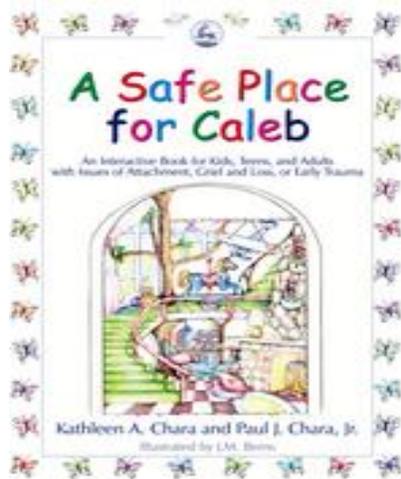


A Safe Place for Caleb: A Wonderful Resource for Healing Traumatized Adoptees: A Book Review

By Arleta James, PCC



Children who have experienced trauma enter the family with thoughts about themselves, adults and the world that are faulty. For example, children who resided in homes replete with domestic violence and physical abuse may think:

- Aggression is a means to solve problems. In homes with domestic violence and physical abuse, it is the strongest member of the family who gets what he wants.
- "What is happening to my birthmom now?" Many children are preoccupied with the status of their birthmother who lived as a victim of domestic violence. They question her safety. They question whether or not she is alive or dead. They feel guilty that they are not present to protect her. Frequently, children will comment, "I am older now and I could help take better care of her."
- "I was not behaving and this is why I was abused." Or, "I made my birthmom mad and this is why she hit me." "I am bad." "I left my birthfamily because of me."

Sexual abuse, abandonment, living with parents who abuse drugs, being placed in an orphanage and so on are all traumas that—like physical abuse and domestic violence—leave children with an irrational thought process. Thoughts drive behaviors and the way we interact with others. Children who think they are "bad" or at "fault", etc. enter adoptive families, and shortly they begin to act in ways that validate their perspective of themselves and adults. Their negative behaviors challenge parents, brothers and sisters!

1 Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Welcoming a Brother or Sister by Adoption: From Navigating New Relationships to Building a Loving Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>, 2013)

Traumatized children need a narrative—a truthful accounting of their life pre-adoption—in order to help them heal, grow and join their adoptive families. [A Safe Place for Caleb: An Interactive Book for Kids, Teens and Adults with Issues of Attachment, Grief and Loss, or Early Trauma](#) is a wonderful tool to help children construct a narrative and recover from past hurts. This book is authored by Kathleen Chara and Paul J. Chara.

This book tells the story of Caleb who was removed from his birth mother, at age 4, and placed with Bob and Catherine Smith and their two children, Tim and Kristi. Caleb takes us through his process of identifying his “hurting beliefs”—false guesses about the truth. Caleb’s hurting beliefs come from his early wounds and there is a wonderful illustration of a “wall of wounds.” At this point, the story line and the illustrations come together nicely—much conversation could be initiated.

Caleb and his family enter therapy with Dr. John. As a result, Caleb learns how to turn his “hurting beliefs” into “healing beliefs.” Caleb also learns the rules about feelings:

- It is okay to feel!
- Talk about your feelings!
- Practice making the bad feeling smaller and the good feelings bigger!

Caleb agrees to stop playing “people games” as well. That is, he finds ways to replace his negative behaviors with ways to be a respectful and responsible family member. Caleb has a little help on his healing journey from Brave Heart and Truthful Spirit. They live in the Safe Tree House and provide him “keys.” I do prefer to think of Brave Heart and Truthful Spirit as mom and dad. The book is flexible enough to allow this substitution as well as many others that “fit” each family’s own unique situation.

A Safe Place for Caleb ends with a great section of interactive activities that children and teens could work on in therapy or at home. I particularly like “Breaking the Trauma Chain” which helps make connections between the faulty beliefs and the resultant behaviors. This exercise concludes with generating a new way of thinking and acting. So, often we tell kids what not to do. It is equally important—especially with traumatized children—to help them learn what to do. There are also drawing suggestions, a list of questions to help identify irrational thinking, ideas about slowing down racing thoughts, and much, much more that will put children on the road to recovery!

Parents will particularly appreciate the very last pages which cover suggestions for self-care while moms and dads are helping their troubled adoptee heal. Parents will also like the ideas about managing some of the more common behavior problems like stealing, lying and food issues.

A Safe Place for Caleb is a must have in any parent’s or therapist’s toolbox!