

Brad's Story

Older Version

Warning: Brad's story is hard to hear. We have intentionally created this fictional story to be appropriate for families; however, you should preview all materials to make certain that you are comfortable with all the content before sharing it with your audience.

Suggestion: If using the Missions Kit for a 5-day VBS or camp, use one story video per day and take time to review the previous day. Use discussion questions and scripture truth to reassure children following each video.

Part 1

Script:

One day after baseball practice, the coach asked Brad to stay behind so that he could help him with his glove. It wasn't a very nice glove, but Brad loved it because his grandma bought it for him at a yard sale. Brad loved baseball and was so excited that Grandma signed the form to let him play on a real team. Practice was just down the street from their trailer, so he could walk there after school. He loved being with the team, and the coach was the nicest person he'd ever met, as well as his school counselor.

Coach started working on the threading of Brad's glove.

"When you took your hoodie off during practice, I saw that you have bruises on your back," he said. "What happened?"

"Oh, it's nothing, I fell off my bike," Brad replied.

"I want you to know you are safe here, if you ever need to tell me anything. You can talk to me at practice or at school. Your teachers will let you come to my office anytime you need to talk."

"Yes, sir, I know. I'm good. I promise."

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After he walked home, Brad knew that he had to tell someone about his stepdad. He was so mean. The bruises were getting harder to hide. He thought if he just stayed quiet and went to bed early, he could avoid all the fighting, but lately, it was just getting worse.

That night, Brad was scared and waited for the yelling to stop, but it didn't. He climbed out the window and ran to the baseball field, eventually falling asleep under the bleachers, until the sound of birds woke him up the next morning. He ran around the corner just in time to see the bus turning on his street. Grateful, he climbed on the bus to escape the nightmare at home.

When they arrived at school, he went to the cafeteria to get breakfast, which was the first thing he'd eaten since lunch yesterday, and then walked slowly to the School Counseling Office.

Coach was there getting a cup of coffee. "Come on in, Brad. How's it going?"

Brad just stared at him, working up the courage to tell the truth.

"Let's go to my office so we can talk."

The 12-year-old froze, so unsure of what was going to happen next.

Questions to Ask:

Who helps Brad? His Coach/ SCHOOL Counselor

Coaches, Teachers, and counselors are “mandatory reporters.” That means they have the legal responsibility to report any unsafe situations children might be experiencing. Children need to be protected. School is a safe place to ask for help.

Why do you think Brad was scared at home? (various answers) Sad, lonely, didn’t want to get in trouble...

Discuss empathy. It’s so important that we are able to look at another person’s situation and think about how hard all those emotions can be.

Why do you think Brad liked school? (various answers) felt safe, got to eat lunch, had friends

Brad probably did not trust the adults at home to meet his needs. He wanted to be like the other children and feel normal.

Reassuring Truth:

God is our helper.

I lift my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalms 121:1-2

Part 2

Script:

Sitting in the school counseling office, Brad watched his Coach unpack his bag and get his computer logged in. The man was so patient and kind, never pushing, but always interested in his students.

Finally, Brad looked up with a tear running down his face. “I need help.”

“Tell me what happened, son,” the coach responded with gentleness.

Brad shared it all. The drinking, the neighbors, the arguing, the fighting, and his mom leaving. It had been weeks of chaos and confusion. He wanted to go live with his Grandma, but every time he called, he couldn’t reach her.

“You are safe here. We’ll figure it out together. Let’s go see the school nurse.” Coach said.

The school nurse checked out his bruises. Brad was glad she didn’t ask any more questions. After that, the School Resource Officer and a lady from the Department of Social Services came to talk with Brad to ask a few more questions as they filled out paperwork and contacted the local authorities.

Brad was scared. He didn’t know what would happen next. Why couldn’t he reach his Grandma?

He spent most of the school day sitting in the counseling office. He didn’t want to go to class, not even to PE. He just wanted to stay with Coach and wait to see if his Grandma would come get him. They were kind and compassionate in the office, gathering some schoolwork for him and letting him work at his own pace. Brad was relieved they didn’t ask more questions.

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When it was almost time for afternoon announcements, a new lady introduced herself.

“Hi Brad, I’m Ms. Jessica, and I’m your caseworker for DSS. For now, you are going to go with me back to the DSS office.”

“No, I’m not going with you. I’m waiting for my Grandma. I can stay with her.” Brad said defiantly.

Jessica replied, “Unfortunately, that will not be possible, Brad. We are still working on a long-term placement for you, but I have an overnight place that we will go to in a little while. You will be going into foster care. Do you know what that means?”

Questions to Ask:

Who listened to Brad at school? The School Counselor, The Resource Officer, The School Nurse

The Coach (and School Counselor) worked with DSS to document Brad’s story. The School Nurse helped check Brad’s back to make sure he did not need medical attention. The School Resource Officer also helped listen to Brad’s story. Brad was not in trouble. He did not do anything wrong.

What questions did Brad think about? (various answers)

Remind children about the many emotions they have when they experience a really hard situation, which is called trauma. It would have been challenging for Brad to focus and answer questions. He thought he had a plan... to live with his grandma.

What is foster care?

Explain that children who cannot live with their families might go into foster care. They will have a caseworker, who works very hard to find children a foster home and does a lot of paperwork. Foster parents are trained to care for children who have experienced trauma.

Reassuring Truth:

God is our safe place. He always listens.

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Part 3

Script:

The shock was evident on Brad’s face, but quickly turned to frustration. “You can’t make me! I’m not gonna go! I don’t care what you say!” They continued walking out to the white minivan, and he rode in silence, refusing to speak. Questions flooded his mind... where would he go? Where was his mom? What happened to his grandma? He knew a kid from the neighborhood who was sent away in foster care. Disappeared. Never came back. They couldn’t make him live somewhere else; he’d run. Make his own life.

When they got to the DSS office, Ms. Jessica received a couple of phone calls, but Brad didn’t understand what they meant by long-term, short-term, or overnight placements. When she got off the phone, the caseworker empathetically explained that he had an overnight placement, which meant he would stay at the office until 8 pm, then spend the night at a home, and get picked up tomorrow morning to spend the day at the office while they made arrangements for the next night.”

“I don’t care, I’m not going,” he said disgustedly.

The next phone call must have been something exciting because Ms. Jessica was beaming when she hung up. “Brad! That was your coach! We found a long-term placement for you at the Smiths’ house! They live near your school and have 2 teenage boys at the High School. Your coach knows them and thinks you might even be able to stay on the team. We’ll go grab some McDonald’s and meet them at their house in an hour.”

After two cheeseburgers and a large fry, Brad’s anger began to ease, but he was nervous as they pulled into a nice neighborhood. Stopping at a white two-story house, he noticed a basketball goal in the driveway and a pitching target off to the side. This place might not be so bad as long as they let him play ball. He climbed the stairs to the front door behind the caseworker.

Questions to Ask:

Why was Brad angry? (various answers) Couldn’t live with grandma, and he had to go with a stranger.

When a child or teenager is taken into foster care, they may respond with anger. Even if we know the situation is better or safer. It doesn’t always feel that way to the child. It can be very frustrating when they don’t get to make decisions or don’t have choices.

What is an overnight placement? When children go to sleep at a house, but spend the day at an office.

Sadly, there are not enough foster families in our community. Some families might not be able to accept an older child or teenager for weeks or months, but can make sure they have a safe place to spend the night.

How can we pray for older children and teens in foster care?

- Pray for more families to be called and equipped to foster teens in our community.
- Pray for community partners that can provide activities during the day while teens wait, so they don’t sit at the office.
- Pray for the children and teens that they can heal from trauma even while enduring hard situations.

Reassuring Truth:

God is our comforter.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4a

Part 4

Script:

A tall man opened the door with a shorter woman just behind him. “Hi Brad, I’m Dylan, and this is my wife Brenda. Our boys are in the den playing Xbox if you want to join them. Can I get your bags for you?”

Brad realized for the first time that he didn’t have anything. He was wearing clothes from yesterday when he slept outside and didn’t even have a bookbag when he ran to catch the school bus that morning. “I don’t have anything,” he said, embarrassed.

“No problem, you can borrow some stuff from our boys, and we’ll go pick up some clothes tomorrow.”

After tossing and turning in a twin-size bed all night, Brad was awake early; He was restless and ready to find out what Ms. Jessica was able to find out about his grandma.

Ms. Brenda was cooking breakfast for the two hungry teenagers, Christian and Matthew, who ate quickly before heading out the door toward a small truck and drove off to school.

“What am I doing today?” Brad asked Brenda

“Oh, Good morning, Brad,” Brenda said, noticing him in the doorway for the first time. “We have an appt this morning to get you some clothes and supplies, and then a meeting at your school to figure out some paperwork.” Mr. Dylan joined the two of them for breakfast, and Brad was a little confused. This just felt weird. He never sat around a table and ate breakfast, maybe once or twice a year at dinner, if it was a holiday... but he thought these family meals were just something in movies. This place was weird.

After breakfast, Mr. Dylan left for work, and Brenda drove Brad to a small office-looking building. “I thought we were going shopping,” Brad said. Brenda smiled, “We are.”

The sign that announced this place was called PS I Love You Ministries.

Questions to Ask:

Why was Brad embarrassed? He didn't have any belongings.

Sometimes when children come into foster care, they come straight from school. They may not be able to bring anything: no clothes, pajamas, toys, blankets, or even a toothbrush! They have nothing and are completely dependent on strangers to provide for them.

Why couldn't Brad sleep? (various answers) Didn't like the bed, Worried about grandma, angry, etc..

Oftentimes, when children have endured trauma (really hard situations that affect your emotions) it can also cause other physical side effects, like not being able to sleep. Sometimes children might have tummy aches or headaches as a result of trauma.

Why did Brad think breakfast was “weird”? It wasn't normal for him

It was uncomfortable because it felt very different from the way he grew up. Think about living in a completely different place with different people; even something as simple as eating breakfast could become a hard or frustrating reminder of trauma.

Reassuring Truth:

God gives us peace and rest.

“I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, Lord, make me live in safety.” Psalm 4:8

Part 5

Script:

Once inside, Brad realized that PS I Love You wasn't a thrift store. It was like a fancy boutique or department store. He'd never been shopping like this before. The ladies gave him a small roly cart with a list of items to pick out and showed him where the teen room was. There were clothes and PJs, but the wall of shoes immediately

caught his eye. New shoes. Nice shoes. Shoes his neighbors would brag about. He realized he was staring when the kind lady said, "You wanna try on shoes first or pick out clothes?"

Within minutes, Brad picked out school clothes, gym shorts, Nike shoes, and a new bookbag full of toiletries, even finding a new baseball, glove, and some cleats. He couldn't believe someone was crazy enough to buy a total stranger this much stuff, but he was gonna take all he could get.

The next few days turned into weeks. Brad felt unsettled, but safe in this home. Mostly quiet and kept to himself, still pretty angry if he was being honest about it. He continued at his school and played on the baseball team with the weird new family in the stands. One night while they were eating ice cream, celebrating a big win, Brad finally asked Dylan, "Why?"

"Why what, Buddy?" the kind man asked, as he waved at the coach who was walking in the door.

"Why do you let random people live in your home and eat your food?"

"Well, your coach and I go way back," Dylan said as the coach walked up and pulled up a chair, "we got into some trouble while we were in high school, and my dad kicked me out. Your coach's family took me in, started taking me to church, and teaching me what Grace was. I didn't think I deserved a family or a second chance, but Jesus radically changed my life that summer. He gave me a new life. Do you remember when you went to PS I Love You? You came home and made a comment that I'll never forget... "You felt like all that stuff was for a new life." That's right. You weren't ready to hear it then, but they were showing you that you deserve a new life. But new life doesn't happen through Nike shoes, or winning a championship like tonight... it only happens through Christ.

Questions to Ask:

Where did they go? PS I Love You

PS I Love You is set up as a "boutique," which means like a fancy store. We want all children to have a shopping experience where they feel like a prince or princess with personal shoppers helping them find all the items they need.

What did Brad pick out? Nike Shoes, clothes, pajamas, a book bag, baseball

PS I Love You now has an expanded shopping area designed just for teenagers. They can shop for adult-size clothing and "care bags" that include new school supplies, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, a blanket, and a Bible.

Why does PS I Love You provide items for children to start "a new life"? To show them the gospel - that they can have a new life through Christ.

PS I Love You exists to support children in foster care and the families who serve them. Meeting physical needs is the first step to providing for vulnerable children. Additionally, the ministry seeks to meet the needs of the foster family so they have the village of support they need to care for children who have experienced trauma.

Reassuring Truth:

God is our provider.

"And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19