



Process to Create a Youth/Adult Healing Story | Nistwayr



Process for Creating a Youth/Adult Healing Story (Nistwayr)

To Support Youth in Creating Their Own Story

This document is intended to support professionals in working with youth and adults to create their own healing stories. It is based on the work developed by consultant Manna Van t'Slot and Jenni Hoefler—a social worker from Germany who experienced a traumatic childhood and spent time in care. Caara Goddard worked alongside of Manna and Jenni to co-create a document that would help other professionals be able to use this work with youth/adults they are working with. She has further adapted it to fit in the context for Métis service delivery for Lii Michif Otipemisiwak (LMO).

You can view Jenni's presentation of her adult *Words and Pictures* (with English subtitles) here:

[Jenni's Presentation Video](#)

Jenni's English presentation slides can be accessed here:

[Jenni's Slides](#)

If you have any questions, please contact:

j.hoefler83@gmail.com

info@mannaslot.com –

caaragoddard@gmail.com

Jenni, Manna, and Caara hope this process will inspire professionals to use *Words and Pictures* with younger children and/or help youth and adults create a *Nistwayr*—a healing story for those who did not have the opportunity to receive their story when they were younger. It is important for professionals to include “messages of resilience” such as “although Jade didn't realize it at the time, staying quiet until it ended was her only option for not getting more hurt. She didn't know it at the time, but she was incredibly brave.

We know in the Métis culture the story telling is significant way of teaching and learning. Listening to Elders tell stories is helpful for children/youth and others to learn important values and to help them critically reflect and make meaning around how those stories/lessons fit into their own life challenges. At LMO we want our youth/young adults to understand their story and be able to share it with la paraantii when they are able to as part of their healing journey and moving towards a stronger sense of connection and belonging.

Sharing the finished *Nistwayr* is a critical part of this process—it helps break the secrecy, shame, and guilt youth or adults may carry. Sharing can be with trusted people: la paraantii, Elders, or counselors. It is not as formal as sharing *Words and Pictures* in safety planning with children, but sharing completes the healing process.

Jenni's key message: she does not share her story for pity or compassion. Instead, she hopes professionals will reflect on their own attitudes and ask themselves:

"What can I do to listen more deeply to the voice of the child?"

The Nistwayr Process:

1. Introduction to the Healing Story Process

- Workers can start by sharing the steps of the process and examples of Jenni's (or others') stories so the youth or adult can explore whether this work is right for them. It can be helpful to show a *Words and Pictures* example designed for children and ask:
"Would it be helpful to create a story with some messages back from the future to your smaller self?"
- Everyone has a story. Most have trauma. This work requires sensitive conversations to assess if the individual is ready to engage in the challenging healing process of telling their story.
- A worker could use some scaling questions to assess readiness:

Willingness:

10 = "I'm willing to step into this work. I know it will be hard, but I believe it will help me."

0 = "I'm not ready for this right now."

Capacity:

10 = "I understand the process and see how it connects to my healing journey."

0 = "I don't understand how this will help me."

Confidence/Readiness:

10 = "I feel confident to begin this work. I trust the structure and feel safe with the worker supporting me."

0 = "I'm unsure and not ready."

Explore what's behind the number: what's holding them back? What would help them move up the scale?

2. Preparing the Professional

- Shame and blame are constant undercurrents in this work. Professionals must help participants access their strengths and resources, validating their journey without judgment or excessive focus on painful details and **stay fact-based** wherever possible and away from any gratuitous opinions professionals can often find themselves using.
- You may also like to prepare the adult/teenager by asking them to bring something to the interviews/discussions that grounds them in the present time, such as keys, their phone, something they didn't have in their childhood, as well as some "comfort thing" they can zone out with, such as some music, beading, crocheting, carving etc.
- Maintain a calm, grounded, and compassionate professional stance. Be present. Ask simple structuring questions such as:
 - What message would you want to give your small child back then? (to set the scene for a trauma informed process).
 - Where would you like to start?
 - Where are we?
 - *"What happened next?"*
 - *"What else?"*
- Always return to the structure and move forward in small, manageable steps.
- Set clear boundaries. Learn to sense when to pause, reflect, or continue. You should continue to check back in with them, ie. "Can I see if I have heard this right from how you saw it, so I make sure I have understood this properly from your point of view?"
- This work is a co-creation. Treat the participant as an equal—capable, wise, and resilient.

SKILLFULL USE OF AUTHORITY
FIRM BUT HUGELY KIND

FIRM

Staying focused
Have a clear Agenda
Ask for permission to take them back
Don't let go of the topic
Dive deep in
Not drowning in empathy
Stay in the present
Stay calm
Keep asking simple questions
Structure
Give homework
Clear boundaries
Continue
Keep on task

HUGELY KIND

Treat them as a capable adult
Compliment on that what you want to grow
Validate
Compassion
Look for the resilience all the time
Close with a moment of Resilience
Be authentic
Patience
Put them in the drivers seat (co-create)
Smallest next step
Feel when they need a pause, reflect, stop
or keep going
Keep encouraging
Tap into their resources
Treating as equal

3. Beginning the Story

- Guide the participant to share their story in chronological order, using the third person to help create emotional distance and reduce shame.
- Use anonymized names if helpful, and a genogram to clarify family members.
- Balance difficult events with positive or resilient moments where possible. It will be important for the professional to highlight those resilient moments saying something like, "OK you say you felt like you couldn't do anything, so how did you get out of there?" Or "you feel like you couldn't help your mom and that was really hard, but it sounds like you realized it was important to hide and/or wait. Did you realize how clever and brave that was?"
- Stay factual when addressing traumatic events. Focus on what happened and who was present: How did they get through the event and how did it end? Did anyone help? How did they make themselves feel better or safer or even numb themselves from the experience?
- Once the basic story structure is complete, begin preparing for healing interviews.

Important reminders for professionals:

- Let the participant set the pace. Your role is to hold the process, not push for outcomes.
 - Reinforce their autonomy:
“This is your story.”
“What’s your intention in sharing it?”
 - Always emphasize their resilience and survivorship. They are no longer victims.
 - Culture is healing. Invite participants to weave their Métis identity, practices, and cultural supports into their story. “As a Métis person, how did your culture help you...until you could get help etc.?”
 - Many of the youth/adults we work with are very disconnected from their culture, so please involve Elders and Métis teachings to still capture the importance of their identity into their story and then you can intertwine the cultural components.
 - Balance comfort zone with courage zone. When the participant nears their “terror zone”, slow down or pause. This is when you can go back to their object that helps them know this is present time, or their comfort music, beading, etc.
 - Hold firm to the process (i.e., the pictures are just as important as the words) yet hugely kind regarding their experience and information.
-

4. Healing Interviews

- Collect blended perspectives to avoid a “single story.” Other people involved may remember key events differently. Lean in to ask who else would have noticed your inner strength and may have wanted to help but didn’t know how?
 - Important people from the participant’s life can share stories of resilience, connection, and belonging.
 - These external perspectives can powerfully shift the participant from shame to healing.
 - Prepare interviewees using Manna’s letter (Appendix 1), and ask their permission to record interviews for the participant’s private viewing whenever possible.
-

5. Creating the Drawings

- The pictures are really important, which is similar to the *Words and Pics* format for child protection concerns and safety plans. Try to keep the words to 3-4 sentences as the pictures can often convey more than the words or additional pieces.
 - Collaboratively decide what drawings will accompany different story sections.
 - Youth/adults may choose who helps create their drawings, including trusted la paraantii. But we will need to make sure we ask questions about each drawing we should have otherwise we may end up with pictures that are hard to draw for the participant or not helpful in settling the trauma.
 - Stick figures should be used (avoid clipart or photos), as in traditional *Words and Pictures*.
 - Focus on drawing the first moment of resilience after traumatic events, rather than the event itself.
 - Manna's checklist (Appendix 2) can support this process.
-

6. Revisiting Purpose: Why Are We Creating This Story?

- Be clear about the participant's intention from the start—return to it when shame and guilt arise and take them back to their “here and now comfort object” and have them hold it in their hand or focus on their beading, etc.
 - Support the participant to see themselves beyond the single story they've told themselves.
 - Discuss how their *Nistwayr* might help others:
 - Could other youth relate to and learn from this story?
 - Could professionals or families gain insights from hearing it?
-

7. Final Reflections

- This process can reduce shame and increase hope.
- Remember: every human carries a story. Professionals don't need to share their own, but they should recognize their shared humanity.
- Through this process, workers can challenge their own biases and move away from judgment.

- Behavior is not the problem—it's a signal that clearer, more compassionate support is needed.
 - Above all, remember:
The voice of the child is sacred.
-

APPENDIX ONE

Manna's letter for healing interview participants:

Hello,

Thank you for the possibility of talking to you about Jenny her life. Jenny is admirably working hard to give everything that has happened in her life its place to be wiser in the now. But a greater cause is that Jenny her story might help other children who are now in that same situation. Children that are not understood and faced difficult trauma's, not getting the help they need. By creating this story, we would like to help especially Social Workers to understand what is usually behind the behavior of children and how they could maybe deal with it better

A little bit about me and why we are doing this

I am just a simple trainer from the Netherlands and by coincidence met Jenny via work. We immediately had a good feeling about each other. The training I am giving is about Signs of Safety. It's a set off collected ideas about how to work better in child protection cases (from a Social Worker point of view). We for instance focus a lot on getting a good Working Relationship with the families, we have tools to help be more transparent with families, lots of tools to involve children. Many ideas and tools how to involve and build up the social network around the families/children. But also, tools to talk about that part of your life or how you got to where you are today in a non-shaming way.

This last one is the one we are trying to develop for Jenny (together with Jenny of course). This tool is called Words & Pictures

Words & Pictures is meant for children, created by biological family or even people that are close. It helps everyone to have one (non-shaming) story, which is honest about the hard things, but also very simple and respectful. Main goal is openness about hard things that happened in their life, because:

- *Children usually/often feel it's their fault*
- *Children create their own stories and aren't sure what is true anymore. Children are often just trying to make sense of the world.*
- *Children and parents get words for the difficult things to talk about and are supported to talk about it*
- *The network around the child/family also gets words to address the difficult things that happened*

Our planned interview

I promised to send you some questions regarding Jenny.

Most important is Jenny doesn't want to bring anyone in a shaming situation or hurt people unintentionally, so if some of the questions are hard to answer or bring this feeling of hurt/shame don't answer them, and we can skip them during our live (online) interview.

Questions:

1. *What is a lesson you learned from Jenny?*
2. *What is touching your heart when you think about the time in which you got to know Jenny?*
3. *What do you remember about the time, meeting Jenny? What was good?*
4. *What was hard for you at the time you got to know Jenny first? Did you have worries about her or the family she came from?*
5. *How did this change or develop over time?*
6. *If we think about Children feeling guilty, what would you want to say to Jenny (now as an adult, that still carries this weight) that might help her to process the events that happened to her as a child a little more?*
7. *If we think about the different stories and truths a child has, not knowing what really happened. Is there anything you can contribute from your perspective that might help Jenny (now as an adult) to process her childhood / teenage time better?*
8. *From your perspective are there any tips for people (like you were then) around children that are currently in a very hard situation you can give? What can they do when they meet a 'little' Jenny?*
9. *Are there any things you would like to say to Jenny, that might be hard for you, but could help Jenny a lot?*
10. *Any other messages, things we forgot?*

Thank you so much for being willing to help Jenny, and also a lot of children with her that are currently in the same situation that she was in when she was young

These questions don't need to be prepared, but you can if it helps you. My experience with these interviews is that they go fluently, and the most important things will naturally come. No pressure needed.

Looking forward to talk to you

Thank you so much

Manna van t Slot

The Netherlands

Friend of Jenny

APPENDIX TWO

Words and Pictures/Nistwayr Checklist

1. **Is the “elephant in the room” addressed?** Have we openly acknowledged the key concerns in a similar way to our work with children? Have we addressed the biggest worry, or are we contributing to the confusion and adding to the secrecy?
2. **Have trauma prevention strategies been applied?**
 - Is the story written in the third person (as a narrative rather than direct speech)?
 - Are the youth's or family's own words used, where appropriate?
 - Is the focus on specific behaviors and decisions (avoiding hypotheses) or opinions?
 - Does the story highlight the first moment of resilience following trauma? Even the smallest resilient moments matter.
3. **Is there recognition and/or an apology included?**

Is the story careful to avoid shaming or “othering” the child, parents, or significant adults? Are there affirmations or compliments highlighting strengths? Does the story convey the important messages you want the child or youth to hear?
4. **Could the story be misinterpreted?**

Provide honest, non-shaming explanations of difficult events. Avoid ambiguity. For example:

 - Instead of saying a boy was “hit” (which could confuse children, as siblings also hit), say: “hitting that hurts and leaves marks, which is not okay.”
 - Instead of describing a parent as “sick” (which children might relate to their own experiences of illness), clarify the difference by specifying: “Mom has an illness in her mind/head that makes her feel very very sad and confused and sometimes it is so difficult she can't make herself get out of bed or do anything.”
5. **Is la paraantii involved?**

Does the child/youth know who they can talk to and who they can reach out to for support? Who are their trusted adults? Who hears their voice?
6. **Do the pictures reflect and enhance the text?**

Do the illustrations support the key elements of the story? Where possible, focus the drawings on the first moment of resilience. Also context and facial expressions.

Group Supervision Reminder:

Engage in group supervision while creating the *Nistwayr*. Listening to diverse perspectives helps explain complex issues, integrate resilience-building messages, and ensure cultural considerations are included.

Team Exercise:

Assign team members different roles (child, mother, father, grandparent, etc.) and have each person read the *Words and Pictures/Nistwayr* from their assigned perspective. Afterwards, gather feedback to help refine the story and ensure clarity, compassion, and cultural relevance.



© 2026 Goddard Consulting Co. & Manna Slot Training & Consultancy. All rights reserved.

