



PS I Still Love You

Teen Book Review

Transfiguring Adoption is a nonprofit organization seeking to nurture growth in foster and adoptive families by giving a HOOT about their families. Transfiguring Adoption does not intend for its reviewers nor its reviews nor its discussion packet to be professional, medical or legal advice. These reviews and discussion guides are intended to help parents to better be able to connect and understand their children who come from traumatic backgrounds.

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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 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 doesn'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:

P.S. I Still Love You, is the second book in the Lara Jean trilogy by Jenny Han. Of the three, it is probably my favorite one for its easy readability and plot line. I love how it discusses themes and situations many teens face, but with an edge of humor. I find this book extremely relatable and frequently find myself nodding along as the main character lives her day-to-day life. I gave this book a score of three hoots because I feel it's a good "jumping off" point for parents. It does not directly deal with adoption/foster care, but its themes relate perfectly to the situations many parents encounter when raising teenagers. Families should pay special attention to the romantic encounters in the book. Many are very emotionally charged and will be both triggers and important discussion points for your children.

The target audience for this novel appears to be children/teens aged 13-18. It also appears this book would be best for everyone, but especially adoptive families, and families with international adoption. This is a plucky, coming-of-age, rom-com that is feel-good and relatable. Foster/adoptive parents can use this book as a tool to relate to their teens (especially girls).

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

How Is This Relevant To Adoption & Foster Care?

A few years ago Netflix picked up this series for movie adaptation. It is a very popular series and the last installment "Always And Forever Lara Jean" aired just this past Valentine's day. Many teen girls will find themselves reading this book or watching the movies so I find it especially important to cover. Its coming-of-age plot and themes of teen relationships/heartbreak are vital points to cover in any discussion with your teen children.

You should care about this book because your teen daughter is probably reading it. The only hesitations I have with this book are its mention of parental loss (Lara Jean's mother died when she was a little girl), and its discussion of teen sex and possible infidelity by one of the characters' parents. You should love this book for its easy readability and clear discussion themes. This book would be a great mother/daughter discussion starter for the older teen in your life. Girls ages 15-18 will especially relate to the main character.

Discussion Points:

- **I Love Him, But He Still Loves Her**

At the beginning of this book all is forgiven and Lara Jean enters into a real relationship with Peter. Naturally, Genevieve is beside herself with jealousy and almost immediately, the drama starts. Things go sideways after Lara Jean finds out Peter has been keeping some pretty big secrets from her. Then, the enigmatic John McClaren enters the picture as another recipient of one of Lara Jean's love letters. So who does she choose? I can relate. Love triangles are a common occurrence in high school as hormones run high and feelings are being discovered. Being a teen can be difficult when it comes to figuring out what love is. Most are experiencing romantic love for the first time outside of family and friends. Talking with your teen regularly about their feelings and relationships will help build a strong foundation to lean on when they reach those sticky points in their life.

- **Everyone Else Is Doing It...**

Like most teens, Lara Jean is under an immense amount of pressure to dress cool, fit in, get good grades, and be the perfect student. This weighs on her more heavily this year as an upperclassman starting to think about applying to university. When the video of her and Peter in the hot tub on the school ski trip surfaces on the internet, Lara Jean is mortified. Many of the teachers confront her about it, but no one approaches Peter and she becomes painfully aware of the double standard. Communication is always the key. Talk to your teens about different scenarios and then trust their judgments on things. No one is perfect. If a conversation needs to be had after a bad call, do your best to approach it from a place of neutrality. Talk about what happened and what can be done so that it doesn't happen again in the future.

- **The Weight of the World On My Shoulders**

This year, Lara Jean is a junior. She is juggling an after school job at the local retirement home, various extra curriculars, and with her older sister at college overseas in Scotland, she assumes a lot of the responsibility in the upbringing of her little sister, Kitty, as well. High school can be HARD. The pressure to be perfect and do your best is overwhelming to the most accomplished person. Helping your teen prioritize their responsibilities and keeping a realistic goal in mind when working towards achievements can make a big difference.

- **Blended Family/Adult Dating**

Lara Jean's father has been alone for awhile and is starting to get back into the dating scene. His eyes fall on their neighbor, Ms. Rothschild. Lara Jean and Kitty are elated about the whole thing, but that isn't always the case. Children often have mixed feelings about their parents seeing other people, especially after a divorce. Adoptive and foster children have another level of trauma added in that they aren't in their biological families to begin with and a new member can feel like a betrayal of trust. Talking to your children and making sure they feel included in decisions when it comes to inviting a new person into their space is important in fostering an environment that feels safe and secure.

- **Betrayal/Heartbreak**

Near the end of the book it comes out that Genevieve's father has been cheating on her mother with a girl not much older than Lara Jean (18/19?) This is the "hard time" Peter keeps referencing throughout the books. As well as the reason he can't seem to let go of Genevieve. Peter's actions throughout this story are less than heroic and there are a few especially terse scenes between him and Lara Jean after they've broken up (for the second time, but for reals this time.) around Chapter 41. This is such a traumatizing event. I hope it never happens to any child. But, if it does, talking your child through the experience is so vital. Children often shift blame onto themselves when there is a situation they can't comprehend. Let them know they didn't do anything wrong, and this is something completely unrelated to anything they did.

Cautionary Points:

- **Death of a Parent**

Lara Jean's mother is mentioned periodically. She had an accident when Lara Jean was a little girl and passed away from brain trauma.

- **Cyber-Bullying**

During the first book, Genevieve spies on Lara Jean and Peter in the hot tub on a school ski trip. She secretly videos it then at the beginning of this book and posts it all over the internet on a site called Anonybitch. It comes out later that Peter knew Gen was behind the cyber-bullying but didn't tell Lara Jean.

- **Teen Intimacy/Sex**

Lara Jean is getting older and her relationships are going further. There is more mention of intimacy and sex in this book compared to the first one in the series. She is juggling relationships with both Peter and John McClaren now.

- **Parental Betrayal**

Near the end of the book it finally comes out why Genevieve is having such a hard time. While playing a game, Lara Jean follows her to her father's workplace where she witnesses Gen's father cheating with a girl not much older than herself. (18-19yrs old)
This could be especially triggering to children who have survived sexual abuse.

- **Abusive Relationships**

I feel like it has to be said. Lara Jean and Peter don't have the healthiest of dynamics. While there is a certain amount of angst to be expected in teen relationships, the amount of drama these two have is borderline emotional abuse. They are constantly on/off, fighting, and doing things to harm the other. Whether intentional or not, after a while it feels like they should know better.

Discussion Questions

Like many YA novels, this book is broken up into a series of shorter chapters. Using this as a reference I will be posing a discussion question for every five or so chapters. At the end, I will pose a final question to summarize the plot of the story as a whole. Alongside this, I will also give you an activity to do as a family that relates to the themes of the story. Use this to connect with your teen and foster a deeper sense of understanding.

Chapter 1-5

1. The story begins with a letter written to Peter from Lara Jean, in it she talks about how much she misses him and hopes their story isn't over yet. The subsequent chapters find them reconciling and starting a "real" relationship. At the same time, Margot goes to talk with Josh with the hope of rekindling their romance as well. Josh doesn't agree and says their break-up was for the best since Margot is overseas at university. How do you decide if a second chance is worth it? How might a situation like this arise in your own life, either with a significant other, or even a best friend?

Caregiver Note: Your child is going to experience a multitude of different relationships over their lifetime. Teenagers especially have new people coming and going every day. Starting at a new school, changing hobbies, and dating are all times when your teen will encounter relationship changes. Starting a dialogue about the different roles people play in their lives and how some roles have a natural ending will help prepare them for the ebb and flow of life.

Chapter 6-10

2. Teenagers can be so cruel. Somebody has taken the video of Peter and Lara Jean's make out session in the hot tub and turned it into a spectacle for the world to see. Who, and why, we do not know. Lara Jean is absolutely mortified but Peter is playing it off with as much bravado as he can muster. Unfortunately, things like this do happen from time to time. And even the best intentions can go awry. How can you talk with your teenager in a supportive way about the less-than-optimal situations they may find themselves in?

Caregiver Note: Talking to teenagers about boundaries, personal safety and the consequences of their actions can be a tough thing. Many foster and adoptive children already come from a traumatic background and use shock-factor as a way to define themselves as teenagers. The more daring the act, the more attention they gain, the more power they feel over their lives. Using harsh tactics such as shame and anger are likely to get you nowhere. If your teen finds themselves in a situation like this, listen to how they're feeling about it. And, if they're open to dialogue, talk about resolutions and ways you both can keep the situation from repeating itself. Frequently there's a deeper issue at hand that needs to be addressed.

Chapter 11-16

3. Lara Jean's job at the retirement home has her caring for the charismatic Stormy. Stormy has plenty of tales from her own youth and advises Lara Jean not to take any relationship too seriously. What are some tales you can tell your teens about your younger days?

Caregiver Note: Making yourself relatable is a key part of earning your child's trust. How can you expect them to talk about their lives to you if you won't open up about your own. Take time to sit down with them from time to time and share stories you remember from being their age. The funnier/more embarrassing the better!

Chapter 17-22

4. Lara Jean's dad is dating again. Maybe. Kitty sure seems to think so when she invites their next door neighbor, Ms. Rothschild over for dinner on her birthday. But, Lara Jean isn't so sure she wants things to change. Adding a new member into your family dynamic is a big deal. Whether it's a foster child, another caregiver, or even a new pet, discussing things with your children is an important place to start. How can you honor your child's feelings during this transition?

Caregiver Note: Adding someone into an established family can be difficult. Chances are your child has a lot of feelings surrounding the matter. Some may not be positive. Feelings of fear, jealousy, hurt, or even anger are normal reactions when a new addition enters the equation. For foster/adoptive children who have a history of trauma and/or abandonment, these feelings can be multiplied. Talking with your child about the change before it happens, involving them in the process as much as possible, and letting them know they are just as important as the newcomer/they aren't being replaced are ways to ensure a smoother transition.

Chapter 23-26

5. It's Valentine's Day!! (In the book) The song girls take their Valentine's very seriously, each making cards and pastries from scratch for their father and significant others. What are some traditions you have around Valentine's Day if you celebrate? And, if you don't, what traditions could you start to shower a little more love on each other?

Caregiver Note: Love is such a strong theme in these books, and such an important theme to carry into our own lives as well. It was love that led you to become the caregiver you are so why not show a little more of that in your day to day life? The greatest thing my adoptive parents ever did was designate my adoption day, "National Robyn Day" This small show of love has been a source of joy for me for many, many years. It makes me feel wanted. Something so many foster and adoptive children need. Make a special day to celebrate the love in your family, I promise, it will be remembered for years to come.

Chapter 27-31

6. Enter John Ambrose McClaren. Lara Jean receives a letter back from another one of the boys she wrote to in the first book. John was her 7th grade crush, but she has a boyfriend now, right? What could possibly be the harm in exchanging a few letters. Life comes with choices, some are right, some are wrong, but they are choices all the same. When your teen is available, sit down with them and talk about this. What are some choices you have made in your life? How did they affect you?

Caregiver Note: Teenagers are learning their way in the world, step by step. Not every step is going to be the right one. Revisiting choices after the fact can sometimes offer a clearer picture of what went right or wrong. Try having this discussion on a good day, not right after something has happened to upset you or your child.

Chapter 32-36

7. John and Lara Jean have discovered the time capsule they buried with a group of friends under their childhood treehouse and decide to have an opening party before it gets torn down by the new tenants of the house. The friend group of course includes Peter and Genevieve as well. Time has a way of bringing things up when you least expect them. What are some memories you share as a family? This could be vacations, parties, holidays, or just good days spent together.

Caregiver Note: Positive association is so important for children. When kids have a store of happy memories to draw on it makes facing challenges easier. Later on in the guide I will give you an activity that lets you keep a wealth of happy memories right at your fingertips.

Chapter 37-41

8. Peter and Lara Jean want to make things work, but Genevieve continues to be a constant bump in the road. At every turn he appears to put Gen first and then it comes out that he knew Gen was the one who took the hot tub video, but he continues to defend her. How do you navigate a relationship without trust? Is it possible?

Caregiver Note: Toxic relationships are, unfortunately, unavoidable for most people. Teaching your teen to recognize when they are being taken advantage of or led on will give them the skills to not only protect themselves, but heal from past traumas as well. Talking about and modeling healthy relationship dynamics with teenagers allows your child to see that abuse is not okay and that they deserve better.

Chapter 42-46

9. Revenge is sweet, but regret is bitter. Lara Jean and Peter are officially broken up. Lara Jean is hurting but Peter is still hanging out with Gen, acting like nothing is wrong. Lara Jean enlists the help of John to get back at Gen via a game the group of friends is playing (kind of like extreme tag). It's tempting to want to get back at someone you feel has done you wrong. But what does that really accomplish? Will you really feel better by hurting someone else?

Caregiver Note: When someone does something to hurt you, it is natural to want to get even. When your child faces something or someone that has upset them, they may want to retaliate. Instead of telling them to take the high road, talk to them about what happened and the feelings they are having. As adults we cannot pretend we don't feel the same emotions when someone does us wrong. Foster and adoptive children are especially sensitive to betrayal because of the many traumas they have experienced in their past. It is important to first validate their feelings, then find solutions together that are both healthy and satisfactory.

Chapter 47-50

10. When was the last time you did something fun, just for the joy of it? There are so many serious moments in life, it's important to grab the little things and hold on tight!

Caregiver Note: Lara Jean and John throw a swinging USO party at the retirement home and they sure do go all out. Pin-up girls, punch, uniforms, just like they were back in the '40s. It's important to let loose from time to time. Make a point to do something fun this week with your teen(s). It doesn't have to be a big to-do, just go out for ice cream, or watch a good movie together. Quality time is time spent together. And that's the most important thing in the world.

Chapter 51-56

11. The one large recurring theme in this book really gets brought to a head near the end of the story. Is this whole debacle about the fact that Peter is choosing Genevieve, or, is it about the feelings that Lara Jean herself is carrying around about the situation? How do the feelings we hold onto define the situations in our lives?

Caregiver Note: In a final attempt to win "the game" and prove that she's better than Gen, Lara Jean follows Gen to her father's office to tag her out. What she finds there is disturbing and answers many of the questions she's been hung over all year. She sees Genevieve's father with another girl, Anna, who is only 18 years old, and they are kissing. Then Gen herself comes out and confronts Lara Jean, ending in forcing Lara Jean to tag her out and storming away in tears. Lara Jean realizes the reasons she's been mad at Peter are really stemming from her own fears and feelings about the past. And, in the final chapter, they do end up reconciling. This section holds many triggers, and many opportunities for discussion with your teen. How you go about it is up to you, but some discussion points worth covering are: How do their feelings in a situation change the way they perceive it? If you learned the reason for another person's actions, would it make it easier to forgive them their wrong-doings? How would you feel if someone found out a secret you had been keeping for so long, but desperately wanted to tell?

12. Family Activity: Time Capsule

Caregiver Note: Just like Lara Jean and her childhood friends! Choose a large tin or container and have each person in the family put a letter to another person in the family and one or two meaningful items into it. Decide on a date in the future, one, five, even ten years, when you will come together as a family to open it! On a smaller scale, you can have each person put an item into a memory box then hang the box in a family room as a snapshot of that day.

About the Reviewer

Robyn Briggs

Robyn lives in Charlotte, NC where she divides her time working as a newborn care specialist, writing, and speaking at literature conventions around the Southeast. She pursued a double major in Sociology/Psychology at university, concentrating in child psychology. She rose to become president of the Sociology/Psychology Association chapter on campus. She was adopted as an infant and uses her experience as an adoptee in a cross-racial family to write and speak about challenges that may arise for both children and caretakers. When not writing, speaking, or holding babies, you can find Robyn in Asheville, NC hiking with her dog.