



# The Legend of Zelda Skyward Sword

**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:

The target audience for this game appears to be children that are 10-12 and up. While the game doesn't have the dark aesthetic of other *Zelda* titles, (i.e. - *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, etc.) there are a couple moments of jump scares and fantasy violence that may spook more jumpy-kiddos. If you are a gamer and remember the Silent Realm (unique to the *Skyward Sword* version of Hyrule) this in particular may be a bit suspenseful for some younger players. Additionally, the controls are a bit more complex due to the controls being nunchuck-centered in the Wii version so some of your children may prefer to use a console controller for the Nintendo Switch HD edition. It also appears this game would be best for most families to play together.

While there do not appear to be any harmful stereotypes, there is not a lot of diversity or representation. Most of the human-like characters are Hylian (appearing as white, elf-like humans). There is one character that could be coded as neurodivergent involved in an insect sidequest but this is not very overt nor is he a primary character. There are other intelligent communities in the game but most of them resemble animals or objects more than humans.

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

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

In this installment of *The Legend of Zelda* series *Skyward Sword* is set as a prequel to all the games that have been released to date (2021). This was a game created to explain the origin of the triforme and much of the lore explored in other games. Link in many games is featured as a youth that does not live with any identifiable parents, and this one is no exception. Throughout the game no blood-relatives are featured or referenced and this indicates that Link was likely orphaned and raised by the residents of Skyloft. He specifically appears to live in Skyloft's Knight Academy and is supervised by Headmaster Gaepora and instructors Horwell and Owlán along with other students. During the start of gameplay it's clear that Skyloft is a tightly-knit community as all the residents know Link well and frequently aid him in his journey.

While there are no overt themes relating to adoption or foster care, Link is a character that most children can see them as. Since Link doesn't really talk and is ambiguous enough it is easy for children to see themselves in Link (or whatever they decide to name him). There are times too where the player can select the degree of reaction Link has to other characters, giving him a personal spin. Link does not appear to have parents in this game, and is sort of raised by his



community so children from adoptive or foster backgrounds may also resonate sometimes with having a more unique circle of support.

While this does not directly correlate with foster care or adoption, many children with traumatic backgrounds are familiar with having supports from beyond the family of origin. Whether they have been “adopted” by sports coaches, neighbors, or church groups or have been placed in foster or adopted care many children that have encountered the system have either already or need to learn how to access positive supports within their circles of influence. Having additional natural supports is always a benefit to a child growing up, but this can be a matter of survival for children that lack some levels of supports from their family of origin. Connection to others is not an innate skill either, but one often taught to us by our primary caregivers so children with trauma often lack some of the skills needed to identify positive connections and then access the support these connections may offer. For this reason this game can be a conversation starter about forming positive relationships and identifying safe connections.

Another positive aspect of this game is there is no risk of cyberbullying or contacting strangers in this game at all, which is a refreshing feature to this game. While most games for the Nintendo Switch have features accessible through the Nintendo Switch Online pass this installment does not have online features so your child or youth may have a bit more freedom with this specific game of play without this risk.

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## Discussion Points:

- **Identifying Positive Connections**

Throughout Link’s adventure he comes across a variety of people and creatures. Some of these people or creatures “look” nice. Some baddies and monsters “look” bad. These sometimes are easier to identify which may be friend or foe. However, during the course of the game there are sometimes folks that may be so easy to identify as good/bad. One example is the side quest featuring Batreaux. Batreaux is a scary-looking demon that very much wishes to be human. He is introduced to you by a young girl in Skyloft named Kukiel (who sweetly calls him “Uncle Bats”). Batreaux very much looks just like one of the traditional bad-guys in the game but is really a sweet guy and sends you on missions to collect Gratitude Crystals by doing good deeds for others. Just like Batreaux, sometimes it’s easy to judge a book by his cover or by our past experiences. For children with trauma, due to abuses and neglect that have occurred at the hands of adults all adults may look like Batreaux. For this reason caregivers should refrain from taking it for granted that their children will automatically trust them or that a child can safely decipher safe vs. unsafe relationships and make sure to take time to teach a child how to judge relationships appropriately.

- **Forming Appropriate Relationships**

How do you make connections with others? If you think about it, a lot of your experiences with making friends or connections with others were likely modeled by how you watched your parents or other trusted adults interact with others, and then were refined with practice with your peers. For children with trauma though there may be a lack of those experiences in their development so social awkwardness and deficits in emotional intelligence may cause your child to need some extra guidance in making friends with their peers. Some of Link's interactions with others are easy, like the ones in Skyloft where he grew up and knows everyone. While on the surface though, while everyone speaks a common language there are lots of differences in how the various residents of the Surface interact and show respect. Like Link, your child is constantly trying to adapt and learn how to interact with folks in very different ways than they are used to including cultural differences.

- **Asking for Help**

When a child has been through trauma there are some skills that they may miss out on building. This is especially true for social skills and interpersonal skills that are developed while interacting with safe, attuned adults or supervised with peers. It may seem like a given but for a child that has learned that adults are unreliable at best asking for help can be a huge ask. For this reason caregivers often need to teach their children how to ask for help when they struggle rather than struggling until complete frustration and meltdown. Like Link, we as human beings cannot experience life alone in a vacuum. Link is definitely a huge hero for this game but there is no way he could have faced all of the trials and challenges without the help of others like Fi, his professors, his neighbors, the new friends he makes on the surface, and even Goose. So, like Link, your child will need gentle guidance and reminders to ask for help when needed.

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## Cautionary Points:

- **Cartoon Violence**

Throughout the game there are lots of sequences with cartoon violence. Most of this is pretty low-key in terms of graphics as there is no blood, brain-matter, or dismemberment of human-like characters so this should be a low-level trigger. However, if your child has had a lot of use of their limbic systems due to toxic stress and trauma they may struggle with the excitement of wielding a sword, bows and arrows, and even bombs and become more prone to aggression due to being unable to differentiate their brain's response to excitement from danger so caregivers should still check in frequently with their child to ensure they are having fun without overwhelming their cortisol and adrenaline-filled bodies and brains.

- **Suspenseful Gameplay/Jump Scares**

These are not as numerous as other games, but there are a few cinematic jump scares to build suspense and draw the player in emotionally. Just like the cartoon violence warning, this can trigger the limbic system and for a child that overuses the stress activation systems due to trauma or toxic stress may be more reactive to such scenes than most children and may need additional support while playing the game.

- **Comic Mischief**

Throughout the game there are sequences of toilet humor --- quite literally. There is a sidequest that involves a ghostly woman in a toilet and giving her paper for... well, you know. This is an old gag from previous *Zelda* games (i.e. - Majora's Mask, Oracle of Ages, etc.) that older gamers may note but a parent may not appreciate so much. There are other sequences of slap-stick type humor sprinkled in but this is also a low-level trigger concern.

- **Scary Monsters**

True to most *Zelda* installments there are lots of enemies to fight in this game. Most of the monsters are fairly cartoonish compared to games like *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (2006/2016)* but a few of them are especially creepy... Personally I found the Silent Realm Guardians to be the most suspenseful and creepy but every kid will have their own fears and triggers. There are some monsters, including a boss, that are spider-like among other creepy things so caregivers with kiddos sensitive to creepy bosses may need to step in for some help periodically.

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## Discussion Questions

1. **When Link first meets Batreaux (pronounced Bat-row), what did you think he was? How did you think he'd respond to Link?**

Caregiver Note: This is a good opening question to open up the conversation about identifying positive connections. In studying behavior humans often engage in the "Halo Effect" which is a bias or stereotype that good looking people are good. In turn this means that often humans are wired to initially see someone scary and associate them with being scary or not trustworthy. Over time most folks hopefully grow up and learn from caregivers that we cannot judge a good or bad book by its cover but kids with trauma may miss out on that very important lesson. By seeing how poor Batreaux is really a sweet, kind character in spite of his demonic-exterior this can help open up a conversation about this.

2. **What could have happened if Link assumed Batreaux was a bad guy? How would Kukiel have felt if her friend was hurt?**

Caregiver Note: If Link had jumped in with sword blazing poor, innocent Batreaux could have been really hurt and Kukiel could have lost a friend. So often it is tempting for people to make decisions on others without taking time to take in the facts. The facts we learn about Batreaux are that he can't help the way he looks, he wishes he didn't scare people, he wants friends, and one of his few friends is Kukiel. None of that could be deciphered by looking at Batreaux so it's very important that Link did not immediately attack him because he looks "bad".

3. **How did Link find out the truth about Batreaux?**

Caregiver Note: Link was able to decipher if Batreaux was a good guy based on Kukiel's experience with him, how consistently caring he has been towards Kukiel, how appropriate he was with Kukiel, encouraging kindness to others, and in his interaction with gratitude crystals. While gratitude crystals cannot measure good vibes with others in real life, there are some good talking points for deciphering if someone is a positive influence as opposed to negative (like pre-character development Goose).

4. **Who are Link's closest friends? Who are other people Link trusts and that he has a lot of help from?**

Caregiver Note: It's pretty clear from the beginning that Zelda and his loftwing are likely Link's closest friends at the start of the game. Link shows this by his familiarity with them, the amount of time he spends with them, and how much he divulges about himself to them. Link also seems to trust Headmaster Gaepora, Professors Horwell and Owlán, and the Knights of the Skyloft Academy. These are all people that have spent a significant amount of time with Link and teaching him how to become an honorable Knight to represent the Academy and protect Skyloft and certainly seemed to contribute to his preparation for heroism. This is important as many children with trauma may not

have such extensive networks of support built in around them. Especially for children that have moved about the child welfare system or due to adoption there may be a large lack of supports and appropriate relationships to help a child model forming appropriate relationships with peers or safe adults so a caregiver will often have to step in to help make connections and teach how to form appropriate relationships with close friends, peers, and safe adults.

**5. How does Link form relationships with the Kikwis, Parella, Goron, and others he meets on the surface?**

Caregiver Note: While Link doesn't mind jumping in to help the folks he meets, it's clear he doesn't immediately jump into close friendships with everyone he meets. Over time with lots of consistency, talking, and exchanging of greetings and information Link is able to develop amicable relationships with most of the folks he meets on the surface (well, except that one robot that calls him "Master Shortpants"). Children that have been through trauma are often so desperate for love and connection that they may over share or over-perform in hopes of garnering new connections and friends so showing a child that a slower progression is totally normal and fine is a helpful way to teach your child that you don't have to be best friends with someone overnight.

**6. At first, Goose does not seem like a good connection. What is that?**

Caregiver Note: As we see with Goose's character development some folks can change and while we hope for good character development we don't want to immediately trust just anyone. From the start we can see as the audience that Goose is exceedingly jealous of Link and often takes others for granted. Just look at how his room is spaced with Cawlin and Strich and you can see how much of a bully Goose is even to the people he likes. However, over time Goose learns that there is more at stake than Zelda's affection and popularity among Skyloft after he falls to the Surface and has some life experience there. While we hope for growth like Goose it's still important for our kids to learn to watch out for those that do not wish us well with behaviors like Goose shows. Help your child identify his bullying behavior, how he insults people, is a sore loser, pouts when he doesn't get his way, and crosses boundaries inappropriately with Zelda, his friends, and his rivals.

**7. How did Goose change by the end of the game? How is he different?**

Caregiver Note: Thankfully for Goose he does experience some character development by helping Link, connecting with those on the Surface, and being a lot kinder with no expectations in return. As a result he gained a large cult-following on the internet due to his wild Goose-isms and swagger. He also by the end of the game shows more of his own strengths once he stops comparing himself to Link and leans into his own interests like his contraption building for the fights against The Imprisoned. Children can learn from watching Goose that not only can others change, but so can they with time and learning about the world around them.

**8. How does Link get so much help from everyone he meets?**

Caregiver Note: This game is interesting for a *Zelda* game as in some scenarios it allows the player to respond in straightforward, nice ways or in sassy or sarcastic ways. While eventually Link usually will find help the way characters respond to him will vary based on his responses to questions and statements. Most often though the simplest way Link finds help is when he calmly listens and asks politely for help. This may seem like a no-brainer but for children with trauma this may not be a simple response. They may not have learned that adults are safe sources of help and care and may be more likely to bottle up their needs until they explode or walk into a social blunder. For this reason caregivers will need to be extra patient and offer lots of guidance and “re-dos” for kids that struggle with asking for help properly.

**9. Could Link have completed the adventure without help from anyone? What would have happened if he didn't have help?**

Caregiver Note: This is simple, there is no way Link could have completed this adventure without the help of nearly every NPC in the game! If Link didn't talk to other players he would lack the majority of the items he needed, especially since most of them cannot be bought in the few stores that exist. He couldn't receive hints about how to traverse the various dungeons or defeat enemies. There are so many places where NPCs help even when danger isn't present. Like Link, people need other people. We are social creatures that grow in the context of relationships. While not every relationship you have may yield rupees or a bomb bag, the relationships with cultivate affect how much we grow as people in developing social skills, emotional intelligence, and general knowledge of the world around us. This means that it is very important that we learn how to ask for and accept help as a life skill!

**10. How can I make it easier for you to ask for help?**

Caregiver Note: Allow your child to guide this part of the conversation and be prepared to hear things you may not like. A child may provide feedback that it's hard to ask because of tone or posturing and while that may not be easy for us as caregivers to hear we do need to be mindful that our tones and postures may not convey being open to providing help and care especially in times where we are stressed, angry, or overwhelmed. Remember, take deep breaths and know that we all are constantly learning about how to best communicate with others around us. Even when we get older sometimes we may need a reminder of what we are communicating when we speak or not.

## 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.