be used in home-based, clinic based, and placement programs. RLH was developed and tested with children who did not meet the criteria for many treatment models or were not improving with other trauma-informed interventions which focused primarily on the child's development of self-regulation skills and desensitization of traumatic memories. RLH can be used with children who have not yet disclosed primary traumatic experiences or where suspected traumas have not been acknowledged or validated, and with children living in placement programs (or at high risk of placement) who lack safe, non-offending caregivers who are able and willing to participate in trauma-focused therapy.

What do Children, Parents, and Supervisors Say About *Real Life Heroes*?

"I have so many more people in my life that can help me now. I am not alone anymore." - 12-year old boy in Parsons Foster Family Care

"Heroes has inspired me to be something I did not think I could be 10 months ago. I thought I was going to give up, fall into a hole, have kids (young) and be like my mother. . . . I am my own hero . . . And now I will be someone and I hope to inspire others!" -15-year old girl in Parsons Home-Based Prevention of Placement Program who was helped to return to family living after living with a family friend and placement in two group care programs.

"I really like the centering activities . . . I have used them in my own recovery, and I have noticed a big difference they have made in my son's anger." -Parent at Parsons Child and Family Guidance Clinic

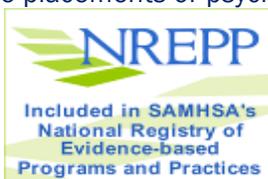
"I gave her (the foster care clinician) a hard time about doing it (*Real Life Heroes*) in the beginning, but once I did it, I really liked it!" -Birth parent in Parsons Foster Family Care program.

"It's not one more thing. It's *the* thing." -Home-based Intensive Case Coordination Program Director

Research Support

Real Life Heroes® is listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the SAMHSA National Center for Trauma-Informed Care "Models for Developing Trauma-Informed Behavioral Health Systems and Trauma-Specific Services," and as one of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's (NCTSN) Empirically Supported Treatments and Promising Practices. RLH is also listed as "High" in Child Welfare System Relevance by the California Evidence-based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. The 2007 *RLH Practitioner's Manual* was rated as addressing 8 of 9 core domains identified for Intervention Objectives and Practice Elements developed by the NCTSN Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma Task Force (Strand, Hansen, & Layne, 2012). The only domain missing, Therapist Self-Care, has been included in RLH training programs since 2007. The model has been successfully pilot tested in home-based and placement child welfare services (Kagan, Douglas, Hornik, & Kratz, 2008) and utilized in a wide range of child and family service agencies in the U.S. and Canada. The *HEROES Project*, a SAMHSA-funded community practice site of the NCTSN, evaluated use of *Real Life Heroes* in seven child and family service programs and found significant reductions in traumatic stress and behavioral problems on standardized measures. Children receiving RLH in this study did not have placements or psychiatric hospitalizations (Kagan, Henry, Richardson, Trinkle & Lafrenier, 2014).

**Practitioner-
Developed
Research-Tested
Supervisor-
Endorsed**



For more information about *Real Life Heroes* research, training programs or consultation, please see: www.reallifeheroes.net or contact Dr. Kagan at: richardkagan7@gmail.com.