



*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 this 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.*

*Copyright © Transfiguring Adoption 2019*

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the nonprofit.*

*[transfiguringadoption.com/media](http://transfiguringadoption.com/media)*

# Contents

## Section I

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

## Section II

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

## Section III

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

**Comprehensive Review**.....07

**Discussion Guide**.....11

**About the Reviewer**.....14

As far back as ancient Greece people were utilizing books as methods for working through various ailments. The term, bibliography, is what we pair with the phenomenon of using media, specifically books, to help people suffering from trauma or psychological issues. While the Transfiguring Adoption is NOT claiming to be professionals in the psychological or mental health arena, we do believe that families can glean from this concept in using movies, video games, and, naturally, books, to help foster or adoptive children process their story.

## Section I

### **Why are we using books, movies, and video games to help children?**

- **Partially disengage mind from fear/problems**  
Immersing yourself in media helps you to escape from reality for a bit. This can give our minds a partial break from the worry and stress so that we have more energy to attach the issue when we come back to it.
- **Introduced to new solutions**  
We might discover new solutions to problems as we experience a character in media conquer an issue.
- **Emotional vocabulary**  
Discovering more ways to express how we feel and think can help us to communicate our own thoughts and feelings. Overall, more effective communication allows us to ask for better assistance with our feelings and issues.
- **Identify with characters/stories**  
You have heard the saying, “no man is an island.” No person wants to feel like they are alone in their thoughts, feelings, or experiences. When we discover a character in media struggling with similar issues as our own, it helps to “normalize,” our life situations and feel comforted. This can also help us to discover our own 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.

---

*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 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.*

# Comprehensive Review

## Transfiguring Adoption's Overview:

*Paw Patrol: The Movie (2021)* certainly took me by surprise as being a great film for children with trauma backgrounds. Granted, I'll admit that I am very new to the *Paw Patrol* world so I am not sure how the pups are each added to the Patrol team but I never considered the subject of adoption to pop up as it did with this movie.

The target audience appears to be children who are toddler-aged and up. It also appears this movie would be best for any family to view, including foster and adoptive families. This film addresses a title character revisiting their pre-adoptive home and working through the emotions and memories of the past with the support of loved ones. This subject matter is handled with great care and can spark some meaningful conversation with your little ones about working through hard memories and emotions, relying on meaningful relationships during times of distress, and reframing experiences.

---

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

---

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

This is a wonderful opportunity to connect children with trauma with their emotions and thoughts through the experience of Chase, the police-themed German Shepherd pup. It's revealed through the course of the movie that Chase was abandoned as a very small puppy in Adventure City prior to his adoption with Ryder. He then moved to Adventure Bay (where the majority of the *Paw Patrol* series occurs) and along with Ryder became integral to the Paw Patrol Team due to his ability to scale heights and rescue people using grappling and zipline equipment. However, when the team is summoned to help Adventure City, Chase's eager "on the case" demeanor immediately disappears and he becomes insecure, fearful, and irritable in response to various trauma triggers while on the job. Children with trauma may relate to these seemingly random and out of control feelings and resulting behaviors as this reflects how younger children often respond to trauma triggers. As a result caregivers will have the opportunity to give their children the chance to learn language to connect their feelings to behavior and better communicate their needs for support as Chase learns with Ryder.

---



# Discussion Points:

- **Working Through Hard Memories**

This is an area that's hard even for adults! I remember walking through an old school as an adult once and feeling very on edge throughout the visit. Even as a trauma-informed social services professional it took me a while to realize that even though I was no longer a student dealing with bullying and fear my body was reacting to the stimuli around me! As a result I needed to take some time to work through some of these hard memories to help my adrenaline and cortisol-filled brain understand that I was not in danger. While I have tools to connect my past experiences and feelings to my physical responses and therefore my behavior... Most little kids who are drawn to *Paw Patrol* have likely not had the chances to learn about that yet. So with Chase's triggering to memories in Adventure City you, the caregiver, can start to help your child build these skills and learn how to use skills such as identifying how feelings from memories can affect behavior now.

- **Relying on Trusting Relationships**

I certainly felt for Chase as he struggled so hard with these hard emotions alone. While we would think that Chase should have easily been able to talk to Ryder and the other teammates about these hard memories and feelings, the truth is that level of vulnerability is hard at any age. Caregivers often think that children are more capable of asking for help than they truly are and struggle when a child has held in stress and frustration until they explode. This is completely understandable, but rather than continuing to tell your child to ask for help, caregivers will often need to respond more like Ryder and be prepared to check in with your child and initiate help in response to behavior cues. Caregivers can become attuned to their child's behavior, which is a non-verbal form of communication, while teaching them the words to use to ask for help as they grow.

- **Reframing Difficult Situations**

While in Adventure City it's understandable that Chase wrestled with some pretty hard memories. Being abandoned, the fear of being alone, nearly being hit by a bus, and other events are plenty of reasons to have such an intense response to returning to a painful place from the past. However, over the course of the movie Chase learns that while Adventure City had memories of pain and sadness there were also memories that were meaningful and full of love. This included meeting Ryder and being adopted. Caregivers can often observe children' struggling with their child's introduction to the family in the same way. Adoption can be an absolutely beautiful experience, but caregivers need to remember that adoption is not possible without intense personal loss for their child. And these losses need to be honored and respected as Ryder did with Chase. Later as Chase grieved and worked through his emotions Ryder was able to also remind Chase of some good memories that are allowed to live alongside those difficult times though. While Adventure City was a place of loss, it was simultaneously also what

led Chase to being adopted by his best friend, Ryder, and joining the Paw Patrol, who he loved very very much. Children may need help from caregivers to take space to honor hard emotions but also reframe perspective as they heal and identify lovely memories as well. This can be tricky, as younger children have not developed abstract thinking and can't imagine having multiple feelings attached to an event (think to Inside Out with how the feelings realize they can share memories). However, over time and lots of patience and space to honor and process the sad parts your child can work through all of these tricky emotions and potentially in time develop the same reframing as Chase.

---

## Cautionary Points:

- **Some Moments of Peril and Danger**

Thankfully, this movie is one with little worry of graphic violence and pain. There are no guns or other weapons of that sort and no one appears to suffer from long-term or permanent pain. However it is important for caregivers to remember that children with trauma often have some struggles with processing stressful events logically due to the overuse of the stress activation systems in the brain. This can mean that good excitement from seeing a fun or suspenseful movie can be confused by the child's brain for danger and flood the brain with adrenaline and cortisol and result in seemingly self-sabotaging behavior. Caregivers should note this is a very normal response to excitement for children with trauma and be prepared to offer support to help their child connect their feelings to behavior and (with lots of practice) counteract this response with co-regulation and self-soothing techniques. So as a result caregivers should be advised that there are exciting situations in the movie that reflect similar events from the series including vehicle crashes, large-scale weather events, pedestrians (animals and humans) nearly being hit by vehicles, reckless driving, a runaway train system functioning like a broken roller coaster, falling elevators, building structure issues, and fireworks/explosion events. Most of these events are largely exaggerated and do not appear to reflect realistic emergencies and so the rescue responses are equally exaggerated as well.

- **Weather-Related Triggers**

One of the larger plot lines in the film involves a machine that can absorb bad weather and ensure good weather. However at one point the machine malfunctions and releases weeks of bad weather all at once leading to intense thunder and windstorms. While not every child may respond to this potential trigger, children with traumatic experiences with such storms may need extra support after viewing this film.

- **Abandonment of Title Character**

Most of the film revolves around Chase working through his feelings of abandonment and rejection from the past in the present. In response to triggers Chase is shown to run away, freeze in fear, react impulsively and irritably, and forgetfulness. These are all very normal trauma reactions for children and adults and can be helpful in relating children to their own experiences. However, Chase's memories and responses to abandonment and rejection may bring up your child's own experiences with such theming and result in some reactivity in your child as well so caregivers should be prepared to offer support to their child if they appear to be responding to the trauma Chase experienced.

- **Comic Mischief**

There is the utterance of the word "poop" in a way adults may use another scat-related term adults may use. There are also sequences of goons kidnapping Chase and engaging in slapstick humor.

- **Depiction of Jail**

Chase and Liberty are puppy-napped and locked up in an old Obedience School that is used and depicted like a jail setting. For children who have experiences of parent or relative incarceration and arrest this may be potentially triggering and result in some discussion about such events. Caregivers should be prepared to offer support in the event this is needed by their child.

## Discussion Guide:

### 1. **Who is your favorite puppy on the Paw Patrol? Why?**

Caregiver Note: This is an opening question to help initiate conversation with your child. While it may be tempting to jump straight into the point it is good to start by connecting your child to the film first before expanding to the character's experience with an event or scenario and then involving the child in that scenario. This is due to children not developing abstract thinking skills until they are much older so they will need extra guidance to connect their own situations to that of the character and attaching subject matter like emotions to the discussion. The main characters are Chase (Police & Traffic), Sky (Air Rescue & Support), Rubble (Construction), Marshall (Fire Rescue & Medic), Rocky (Eco/Recycling Support), and Zuma (Water Rescue).

### 2. **Activity: Draw Your Favorite Pup**

Caregiver Note: This activity will be pretty easy to set up and will help give your child something to do with their hands while you talk. Children, especially younger children, struggle with face to face conversation and find talking about hard things easier when their hands are busy while engaging with side-to-side conversation. Grab some paper and your preferred coloring tool and help your child draw their favorite rescue pup and color them. Also draw your favorite so you can both participate and enjoy spending time together.

### 3. **Why did Chase not want to go back to Adventure City?**

Caregiver Note: Poor Chase makes it very clear from the get-go that going to Adventure City is the last thing he wants to do. Chase was previously abandoned as a very young puppy and left to wander the streets alone. Being dropped off at an unknown place with no tools or support is certainly terrifying and it is completely understandable that Chase (who is still a puppy in the series) would not want to revisit such painful memories.

### 4. **What seemed to help Chase when he was afraid or hurting while working in Adventure City?**

Caregiver Note: Chase very much benefitted from his teammates watching his body language for when he needed support, giving him space when he needed it to process how he felt, checking on him when he seemed down, and never giving up on him. In the same way children that have been through hard things may also need similar responses when they act out in anger, frustration, sadness, and pain like Chase. The caring attitude of his teammates is also very important. At any time they could have fussed at Chase for making their work harder but they were always most focused on his well being and

needs. This can be hard, especially in stressful situations, but it is equally important for caregivers to be well attuned with their own feelings and behaviors so they can ensure they can stay calm while attempting to calm their child in crisis.

5. **Why didn't Chase just tell the team he was afraid from the beginning? Why did he run away instead of asking for help?**

Caregiver Note: Like Chase, children who have been through trauma often learn that people are unreliable and they need to rely on themselves more so than their peers. While this can be very confusing for caregivers this makes sense when we realize that most adults were a source of insecurity and danger in the past for children who have been in the foster or adoptive systems. Showing vulnerability is hard for most human beings but for children who have been rejected or shamed for showing weakness before this sense of over-independence and competence is a survival skill that helped your child make it to this point so this will be very difficult to unlearn and learn new communication skills to use instead. For this reason caregivers will often need to check in and initiate discussions about hard things with their child to teach them how to check in and voice their needs.

6. **Have you had a time like Chase where it was hard to ask for help?**

Caregiver Note: Give your child the space here to guide the conversation. Caregivers should also be prepared for if the child brings up a time where you, the adult, perhaps were a part of the barrier. It will be easy to want to excuse or explain why you acted in such a way but it is most important now to listen to your child. You are giving them the chance to practice using language to identify struggles and together you and the child can find a solution. Rather than seeing this as a critique of your personality or parenting skills, take this as an opportunity to learn how your child perceives your communication and perhaps improve in areas that can support you and your child's relationship.

7. **How can I help you when it is hard for you to ask? What signals can I watch for?**

Caregiver Note: Again, allow your child to lead this part of the conversation. Talk about giving a hand signal that can be code for "help!" or perhaps making a list of things your child may do (behavior) to watch for when your child is growing overwhelmed and words are becoming too hard. Then, create a "rescue plan" for how you can swoop in and help your child find a place of calm to allow words to flow more easily. It is important to help a child reach calm before learning or practicing new skills due to their brain being so busy with fight-or-flight responses due to cortisol and adrenaline release when under stress. Once a child is calm, they will be able to better use their prefrontal cortex to engage in language and regulation skills due to the limbic system being calmed down.

8. **Activity: Reframe!**

Caregiver Note: This is another activity to do while keeping your child engaged in the conversation. Grab a piece of paper and help your child draw a picture frame around the border on each side of the page (front and back). On one side draw Chase as a puppy being alone and sad in Adventure City. On the other side, draw Chase as a puppy meeting Ryder and how happy they are together. This will help connect your child to how the same event and memory can have more than one feeling and how it is very normal to have both positive and negative connections to the same memory.

9. **When Chase talks about Adventure City why does he remember more of the sad parts?**

Caregiver Note: Sad and Angry are big, intense emotions. Especially since Chase started this memory with the tone of abandonment it is very easy for these to be the first emotions he registered with these memories. However, over time and giving space to feel these big emotions, Chase was later able to make room for the happier ending in the end and still honor all of those emotions together. This is very important for a caregiver to remember as well. Your child may be very happy to be with you and love you very much. However, like Chase, there are going to be times where the memories surrounding why they are with you in a foster/adoptive/kinship situation may overshadow those feelings and need a safe space to process them.

10. **Has there been a time where you felt both sad and happy about a memory like Chase?**

Caregiver Note: Allow your child to talk through this point to their comfort level. Some children may not be ready yet to connect such big emotions like this, and that's perfectly okay. These are discussions that can happen many times as your child grows and develops, but you will always have Chase's experiences to return to as examples in the future.

## About the Reviewer

### **Rachael Rathe**

Rachael B. Rathe is an East Tennessee native with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology with a Minor in Child & Family Studies from The University of Tennessee Knoxville. She has worked in mental health since 2013 and in foster care/adoptions for a private provider agency since 2014. Rachael was inspired to work in the field after working with children and teens on a volunteer basis 2008 - 2013. Rachael's ideal self-care day involves snuggling on a couch with her kitties (Tabitha, Fergus, and Rufus) while enjoying a good movie or book. She also enjoys gallivanting around conventions concerning all things nerd and geekery.