

NARRATIVE ORGANIZATION

What is this developmental skill?

Narrative organization is the ability to organize events into meaningful stories with a beginning, middle, and end. It helps children explain experiences, understand what happened, make sense of emotions, and communicate their memories to others. Narrative skills support learning, reading comprehension, problem solving, and identity development.

How does this normally develop?

Children first learn stories through conversations with caregivers. Adults ask questions such as: "What happened next?" "How did you feel?" "Then what did you do?"

These repeated conversations help children organize experiences chronologically and understand cause-and-effect relationships. As children mature, their stories become increasingly detailed, organized, and emotionally meaningful.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Children experiencing neglect often have fewer opportunities to discuss daily experiences with attentive adults. When caregivers are emotionally unavailable, children receive little help organizing memories or making sense of difficult events. Chronic stress may also disrupt memory formation, making experiences feel fragmented. Instead of developing coherent personal narratives, memories may remain disconnected pieces.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Tell stories out of order.
- Leave out important details.
- Jump unpredictably between events.
- Struggle to explain what happened during the day.
- Become frustrated when asked to explain experiences.
- Recall isolated details without understanding the overall sequence.

These difficulties may affect both school performance and relationships.

Parenting Implications

Adults can strengthen narrative organization by helping children tell stories without correcting every mistake.

Helpful strategies include:

- Talking about daily events together.
- Asking gentle follow-up questions.
- Reading books and discussing story sequences.
- Looking at family photos and talking about memories.
- Encouraging pretend play that develops storylines.
- Helping children identify feelings during events.

The goal is helping children organize experiences, not produce perfect stories.

From Understanding to Attunement

Instead of thinking: *"She can't even tell me what happened."* Try thinking: *"She may still be learning how to organize experiences into meaningful stories. My questions help build that ability."*

