



Willoughbys

Movie Review

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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:

I'd seen a number of concerned reviews regarding *The Willoughby's*, the newest Netflix Original offering, so I went into it expecting there to be some trauma triggers. But even with that knowledge ahead of time, I was surprised by just how much concerning content there was, especially in the first 30 minutes of the movie (which I had to watch in 5-minute increments). The basic premise is that a group of siblings has 'bad parents' and decide they would be better off without them and send them on an extended vacation so they can take care of themselves instead. This premise is problematic as is, but it is quickly revealed that these parents aren't just 'bad' they are abusive, and the children hope they will die on vacation.

The entire movie has a satirical overtone which in my opinion actually makes it worse somehow—that this abuse is seen as humorous. It seems to be attempting to capitalize on the success of works like *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, using a detached narrator (in this case, a cat) to tell a 'tragic story' that they advise you 'not to watch'. However, it seems to lack the charm and redeeming qualities of other stories in this genre and the storyline, while it has potential, is poorly executed. Things improve some in the second act, and there are some heartfelt moments, but they are few and far between and much less memorable than the problematic scenes.

While the targeted age range of the film seems to be upper elementary and middle school aged children, we would recommend only watching with older children or those who have processed their trauma. There are many themes and situations that would lend themselves to good discussions about foster care and adoption, but the way they are presented are likely to cause more harm than good for children who have experienced trauma. If you are going to watch it, it is recommended to do so together with your children and perhaps plan to take breaks to discuss some of the more traumatic events.

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

How Is This Relevant To Adoption & Foster Care?

This movie directly addresses foster care and adoption, though it doesn't use those specific words to describe it. Tim, Jane, and Barnaby(s) are the four unfortunate children to two parents who are described as 'selfish' (read- abusive). They frequently neglect their children – denying them food and love and even locking them in a cold basement when they misbehave. These

acts are shown in a satirical manner but for our children who have likely experienced similar things at the hands of their caregivers it isn't funny at all.

The children find an abandoned baby outside their doorstep at one point and decide to find her a home- which they are able to do by dropping her off on another doorstep- one where the resident decides to take her in. After seeing this, the children decide they would be better off if they were 'orphans' like the baby they found so they decide to send their parents away and take care of themselves. They plan a travel itinerary of dangerous locations and activities hoping that one of them will kill the parents so they will truly become orphans.

Enter: Nanny. For the first time, we see someone in a caregiving role who truly seems to actually care for the children. The younger children quickly warm up to her- however Tim, the eldest, is mistrustful and assumes she is in league with his parents and means to cause them harm. These feelings mirror what many children who come into care experience. Because they have never had a positive caregiving relationship, they can be mistrustful of all adults and take the actions and words of a caring adult and misunderstand them because of this. Tim even goes as far as to call 'orphan services' to report her and as a result the children are taken away and placed in separate homes. Again, while the younger children seem to accept and adapt to their new caregivers, Tim continues to run away, even when placed with kind and well-meaning families- because he doesn't trust them to care for him and is eventually placed in a juvenile detention facility. Foster and adoptive children will likely relate to Tim's struggles here as well.

The siblings eventually decide that it would be better to go back to living with their abusive parents than to be separated and seek their caregivers out. Many children who get split up in foster care or adoption may feel this way at first too- that they would rather go back to their abusive home than to be separated from their families or to face the unknowns of their new situation.

The movie does end on a 'happy' note- the biological parents end up being killed in an accident and the children are adopted by Nanny (who we find out used to be in care herself). So throughout the movie we see what may mirror an adopted child's journey- they start out with abusive caregivers, end up in the care of a good 'foster' caregiver but aren't able to trust that relationship, end up split up by a child protection service agency and eventually find their way into a loving adoptive home.

Discussion Points:

- **Trusting Caregivers**

Tim is extremely distrustful of all adults throughout the movie. This is very common among children who have experienced abuse or neglect by a caregiver. Because the adults who are supposed to care for them don't, that makes it hard for a child to trust that

any adult has their best interests at heart. If all they know is abuse/neglect they have no frame of reference as to what a healthy caregiving relationship is supposed to look like. They may take words or actions of a caregiver that are meant with good intentions the wrong way, because in their experience adults are not to be trusted. The biggest example of this in the movie is when Nanny comes to care for the Willoughby children while their parents are gone. She is kind and friendly towards them and seems to genuinely care about their well-being (and concerned about how their parents have treated them). However, Tim seems to take everything she says and does as proof that she's dangerous and in league with his parents and wants to hurt him and his siblings. He even goes as far as to call child protective services to report her. Use these opportunities to talk to your children about how and when to trust adults and how to determine who should be trusted. You can discuss why Tim felt the way he did and what things he could look for in the future to help him figure out if an adult has his best interests at heart and use that as a way to start a conversation with your children about the people in their life they trust and how they figured that out.

- **Resilience**

After showing all the ways the children are abused/neglected by their caregivers the narrator states that, "against all odds, the Willoughby children still had determination, imagination, and hope." This can be a great opportunity to talk about resilience and the ways in which these children are able to be kind, caring, and intelligent people despite all they have been through (which may then facilitate discussion about your children's own strengths and the ways that they are resilient). Anyone who has survived trauma has a great deal of resilience. This is that deep inner personality traits and strengths children have that allow them to get through difficult situations. Resilience is also improved by protective factors- positive experiences and relationships they may have the help to balance out the trauma. This may be in the form of strong sibling relationships (as is the case with the Willoughby children), relationships with teachers or friends, summers spent with a loving caregiver such as a grandparent, religious beliefs, hobbies etc. Talk about the personality traits and protective factors the Willoughbys have, as well as those that your own children have and how these things help them get through difficult times.

- **The Foster Care/Adoption Journey**

While the movie has many triggers and problematic portrayals of themes and situations, it does a fairly good job of following a trajectory of the experience children may have with coming into care. We see children in an abusive home who experience being placed into temporary foster care with a positive caregiver, the process of learning to trust that caregiver, being removed from that care and separated from siblings, attempted reunification with their biological parents and then finally adoption. This can be a great means to launch a discussion about your child's own journey and experience with foster care and adoption and how they got to where they are not and the various steps along the way. We also see several other examples of characters experiencing different trajectories such as Ruth being adopted fairly quickly as a baby and Nanny aging out of

care without ever achieving permanency. Every journey is different, and this can be a great way to discuss what theirs looked like and/or what they hope or worry about for the future if they are still in care.

Cautionary Points:

- **Abuse and Neglect from Primary Caregivers**

At the very start of the movie we are told that Mom and Dad are very loving people and see them engaging in acts of love towards one another. However as soon as they have a baby (Tim), Dad takes it out into the hallway and leaves him there alone saying, “If you need love, I beg of you, find it elsewhere,” and the narrator tells us, “His loving parents had no love left over for Tim.” Despite this, we see them have three other children, none of whom they appear to care for. We see images of the parents eating an extravagant dinner while the children huddle in the kitchen hoping for scraps. The parents explain things as “we eat today’s food; you eat yesterday’s food” and seem appalled when Tim asks if they could have something to eat. The youngest twins share one sweater between them. It is very clear that their basic needs of food/shelter/safety are not being met.

Everything the children do or say is seen as an annoyance and inconvenience to the parents. They complain that the children are ‘always wanting’ and that they bother them with ‘childish needs’. The parents almost never call the children by name and say things like ‘that girl’ or ‘the creepy one’ in reference to them. And when the children ‘misbehave’ (such as asking for food) they are routinely punished by being locked in The Coal Bin (a dark and dirty basement area). At one point we even see the father lock them all out of the house at night as ‘punishment’.

- **Asking for Help Shown Negatively**

When the children are hungry and watching their parents eat dinner while they are not given any themselves, Jane tells her brother they need to find a way to eat and his response is that “I know we’re hungry, but Willoughbys do NOT beg for food.” In this case, he is trying to protect his siblings and feels that asking for food or other needs would make their parents angry and might lead to an abusive outburst. We see this pattern throughout the movie where Tim never wants to ask anyone for help and instead figure things out himself. This can be a common behavior with children from trauma, as in their experience adults cannot be trusted to actually help. Because the Willoughby children do often succeed at their endeavors without adult help, it may be a point to keep an eye on with your children if they have this tendency as it shows this in a somewhat positive light.

- **Revenge/Plotting to Hurt Others**

At one point the children get fed up with their treatment and decide they would be better off without their parents. They come up with a plan to send their parents on a trip to various dangerous locations around the world with the hopes that their parents will die. During this scene we hear Tim describe the various dangers and how harm might befall them with no real concern for their welfare. For some children who have experienced abuse they may harbor negative and potentially violent feelings towards those caregivers and this plot point in the movie may send the message to them that hoping for harm to befall others is acceptable.

- **Negative Language to Refer to Children in Care**

The movie uses the term 'orphan' with extreme frequency- they use it when referencing Baby Ruth, calling her 'the orphan' (and in one instance 'the beast'). They also talk about wanting to be orphans or how they aren't 'real orphans' since their parents are alive. This word tends to have pretty negative connotations these days and may be upsetting for children who are in care or adopted.

- **Moments of Mild Peril/Cartoon Violence**

When baby Ruth is brought into the home there is a scene where she gets loose and causes havoc in the living room- including a moment where she seems to have been flung into the fireplace. However, she reappears unscathed a moment later. Tim and Jane design a catapult to get rid of Nanny and instead Tim gets launched through an open window into the air. He is also, however, unharmed. The parents experience several dangerous scenarios on their 'vacation' which almost end in peril, but the parents always manage to escape it. There is also a scene where the children booby-trap their house to keep potential buyers from wanting to live there. All of this is portrayed in a cartoonish way and with very little real fear that bad things will actually happen but could be upsetting or scary to some children.

- **Risk-Taking Behaviors**

The Willoughby children frequently engage in risky activities during the movie- there is a scene where they walk through traffic without looking, the breakthrough a fence with a 'no-trespassing' sign and fly a homemade dirigible through the sky. As with the moments of violence, these are all written off with a humorous tone and the children never seem to be in any real danger from these activities. However, many children with traumatic pasts tend to engage in risk-taking behaviors. They often didn't have caregivers to tell them not to, or they never experienced safety at home, so they have a lessened understanding of the dangers of these activities. Seeing characters in a movie engage in these behaviors may send a message to them that it's okay to do such things.

- **Abandonment/Rejection of Children**

Aside from the abuse and neglect by the parents to the Willoughby children throughout the film, there are several examples of clear rejection and abandonment as well. The

children find Baby Ruth in a metal cage dropped by their garden gate and the movie never addresses where she came from or what happened to her before then. When Baby Ruth is brought to the parents they react with disgust and anger and insist the children get rid of her. The children do this by dropping her off at the doorstep of a candy factory with a stranger. The Candy Man ends up deciding to keep her, but he discusses that his initial thought was to call Orphan Services and have them come get her. We learn that Nanny was an orphan as a child, and we are told “we tried to find her a home, but no one wanted her.” Finally, towards the end of the movie the children seek out their parents on a mountain and beg for their parents to take them back and tell them it’s okay if they don’t love them, but they just want to have parents again. Their parents basically laugh in their faces and steal their dirigible leaving them stranded on the mountaintop. All of these situations may be difficult for foster and adoptive children to watch, as they have likely experienced these feelings of abandonment by a caregiver on some level. The part where we learn Nanny never found a forever home as a child may be especially sad for children who are in foster care and have worries that they will never get adopted or find permanency.

- **Negative Portrayal of Child/Social Services**

When we meet Candy Man, he says he considered calling ‘orphan services’ (CPS) to come and get Ruth. Nanny is appalled and tells him that “giving a baby to them is like locking a puppy in a cage”. After Tim reports Nanny to orphan services, they rush to the house to remove the children from her care. This is shown in a scary way with dozens of cars pulling up to the house and militant agents marching in and surrounding the place before seeming to almost arrest Nanny and then place the children in three cars to send them to separate homes. Later, after several instances of running away, Tim ends up put into a juvenile detention facility which appears to be a prison cell. While it is not actually done in this way in reality, for many children this depiction may be what it feels like to have been removed from their home. To them, they are being ‘attacked’ and taken away from their parents and siblings and it feels very scary and unsettling. For children who were removed from a home in the past, this scene in the movie is likely to be very upsetting and stressful for them to watch. Also, many children may have negative feelings towards social services agencies because they view them as the people who took them away from their family. Seeing them portrayed in a negative and scary way may exacerbate those feelings.

- **Siblings Separated**

When Orphan Services comes to remove the children from Nanny’s care, they separate them and send them each to different homes stating, “fighting children must be separated- for your own good”. So far throughout the movie the only thing the Willoughbys seem to have going for them is that they have each other. Then they lose the only caregiver who has ever shown them kindness which is a trauma in itself but instead of being able to process this together they are separated. In many foster care cases this ends up happening for a number of reasons but can be very hard on the kids.

For those who have siblings who are not in the same home as them, this scene and the montage of their new homes that follows is likely to be very upsetting to watch.

- **Parent Death**

At the end of the film we see Mom and Dad fall from the dirigible in an accident and they are presumed to be dead. It turns out that they survived the fall only to be eaten by a crocodile. We don't know whether they survive this mishap or not, but the children process the event as if their parents have died. Even though they treated the children poorly, it's still difficult to watch your caregivers die and the scene may elicit complicated feelings in children who have experienced similar situations.

Discussion Questions

1. **Many times, during the movie Tim states that they should or shouldn't do something because 'We are Willoughby's!'** He places significance on his last name and being a part of that family, despite being mistreated by them. **Why do you think being a Willoughby is so important to Tim?**

Caregiver Note: When the movie first starts the narrator tells us that the parents give nothing to Tim except for his name- this may be one of the primary reasons he is so attached to it. It's the one positive thing he got from his parents. We also see in several scenes Tim looking at family history through paintings or books and wishing he knew his extended family. Everyone longs to feel like they are a part of something, especially children who have been abused or neglected. For Tim, being a Willoughby is what gives him this feeling of belonging to something bigger- not just his parents who don't love him, but generations of other Willoughbys who maybe would have. Also, at the end of the day all children want their parents to be proud of them, and Tim's insistence on holding up The Willoughby Name, may be his way of trying to please his parents.

2. **The children each have very different ways of dealing with the mistreatment by their parents. Tim is focused on staying out of the way and doing whatever they say to try and keep them from getting angry. Jane on the other hand, will ask for the things she feels they need like food or clothes, and almost challenges her parents. The Barnabys run away or hide from their parents. Who do you think has the best strategy? What would you do in their place?**

Caregiver Note: Tim, Jane, and the Barnabys are all employing strategies that they think are helping themselves and their siblings. Tim tries to follow all the 'rules' and never 'bother' his parents because he has learned that is the best way not to get punished or make things worse. As the older sibling, he likely feels an additional pressure to protect his younger siblings and keep them from being hurt. And the best way he has found to do this is to essentially stay out of their way. For Jane, there may be less pressure and she feels like the best thing to do is to try and get what they need to survive by asking for it. So, she will tell the parents that they need food or clothes, or she will try to find a way to take it, even if that might be riskier. For the Barnabys they are the youngest and may feel like they have no control or power to fix the situation so the best thing for them to do is to run away or hide from their parents. None of these strategies are necessarily 'more right' than the others- they're all just different means of survival. Talking to your child about what they think about these choices will likely provide insight into their own personalities and perhaps their past experiences.

3. **When the children find a mysterious box in their yard it turns out to have an abandoned baby inside. How do the Willoughbys handle this? Do you think they did the right thing? What is a better way they might have handled the situation?**

Caregiver Note: It's interesting to see how the Willoughby children handle this situation-

Jane immediately wants to make baby Ruth a part of their family and take care of her, while Tim worries about how their parents will react. They ultimately decide (after the parents reject Ruth) to help find her a home and end up dropping her off on another doorstep where they think she'll be happy (a candy factory- which to a child who never has enough to eat, likely seems like the perfect place). Children may feel like they did the right thing and found her a loving home (which it turns out to be) but may be concerned that they did not make sure it was before leaving her. Some children may feel sad that she did not stay with the Willoughbys. If other foster siblings have been in and out of the home children may draw a parallel to this situation- they receive a new sibling but later that 'sibling' goes on to end up with another family either by returning to biological parents or being adopted. This question may prompt discussion about the feelings they have around the idea of siblings living in other homes. Their opinions on how the Willoughbys handled the situation may also give some insight into what they think caregivers need to provide and what makes somewhere a good home.

4. ACTIVITY: Dream Home Design

Caregiver Note: Going along with the last question about Ruth and the home the Willoughbys find for her at the candy factory, Have children create their own dream home- either by drawing/painting a picture or making a collage depending on their age level. This can go in many directions from the wacky and silly (all-you-can-eat candy, water slides, etc.) to serious such as wanting to have siblings, loving caregivers, a safe place to sleep. Talk with kids about what they chose to put in their dream home and why they chose these things. If children are newer to care, they may not have given much thought to what they would like their future living situation to be like because they have been so focused on just surviving and this can be a good way to facilitate discussion about what they feel is important in a caregiver/home.

5. When Nanny first arrives- do you think she's a good person or a bad person? What does she do or say to make you think this?

Caregiver Note: When we first see Nanny arrive, it can be confusing as to whether she really works for the parents and will go along with how they treat the Willoughby children. However, we quickly see he engage in behaviors that show she is indeed a caring and trustworthy adult. She makes a point to learn the children's names and praises their good qualities and the inventions they have made- taking an interest in them. Even when Tim acts out, Nanny responds in a gentle way, telling him she knows change is hard and that he must miss his parents. When the children misbehave, they expect to be punished like their parents would, but instead Nanny seems concerned when they explain to her about the coal bin and that they would be punished simply for needing 'food, clothes, love'. Talk with children about these different behaviors and statements and how they are signs that Nanny is a person who should be trusted. Children who have been abused or neglected by caregivers often have a difficult time with trust and may not trust their own judgement of others. So, it is important to have conversations about what signs to look for to decide if a person is trustworthy or not.

- 6. Nanny has been nothing but kind and gentle with the Willoughby children. However, we see Tim call 'orphan services' and claim she is not taking good care of them. Why do you think he did this? Would you have done the same thing in his shoes?**

Caregiver Note: As discussed above, there are many signs that Nanny is a good and trustworthy person. But because Tim has only ever experienced the abuse and neglect of his parents, he assumes all caregivers are the same. Because of this he misconstrues everything Nanny says or does and believes that she does not have his best interest at heart. Many children who come into care from abusive pasts may feel the same way. They have no faith that an adult could actually take good care of them or that they would want to. Because of this they may misunderstand things their new caregiver says or does, jumping to the worst possible explanation because that is all they know. It can be a long and difficult struggle for them to learn to trust their new caregivers. Talking about how and why Tim feels the way he does may be a way of learning how they feel about adults/caregivers and trust.

- 7. After Orphan Services shows up, they reveal that Nanny lost her parents when she was a child and never got adopted. How do you think this has affected her? Do the other characters view her differently when they find this out? How does Nanny respond to having this information about her past shared?**

Caregiver Note: This is a heart wrenching scene for a number of reasons. We see Tim finally started to trust Nanny and realize he made a terrible mistake in reporting her. Then it's revealed that Nanny never found a forever home, which is one of the fears that many children in care carry- that they will never find permanency and will age out of care and end up alone. This information about her past surprises the children but they ultimately find they can relate better to her knowing she's been through the same struggle they have. Nanny feels ashamed about this information and it seems to bring up some of her old feelings related to her trauma and she decides she's not good enough and runs away, leaving the Willoughby children in the care of orphan services. Our children often experience similar feelings of shame around being in foster care or being adopted and may have low self-esteem and feel like they don't deserve happiness. Talking about how this situation plays out with Nanny may help them realize their own similar feelings. It can also be a good time to discuss how their story is their own and it's up to them to decide how and when to share information about their past.

- 8. After Tim is put into foster care, he runs away multiple times even though the families are kind to him and treat him well. Why do you think he does this? Have you ever felt similarly? What might have been a better way for Tim to deal with his feelings?**

Caregiver Note: The narrator of the film tells us, "Tim resisted change, running away from well meaning families...he wanted his old life back- but it was gone." Even though the families he is placed with are kind to him and are likely a better environment than his abusive home life with his biological family, Tim is unhappy because he wants to be with

his siblings. When he runs away, we generally see him going back to his old house as if he can just run there and things will go back to the way they were. Even with out the separation from his siblings- change can often be scary. Even if that change is for the best. When children have been through trauma, they tend to expect the worst because that's all they know. So even if their home was abusive, in their mind it's safer to return to the situation they know and understand, rather than face the scary unknown of their new environment, because it might be worse. Children may not be able to answer the last part of the question- but this is an important time to discuss healthy coping skills, especially if children have engaged in running away or similar behavior in the past. Talk about how it was dangerous for Tim to run away and discuss possible other solutions, such as talking with caregivers or a counselor about these feelings and how to cope in a healthier and safer way.

9. After Tim is put into juvenile detention, Nanny comes to rescue Tim, but at first, he doesn't want to go with her. Why do you think that is? How does Nanny help him change his mind?

Caregiver Note: Tim feels like he made a mistake and because of it, he deserves to be punished and unhappy. Many children feel like this, especially children with a background of trauma. Many times, they blame themselves for the abuse or trauma they have suffered and feel like if they'd been better or done something differently, they could have stopped it, or could have kept their family together. This can cause lingering feelings of guilt and worthlessness, so every time they make a mistake, they feel like it means they are a bad person. Nanny explains this to Tim telling him that he did make a mistake but that she had too, and everyone does. This is important to reiterate to children- everyone makes mistakes but its what you do after that matters more than the mistake itself. Nanny ran away and left the Willoughbys, but she came back and helped them in the end and made up for it. Make sure they understand that when they make a mistake it doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with them or that they're any less deserving of your love.

10. Even after everything the parents have done to mistreat the kids, they decide to rescue their parents and help them anyway. Why do you think they do this? Would you have done the same thing in their shoes?

Caregiver Note: Despite the abuse and neglect, and the end of the day every child cares about their parents. When they show up to rescue them, they tell Mom and Dad, "You don't have to love us...just be our parents again." This may echo the sentiment that many children have towards their biological parents- that they're willing to make whatever concessions necessary and be treated badly if it means they get to be together. We as humans are inherently wired to love and want to be with our parents, even when they have harmed us. So, it can be difficult for many children who have been abused or neglected to accept that their parents did anything wrong or accept that they are safer and healthier in a new situation. These feelings, as well as the fact that the Willoughbys are just caring people explain why they went back for their parents. They

realized that even though their parents were not good people, they didn't deserve to die, and they felt bad for sending them away into harms way and tried to fix their error. Some children will agree with the choice the Willoughbys made, but others may have a hard time understanding why they would be nice to the people who hurt them. It's important to note that whatever feelings they have about this or their own situation are valid and that it's a complicated issue, but that viewing people, even those who have harmed us, with compassion rather than a desire for vengeance can be a healthier place.

About the Reviewer

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Jenn is a central Virginia native who received her BA in Psychology from the University of Virginia in 2012. Since then she has worked for a local mental health agency and the Department of Social Services in various capacities and has been involved in her community's efforts to create a Trauma Informed Network. Currently Jenn works in vocational rehab and mentors youth in foster care. When she isn't working, Jenn enjoys writing stories, anything and everything Harry Potter, and spending time with her niece and nephew.