



Little Blue Truck

Book Review



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Contents

Section I

Why are we using books, movies, and video games to help children?.....03

Section II

This Only Works TOGETHER - Parent & Child.....04

Section III

How To Use Our Discussion Packets.....05

Comprehensive Review.....07

Discussion Guide.....12

About the Reviewer.....14

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:

Little Blue Truck has become a staple in our home and not only for the intended age group of birth – 3 years. Given the prevalence of social-emotional development delays among foster and adoptive youth, children up to the age of 14 in our family have been able to express a variety of feelings while unpacking complex topics thanks to this thoughtfully illustrated book. This brief yet powerful story can help your child(ren) explore communication skills, social perceptions, the value of friendship, and more.

With the assistance of a current foster teen, the following bonding guide and discussion questions have been derived from real life conversations that *Little Blue Truck* has elicited in our own home among children from preschool age through 8th grade.

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

How Is This Relevant To Adoption & Foster Care?

Foster and adoptive youth encounter many social challenges and barriers due to ever changing life circumstances and the impacts of trauma, such as difficulty forming relationships with peers. As a result, most of these youth struggle to interact with others in a healthy or age appropriate manner, let alone develop meaningful attachments. Often times the opportunities to create friendships are lacking in their lives or those opportunities are disrupted. Even more disheartening is the fact that nurturing and maintaining permanent connections with peers is not typically considered when a child experiences a change of schools or communities. This can lead to an array of dilemmas for a child and mars the significance of camaraderie and healthy relationships in their perspective. It is imperative to a child's future success that they learn how to build (and be encouraged to maintain) healthy friendships, especially ones that will likely comprise their support network throughout life.

CAUTIONARY POINTS:

- **Very mild rudeness**
There are two almost unnoticeable moments when the storybook characters are less

than courteous towards each other however, if you are caring for a highly sensitive child (especially one affected by such behavior) then it is worth noting that:

1. the Dump recklessly rushes past Little Blue Truck and his farmyard friends, inadvertently running a couple of them off the road
2. moments later the farm animals ignore the Dump in reaction to his previously inconsiderate behavior and even by the end of the story show no interest in the Dump or relationship repair

- **Unsafe Driving / Disabled Vehicle**

The Dump finds himself rolling into mud and getting stuck as a result of his unsafe driving, particularly for the weather conditions. For children who have been passengers of unsafe drivers or who have experienced a vehicle accident, this scenario may trigger frightening memories.

- **Neglect trigger**

This concept may very well be the most likely needed caution point as the majority of foster and adoptive youth have experienced neglect.

1. As Dump rushed past Blue and friends he comments that he has “big important things to do” and doesn’t have “time to pass the day with every duck along the way!” These remarks can be hurtful to any child who has had caregivers whom were habitually indifferent towards the child’s attempts at connection with such dismissive replies as “I have other things to do” or “I don’t have time, I’m busy.”
2. When the Dump cries for help after becoming stuck “nobody heard (or nobody cared).” Again, for children whose needs have largely gone unmet to hear that nobody cared about the Dump could be dejecting for them. Furthermore, the correlation that no one cared because of his socially inept behavior may trigger negative connotations or beliefs about themselves and perpetuate the misconception that to be deserving of love bespeaks decorum.

- **Momentary distress**

Once Little Blue Truck realizes that he too is “stuck tight” he begins crying for help, beeping his horn, and yelling “I’m stuck!” These couple of lines can read intensely and evoke feelings of worry or anxiety in your child(ren) if you are an animated reader.

Discussion Points:

- **Communication Skills and Social Perception**

“Trauma compromises our ability to engage with others by replacing patterns of connection with patterns of protection.” –Stephen Porges Often the ability to openly and honestly communicate is negatively impacted by trauma as a child’s main focus has become survival. In the interest of having their needs met while avoiding the potential of varying harmful responses from caregivers, traumatized children learn to communicate in ways that best gave them some control to navigate previously unhealthy

environments. As a result they can lack skills necessary for effective and healthy communication, a cornerstone of establishing and building healthy relationships. Given that many foster youth develop defensive communication patterns this can be a difficult subject to broach without causing children to feel blame or shame, making the opportunity to use storybook characters all the more efficacious. When our story begins, the reader witnesses Blue as he cordially makes his way through the countryside, kindly greeting all those whom he encounters. After a couple of pages that tacitly serve to upskill animal sound expertise for all those in need, we meet the Dump when he loudly comes barreling through, disrespectfully disrupting the peace and tranquility of the scene with little regard for those along his path. These characters are an easy comparison of communication style "do's and don'ts."

Moments later the Dump finds himself in a bind requiring assistance, providing the fortuity to explore social perceptions. One of our former placements (who was 11 years old at the time) became genuinely confused at this point in the story as he inquired why it was that the farmyard animals had no interest in aiding the Dump. Understanding the reasons why others perceive and react to us in the way that they do requires us to first understand how our words and actions make others feel and for us to then possess the ability to take responsibility for those words and actions. It is difficult for a child who cannot own and correlate their behavior with its social repercussions to grasp social perceptions and make changes conducive to developing healthy friendships.

- **Danger Cues & Safety Awareness**

As the story progresses there is a subtle change in the weather conditions, combined with the facts that the Dump is distracted by his likely inflated sense of urgency and that he is driving a bit too fast for the winding road, the results are an accident that was waiting to happen. It may seem counter intuitive that children who operate in a constant state of hyper-vigilance experience an inability to recognize and respond to danger cues but stress inhibits the capacity to be fully cognizant of one's environment. So while traumatized children are ever searching for signs of the dangers that are familiar to them, they are inattentive to general safety awareness resulting in mishaps and precarious situations. An underdeveloped sense of cause and effect can compound the challenge of maintaining safety in the home, or in various public settings. This is a topic area that we have found few substantial resources for addressing in our time as foster parents, which makes the chance that this story inadvertently gives to have a teaching moment quite helpful!

- **Self-Worth**

The first time I read *Little Blue Truck* to our toddler and Toad came to the rescue of his struggling friends, I was impressed. It was in that unexpected moment that I declared this was officially a book of substance and worth adding to our home library. Here was this character who was just one of many other toads, who differed from the other characters by not fitting the typical farmyard animal mold, and who greatly varied in size. This character who was all but lost in the repertoire of other animals as we became

engrossed in the storyline. Here he was, apparently out of nowhere, **BEING ENOUGH**. It sent the message that even the seemingly least among us have significance and are of importance to us all. "Sometimes it is the people no one imagines anything of who do the things that no one can imagine." - Alan Turing (The Imitation Game) As uplifting as self-worth can be, a lack of such can be debilitating both socially and emotionally. Much like an insecure youth who flaunts exaggerated stories of non-existent material possessions and connections to fame or fortune in hopes that others will see value in them, the Dump's self-worth is perceivably defined by accomplishment and assets. A lack of self-worth intensifies poor relationship building skills as youth often times are perceived by their peers as standoffish, peculiar, or "fake" depending upon how their insecurities and stress response styles influence their reaction to others in social situations. When interactions end up feeling awkward or go awry youth may engage in negative self talk such as, "This always happens to me, there's no point in trying!" which perpetuates a lack of self-worth. As illustrated by the final interaction between Blue and the Dump, it is not a far stretch to interpret that Blue's benevolent gesture showed the Dump he is worthy of someone's friendship and capable of relationship repair despite his mistakes. This is an indispensable lesson which will need replicated for foster and adoptive youth at every auspicious moment that arises.

- **Asking for Help**

A lack of self-worth can also contribute to a foster youth's hesitation to seek assistance, for even the smallest of needs, being that they do not feel as if they deserve the courtesy of being shown a kindness, at least not one given free of expectations or consequences. Asking for help also requires a child to expose vulnerabilities and must contend with fear of rejection, angering a caregiver, or the fact that past needs have gone unmet. Additionally, when you have already lost so much control over your own life it can make asking for help difficult. Even a well-adjusted adult will not always feel in control asking for help let alone a traumatized child.

- **Strengths of Character**

Blue embodies many stereotypically positive qualities that we strive to instill in our children every day. He is kind, respectful, and courteous. These are easy go-to examples for young children but for older children, the quality that has held the most significance when discussing this book in our home is, above all else, the fact that Blue is magnanimous. "A magnanimous person has a generous spirit. Magnanimous comes from Latin magnus 'great' and animus 'soul,' so it literally describes someone who is big-hearted. A person can show that over-sized spirit by being noble or brave, or by easily forgiving others and not showing resentment." Highlighting Blue's altruistic personality has been useful in breaking down barriers with placements who are skeptical of a caregiver's intentions as they grapple with believing in the integrity of others while questioning such notions as:

- "How can you think that the social worker cares?"

- "Why would you want me in your home?"
- "How can you still care about me after what I did?"
- "Why do you talk nice about my family?"
- "How would you know that my therapist wants to help me?"

The answer to these questions, and more, is the same: while we are all far from perfect, good people do exist in the world. The ability to believe in the genuine kindness of others is a powerful element when developing trust, without which there is little hope for sustainable healthy relationships. The Dump's character strengths are easy to overlook though are possibly the most important. Even though he initially comes off as unpleasant, the dump is able to demonstrate humility, appreciation, the ability to learn from his mistakes, and the willingness to change. Remember that this discussion point is an opportunity to remind your child(ren) of their positive qualities and attributes that shine through regardless of any challenges or perceived flaws!

- **The Value of Friendship**

It is difficult for a child who has been forced to become self-reliant for survival to trust in others or see the value of healthy relationships. Foster youth are far too often shuffled around and then dismissed when self-advocating to maintain friendships (or even relationships with siblings and prior caregivers). Encouraging foster and adoptive youth to utilize their treatment team as their support network, which is commonly done in my years of experience as both residential placement staff and as a foster parent, is not practical and ultimately detrimental to their best interests. The likelihood that any member of that team will be present as an informal support in their life 20 years later is improbable and leads to youth aging out of the foster care system with no permanent connections or reliable support network in life. Relationships and connection are vital to the healing process, as our current foster teen states: "if you have a bonding relationship with some else then you can talk to them and they can help you get through it."

Discussion Questions

Communication Skills and Perceptions

1. How does Little Blue Truck LOOK friendly to others?
2. How does Little Blue Truck SOUND friendly to others?
3. How did the farm animals react to the way that Little Blue Truck looks and sounds?
4. What about the Dump, does he look or sound friendly? Why not?
5. How do you think Blue felt when Dump loudly rushed past him to the “big important things” he had to do?
6. How do the farm animals react to the way that Dump looks and sounds? Did you notice their facial expressions or body language?
7. How could the Dump have communicated differently?
8. What type of friend might Blue and the animals interpret the Dump to be based on this interaction?
9. Do you think it is fair to form an opinion about someone based on a first impression?
10. How could the Dump improve negative perceptions of himself? (This is the question that can lead to discussions of dispelling negative self-talk and engaging in relationship repair!)

Danger Cues and Safety Awareness

1. Did you notice at what point in the story it began to rain? (Most adults don’t even notice this detail and it can be fun to go back and look together.)
2. Why should the Dump have used more caution when driving in rainy, wet weather? Or on a curvy road?
3. Do you think that whatever the Dump needed to do was an emergency, or could he have gone at a steadier pace?

Self-Worth

1. What is it about Toad that makes him an admirable role model? (ANSWER: He believes in himself!)
2. Why do you think it seems to matter so much to the Dump that he has “big important wheels” and “big important things to do”?
3. Was it the things he had to do, the stuff that he possessed, or the relationships that were built that really mattered in the end for the Dump?

Asking for Help

1. How do you think the Dump may have felt needing to ask for help?
2. Why do you think that Blue may have felt more confident than the Dump when asking for help?
3. How do you think it made the Dump feel when he saw Little Blue Truck coming to help him?

Strengths of Character

1. What are some of Little Blue Truck's positive character traits? What are some of your own?
2. Why do you think Blue helped the Dump when he got stuck, even though nobody else did?
3. What character strengths does the Dump demonstrate?

The Value of Friendship

1. Why do you think that it is important to have at least "a few good friends" in life?
2. Do you agree that it's "better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all"?
3. How can the friendships you develop now impact your life once you become an adult?

About the Reviewer

Felecia Neil

Felecia Neil is a foster care alumni who has 12 years of experience working within residential settings and has served as a foster parent for over 5 years. She is currently a much needed asset to the Transfiguring Adoption team where she reviews books and helps to assure the organization considers the perspective of foster youth.