Tree of Life Template

Part 1. The parts of my tree

Each part of the tree stands for a part of my life. Write a few words or draw in each box. There are no wrong answers.

The roots: where I come from

Include: my family, the places I come from, my culture, and songs, sayings or traditions that matter to me.

The ground: my life now

Include: where I live and what I do in an ordinary week.

The trunk: my skills and what I am good at

Include: my skills and values, and who I learned them from.

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The branches: my hopes, dreams and wishes

Include: hopes for myself, my family or my community, near and far.

The leaves: people who are important to me

Include: people, living or not, and pets, who matter to me.

The fruits: gifts I have been given

Include: gifts of care, kindness, knowledge or time, and who gave them to me.

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Drawing my tree

Draw a tree, label the roots, ground, trunk, branches, leaves and fruits, and add words from the boxes above.

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Part 2. When the storms come

Trees face storms, and so do people. Once the tree is finished, these questions help talk about hard times while standing on the strengths in the tree.

Storms that affect the trees in my life

Include: hard times that affect me, my family or my community.

How I respond to storms, and what helps

Include: what I do, who helps me and what I have learned from past storms.

What I would like to remember from my tree

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Facilitator guide: running a Tree of Life session

- **When it fits.** The Tree of Life is a collective narrative approach that uses a tree as a metaphor for a person's life. Ncazelo Ncube designed it in Zimbabwe to support vulnerable children (Lock, 2016), and she and David Denborough developed it further. Groups now use it with children, young people and adults, in schools and in mental health services (Parham et al., 2019).
- **Start with the tree.** Invite each person to draw a tree and talk through the roots, ground, trunk, branches, leaves and fruits, so stories of skills, people and hopes come first.
- **Retell what you hear.** As each person shares the tree, reflect back the skills, values and people named, and invite the group to say what stood out to them.
- **Follow the four parts.** Lock (2016) describes four stages: drawing and retelling the trees, the Forest of Life, When the Storms Come, and certificates. Talk about hard times only once the trees are finished.
- **Adapt with care.** Adapt the words and the pace for age, culture and setting, and let people choose what to share. Follow your setting's safeguarding and crisis procedures if a participant discloses harm or risk.

Based on the Tree of Life approach as described by Hughes (2014), Lock (2016) and Parham et al. (2019). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Amina (a fictional participant)

Amina, 34, moved to a new country three years ago with her two children. She filled in this template in the second meeting of a Tree of Life group for women at a community center, on November 14, 2026, led by a counselor, F.O. Amina, the counselor and every detail of the example are invented.

Part 1. The parts of my tree

The roots: where I come from

My grandmother's village and her bread. The songs my mother sang while she sewed. The saying "A guest is a gift."

The ground: my life now

A small apartment near the school. English classes three mornings a week. Cooking with my children on Sundays.

The trunk: my skills and what I am good at

Sewing, which my mother taught me. Patience. Making a home anywhere. Making new friends feel welcome.

The branches: my hopes, dreams and wishes

Open a small tailoring shop. See my children finish school. Visit my sister again.

The leaves: people who are important to me

My children. My mother, who died before we left. My sister. My neighbor Rosa.

The fruits: gifts I have been given

My mother's sewing machine skills. Rosa's help with the school forms. The teacher who stayed late to explain the bus routes.

Part 2. When the storms come

Storms that affect the trees in my life

Missing home and my mother. Not understanding letters from the city. Long winters.

How I respond to storms, and what helps

I sing my mother's songs while I cook. I ask Rosa or the teacher. I remind myself that I have built a home twice.

What I would like to remember from my tree

My trunk is strong. I carry my roots with me.

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F.O. asked the group to draw their trees before any talk of hard times. When Amina named sewing as a skill, F.O. asked who had taught her, which brought her mother into the leaves and the fruits. The group's retelling picked out "making a home anywhere" from Amina's trunk, and she began her last box with "My trunk is strong."

References and further reading

Research

Hughes, G. (2014). Finding a voice through 'The Tree of Life': A strength-based approach to mental health for refugee children and families in schools. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 19*(1), 139–153.

Lock, S. (2016). The Tree of Life: A review of the collective narrative approach. *Educational Psychology Research and Practice, 2*(1), 2–20.

Parham, S., Ibrahim, J., & Foxwell, K. (2019). Could the Tree of Life model be a useful approach for UK mental health contexts? A review of the literature. *Narrative Works, 9*(2), 44–70.

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