



# Toy Story 2

Discussion Packet



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As far back as ancient Greece people were utilizing books as methods for working through various ailments. The term, bibliography, is what we pair with the phenomenon of using media, specifically books, to help people suffering from trauma or psychological issues. While the Transfiguring Adoption is NOT claiming to be professionals in the psychological or mental health arena, we do believe that families can glean from this concept in using movies, video games, and, naturally, books, to help foster or adoptive children process their story.

## Section I

### **Why are we using books, movies, and video games to help children?**

- **Partially disengage mind from fear/problems**  
Immersing yourself in media helps you to escape from reality for a bit. This can give our minds a partial break from the worry and stress so that we have more energy to attach the issue when we come back to it.
- **Introduced to new solutions**  
We might discover new solutions to problems as we experience a character in media conquer an issue.
- **Emotional vocabulary**  
Discovering more ways to express how we feel and think can help us to communicate our own thoughts and feelings. Overall, more effective communication allows us to ask for better assistance with our feelings and issues.
- **Identify with characters/stories**  
You have heard the saying, “no man is an island.” No person wants to feel like they are alone in their thoughts, feelings, or experiences. When we discover a character in media struggling with similar issues as our own, it helps to “normalize,” our life situations and feel comforted. This can also help us to discover our own identify as a character goes through process in their life.

## Section II

### **This Only Works TOGETHER - Parent & Child.**

Here is why it is IMPERATIVE that a parent or trusted adult walk through these questions and media with a child:

- **Trauma Triggers**

An event or language in a piece of media might remind our children of past events in their lives which were traumatic. If we are to assume that they have not yet had enough life experience to successfully walk through these situations and make sense of them, then they will need a safe adult to be able to process feelings and emotions.

Some caregiver might be nervous or scared to discuss the details of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and so on. Our children are also scared but have no choice but to live through it. Our children need an adult who can help them process through issues by listening. They need an adult who knows when information needs to be given over to a trusted therapist and other professionals.

- **Reliving Trauma**

Some media might not simply suggest or bring up past trauma but could expose a child to a similar situation as what they have experienced. If a child is exposed to such media, it goes without saying that they will need a safe adult to help them process their thoughts and emotions. They will even need a safe adult who may not have the right answers but can get the child to a professional who can help.

- **Living in a Dream World**

As much as negatively living through trauma can have a devastating effect on our children, too much of a good thing can also have a poor effect when it is experienced on their own. Some children who have come from traumatic background may have trouble separating fantasy from reality. When given media where the main character is always rescued in the nick of time, the waif always marries royalty, or all problems are solved in a neat package, our children could be given over to considering this is how the world operates and that the solutions of the characters will produce similar fantastical results. It is important to have a trusted adult on duty who can applaud the fun of a tale but also bring everyone back down to reality.

- **Never Really Find Results**

Again it can be a pitfall for caregivers to be nervous about a topic and simply hope that children will learn by experiencing a book or movie on their own. The problem is that many of our children lack the life experience to be able to connect the dots to see how a character's struggles and life solutions could be compared to their own life.

A trusted adult can help a child to glean solutions and conversations from a piece of media to make real life change begin.

## Section III

### How To Use Our Discussion Packets:

#### 1. **Exposure as a Family**

Watch, read, or play the respective media this packet discusses together before you begin the conversation. It is important that parent and child experience things together. Natural bonding and teachable moments come about when we experience things together.

#### 2. **Wait for the Right Time**

As foster and adoptive parents, many of us want to help our children so badly that when we get a new resource we want to try it out faster than a child wants to open up presents on Christmas. However, it is important to judge when your child is ready to talk about issues brought up by media.

If your child is struggling with habitual lying and just reprimanded earlier in the day at school, there might be intense feelings of guilt and embarrassment. It may not be the correct time to point out that Pinocchio gets in trouble when he lies and try to begin a discussion about how lies can harm your life. Instead wait a day or two when everything is going right in your family's world, and then try to begin a conversation.

People who are hurt, angered, frustrated or depressed due to a topic are not going to be open to having a dialogue about the issues.

#### 3. **Nudging Toward Identification**

If we look at this conversation as a swimming pool, "Nudging Toward Identification" is going to be the shallow end of the pool. The goal is to simply notice - just notice - similarities you might see in a character's life and your child's life. This step is helping our children to see that they might be able to relate with a character. The media is going from merely a source of entertainment to something we possibly - POSSIBLY - could connect with in some manner.

This might come in the form of phrases such as:

- "Hey, did you notice that in the book Sally had to figure out how to make friends at school too?"
- "Tom's brother in the movie was really good at soccer just like you, right?!"
- "Too bad you're not in the story with Samantha, because you like learning about science as much as she does, right?"

#### 4. **Emotional Involvement**

In Step 3 we helped our child to consider that they might be able to connect with a character. During this step, if the atmosphere is still good for conversation, we are going to push the similarities with the media character a bit further. We are going to take a look at specific situations and emotions. We are going to take a look at issues that characters confronted and discuss solutions and emotional outcomes. Hopefully, through this step our children will be able to more deeply and emotionally be able to identify with a character.

We might ask questions such as:

- "Sally made up stories to try and make new friends. Do you think this was the right way to make friends? Why? What should she have done differently?"

- “How do you think Tom felt when missed the goal and lost the soccer game for his team? What would you tell him? Do you ever feel like Tom?”
- “Which do you think made Samantha feel better, winning the science fair or making new friends at school? Do you ever feel like that? Why?”

#### 5. **Continued Conversations**

Always remember that helping children walk through trauma is not a sprint but a marathon. Do not get discouraged if the right time to talk about themes in a piece of media don't turn up right away. Do not get discouraged if your child doesn't want to talk about anything “deep” or life changing.

Some people have reported that their children might watch a movie, lightly discuss it, and then a month later begin asking deeper questions about a theme or topic in the media.

As parents our job is to create an atmosphere where learning and growth can happen AND CAN CONTINUE HAPPENING. We need to equip ourselves with the tools to be ready for those small windows of time that our children are ready to discuss and learn from us.

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# Comprehensive Review

## TRANSFIGURING ADOPTION'S OVERVIEW:

*Toy Story 2* is rated G and can be enjoyed by all audiences: children and adults. Anyone could enjoy this fun but emotional sequel to *Toy Story (1995)*. This movie might be relatable to foster and adoptive families due to the themes of reunification, identity with family of origin versus found family, and building attachment.

This movie can be enjoyed just for the sake of enjoyment. However, this movie can also be used as a tool to discuss how children view their identity in terms of their family of origin versus their identity as a foster youth in your family. Children can also respond to how they might feel about going home or moving to another placement, especially if they (like Jessi) have felt displaced before coming to your home.

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**\*\* Spoilers Could Be Ahead \*\***

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## HOW IS THIS RELEVANT TO ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE?

The first *Toy Story* installment features Buzz's internal conflict with returning to Space Command and accepting his identity as Andy's toy. Throughout the film Woody was firm in his identity as not just a toy but Andy's toy. In this film, though Woody did not choose to be taken from Andy, Woody is confronted with a heart-wrenching choice. Return to Andy, knowing that his love and care may not last forever, or remain with his on-screen companions from Woody's Roundup to be enjoyed forever by many children for years to come. At first, the choice is obvious for Woody: Return to Andy and the other toys! But, over time and manipulation on a seemingly well-intentioned toy's part, Woody begins to struggle with knowing where (and with whom) he truly belongs.

Children in foster care always will long for knowledge of and closeness with their family of origin. It makes sense: the family of origin (no matter how short of time spent with them) compose a child's very first relationships. Families of origin often pass along traits unique to a birth family. Appearance, some degree of temperament, culture, and health history are all things that come from that birth family and will at some point or another be on a foster or adoptive child's mind. For caregivers, it is important to remember that an interest in family of origin is a chance to celebrate part of who that child is today. Ultimately, Woody did choose to reunify with his "found"



family of Andy and the toys and was able to integrate a part of his past (most of which he knew nothing of before the adventure) into his present to develop a wonderful future and tighter bonds with his fellow toys. This is exactly how a foster/adoptive parent can view this exploration without intimidation.

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## **DISCUSSION POINTS:**

- **Reunification**

The number one goal of foster care is often to return a child to a member of the family of origin, whether that be a parent, extended family member, or kinship placement. Woody's struggle with found family versus family of origin is a real struggle our foster children are challenged with regardless of how their court-ordered permanency plan reads. It's often hard for foster parents to love and let go after pouring out to our foster children, and though sometimes returning "home" for children is a celebrated step with a child and family team, it can also be hard on children to understand the transition.

- **Family of Origin Culture**

Even if a child does not remember their family of origin, children are naturally curious to learn about their biological family and to hold some connection to this. I have a friend who adopted a child as an infant that is of a different ethnicity from her own. Though her child has no memory of his family of origin, he is constantly looking for information about his ethnic background. My friend does a fantastic job of encouraging the learning journey and taking part, which both helps her child educationally and introspectively by validating his curiosity about his identity. Even if children seem to come from a similar background, their exploration is valid. If adults can be interested in all the trendy DNA tests, why would our children not be drawn to the same mysteries?

- **Foster Care Culture**

Children in foster care very much have their own culture. There is a myriad of terminology, resources, paperwork, relationships, and even memes that make up the unique culture! Our children have challenges unique to their peers that we as caregivers can take for granted if we are not sensitive to our children's perspectives. For example, when you were young did you have to ask an entire team (sometimes including a therapist) permission to attend a sleepover? While some policies are trying to remedy how intrusive foster care can be to normalcy (such as Tennessee passing Prudent Parenting), there are still nuances that are important to remember and acknowledge when working with children in foster and adoptive contexts.

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## CAUTIONARY POINTS:

- **Woody is Stolen**

It is important to remember that our children have gone through many challenges and experiences unique to a foster or adopted child. Sometimes we know pieces of information upon placement, but other times we find out about trauma triggers and problematic survival behaviors after building a relationship of trust and security with a child. Children who view their arrival into foster care or adoption as being “taken” or “stolen” may react negatively to watching Woody literally be stolen toward the beginning of the movie.

- **Unrealistic Expectations of Reunification**

Woody by the end of the film gets to live with his toy family, and Jessi and Bullseye also are added to the toy family. While it would be wonderful if foster children could hold on to all positive relationships after reunification or adoption, in most cases this is not possible. Seeing Woody getting to have the best of both his family of origin and found family may create an unrealistic expectation of reunification for especially young children.

- **Abandonment**

Let’s face it, even Tom Hanks reported crying watching Jessi’s story set to “When She Loved Me” by the queen of tearjerkers Sarah McLachlan. The scene as a whole is hard on even adults. Be prepared to discuss this scene with children regardless of age or foster/adoptive status. Feeling thrown away or left behind is never a positive feeling and can, again, be highly traumatic to children who have suffered immense loss through their experiences in foster care or adoption.

- **Al In General**

Honestly, Al gives me the creeps. He steals Woody, talks down to people, shoves the sweet elderly man who cleans up Woody, and overall is not a nice guy. Children may not respond well to how Al treats others.

- **Stinky Pete Character is Terrifying**

Stinky Pete is very manipulative and emotionally abusive to his fellow toys. He starts out seeming nice and endearing, but as the film progresses, his anger and insults become more intense. Again, we do not often know up front everything a child has

experienced, so Stinky Pete may be a hard character to watch.

# Discussion Questions

**1. Who was your favorite character in the movie? Why?**

Caregiver Note: This is a nice ice-breaker question to get children talking. Think of how therapy goes for children of most ages... They may be willing to talk about fun things first but it takes time to build rapport to discuss deeper issues. Starting light will help connections form to more easily and organically discuss things that may not be as easy. Ask open-ended questions here to keep conversation flowing. Feel free to share your favorite character and why to help model participation and help make connections.

**2. Who did you most relate to in the movie? Why?**

Caregiver Note: This question may be harder for younger children and may need an explanation of what that means. Work in a character or scene you identify with as an example. If there is more than one character, that's even better as children very seldom experience just one reaction at a time. Maybe Woody's longing to return to Andy is relatable after family visits, but Jessi's hurt and wish for distance from the pain can be relatable after a long day in court.

**3. Why was Woody drawn to the toys from Woody's Roundup?**

Caregiver Note: Children often long for a connection to their culture of origin. This is a good question to facilitate discussions and connect introspection and communication.

**4. Do you think about your biological family/family of origin and what sorts of traits or stories you share?**

Caregiver Note: This doesn't have to be necessarily a separate question but an extension of #3. Feel free to word the question in a way that is comfortable to your children. This is a good chance to really listen to your children and let them explain where they are emotionally with interest and exploration. This can be a great way too to discover your child's budding interests and hobbies. Music, food, celebrations, art, dance, and sports are but a few of many avenues a child can explore culture and history with a dash of fun!

**5. Activity: Write A Stage Play of Your Favorite Holiday.**

Caregiver Note: How a child celebrates a holiday can be a great look at several different pieces of culture. Religion, dance, food, relative relationships, communication, music, and many more facets can be observed through this. By having a child write up a one-scene play, assign roles, and have the family act it out, this can be compared and contrasted to how your family handles a similar holiday and open up a lot of discussion. Make note of pieces that may be especially important for your child as these can help with navigating homesickness during the holidays.

**6. Why was Jessi afraid of the dark and going back into the box?**

Caregiver Note: Children often struggle to connect their feelings to their behaviors. A child may or may not understand that they throw fits every night at bedtime because they are afraid of the dark. The same child may not connect that something that happened in the dark to them has connected darkness to pain or fear. And, of course, if that child is unable to make those connections, they are certainly not going to be able to communicate that fear. This question can help children connect feelings to behaviors. Feel free to explore times where children were afraid like Jessi with mindfulness to the child's comfort level with the conversation.

**7. Have you ever felt especially happy like Jessi when she was with Emily? Have you felt especially sad like when Jessi saw Emily grow up and leave?**

Caregiver Note: This may be a hard question for children. Let them set the pace for this question set. If they are not comfortable answering this one completely, it's okay. Let them know that you are there for them and will be available to them if they ever want to talk about times that they felt especially sad or angry. Grief is a multi-faceted experience, and children may experience the stages of grief many times before reaching acceptance. And each new loss could bring about old feelings of grief as well. It is important for foster and adoptive parents to be experts in loss and grief and to help meet children in their grief and pain and help them learn to walk through it. This is very challenging for caregivers as we do not wish to see children in pain, but quietly walking with them through the hard stuff will help them to live more healthy and emotionally balanced lives in the future.

**8. Woody and Jessi both came from Woody's Roundup but both had very different experiences with belonging to a child. They also trusted children as a whole very differently. How can that be?**

Caregiver Note: While there are a lot of similarities between cultural groups (including the foster care culture), it's important to always remember that every child is unique and will respond to stress and trauma differently. Woody, through his relationship with Andy and the other toys, has come to believe that his role as being Andy's toy is more important than Woody's potential to be displayed for many toys. Jessi has experienced immense pain and loss through her abandonment by Emily and at first believes the best option for her wellbeing is to not develop closeness with any more children, which is why she is drawn to being protected behind a barrier with toys she feels are like her. Through introspection and communicating with one another, both toys are challenged in their initial beliefs and come to understand one another better and move forward emotionally. This is a great lesson for children that it's okay to think about such things and to see how positive communication can help them learn about themselves as well as those around them.

**9. Activity: Life Book – Make a scrapbook of months or years of the time your child has spent in your home. For children who may reunify with their family of origin,**

**this is a great way to document the times they have spent with your family.**

Caregiver Note: While making the scrapbook, take an opportunity to talk about how your child has grown. This is not just limited to height and weight! Talk about how they handled challenges and fears when you first met them and compare how they address challenges now. Talk about their perspectives and see how much those have changed. Even very small children can compare and contrast some differences.

**10. How can we help make your time in foster care more comfortable? Less like a “foster/adoptive kid” and more like a “kid?”**

Caregiver Note: Again, this wording can change depending on the age group you are working with, but this is a great chance to discuss with your children ways to promote normalcy. Of course, always follow the advice and policies of your therapeutic teams (where applicable) but explore with your team and child events that can promote normalcy in childhood. Familiarize yourself with agency policies that relate to this. Can your caseworkers visit the child at school/clubs less? Can your caseworkers dress in street clothes when they do have to meet with the child in a public space? Are there any areas that do not require a Child & Family Team meeting (i.e. – sleepovers, parties, youth group/club trips, cell phone ownership, jobs such as babysitting, going out with friends, etc.)?

**11. Activity: Andy’s Coming! This is a nice game that is just plain fun for bonding and togetherness!**

Caregiver Note: Play this game similar to Red Light Green Light. Designate a person to be “Andy.” “Andy” will stand at one center side of the playing area facing away from the rest of the players who are “toys.” When “Andy” isn’t looking, players should tiptoe towards the finish line. “Andy” will start to slowly turn. When “Andy” turns any toy can yell “ANDY’S COMING!” so the “toys” can drop to the floor. When “Andy” turns back away, the toys can resume tiptoeing. The object of the game is to cross the finish line first without being caught by “Andy”.

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## About the Reviewer

Rachael B. Rathe is an East Tennessee native with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology with a Minor in Child & Family Studies from The University of Tennessee Knoxville. She has worked in mental health since 2013 and in foster care/adoptions for a private provider agency since 2014. Rachael was inspired to work in the field after working with children and teens on a volunteer basis 2008 - 2013. Rachael's ideal self-care day involves snuggling on a couch with her kitties (Tabitha, Fergus, and Rufus) while enjoying a good movie or book. She also enjoys galavanting around conventions concerning all things nerd and geekery.