



**NOTHING
IS WRONG
WITH YOU**
the Playbook

**A 30-DAY RESET
FOR KIDS
WHO FEEL BROKEN**

Help your child move from
“I’m broken” to
“I’m becoming”

Niki Bartelt

narrative.
RAISE RESILIENT KIDS
THROUGH THE POWER OF STORY

NOTHING IS WRONG WITH YOU
the Playbook

Join the movement.

**Be a part of a community of parents who want to
reclaim their roles, tell a better story, and raise resilient kids.**

@buildnarrative

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BUILDNARRATIVE.COM

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**RECLAIM YOUR ROLE.
TELL A BETTER STORY.
RAISE RESILIENT KIDS.**

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK



This isn't a book you simply read. It's something you use.

You can move through it from beginning to end, or come back to the sections you need most. Each part builds on the last...but the goal isn't perfection.

It's consistency.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

Core ideas to help you rethink how your child understands themselves

Real-life language you can actually use in everyday moments

Guided prompts to help you apply this in your own family

Simple actions that build over time

Toolkit access

As part of this Playbook, you have **access to the Narrative Reset Toolkit**.

Inside the Toolkit you'll find:

- Printable worksheets from this book
- Additional tools to help you apply this in real life

You can access it here: buildnarrative.com/nothing-is-wrong-with-you-playbook

Or scan the QR code at the end of the book.

HOW TO USE IT

You don't need to do everything at once.
Start small.

- Try one idea
- Use one shift in language
- Come back and build from there

This work happens in real life...in conversations, in hard moments, and in the stories you reinforce over time.

MAKE IT WORK FOR YOUR LIFE

If you're short on time:

Start with the section that feels most relevant and focus on the action steps.

If you want the full experience:

Move through it in order, taking time to reflect and apply as you go.

Keep a pen nearby. Some sections are meant to be written in...not just read.

ONE LAST THING

Don't overthink it.

You don't need perfect words.

You don't need perfect timing.

Your child doesn't need a perfect parent.

They need a parent who is paying attention...
who is willing to be intentional...
and who is **committed to
telling a better story.**



**Every child
is building a story
about who they are.**

**Is it a story that limits them
or one that calls them forward?**

**RAISE RESILIENT KIDS THROUGH
THE POWER OF STORY**





Introduction

Every child is asking, whether they can put words to it or not:

Who am I? And do I matter?

They don't just ask it once. They ask it over and over again...through their behavior, their questions, their fears, and the stories they begin to tell about themselves.

And whether we realize it or not, they are building the answer from what they hear and what they experience.

From us.

The problem is, most of us were never taught to think about this intentionally.


We focus on behavior.
We correct mistakes.
We try to encourage, comfort, and guide.

But underneath all of that, something deeper is forming:
A story.

A story about who they are.
A story about what they're capable of.
A story about whether they have purpose, responsibility, and worth.

And that story becomes the foundation for everything else...

how they handle failure,
how they treat others,
how they see their future,
and how they respond when life gets hard.





This playbook is built on a simple idea:

If you can shape the story, you can shape the trajectory.

Not through pressure.
Not through perfection.

But through consistent, intentional language and living in a story that aims up over time.

This is not about having the right words in every moment.

It's about learning how to:

- recognize the stories your child is already forming
- interrupt the ones that don't serve their future
- intentionally build ones that do

You don't need a complete overhaul.
You need a framework.

Something you can come back to.
Something you can apply in real life.
Something that helps you move from reacting...to leading.

That's what this playbook is designed to give you.

Not just ideas but a way forward.



NOT FEELING BROKEN
starts here



WELCOME

All of us live inside a story.

If the dominant story is limitation, we shrink.

If the dominant story is growth, we stretch.

This is true for us adults, but it's true for our kids too.

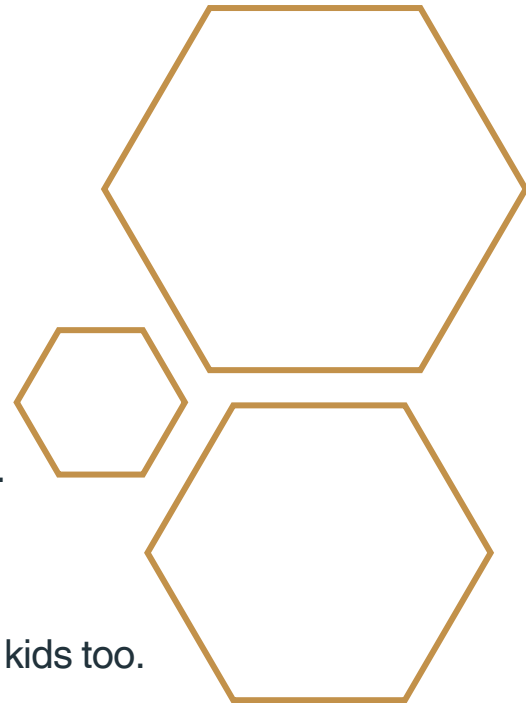
And parents...we are supposed to be the primary storytellers.

More than culture. More than school, friends, "experts",
diagnoses. Even more than the internet.

So knowing how to tell a better story can be life changing. Truly.

This Playbook will help you embrace your storyteller
role and build narrative with confidence.

Equipping you to raise resilient kids through the power of story.



Hi there.

A note from me

Over the last few years, I immersed myself in research on narrative psychology, identity formation, generativity, autobiographical memory, mental health interventions and family systems.

So I traversed scholarly articles, tested practices in our home, listened carefully to other parents and now want to share what I've learned with you.

But first, a story.

When I was born, doctors told my parents their baby girl might not survive. There was bleeding in my brain and a list of complications that sent me straight to the NICU. Two weeks later, I made a surprise appearance at my very first Thanksgiving dinner.

As a child, I remember telling it with pride.

I survived.

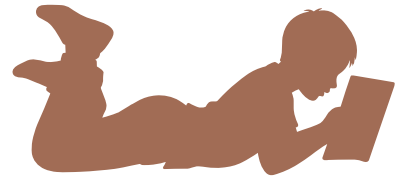
I fought, won, and got to live.

That framing mattered more than I realized at the time.

Today I'm a mom of five who homeschools, runs a business with my husband (outside of narrative) and volunteers with kids. My world is full of parents.



Niki Bartelt
Founder



And parents are not crazy to be concerned about their children's mental health. The data is sobering.

Many kids believe there is something wrong with them.

Many believe they are broken.

Many believe they have no purpose.

That's not just a behavior issue.

That's an identity issue.

**Identity is always
rooted in story.**



Over the last several years, multiple fields - neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, even AI - have converged around an interesting truth:

We see the world in stories.

Isn't that interesting?

The story of my beginning could have been told very differently - framed as trauma. As something that permanently limited me.

My parents could have lowered expectations. Teachers might have approached me cautiously. The narrative could have shifted toward fragility. A brain injury could have easily become a limiting excuse for why "you can't".

But it didn't.

Instead, it was framed as something hard that I overcame. That framing became part of my identity.

(Now, actual trauma is real. Some children do face serious clinical challenges that require professional support. This Playbook is not about ignoring those realities. And is not intended as medical advice.)

We see the world
in stories.



RAISE RESILIENT KIDS THROUGH
THE POWER OF STORY

This playbook is about the ways our culture allows struggle to become identity. And what parents can do about it.

It's about how easily "This happened to you" or "You have this tendency" becomes "This defines you."

That narrative shift changes everything. Especially for kids.

I hear it all the time.

We use clinical language to describe our kids.
The bar lowers in small ways. Eventually excellence isn't expected.
Purpose fades. The wrong stories win.

A diagnosis, emotion or negative past experience should *never* become the story a child orbits his world around.

That's where this matters.

Once we become aware of the stories forming around our children, ***we can reshape them***. We can build narrative. Intentionally, thoughtfully, and with hope.

And because I'm a busy mom too, I didn't want this to become another inspiring idea that never gets implemented.

So this Playbook is practical.

It will walk you step-by-step through how to:

- Identify the story your child may be internalizing
- Separate struggle from identity
- Install a stronger, growth-based narrative
- Integrate purpose & meaning into the story

So your kid can begin to see that they're unfinished. But in the process of becoming great. Not broken, deficient, or disordered.

They can see they are equipped with traits that, when guided well, can become strengths. They are full of potential. Wonderfully made.

This isn't about pretending hardship doesn't exist.

It's about telling the kind of story that helps a child rise. And you, more than anyone, are positioned to help shape that story.

Let's do this.

A QUICK (BUT IMPORTANT) NOTE

To get the most out of this playbook, be open to new ways of thinking about how you can raise a resilient kid.

If you recognize yourself in some of the language or examples in this guide, don't take it as criticism. (It's not.)

It's simply an invitation to consider a different approach. We're all trying to figure this parenting thing out.

If your kid is not struggling with mental health, you are ahead of the game. Building resilience intentionally now can make all the difference. If they are, be encouraged, the right story can change everything.

My goal is to equip you with narrative strategies that help you to raise a child who grows into a strong, capable adult.

I think that's what you want too.



01

the core problem

The wrong stories

WHEN A CHILD INTERNALIZES “I’M BROKEN”

AND BEGINS TO BELIEVE “SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH ME”

There’s a difference between a child struggling...
...and a child believing they are the struggle.

One is temporary.
The other becomes identity. Who they are.
And identity is powerful.

Children don’t wake up one day and decide they are broken.
It happens slowly.

Through language.
Through repetition.
Through experience.
Through environment.

Through story.



01

language and repetition

THE CORE PROBLEM | WHEN A CHILD INTERNALIZES "I'M BROKEN"

Let's start with a fundamental truth, we parent in this culture. So of course we use it's language.

This means that sometimes when we talk we take shortcuts (efficiency right?). We mean to describe behavior...but we accidentally ascribe identity.

This can happen when we talk to our kids or when we talk about them.

It can be subtle and sneaky. Culture has dropped lots of clinical terms into our everyday vocab.

"Their ADHD..."

"My neurodivergent kid..."

"Because of their trauma..."

"Your anxiety..."

These sound small.

But children don't filter or frame language the way adults do. They absorb it.

And it becomes who they are...the stories they live inside.

They hear it over and over. From different adults they look up to. So they believe that the story is true. I must be broken. Everyone keeps saying so.

But a subtle shift to different language, of a better story, can change everything.





research snapshot

studies say

PARENTAL SELF-EFFICACY

Before you can make this shift, you need to have parental self-efficacy. What's that?

So glad you asked.

Studies consistently show that a parent's belief in their **own** ability to guide and influence their child significantly impacts outcomes in key areas like mental health, life trajectory, and overall happiness.

So the story *you* believe matters a lot too!

When parents tell themselves (and believe):

"I can shape my kid's growth." "I can raise them." "I can do this."

Children show:

- Greater emotional stability
- Better coping skills
- Higher resilience

When parents feel powerless or overly dependent on external authority (the "experts"), children often internalize that uncertainty.

Kids build an identity around being "too much for their parents to handle". Being "so broken" that they need an army of people to try to fix them.

So remember, you can do this. Believe it. Live in that story. It'll do you, and your family, a world of good.

REMEMBER THIS



The "experts", even nice or well-meaning ones, have vested interests (money, power, influence, job security) in making you feel powerless and ill-equipped.

But no one...NO ONE...is better positioned, created, and purposed to raise your child into resilience.

Before you get started, make this your story: **I CAN DO THIS.**



experience **IDENTITY FRAGILITY**

01

THE CORE PROBLEM | WHEN A CHILD INTERNALIZES "I'M BROKEN"

The mental health crisis is not just about anxiety or depression. It is also about **identity fragility**.

Children are labeled now more than ever.

Diagnoses are replacing interests and talents as identity markers. This has become how they introduce themselves. You'll see diagnosis in social media bios. It's the first thing they want people to know about them...wild.

When a label becomes the dominant story, when it overshadows passions, growth, effort, talents, beliefs, relationships and becoming, it can limit a child's imagination of who they can be.

And imagination is critical for resilience.

When a child's sense of self rests on:
Negative experiences. Diagnosis. Victimhood. Comparison.

It cannot withstand normal hardship.

But when identity rests on growth, contribution, and deeper meaning... resilience strengthens.

That identity loop can be good or bad.

It all depends on the story they think, believe, and act on.



experience TIME



SOCIAL MEDIA

Speaking of social media...If your kids are on social media, get them off immediately. It's a wasteland of the wrong stories.

Don't believe me? Go check out Jonathan Haidt's Instagram. Terrifying.

If your kids spend hours a day on screens, scale back. This is a simple, but hard step to **making space for the right stories to take root.**

Spend time together. Play games. Read books. Talk.

Your ability to speak into their life, to tell them they aren't broken, comes from influence. And if you are competing with people who have "influencer" in their job description, it's going to be an uphill battle.

Luckily, you can just remove them. Haha. You win.

Will your kid like it? Nope.

Will you have more room to speak into their life? Yes.

Will you be setting them up for a better, healthier adulthood? Yes.

Is that worth it? Every. Time.

EXTRACURRICULARS

Maybe you don't have a screen problem. But maybe busyness is your enemy. Kids need quality, face-to-face, unrushed, unhurried time with you.

If activities, sports, or work are your main focus as a family, you are missing out on opportunities to build narrative. Because you aren't together to do it.

If this is you, scale back. Prioritize **quality** time together. Your family will be stronger for it.

There is
a difference
between struggling
and becoming
the struggle.

That difference is everything.



RAISE RESILIENT KIDS THROUGH
THE POWER OF STORY

THE CORE PROBLEM | WHEN A CHILD INTERNALIZES "I'M BROKEN"

01

experience

THE IDENTITY LOOP

THE CORE PROBLEM | WHEN A CHILD INTERNALIZES "I'M BROKEN"



the identity loop

THOUGHT → EMOTION → BEHAVIOR → REINFORCEMENT → IDENTITY

Research across psychology and neuroscience tells us this too. Our stories form a loop that leads directly to the heart of identity.

Here's what that looks like:

Thought → “I can't focus. It's too hard for me.”

Emotion → Shame. Anxiety. Frustration.

Behavior → Avoidance. Acting out. Shutting down.

Reinforcement → See? I can't.

Identity → “I'm the screw up. I can't do what other kids can do.”
(Translation: I'm broken.)



And once identity forms, it informs thoughts. It continues to loop.

A child who believes they are bad at school stops trying.

A child who believes they are “the angry one” leans into anger.

A child who believes they are anxious starts organizing life around avoidance.

Not because they want to fail.

But because the story feels true.

The cool thing is that this loop can also work for a better story... and we can be intentional about that.



research snapshot

studies say

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY & IDENTITY

Experience shapes self in another important way.

Research shows that the way we remember and retell our past experiences shapes our sense of self. Children don't just remember events, they build identity from them.

When experiences are framed as:

“I survived something hard.”

“I learned from that.”

“I grew because of it.”

They strengthen resilience.

When framed as:

“This damaged me.”

“This explains why I can't.”

“Because of my trauma...”

They reinforce fragility.

THE STORY ATTACHED TO AN EVENT OFTEN MATTERS AS MUCH AS THE EVENT ITSELF (IF NOT MORE).

REMEMBER THIS



You can use something as simple as photos on your walls to reinforce autobiographical memory. In our home we highlight moments of connection that reinforce family values and remind us of good times.

And all those videos on my phone? I curate those into family videos that we watch regularly together. Again, reinforcing the narrative I want them to have of their childhood. Building narrative can be creative & fun!



environment

ZOOM OUT

REFLECT

This is an important one to pause on. Sometimes a child thinks they are broken simply because the environment around them isn't a good fit for their wiring.

- How much of my child's day is structured or performance-based?
- How much time do they have for unstructured play, exploration, or wild-and-free movement?
- Are expectations in this environment aligned with how my child naturally learns and operates?
- How much time do you have to really connect as a family? (Sitting in the same room on screens doesn't count y'all.)

Children vary widely in how they thrive. (Adults too.) Some flourish in highly structured settings. Others need freedom, movement, creativity, or hands-on action.

If my child's environment isn't a good fit, how can we change it?

- Adjust expectations within the current setting
- Advocate for changes at school or activities
- Reduce overscheduling or pressure
- Increase free play and outdoor time
- Change extracurricular commitments and increase family time
- Explore alternative schooling models (including homeschool, hybrid, learner-driven academy, forest schools, unschooling, worldschooling, or co-ops...)

Does that last one seem drastic? Maybe. But as a mom... who is naturally not a teacher...who is homeschooling...I can say from experience that this is do-able and a real option for parents who want to avoid the gauntlet of public school altogether. I highly recommend it.

BEFORE WE MOVE ON...

a quick reminder

01

**Children don't form identity in a vacuum.
Stories come from everywhere.**

RAISE RESILIENT KIDS THROUGH THE POWER OF STORY

Friends
Social media
Teachers
Internet
Clinical language & diagnoses
Extended family
Entertainment
Even casual comments adults make without thinking

Even good parents can have kids who embrace bad stories.

Kids are impressionable. Not because they are weak, but because they are learning who they are.

It is not your job to control every story your child encounters. That's impossible. **It is your job to NOTICE** which stories have sway and to, of course, help them pick the better ones.

Sometimes you'll see a narrative forming early.
Sometimes you won't.
That doesn't mean you've failed.

It simply means you are parenting in a complex world.



Even if you don't see a harmful story at work right now...

Resilience isn't built in the middle of crisis.
It's built ***beforehand***.

When strong identity is in place, the wrong stories just won't stick.
They sound off, misaligned, even ridiculous.
They lose power.

A child that knows who they are and what they are worth is far less likely to be defined by bad narrative.

Don't beat yourself up if you do see the wrong stories at work in your family. You are not the villain in your child's story. You are the narrator-in-chief.

The wisdom provider.
The tone setter.
The expectation holder.
The top storyteller.
And that's not a burden.

It's influence.

This Playbook exists to strengthen that influence.
So you can guide your child with clarity and confidence.

(Parental self-efficacy, remember?!)

You can choose a better story.





the core problem

REFLECTIONS



PAUSE

- Do I really believe that I am the best person to raise my kids? That I can do it without “experts”? That I won’t screw it up?
- Can I identify any stories right away that are bad narratives that have a grip on my family?
- How could I change our family life to make time and space for my influence to grow in my child’s life?
- Can I think of one story from my child’s past that I could reframe, to use autobiographical memory in a positive way, to help them see how strong and amazing they are?

THE CORE PROBLEM | WHEN A CHILD INTERNALIZES “I’M BROKEN”

THE CORE PROBLEM | WHEN A CHILD INTERNALIZES "I'M BROKEN"



WRAP UP *01*

THE GOOD NEWS

Language, experience and environment are not fixed.

Story is not permanent.

The loop can be interrupted.

And parents are uniquely positioned to do it.

That's what the rest of this
Playbook will show you how to do.

you can make all the difference

LET'S GO!

02 SECTION

Diagnose THE STORY discover where you are

The Identity Audit

Before we can build a better narrative, it's helpful to see where things are at. Clarity is a parent's friend. I know honesty can be hard. But your kids are worth it. Am I right?

In this section you will complete worksheets to better understand your child's story. They will help you:

- See language at work
- Thoughtfully examine experience
- Notice environmental mismatch

Remember, most parents don't intentionally hand their child a limiting story. None of what you uncover is an indictment of you. Seriously.

You are doing your best. You've been looking for answers. You want to raise a resilient kid.

And clearly seeing what story your kid is living in, that's powerful.

So be honest. Be brave. You can do this.



The instruction

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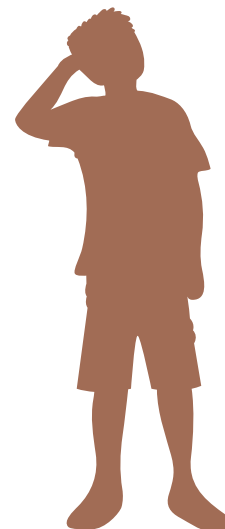
How to Use This Section's Worksheets

- Choose a quiet moment (15–30 minutes at a time).
- Answer honestly, not perfectly. You can come back to it if you need to. (We all know interruptions happen...often.)
- Use your child's exact words when possible.
- You're not building a case against yourself or your kid. You're gathering narrative data. That's power.

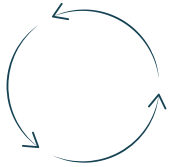
**Think of this like taking a snapshot
of your child's current "inner narrative script."**

DIAGNOSE THE STORY

02



REMEMBER *language matters*



REPETITION

Children build identity through repetition.

The phrases they hear again and again slowly form the story they believe about themselves.

Small wording differences matter more than we realize.

Over time:

“He’s overly emotional.”

“Our neurodivergent kid.”

“She’s ADHD.”

This one tells them they’re deficient & disordered. That’s what the “Ds” stand for.

...can subtly become permanent identities.

So dig into what language is floating around your kid.
In your house, at school, with friends, online.

Be a detective and uncover what story is there.

Remember you can print additional copies of these worksheets from the online toolkit. See QR code at the back of the book.

the words THEY ARE USING

What does my child say about themselves?

Write exact phrases you've heard recently:

- "I'm _____"
 - "I always _____"
 - "I never _____"
 - "I can't _____"
 - "Everyone else _____"
 - "Something is wrong with me because _____"
- _____

Now go back.

Circle any statements that sound like identity (not just behavior or a situation).

Reflection

- When do they say this most?
- Who or what else might be reinforcing it?



labels &

LANGUAGE AUDIT

DIAGNOSE THE STORY | WORKSHEET 3

What labels are floating around your child right now?

(From school, adults, friends, social media, doctors, even your own mind.)

Labels they've been called:

Labels I use (even casually): (Any clinical language goes here)

Does my child use a label to describe themselves?

Yes No Not sure

If yes, what do they say?

Reflection

- Is this label functioning like a tool... or like a definition?

**LABELS CAN START AS A TOOL BUT
BECOME AN IDENTITY OVER TIME.**





DIAGNOSE THE STORY | WORKSHEET 5

Sometimes the problem isn't the child, it's the setting.

Where does my child struggle most?

- school homework mornings bedtime social settings
- sports chores other: _____

What is the environment asking of them? (sit still, focus quietly, transition quickly, tolerate noise, perform on demand, etc.)

What might be mismatched?

If nothing was “wrong” with my child, what might I adjust first?

- expectations schedule sleep transitions screen time workload sensory input social exposure family time
- other: _____



What You Just Did

You slowed the story down and diagnosed the underlying narrative. Instead of just reacting to bad behavior, you looked underneath it:

- language
- experience
- environment
- story

That's not small. It's honest and hard and worth it.

Next, we'll learn some ways to build narrative. We'll dig into practical action items that will help you tell your kid that they aren't broken.

They are becoming something exceptional.

before we can change

**WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THE STORY
AND YOU TOOK THAT STEP**

NOW WE CAN GET PRACTICAL...

03 SECTION

build narrative 30 DAY IDENTITY RESET

Practical. Actionable. Story building.

So far we've talked about the problem generally and you identified what wrong stories may be impacting your kid's identity. But that still leaves you with that wrong story problem.

So now what?

Now the rubber meets the road. I'm going to give you actionable, practical tools to use to start building narrative in your family.

To give your kid a better story.
To help them aim up.

It's up to you to use them. Decide which tools make sense for your kid and which don't. Then implement.

Pick one or two to do at a time.
Then add in more. Like any new habit, small changes add up but you have to be consistent.



ACTION STEPS *quick reference*

Become the storyteller you were meant to be.

Here's what we cover in this section. In case you need an easy place to reference what order these options are presented in.

- Protect identity, grow skills
- Scripts for better stories
- Story in action, a video experiment
- Anchor into family identity

Raise resilient kids through the power of story.



03

PROTECT *identity*

CHECK OUT SCHOLARLY RESOURCES
AT THE BACK OF THE PLAYBOOK

PARENT SKILL | EXTERNALIZATION

Externalization means describing a struggle as something a child is facing...not something they are.

This creates space between the child and the challenge.
Practice this with your language.



IDENTITY SEPARATION

THE RULE

**Describe the struggle.
Protect identity.
Grow skills.**

Behavior can be corrected. Situations addressed.
Identity should always be protected.

When children know that their worth is secure, they are far more willing to grow.

When they are safe in knowing they have purpose, and their traits are not signs of brokenness, but tools to help them fulfill their destiny in life, they are more likely to be resilient.

Resilient kids will ignore bad stories and aim upwards.

INTRO & HOW TO

skills

VS STRUGGLE

BUILD NARRATIVE

NOT STRUGGLE BUT SKILLS

Here we will work on telling a new story about negative behavior, as a marker, not of identity, but of immature skill.

Most behaviors we don't love are actually skills that are still developing. Like...

Focus
Frustration tolerance
Emotional regulation
Vision & preparation
Task initiation
Impulse control
Social awareness

They are skills.

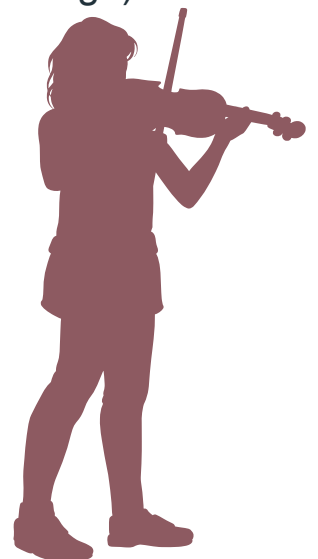
And skills can grow.

If the story you believe says they can.

HOW TO REWRITE A STRUGGLE AS A SKILL

1. Describe the behavior clearly. (What is actually happening?)
2. What labels could be negatively impacting identity?
3. Identify the immature skill that needs developing.
4. Write how having that mature skill will benefit them as an adult.

Extra credit: After you finish this playbook. Revisit this. Brainstorm how you can help guide this skill to maturity in your child.





SAMPLE EXERCISE

skills

VS STRUGGLE

EXAMPLE

1. Behavior:
Melts down during homework every evening.
2. Identity framing:
My child is lazy, refuses to work, and is neurodivergent and ADHD.
3. Immature skill ID:
My child is developing **frustration tolerance** when work feels hard.
4. Mature skill possibility:
An adult with high frustration tolerance will be patient. A better problem solver, innovator, parent, spouse, and teacher. They'll be more likely to succeed in all areas of life.

Now you can focus on building the skill. Equipped with practical tips we discuss through the rest of this playbook, you can take time to build this narrative. Tell your kid they are becoming.

This will set your kid so far ahead of people living in the wrong stories. Just watch them grow.

**THIS EXERCISE DOESN'T EXCUSE BAD BEHAVIOR.
IT HELPS YOU FOCUS ON THE SKILL YOUR CHILD
NEEDS TO GROW.**



WORKSHEET
skills
VS STRUGGLE

BUILD NARRATIVE | WORKSHEET 6

Write 2 behaviors that concern you.
Then rewrite them as skills-in-progress.

1| Behavior: _____

2| Identity framing: _____

3| Immature skill identification: _____

4| Mature skill possibility: _____

1| Behavior: _____

2| Identity framing: _____

3| Immature skill identification: _____

4| Mature skill possibility: _____

skills

CHEAT SHEET

Anxiety

- Highly developed caution and risk-management system
- Strong risk awareness & situational awareness
- Careful planner and preparer
- Attention to details others overlook
- Strong sense of responsibility
- Conscientious, protective, thoughtful
- Future-oriented thinking - problem anticipator

Depression

- Deep reflection and introspection with ability for meaning-making
- Empathy and compassion for suffering
- Sensitivity to injustice or pain
- Philosophical thinking
- Strong moral awareness
- Realistic assessment of situations
- Capacity for solitude and contemplation
- Ability to process complex emotions

Laziness | Fatigue Disorder

- Preference for meaningful work over busywork
- Ability to question inefficient systems - seeking best ways/process
- Optimization thinking
- Creative problem solving (finding shortcuts)
- Focus on leverage rather than effort
- Natural prioritization instinct
- Resistance to low-value tasks - visionary or big picture thinker

ADHD

- High energy and drive
- Curiosity, creativity, and exploration instinct
- Rapid idea generation
- Willingness to take risks and try new things
- Ability to see unconventional solutions
- Strong intuition and quick pattern recognition
- Adaptability in fast-changing environments
- Comfort with uncertainty and chaos
- Entrepreneurial mindset
- Ability to pivot quickly

ODD | Anger

- Strong sense of justice and fairness
- Willingness to confront problems directly
- Courage to challenge authority or wrong behavior
- Clear personal boundaries
- Protective instinct toward others
- Passion and emotional intensity
- Drive to correct what is broken
- Assertiveness
- Leadership under pressure
- Motivation to take action rather than tolerate harm
- Loyalty to people or values that matter

Neurodivergent

- Independent thinking, original perspectives
- Ability to question assumptions others take for granted
- Curiosity & pattern recognition
- Deep focus leading to innovative problem solving
- Strong memory for specific topics or details
- Resistance to groupthink
- Ability to see connections across disciplines
- Persistence in solving complex problems



research snapshot

studies say

Does this sound like your kid?

- High energy and drive
- Risk taker and willingness to try things
- Creativity and out-of-the-box thinking
- Hyperfocus when interested
- Comfort with uncertainty and chaos

This kind of “ADHD” personality
is 5-6* more common
among entrepreneurs.

CHECK OUT THE SOURCE AT THE BACK OF THE PLAYBOOK

hello
future business owners
RAISE RESILIENT KIDS THROUGH THE POWER OF STORY



Your child **IS NOT BROKEN**

BUT WHAT DO I ACTUALLY SAY TO GET THEM TO SEE IT?

So we've determined that words are important. They can ascribe a negative identity or describe a challenge, situation or trait.

Check out this subtle but important difference between these statements.

“You are anxious.” vs “You're worried right now.”

“My neurodivergent daughter...” vs “My creative daughter...”

“You're lazy.” vs “You're having trouble getting started but you can do hard things.”

“My ADHD son.” vs “My son is full of gusto and life.”

Children who see problems as something they can face, or as a superpower to be harnessed, begin to develop agency.

And agency is the foundation of resilience.

The next few pages have scripts and associated narrative-building exercises that can make all the difference in the story your kid believes.

WHAT DO I SAY INSTEAD? *script library*

SCRIPT 1 | WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS, I'M BAD AT SCHOOL

Try: “School is one place where your brain is still learning how it works. That’s different from being bad at it.”

Then ask: “What part feels hardest right now?”

Follow up with a family narrative: “You are a Bartelt. And Bartelt’s are built to do hard things.” (Obviously, use your own last name.)

Action: Go on [familysearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) to research your family tree together. It’s a free crowd-sourced site.

My kids LOVE digging into the past and reading stories. I LOVE that it reinforces our family narrative. It gives real-life stories to point to.

Remember great-great Grandpa Andrew? He grew up on the frontier, was taken prisoner during the French & Indian War and even advised George Washington during the Revolution.

My boys know his blood flows in their veins. If he could overcome all that, and thrive, then they can certainly finish their math. I remind them that they are his legacy. That’s something they should be proud of.

This is very counter-cultural by the way. Too many people are telling American kids that they should be ashamed of their families, their heritage and their legacy.

It’s a wrong story that can be easily combatted by parents using this kind of script.

This script also works great for kids who are having trouble focusing or calming down to accomplish a tough or boring task.



03

WHAT DO I SAY INSTEAD?

script library

SCRIPT 2 | WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS, I ALWAYS MESS UP.

Try: “Mistakes are information. They show us what to try next.”

Then ask: “What do you think this one is supposed to be teaching you?”

Follow up with a family narrative: “I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my life. Some of them have led me to where I am today. So I’m actually very thankful for the times I’ve messed up.”

Action: Kids don’t have the benefit of hindsight. So lend them some of yours. Opening up, showing humility, and sharing personal stories will bring a closeness to your family and will show your kid that you aren’t perfect either.

If you can pick a story from a time that your kid witnessed, even better. They’ll know you aren’t making it up.

This further reinforces the narrative you want to create that they are not broken. You have struggled (and continue to) with mistakes made but you have the ability to now look back and see how those mess ups have worked together for good in your life.

Help them see that looking for lessons, rather than chasing perfection, is a better story. Help them to aim up by borrowing some strength from your life.



You’ll have a more resilient kid and
a more connected family
as a result.



WHAT DO I SAY INSTEAD?

script library

SCRIPT 3 | WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS, I'M JUST THE ANGRY ONE.

Try: “You feel things strongly. That intensity can become a strength when you learn how to direct it.”

Then ask: “What was happening right before the anger showed up?”

Follow up with a legacy narrative: “Did you know that anger, properly directed, has changed the course of history? It actually built this country.”

Action: Share stories of leaders who used righteous anger to change the world. The Founding Fathers threw tea into the Boston Harbor and ignited a Revolution that would change everything.

William Wilberforce used his anger about slavery to build alliances and form a movement that eventually led to Britain ending its participation in the slave trade (the first major world power to do so).

Jesus himself made a whip and overturned tables in the temple to drive out people who were making a mockery of God’s house.

So if you get angry, you are in good company. We just have to make sure that it’s channeled into righteous anger and action. Not personal frustration, irritation and self-focused vengeance.

Those won’t get you anywhere.

Leaders aim up to make change.
They can harness righteous
anger to get them there.



BUILD NARRATIVE

SCRIPT 4 | WHEN YOUR CHILD FEELS ANXIOUS.

Try: “Anxiety is a normal human experience. It’s trying to predict problems before they happen. Sometimes it’s helpful, but sometimes it gets too loud.”

Then ask: “What is anxiety telling you right now?”

Follow up with a meaning narrative: “Being nervous is a normal human experience. I feel that way sometimes. But when that happens, I like to focus in on the meaningful things I can do right now to fulfill my purpose.”

Action: Take them out for a special date - a one-on-one lunch or coffee date. Ask them what their purpose is right now. What are your roles? What duties come with those roles? What responsibilities do you have? Those answers are ways to determine what their purpose in life is right now.

Remind them that they don’t have to know what their purpose is at 18...30...or 65. Connect by telling them that your purpose and life course has changed in many ways you couldn’t have anticipated. Point to past experiences you’ve had that worked out despite fear or anxiety.

At the end of the day, their job is just to do the best with what is in front of them. Fulfill their purpose. Do their best. Serve and love others. Those are things they can absolutely do.

Focus on that narrative and the anxiety will be a passing experience, not a crippling state.



script library

SCRIPT 5 | WHEN YOUR CHILD FEELS DEPRESSED.

Try: “I’m really glad you told me. Feeling this way doesn’t mean something is wrong with you. Sometimes life can feel heavy. You’re not the only person who has felt this way. And it’s not something you have to stay stuck in.”

Then ask: “Can you tell me what feels the heaviest right now?”

Follow up with an anchoring narrative: “That feeling doesn’t get to decide who you are. We’re going to walk through this together. You are still you. And you’re someone who can get through hard things...even this.”

Action: This might sound a little counterintuitive, but when a child is feeling low...what they need isn’t cheering up. They need something meaningful to step into.

So ask: “If you could help someone or be part of solving a problem, what would you want to do?”

It doesn’t have to be big - helping younger kids, caring for animals, serving a neighbor, cleaning up a place they love.

When kids step outside of themselves and take on real responsibility, something begins to shift. They start to feel needed, capable, and like they matter. And that’s where meaning (eventually joy) begins to grow again.

This works even better when it’s paired with trust. Giving them some independence can change their story drastically. Even if it makes you a little uncomfortable. They begin to see themselves as someone who can handle things.

Someone who can help.
Someone who has a role to play.
And that shift in identity is powerful.





story in action

REAL LIFE EVIDENCE

a simple experiment

SHOW AND TELL | IT'S NOT JUST FOR KINDERGARTEN

There's an idea from research that I found really interesting.

In a scientific study, people were shown video of themselves successfully doing something they usually struggled with. In a week or two, it greatly helped to shift how they responded to the struggle.

Because they had seen themselves do it.

That stuck with me.

Because as parents, we actually have opportunities to do something very similar. Bring back show and tell baby. It's narrative building.

STEP 1 | CAPTURE THE WINS

When your child handles something well - even in a small way - try to capture it on video.

A moment of patience.
Finishing something hard.
Staying calm when they normally wouldn't.
Trying again instead of giving up.

It doesn't have to be perfect.
It just has to be real. Authentic.
Not forced or staged. (That's important.)

Over time, those moments become powerful evidence.



story in action

REAL LIFE EVIDENCE

a simple experiment

STEP 2 | SHOW IT BACK TO THEM

Later (not in the heat of the moment) show your child what you captured.

Let them see themselves doing the very thing they think they can't do.

You might say something simple like:

“Look at this. You stayed with it even when it was hard.”

or

“See that? That's you handling something really well.”

No lecture needed.

Just let them see it.

Repeat 2-4 times a week.

Not a long drawn out thing either. 30 seconds - 2 minutes.

WHEN YOU MISS IT (AND YOU WILL}

You won't always have your phone ready. That's okay. Good really. You don't want to turn into a camera wielding crazy.

But when you notice a genuine win, don't let it pass quietly. Call it out in the moment.

“I saw what you just did there.”

“You kept going.”

“You stayed calm.”

“That was hard & you handled it.”

These moments matter more than you think.

Children need to know that they are capable. Growth is happening. They are becoming. And someone sees it.

BUILD NARRATIVE



story in action

REAL LIFE EVIDENCE

a simple experiment

WHY THIS WORKS

When a child sees themselves succeeding...or hears it clearly named...it begins to change their internal story.

Instead of:
“I can’t do this.”

They start to think:
“I’ve done something like this before.”

And that’s where confidence begins.

Not from hype.
From evidence.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Pay attention for small wins.

Capture one if you can.

Call it out when you can’t.

Then later, remind your child: “You’re growing. I see it.”



Confidence grows
when a child
sees evidence
of their own progress.

RAISE RESILIENT KIDS THROUGH
THE POWER OF STORY





03

ROOTS TO *anchor into*

Family narrative

We touched on this a bit in Script 1 but it's so important I think we need to revisit it again.

For thousands of years, families have helped children build a positive sense of self through family identity and legacy.

Stories about where we come from.

Stories about what kind of people we are.

Stories about how we handle hard things.

Those stories shape how a child sees themselves.

And when a child has a strong identity story, challenges don't feel like proof that something is wrong with them.

**Children borrow confidence
from family identity until
they build their own.**



family identity

BUILD NARRATIVE | WORKSHEET 7

Think about the kind of story you want your child to know about your family.

Finish these sentences:

In our family, we are the kind of people who:

When life gets hard, we:

The people who came before us were known for:

Here are values we stand for as a family:

Example Identity Phrases

We are the kind of family that keeps trying.

In this family, we solve problems.

We finish what we start.

We serve others.

We face tough things. We don't run.

Or in our family, we say,

“You are a Bartelt. And Bartelt's do hard things.”



What You Just LEARNED

In this section, you've learned practical ways to...

Separate your child from struggle so it doesn't become identity.

Give them a stronger story to stand on. Reminding them who they are and what kind of person they are becoming.

Reinforce that story with real evidence. Through your words, your attention, and even letting them see their own progress.

Anchor them into a strong family legacy while they are still building their individual identity.



Now select a few of these narrative strategies to try over the next 30 days. Commit to telling your kid a better story and see how their identity begins to reset.

you are well on your way

TO RAISING A RESILIENT KID THROUGH THE POWER OF STORY

**Psychologists have discovered
that the more children know
about their family's story,
the stronger their sense of
control over their lives,
the higher their self esteem,
the more successfully they believe
their family functions.**

**Knowing their larger family story
helps them understand that they are
part of something bigger.**

Every family has a unifying narrative.

BRUCE FEILER

The Secrets of Happy Families

**RAISE RESILIENT KIDS
THROUGH THE POWER OF STORY**



THE ROCK THEY NEED

EVERY CHILD IS ASKING A BIGGER QUESTION

Up to this point, we've talked about language, identity, and the stories children begin to believe about themselves.

But underneath all of that, there are deeper questions every child is asking...whether they articulate it or not. Things like...

- Do I matter?
- Is there a reason I'm here?
- Is my life meaningful?

If your kid doesn't have a solid answer to those questions, their identity has nothing stable to rest on. And when identity has no solid foundation, it's easily molded by the wrong stories and wraps itself around:

- Performance and Comparison
- Approval and Failure
- Labels and Diagnosis

Because that kind of identity is fragile.

It floats by when life is easy.
It says "I'm broken" when life gets hard.



why it matters

MORE THAN WE THINK

Purpose wins.

When a child believes their life has purpose, even in small ways, they become more resilient.

They tolerate frustration better.

They recover from setbacks faster.

They are less likely to define themselves by failure.

Research continues to point in this direction.

A strong sense of meaning and purpose is associated with:

- Lower rates of anxiety and depression
- Greater resilience in the face of stress
- Higher life satisfaction and long-term well-being

Studies in psychology and developmental science consistently show that meaning-making and identity formation are deeply connected.

So the obvious question is - what is the best way to build purpose and meaning into the narrative?

A child who knows their life matters is far less likely to believe they are broken.

what this does

04

FOR A CHILD

When a child grows up hearing:

You were made on purpose.

You have value that can't be taken away.

You are part of something bigger than yourself.

It gives them a kind of stability
the world can't offer.

They still face challenges.

They still struggle.

But they are anchored.

And anchored kids are far more resilient.



MEANING MATTERS

A simple starting point

You don't need to have every answer.

You don't need to explain everything perfectly.

You can start with simple, honest conversations:

“Why do you think your life matters?”

“What do you think you're here to do?”

“Where do you think our worth comes from?”

Let those conversations grow over time.

Although it does help if you have some foundational beliefs
in a bigger story yourself...let's dig into that.

foundational story

A STORY THAT CAN ACTUALLY HOLD

A BIGGER STORY

We all need a story big enough to hold:

- success and failure
- strength and weakness
- joy and suffering

Our kids need a story where their worth isn't up for negotiation.



WHERE THIS LEADS

In our home, this is where everything ultimately points.

We believe our kids are not accidents.

They were created with intention.

They have inherent worth...not because of what they achieve, but because of who they are.

And that worth comes from God.

Belief in that narrative...well it changes everything.

It means:

Their life has meaning before they prove anything.

Their value doesn't rise and fall with performance.

Their struggles don't define them.

Their skills, traits, and even their quirks are all a part of them on purpose.

They are not broken.

In fact, they are so valuable that God did the one thing that is unthinkable for a parent - he sent his son to die so that he could be with them. Jesus is a testament to their immeasurable value.

All of our lives are shaped by how we respond to that story.



a thought for you

IF YOU AREN'T SURE ABOUT THIS PART

If you're reading this and you're not sure what you believe about God, you're not alone.

You don't have to have everything figured out to start thinking about these questions. But this is worth reflecting on personally.

Because if it's true that your child's identity needs to be anchored in something stable...then so does yours.

Questions about meaning, purpose, and where our worth comes from aren't just abstract ideas. They shape how we live, how we parent, and how we understand ourselves.

When I started really looking into this, I was struck by how much of what we long for (meaning, order, beauty, purpose) points to something beyond us.

As if deeper reason, truth, and beauty are woven into the fabric of reality. And if that's true, it's worth asking what's up with that.

For me, that ultimately led to the gospel. The story that we are created with intention, deeply loved, and invited into a relationship with the One who made us.

I know those are big claims.

Big stories. But they're worth understanding and wrestling with. Even if (especially if) they run against what much of modern culture assumes.

You don't have to resolve it all today.
But keep that door open.

Because the story you believe about your own life will shape everything - including the story you pass on to your children.

∴ ∴ ∴ *thank you*

Thank you for staying with this playbook to the end. For being open to a different way of thinking about how we raise resilient kids...through the power of story.

My prayer isn't that you walk away with more information, but with intention. Because the story your child believes about themselves will shape far more than any single decision you make. And that story is being formed every day...whether we're intentional about it or not.



This is your opportunity to step into that process with purpose.

Less brokenness.
More connection.
More meaning.
More becoming.

If we want to see the next generation thrive, it will take parents who are willing to be intentional, who choose to tell better stories.

So start small. Use what you've learned. Come back to it often.

And if this has made an impact, share it with another parent.

This is just the beginning.
Keep building narrative.



implementation **CHECK LIST**

**You don't need to do everything at once.
Start here.**

Foundation

- I understand that my child is forming a story about who they are.
- I recognize that my words and actions shape that story daily.
- I am committed to being intentional, not reactive.

Awareness

- I am paying attention to the language my child uses about themselves.
- I can identify negative or limiting stories as they form.
- I notice patterns in behavior that reflect deeper beliefs.

Language Shifts

- I am reinforcing identity, not just correcting behavior.
- I use clear, consistent language about who my child is becoming.
- I speak to effort, responsibility, and character regularly.

Rewriting the Story

- I interrupt negative narratives when they appear.
- I replace them with truthful, constructive alternatives.
- I connect actions to identity. ("That's what someone like you does")

Daily Integration

- I am using these ideas in everyday moments - not just big conversations.
- I am consistent, even when it feels small or repetitive.
- I am modeling the identity and behaviors I want to build.

Moving Forward

- I have chosen one area to focus on this week.
- I will revisit this checklist regularly.
- I am committed to building this over time, not overnight.

**Small, consistent actions shape lasting identity.
Keep building narrative.**

the narrative movement **RAISING RESILIENT KIDS IS A CHOICE**

The work you did in this Playbook matters.

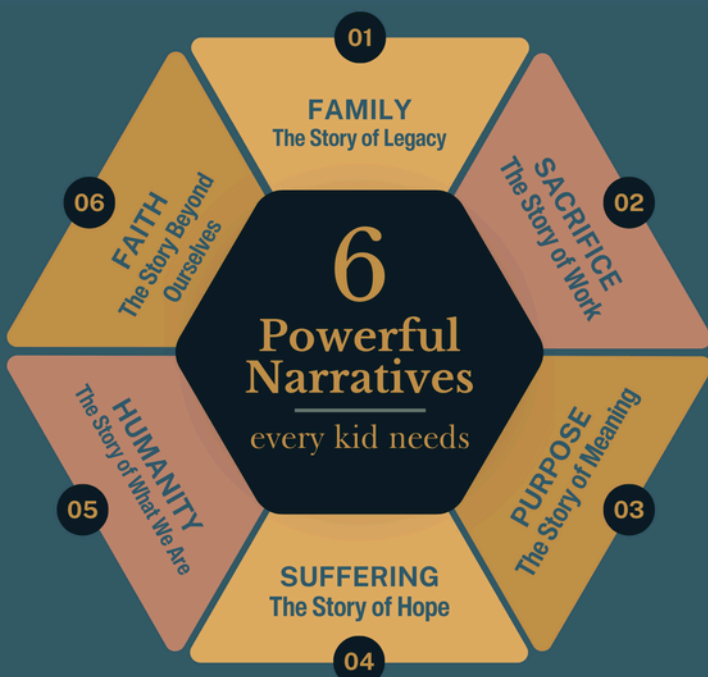
It means you're not parenting on autopilot. You're choosing to be intentional about the story your child grows up in.

That's how strong families are built.

And over time, it's how we push back against the mental health crisis - one home, one story at a time.

**RECLAIM YOUR ROLE.
TELL A BETTER STORY.
RAISE RESILIENT KIDS.**

You've got this. And we're right here with you.



NEXT STEPS:

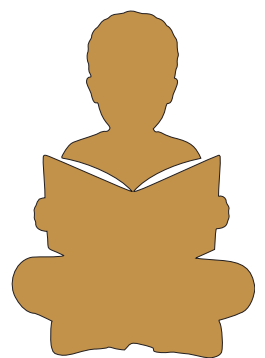
This is just the beginning.
Start small. Apply one shift this week.

Follow along and go deeper:

- Follow us on Instagram: @buildnarrative
- Get tools + guides: buildnarrative.com
- Join our e-mail list: buildnarrative.com
- Share this with a parent who needs it



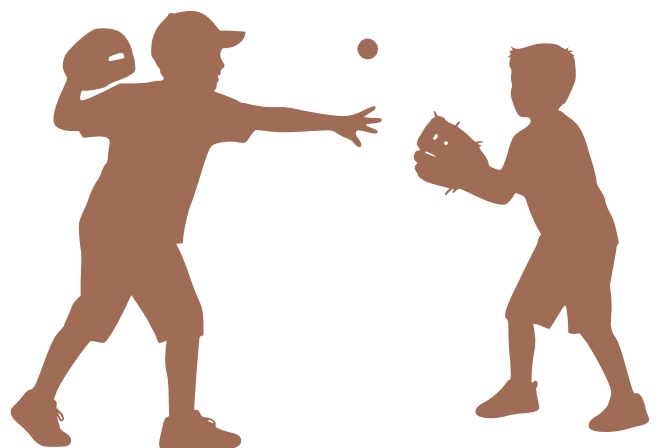
notes



notes



notes



understanding

COMMON TERMS

Throughout this playbook, you may recognize words often used to describe children and their behavior.

Each definition below includes both a general understanding and a broader perspective - one that considers the role of identity, environment, and narrative in how a child comes to see themselves.

ADHD (ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER)

Common understanding:

A condition characterized by difficulty with attention, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity.

Narrative perspective:

These traits are often framed as deficits, but they can also reflect high energy, curiosity, and a fast-moving mind. The story a child hears about these traits, whether they are “too much” or uniquely capable, can shape how they learn to manage and channel them over time.

ODD (OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER)

Common understanding:

A pattern of defiant, disobedient, and sometimes hostile behavior toward authority.

Narrative perspective:

What is labeled as defiance can also be a strong will, a desire for autonomy, or a sensitivity to control and fairness. How this behavior is interpreted, and how a child is spoken to about it, can influence whether it becomes resistance or leadership.

NEURODIVERGENT

Common understanding:

A term used to describe individuals whose brain functions differ from what is considered typical, including ADHD, autism, and other variations.

Narrative perspective:

Neurodivergence highlights difference, not deficiency. The way these differences are framed matters. When children understand themselves as capable, purposeful, and uniquely wired, they are more likely to grow into those strengths rather than feel limited by a label.



ANXIETY

Common understanding:

A condition involving excessive worry, fear, or nervousness that can interfere with daily life.

Narrative perspective:

Anxiety often reflects a heightened awareness, sensitivity, or anticipation of outcomes. While it can feel overwhelming, the story a child believes about it, whether they are fragile or learning to handle hard things, shapes how they respond and build resilience.

DEPRESSION

Common understanding:

A mood disorder marked by persistent sadness, low energy, and loss of interest or motivation.

Narrative perspective:

People who struggle with depression often carry deep empathy and a strong capacity to care for others. When the narrative shifts from “this is who I am” to “this is something I’m moving through,” it creates space for hope. In that space, connection, responsibility, and purpose can grow...especially through serving others and contributing to something bigger than oneself. Over time, resilience builds. Depression can become a hurdle, not a brick wall.

A FINAL NOTE

Labels should never be someone’s identity.

Children are always becoming. And the words used to describe them...by professionals, by parents, and eventually by themselves... play a powerful role in shaping who they believe they are.

Make sure the story stays bigger than the label.



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about the author

niki bartelt



Niki is a follower of Jesus, wife, mother of five, homeschooler, and researcher who cares deeply about how children come to understand who they are.

Her work didn't begin as a framework - it began in her own home. As a mom of energetic boys, she felt the weight of wanting to guide them well toward strength, responsibility, and purpose - in a world that offers a much smaller story for them to live into.

Through years of research, observation, and everyday life with her own kids, she has focused on understanding how identity is formed. And how it can be shaped with intention, using one of our most powerful human tools, story, to do it.

At the core of her perspective is a belief that children are created with purpose and meaning, and that parents have a unique opportunity to help them grow into that identity over time.

Her approach is practical, thoughtful, and grounded in real life - not perfection.

Most of what she teaches is lived out daily through homeschooling, family rhythms, and the ordinary moments that end up mattering most.

She lives in Wisconsin with her husband and their children.

This playbook is one part of a larger mission to help parents become more intentional in how they guide their children - and to raise a generation of kids who know who they are, why they matter, and how to live with purpose.

You can follow along and find additional resources at buildnarrative.com or on Instagram @buildnarrative.

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