



# LEGO Harry Potter COLLECTION

Video Game 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 identity as a character goes through a 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 he 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:

If you've never tried one of the LEGO video games- you're missing out. They have versions now for pretty much any popular franchise from *Star Wars*, to *Marvel*, to *Ninjago* to, of course, *Harry Potter*! In addition to re-telling these familiar stories in a hilarious fashion, the game controls are incredibly easy to pick up, even for a young child or non-gamer. The game also provides many opportunities for cooperative play and could be a fun one for you as parents to jump in on! The best part of this feature? Selecting 1-player or 2-player doesn't lock you into that mode for the entire game. The 2<sup>nd</sup> player can jump in or out as they please (when this happens player 1 just takes over control of all the LEGO characters in play at the time). This means that if a kiddo has started playing the game alone and you want to join them for a level or two, you can, without forcing them to start over.

Technically *LEGO Harry Potter* is made up of two different games, broken up into Years 1-4 and Years 5-7. However, as it's been re-released for new consoles like The Switch and PlayStation 4, they're bundled together as The *LEGO Harry Potter* Collection, containing both games. Because the games are so similar in gameplay and structure, this review covers both of them together. The game is rated 10+ but given the ease of play and limited violence (they're cartoon LEGO bricks, the worst that can happen is they break and are put back together) I'd say it's probably okay for a slightly younger crowd- especially if they've already read/watched *Harry Potter*, provided they're old enough to work a controller and utilize basic problem-solving skills. That said, however, I would say that the gameplay gets harder and the storyline slightly darker as the years progress so 1-4 might be more appropriate for younger children.

While not required, at least some knowledge of the basic story of *Harry Potter* would be ideal before playing the game. They do provide some story recap scenes, but these are just brief clips of the highlights reenacted by the LEGO characters in mime. As a lifelong fan of *Harry Potter* personally, I love the way this game has hidden details and fun references to the Wizarding World.

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

## How Is This Relevant To Adoption & Foster Care?

This game doesn't specifically address foster care or adoption, other than in the brief references to the source material of *Harry Potter*. Anyone familiar with the story of course knows that Harry's parents died, and he was placed in the care of his Aunt and Uncle (though looking at the game's coverage of these events, that is not particularly clear). However the franchise often appeals to children from these backgrounds because they can relate to Harry's parental loss and desire to create a 'found family' of his own.



This game is also a great way to let kids with backgrounds of trauma experience the story and characters without having all of the intense triggers and content that are present in the books and movies. While there are a fair number of cautionary points listed below, they are mostly very minor due to the fact that everything in the game is built out of LEGO bricks and therefore fairly unrealistic. The game also takes on a primarily humorous tone so a lot of things that might be scary or heavy in the books are funny instead. It's also a GREAT game for cooperative play because it's easy to learn and parents don't need to have any gaming experience to be able to figure it out. And there are a lot of opportunities for problem solving and teamwork, so it works a great bonding activity!

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## Discussion Points:

- **Teamwork**

Teamwork is a big strategy during the game. There are a number of times when it takes two characters to complete a task such as reaching a tall ledge or levitating something heavy. There are also 'student in peril' side quests throughout the game where you are rewarded for helping fellow Hogwarts students get out of troubling situations they've gotten stuck in, such as being trapped in spider webs or bullied by other students. This can be a great opportunity to talk about the merits of helping others and the importance of working together in order to accomplish goals.

- **Utilizing individual strengths**

Throughout the game there are a number of different puzzles to solve, and they require different skills. Some require magical spells which are learned by most characters throughout the game, but some require special abilities. For example, there are some levers that need to be pulled by a strong character like Hagrid. Other times, you need to dig in the dirt which can only be done by someone with a pet or herbology skills. There are a variety of these puzzles in every level and to unlock all of the secrets and side quests you'll need a team made up of characters with all the different types of skills. This can be a great learning experience to talk to kids about. We all have our different strengths and skills we bring to a group, but it usually takes all of us working together to accomplish a task.

- **Problem Solving**

The LEGO games are primarily puzzle-focused; which means that rather than fighting bad guys you're trying to figure out how to solve various puzzles in order to progress in the game. Even the fighting sections are set up as puzzles requiring you to match colors and shapes in order to fire your spells at opponents. This can lend itself to being a great learning opportunity and a way to talk to kiddos about the different strategies involved in figuring out how to approach a problem and work on coping skills to deal with frustration that might arise when the solutions don't come easily. Because kids from a background of trauma have often spent their lives in a constant fight-or-flight mode, they are used to

needing to think quickly to figure out the best course of action to survive. Because of this their brains aren't necessarily as good at the skill of being able to slow down, think things through, and try different approaches until reaching a solution. This game can be a great way to work on building those skills together within a fun activity.

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## Cautionary Points:

- **Can 'attack' fellow LEGO people/animals**

During periods of free gameplay you are able to shoot spells at anything or anyone on screen. Sometimes these spells hit other characters or animals and they respond by making an exclamation and jumping. It's also possible to spontaneously levitate other players but this doesn't seem to cause them any harm. During free-play you also have the option to play as a 'dark wizard' character such as Lucius Malfoy or even Voldemort (and to unlock all of the secret collectibles it's actually required at times). While you are playing as a dark wizard you have different spells available including Avada Kedavra (the killing curse) and Crucio (torture spell) which you can cast at other characters causing them to instantly break apart or cry out in pain.

- **Allusions to abuse by caregivers.**

Those who are familiar with the story of *Harry Potter* will know that Harry is sent to live with his Aunt and Uncle after his parents die and they do not take very good care of him. He is forced to live in the cupboard under the stairs and is frequently verbally berated and knocked around by his aunt, uncle, and cousin. While none of this is shown in great detail, there is a speed reenactment of Harry's childhood and we do see his cupboard, several scenes where Mr. and Mrs. Dursley have angry expressions and seem to be yelling at him, bars being put on his window, etc. So while it's not particularly noteworthy on its own, it's something to be aware of, especially if kids know the story.

- **Cartoon violence**

There are a number of situations where there is mild cartoon violence between the LEGO characters. These follow the adventures Harry and his friends encounter during the books such as a troll attack, giant spiders, a basilisk, etc. There are also times where characters cast spells at one another. Characters 'die' when they lose all of their hearts. However when this happens, they merely break into pieces, lose some of their collected studs and reappear back as one piece a moment later.

- **Some Scary Content**

There are frequent appearances by LEGO versions of snakes, spiders, and hornets which might frighten children who have fears of these creatures. Voldemort appears in a number of scenes and he sometimes makes scary faces. There's a scene with Fluffy,

Hagrid's three-headed dog and while the LEGO dog doesn't look particularly scary, he barks a lot, and it sounds fairly realistic and might frighten children with a fear of dogs. As with everything else these beings are all made out of LEGO bricks and are not particularly realistic.

- **Property destruction**

One of the side tasks in the game is to collect 'studs' in order to buy things like additional abilities or characters. One of the main ways of earning studs is destroying everything in sight (benches, statues, etc.). Granted, everything is built out of LEGO and can be easily fixed, especially considering wizards can cast a simple 'reparo' charm. However, for children who have experienced their own property destroyed or have an issue with engaging in this type of destructive behavior, it may be an issue for them to engage in it during gameplay.

- **Engaging in Dangerous Stunts/Behavior**

Characters are able to do things like climb on roofs and jump from large heights with little consequence and often these activities are required to complete certain quests. Of course the characters are made out of LEGO bricks and at worst they break apart and are put back together. However, when children have experienced trauma, they are often more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors, so it's important to make sure they understand that there's a difference between a video game and real life and know not to attempt similar stunts themselves.

- **Bullying**

There are several instances of characters bullying one another during the game (frequently Draco and his buddies). They do things like tease and laugh at the other characters, throw mud, etc. Sometimes the victims of this behavior are seen crying or running away. Another scene requires you to chase a student around and eventually scare them with a snake to make them drop an item they're holding (that you need). There are also a number of 'trick spells' that can be unlocked. These do things like cause other characters' hair/hats to fall off, enlarge their heads, or give them carrots for noses.

- **Mild Cartoon Peril**

Along with the dangerous stunts, there are times that the characters are in mild peril. There are frequently students caught in spiderwebs on walls or hanging from chandeliers that need to be rescued. Characters can also fall off ledges if they aren't careful- however all that happens is that their minifigure breaks and reappears a moment later back in one piece. There are also a few levels where you are being chased down hallways by death eaters, dementors, dragons, spiders, etc. which might cause an adrenaline rush.

- **‘Sexual Content/Nudity’**

Obviously, all the characters in the game are made out of LEGO bricks so none of these instances are particularly risqué. However during Diagon Alley exploration you are able to enter an occupied dressing room and there is a ‘naked’ wizard inside who hastily covers himself up when you appear. There are also a number of times, especially in later levels, where characters kiss one another. Finally there is one level in year seven where both the characters you are playing as (Harry and Ron) are wearing only their underwear and swimming in a lake. While absolutely nothing inappropriate happens, it might make some uncomfortable or inspire inappropriate conversation. These characters are both ones you can choose during free-play as well so they would be running around Hogwarts without any clothes on. All of these instances are extremely mild, but it is something to be aware of if you have kids who have been sexually abused or are sensitive to this.

- **Character Death**

There are a number of main characters who die in the *Harry Potter* series, especially in the later years. The game brushes quickly over most of these but one of note was when Dobby dies. We see Harry with a sad expression holding a piece of his body and then what appears to be a gravesite. Other characters who die include Cedric (year 4), Sirius (year 5) and Dumbledore (year 6) though all of those death scenes are more subtle.

## Discussion Questions

1. **Do you enjoy playing in story-mode or free-play better? Why?**

Caregiver Note: The game has two major options for play. The first is 'story-mode' where you follow the story of Harry's time at Hogwarts- going to classes, learning spells, and escaping from the various scrapes he and his friends get into. In this mode you're assigned which characters to play based on what's happening in the level. Once you've beaten a level for the first time, you have the option to replay it in 'free-play' mode. Here, you can choose your own character from all the options you have unlocked. In addition there's more flexibility to explore Hogwarts, discover new places and complete various side quests. This is primarily a fun question to get the conversation going, but a child's preferences might give some insight into their personalities. Some might like the structure of story-mode and their goal might be that they want to beat the game as quickly as possible and not waste time replaying levels. Other kids might like the flexibility and creativity available in free play to explore Hogwarts and the other Wizarding World locations and to collect additional special features that might help them in the game. Ultimately, if you want to beat the game to 100% completion, you have to use both modes- story and free play. This can be a time to talk about the merits of different approaches and how sometimes more structure is needed and sometimes you need flexibility.

2. **Do you have a favorite character to play as? Why?**

Caregiver Note: There are over 200 collectible characters in each half of the game. These range from our main trio of Harry, Ron, and Hermione (in about 12 different outfits each) to their friends, teachers, enemies, and random side characters that are only mentioned once. This gives a lot of choice! This is mostly just another fun question but talking about favorite characters and why they like them almost always leads to an interesting discussion!

3. **Sometimes there is a puzzle that requires a spell you haven't learned yet, especially early in the game. Does it frustrate you when this happens? Do you think Harry and his friends experience similar frustrations while they're learning magic?**

Caregiver Note: It can be really frustrating to see a collectible token or secret doorway that you can't quite get to because it requires more advanced magic. In the game you learn additional spells with each year, just like Harry and his friends do at Hogwarts. But this means that not everything in a level is unlockable when you play it through the first time and to completely unlock everything in the game you have to go back and replay all the levels after you've learned all of the required magic spells. This, however, mimics some situations in the real world- maybe you can't reach a high shelf because you aren't tall enough yet, or you can't read the book you want to because you haven't learned enough reading skills yet. However, once you learn the more advanced skills you can

come back and do things that you previously could not. It may also help to ease frustration to talk about how Harry and his friends only learned certain spells each year while they were at Hogwarts and so they couldn't do as much magic as some of the older students which probably frustrated them at times too. Instead of being frustrated by what they can't do, they can focus on what they CAN and use that as motivation to keep playing and getting to the higher levels to learn more so that they can unlock all of the additional abilities.

**4. What type of puzzle do you enjoy the most? Which type do you find the most challenging?**

Caregiver Note: There are many different types of puzzles in the game. One type involves stacking large LEGO pieces in a particular formation in order to climb to another area. Another is potion-making, where you're asked to go on a scavenger hunt to locate ingredients. There are bookcases/Parseltongue spots where you have to remember a certain pattern of shapes or colors and then repeat it. Because there is so much variety there are likely some puzzles that come easier to a player and others that are more challenging. While not always true, their likes and dislikes here might correspond to which puzzles are easiest/hardest for them and could prompt some discussion on how to improve at the ones they find more challenging.

**5. What do you do when you get stuck in the game? How do you figure out what to do next?**

Caregiver Note: While the game does follow a story during initial playthrough there is a lot of room for exploration. Your characters can frequently wander around Hogwarts exploring between story levels and sometimes it's not obvious where to go next. Each level also consists of mini puzzles so it's not always clear exactly what needs to be done to trigger the next movement of the story. There are large blue arrows in the game directing you around Hogwarts when it's time for glass and Nearly Headless Nick (a ghost character) lays out a trail of 'ghost' studs showing you the way to go. This could also be a good way to talk to children about problem solving skills and the benefits of trying different things until they figure out what works. Sometimes children (and adults!) can get easily frustrated when the solution to something isn't immediately clear so you can also talk about ways to manage that frustration by doing breathing exercises or taking a break from the game and coming back to it with a clear mind to try again.

**6. Are you able to follow the story during the cutscenes even though the characters don't talk? How do they get their point across without words?**

Caregiver Note: The LEGO characters in the game don't speak at all, either during the game levels or the movie scenes. Instead they tell the story through gestures, facial expressions, and sound effects. This can be a great way to talk about alternative means of communication and ways youth can express themselves if they aren't able to do so through words. For children who have difficulties with verbal expression they may really relate to the way that the story is told. It can also be a good way to talk to kids about how

to tell what emotions others might be feeling. This is something that kids who have experienced trauma may have difficulty with so talking about how we know a character is sad based on how their face looks or that they're angry based on the way they move. While LEGO bricks are not the most realistic comparison to real people, the added benefit is that they are using exaggerated gestures and expressions so it might make it easier to recognize if this is something a kiddo has trouble with.

**7. Do you have a favorite spell? Do you think it would be useful in the real world?**

Caregiver Note: This is mostly a fun question. There are different spells used throughout the game with effects that include making things fly, opening locks, creating light, etc. Children may choose a spell based on its usefulness in the game, a memory of the way it was used during the *Harry Potter* movies or books if they've seen/read them, or just because they like the idea of it. The important part is to talk about why they like something because this gets them sharing their thought process. Trying to imagine how different spells might be useful in the real world could also give some insight into their personality or things they'd like to be different. Maybe if they have a fear of the dark they would like to have a Lumos spell that can create light, or maybe they like Expecto Patronum because it makes the Dementors/Scary bad guys go away.

**8. If you could use Polyjuice Potion to be someone else for an hour, who would you choose? Why?**

Caregiver Note: Sometimes in the game you have to make Polyjuice Potion which transforms you into another character in order to complete a quest. This question again is mostly one that's light and fun but could lead to some interesting discussion depending on who they choose to be! We've all wondered what it would be like to be someone else at some point in our lives, so talking about who they would pick and why they would want to be that person could offer insight as to things they might like to change about themselves or experiences they might like to have. Depending on comfort level, you could choose real people like celebrities or historical figures you'd like to turn into or choose a fictional character either from the *Harry Potter* universe or another books/movie/video game.

**9. Have you used any of the trick spells? How do they affect other characters?**

Caregiver Note: One of the special features you can unlock within the game is 'trick spells'. These are special spells you can buy that include a 'tripping jinx' and a spell to replace others' noses with carrots. Most of them are harmless pranks but this can be a good opportunity to talk about the differences between teasing in good fun and bullying and how to know when a joke stops being funny and is hurting someone's feelings. All kids like to joke and pull pranks on one another but it's important to know where that fine line is and also how to tell someone else that something they think is a joke bothers you.

**10. Have you created your own custom minifig yet? Can you show me/tell me about it?**

Caregiver Note: The game is loaded with special features- another one is the ability to create your own LEGO minifigure to play as during Free play. There are a number of templates to choose from and everything can be customized from their outfit to hair color to facial expression. This gives your child the opportunity to talk about their creation and why they made the choices they did. Maybe they wanted to make one that looked like themselves or create a made-up character wearing a crazy outfit. Either way it could be a jumping off point for a fun conversation and maybe a creative activity to do together, even if you don't play the actual game levels with them. Try asking them to make a character that represents you and see what they come up with!



## About the Reviewer

### **JENN EHLERS**

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.