

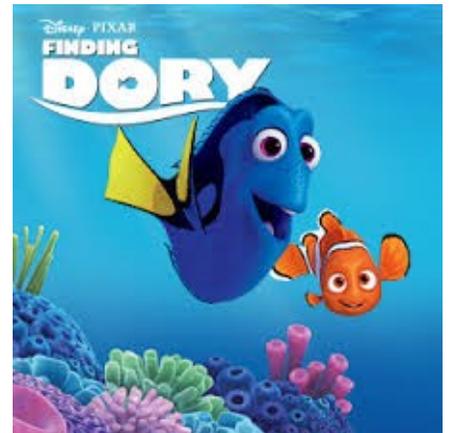


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## FINDING DORY MOVIE REVIEW

BY ELLEN SINGER, C.A.S.E. SENIOR THERAPIST, LCSW-C

I wanted to love this movie. I did love Finding Nemo, especially the character of Dory. Even though Dory is of course, not an adopted person, the theme of trying to remember and find her parents, and herself...her identity (hence the name of the movie) is one that my C.A.S.E. colleagues and I believed might resonate for adopted persons and that is also why I went to see the film. I took my 17-year-old son with me to watch Finding Dory, just as we'd gone together 13 years ago to watch Finding Nemo. He loved Finding Dory and was disappointed that I was not as enthusiastic. Since I review movies for adoptive parents, I explained to him, I try to view the movie through the eyes of an adopted child, teen, and adult.



Judging by Fandango.com, critics and audiences generally loved Finding Dory. There are wonderful, important messages about overcoming personal challenges (e.g. Dory's short-term memory problem), believing in your strengths despite those challenges and perseverance. The movie demonstrates the beauty of true friendship. Watching Marlin (Nemo's father) grow into understanding that love means supporting your friend's strengths while embracing their challenges is one of the best parts of the movie. In addition, Dory's friends are diverse – a septipus, a Beluga whale, all with their own unique strengths and challenges – all willing to go the extra mile to help each other.

The difficulty for me around Dory's journey to find her parents was that there was such an undercurrent of sadness. I worry that this could be overwhelming for ALL children, let alone adopted children. As Dory's memories slowly come back, she experiences missing her parents and an overwhelming sense of loss, and a desperate need to find them. With these revelations comes the painful realization that Dory herself was to "blame" for the loss because of her disability. (She forgot not to go to an unsafe place.) For those of you who may not know this, adopted children who are trying to understand why they were adopted – why they "lost" their birth families - are at great risk of blaming themselves. Their young minds can't conceptualize adult problems and circumstances that result in adoption. They may silently wonder, "I must have done something wrong. I was bad." In her case, Dory was not wrong. She did get lost because she forgot to avoid something unsafe. What might this trigger for an adopted child?

The other problem for me is that while you know that this is a children's movie and therefore will definitely have a happy ending – that Dory, of course, will be reunited with her parents – as is customary in children's movies, Finding Dory has scenes that bring this conclusion into doubt. Scenes where Dory believes she is too late— that her parents are dead--- she is all alone, I worry are just too much to ask any child, let alone an adopted one to bear.

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There ARE messages that are very positive for adoptive families. Once reunited with her parents, Dory realizes that to be happy and whole, she also needs to be with Marlin and Nemo – because they are also her “family.” At the end of the movie, she is with everyone who belongs to her.

Finally, I must comment on Dory’s memory loss disability. Toward the beginning of the movie, there is a scene that shows how “annoying” she can be because of it. Something happens to knock Dory temporarily unconscious, but the children fish in the movie are disappointed to learn that Dory is not dead. Just plain awful. I know this sets things up to show how amazing Dory is despite her disability, but this was just terrible. Anyone who loves someone with any disability that makes them “annoying” at times – memory loss, ADHD, autism, a mental health issue, etc. may find this particularly distressing as I did.

In sum, I always recommend, whenever possible, that parents see an adoption-themed movie first to decide if they feel it is appropriate and beneficial for their child. Again, while this movie is not about adoption, it is possible that it can certainly generate a great deal of discussion around adoption. Maybe I’m being too protective. My concerns simply are meant to give parents a “heads up” as you consider taking your children to see it. I would certainly not recommend this movie for adopted children under the age of 10. Your teens may enjoy the movie, however and it may foster good discussion with them as well.

Whenever an adoption-themed movie comes out, I recommend that parents familiarize themselves with that movie just in case their children’s friends see it and start asking questions. With this movie, it is possible that non-adopted friends would simply see the movie’s theme of separation from family to be about their friend’s adoptive family. I wonder if they would think of the separation/search in terms of their friend’s birth family? They might. They are known to ask adoptees, “Where are your real parents?” “Don’t you want to find your real parents?”