



# Toy Story

Movie 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 backgrounds 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:**

Oh, the 90s! The decade of computer animation and innovation! Long before Disney bought Pixar outright (in 2006) studio collaborations such as 1995's Toy Story were highly anticipated and paved the way for many fan favorites we enjoy today. Throw in some fantastic vocal talents and a heartwarming soundtrack, and you have the perfect ingredients for a 90s blockbuster.

This movie can be easily enjoyed by almost all ages as indicated by the G rating due to the quick pace and colorful, slapstick humor for children and the endearing storyline and wordplay for teens and adults.

Foster/Adoptive families can benefit from this film, though foster care or adoption is not explicitly discussed. This movie features themes such as separation and reunification of a family-like unit, jealousy, identity, communicating needs, cultural awareness, and problem-solving.

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

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

While this movie does not directly reference foster care or a traditional adoptive family, this film does have several themes that do relate to the territory. The story revolves around toys coming to terms with feelings of abandonment, jealousy, comparison, separation anxiety, abuse, and grief. Many of our children can relate to feeling all of the above and struggle to self-regulate appropriately while working through these difficult events and emotions. This movie can be used as a tool to help facilitate discussions after family movie nights to help put big abstract feelings into words and pictures for children who may not be able to directly connect feelings of abandonment and jealousy to their behaviors. This can also be a beneficial tool in talking with children already in the home before, during, or after foster placements to check in and reaffirm that children already in the home are not going to be "replaced" by foster children. As the toys learn in the end, the more the merrier!

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## DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Feeling Discarded and Abandoned**

The children we interact with have felt thrown away, abandoned, and replaced. Children may relate to Buzz feeling “crash landed” on another planet and trying desperately to go home. Other children will relate to Woody feeling pushed aside by the shiny, cool, new housemate. Often our children will struggle with connecting their emotions to their behaviors, and this movie can allow them to see and explore these connections.

- **Problem Solving and Team Work**

Children, whether established as part of the household or new, are able to see that housemates can work through their differences and work as a team through hard situations, even if they are experiencing the same challenge differently. Children who have grown up in the system may not have had consistent examples of cooperation and compromise. Biological children may struggle with having different expectations from their new foster siblings and having to split time and attention more than they are accustomed.

- **Communicating Feelings and Needs**

This movie can also be used to help support biological children in appropriately expressing their feelings concerning new housemates and helping welcome foster/adoptive children. Biological children may not have much of a reference point for how coming into a new home/culture can feel, just as Buzz experiences culture shock when leaving “Star Command” to reside in Andy’s Room.

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## CAUTIONARY POINTS:

- **Discussions of Being Thrown Away/Abandoned/Replaced**

Children who enter the child welfare system or adoption often deal with several emotions (i.e. - sadness, grief, anger, denial, etc.) that connect to feelings of being abandoned by their primary caregivers. These themes may help children by giving them someone to relate to. However, every child responds to trauma from abandonment or removal differently, so a caregiver should be aware of such themes.

- **Abuse and Mutilation of Toys**

Though the characters who are physically harmed are toys, they are given life and meaning in the film and appear lifelike. Some children may react negatively to the “living” toys being dismembered, blown up, and spoken to aggressively. Most of these scenes

involve a human boy named Sid.

- **Mild Adult Humor**

Some of the jokes may go right over most children's heads. However, some children may have been exposed to inappropriate subject matter, and this may invoke inappropriate behavior. (i.e. – Mr. Potato Head removing lips and moving them toward rear end to communicate “kissing butt,” “lazer envy,” etc.)

- **Characters Pointing Laser at Toy's Heads**

Throughout the movie, Buzz is shown pointing a laser-beam in a weapon-like manner at various toys' heads. This resembles a laser sight on a gun. This could be triggering for children who have been exposed to gun violence.

- **Implied Drinking/Drunken Behavior**

Children could be triggered by Buzz's behavior in the tea party scene. Some children come from homes with substance abuse exposure or domestic violence that occurs alongside substance abuse. Though the drink is specifically referred to as “tea,” Buzz slurs speech and both he and Woody speak as if he is drinking an alcoholic beverage.

## Discussion Questions

1. **Have you ever felt like Woody and felt like another toy was taking your place? What did that feel like? What did you do?**

Caregiver Note: This is a good question to open the floor to discussion. This question will also encourage introspection, meaning that children connect feelings to behaviors. This is a valuable skill that, if practiced often, will serve them well as they grow and form relationships with others.

2. **Have you ever felt like Buzz, crash landed onto another world with no sign of familiarity? How did you feel versus how you acted?**

Caregiver Note: This is a good question to help connect feelings to behaviors. Remember, children from the child welfare system develop survival behaviors in their original cultures and may not realize why they do specific things (i.e. what need the behavior was formed to address) or why some behaviors that achieved needs before don't work in your home.

3. **Why was it so important for Woody to return to Andy as his toy? Why was it important for Buzz to return to Star Command before learning he's a toy?**

Caregiver Note: It's interesting to see how children can pick up on these things. For both established children and foster children, they may point out themes of family and returning to a place they felt they belong.

4. **What do you think would have been a more cooperative/considerate way for Woody to discuss with Buzz their roles as toys? Or for Woody to express to the toys how he felt?**

Caregiver Note: For both biological children and foster/adoptive children, this will help foster discussion on using appropriate means to communicate needs. This would be a good avenue to discuss using "I-statements," Active Listening, and "I Think.../I Feel..." to aid in problem solving through effective communication. I used a similar avenue for my child when she was about seven and was amazed how quickly she caught on between discussing these terms and modeling these myself when conflict occurred in the house. She's nearly fourteen now, and I've overheard her coaching her peers with this as well!

5. **How do you think the other toys could have supported Woody to help the transition? How could Woody have better handled Buzz's learning he is a toy?**

Caregiver Note: This seems like a stretch of a question, but if we seriously consider how Woody reacted to all the changes, we will notice how a few toys egged on Woody from the moment Buzz's rocket-box crash landed on Andy's bed. Mr. Potato Head and Hamm both appear to love to take jabs at Woody and feed into his insecurity. This can be a great discussion on how humor can be good and healing but also be used to tear others down. Woody also tended to lash out at Buzz with passive-aggressive (or just

aggressive) humor as well and mocked Buzz for his belief that he'd be going home to Star Command. In both of these questions, children can discuss and practice reading social emotions and the power of words.

6. **Do you know someone like Sid? How did his choices affect the family members and toys around him? Has there been a time where you felt like Sid?**

Caregiver Note: Though Sid is easily portrayed as the villain, some of our children may relate to trouble-making Sid. Children often develop survival behaviors that make sense in the contexts the behavior was formed but make no sense outside of that context. We don't see much background for Sid in the film, but there are a few hints throughout the film that Sid does not get much attention or supervision from his parents. We see him acting out for attention in picking at his sister and how he mutilates toys. Sid also appears to have a lot of focus on garnering control. Watch how he "interrogates" Woody in his room, and you'll slowly notice book guides on interrogation and other items related to "bad cop" type instruction. This can be a good discussion on how Sid's behaviors, while very maladaptive to social functioning, do not mean he is doomed to be a "bad kid." Sid may have a caring adult in his life who can help him learn better ways to communicate his needs (like Woody and Buzz are learning) and control his actions to help him reach goals that are acceptable to the rules of society.

7. **What did Woody do well when talking Buzz through Christmas morning?**

Caregiver Note: This will not only end the discussion on a positive note but will also help biological children to open discussion about welcoming a child in the home. This can also help established foster/adoptive youth turn thoughts towards welcoming a newcomer as Buzz is also feeling some fear of change and rejection here as well.

8. **How can a foster family (both children and adults) help foster children adjust when "There is no sign of intelligent life anywhere?"**

Caregiver Note: Encourage your family to think of different ways to make a new child comfortable in the home the first few weeks. This would be a great time to discuss how children from foster care may not conduct themselves the way your household may and to be prepared for differences. If you have taken a cultural awareness class in your pre-approval or post-approval classes, some notes from those may be helpful. Remember, culture can refer to a variety of factors and not just race/ethnicity.

9. **ACTIVITY: Role play how Woody and the toys could have better welcomed Buzz. Then, role play how Woody and the other toys could have better communicated about Woody's feelings and supported one another.**

Caregiver Note: Children of all ages learn best by doing. Even the smallest children are better able to remember what they have learned if they say it, sing it, and act it out themselves. Make it fun! Dress up or make a cowboy hat and space helmet as a family so that different family members can take turns. Make sure to applaud and praise the

children for strengths in their "performances."

10. **ACTIVITY: Make a "Welcome List" as a family.**

Caregiver Note: As a family, create a to-do list for welcoming a new child into the home. Have your children contribute ideas and have items for every member of the family. Again, make it fun with lots of colors and pictures to decorate. These can include items like helping the child unpack, giving a house tour, showing where the "best" toys are, having the foster child's bed space ready and clean, introductions with family pets, etc. Keep this with your paperwork and refer to it during family meetings before and after placements so as a family you can determine what helped more or if something should be added. Children love to contribute and this is a great way to give direction for that desire to help.

## 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.