

A Safe Place for Caleb

**An Interactive Book for Kids, Teens,
and Adults with Issues of Attachment,
Grief and Loss, or Early Trauma**

Kathleen A. Chara and Paul J. Chara, Jr.

Illustrated by J.M. Berns



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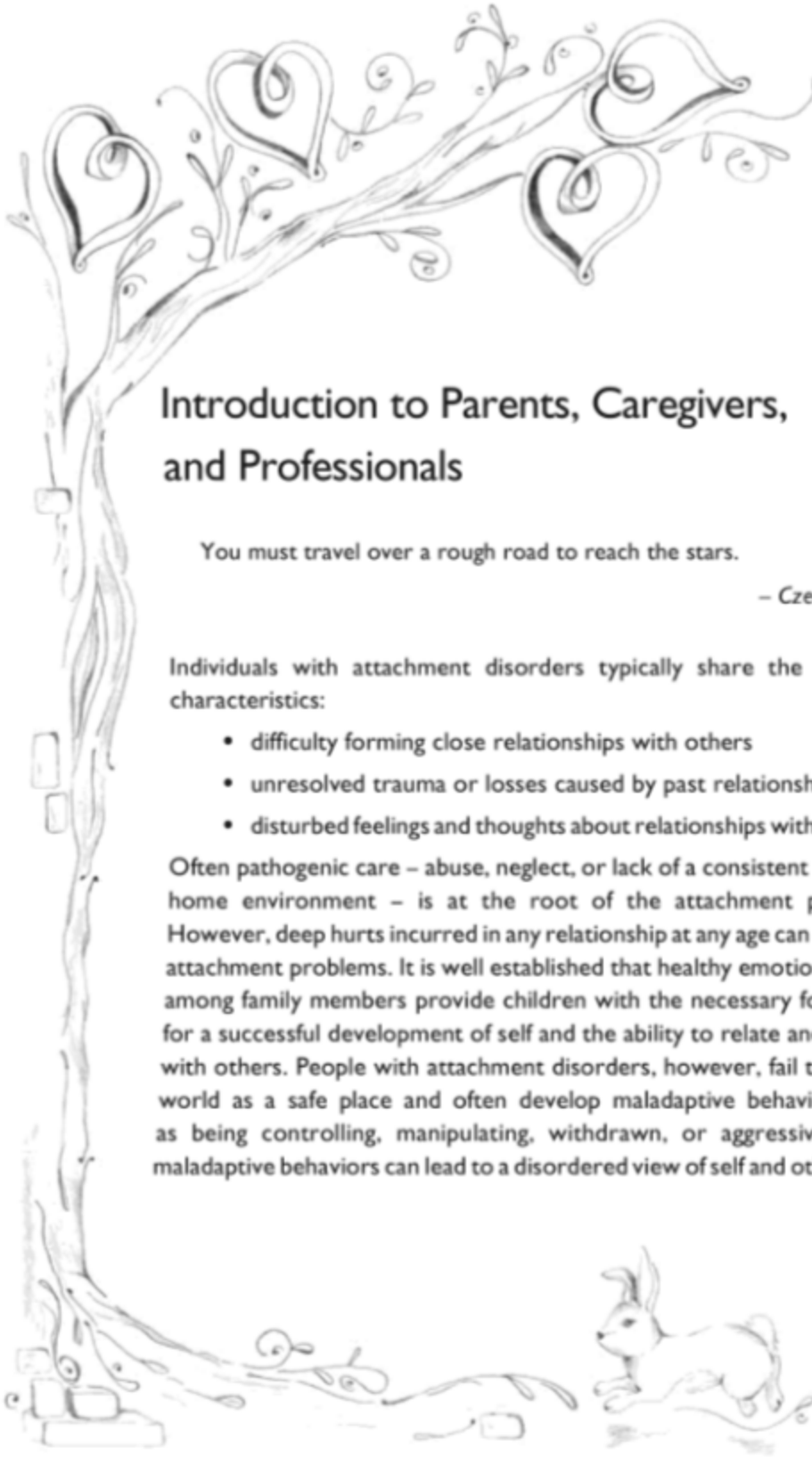
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Introduction to Parents, Caregivers, and Professionals

You must travel over a rough road to reach the stars.

– Czech proverb

Individuals with attachment disorders typically share the following characteristics:

- difficulty forming close relationships with others
- unresolved trauma or losses caused by past relationships
- disturbed feelings and thoughts about relationships with others.

Often pathogenic care – abuse, neglect, or lack of a consistent nurturing home environment – is at the root of the attachment problems. However, deep hurts incurred in any relationship at any age can engender attachment problems. It is well established that healthy emotional bonds among family members provide children with the necessary foundation for a successful development of self and the ability to relate and interact with others. People with attachment disorders, however, fail to see the world as a safe place and often develop maladaptive behaviors, such as being controlling, manipulating, withdrawn, or aggressive. These maladaptive behaviors can lead to a disordered view of self and others. As a

result, this complex disorder tends to manifest itself in a profound disturbance in feelings of safety and security within relationships. What can be done to help the adult struggling with attachment issues, or the families grappling with the difficulties in raising a Reactive Attachment Disordered (RAD) child?

We believe that successful treatment of people wrestling with attachment issues should include a comprehensive evaluation to rule out other disorders or additional problems, such as learning disabilities, bipolar disorder, and sensory integration problems. Furthermore, for young people wrestling with attachment problems, we recommend family-centered therapy using relational-based techniques, conducted by a therapist trained in working with attachment disorders. However, there are numerous therapeutic interventions and approaches (e.g., trauma therapy, narrative therapy, attachment parenting, cognitive-behavioral therapy, reality therapy) that have been used by professionals with varying degrees of success. Many of these interventions can be adapted for use by nonprofessionals and individuals struggling with attachment difficulties. Although there are different treatment techniques, many professionals agree that at least five therapeutic goals need to be addressed:

- resolve past trauma/losses
- reconstruct cognitive beliefs based on these experiences
- assist with the development of trust
- learn to handle emotions appropriately
- understand societal expectations and learn to engage in reciprocal relationships within a safe, family-focused environment.

Therapy is usually a necessary component of the attachment healing process. However, there is much that a person can do on her or his own to overcome attachment problems. People struggling with attachment issues often feel that their situations will never change for the better. They think that even if there was a possibility for positive change, they wouldn't have the ability or the knowledge to go about effecting the needed changes. We wrote this book to address those beliefs. To those of you who feel hopeless about overcoming your attachment difficulties, we offer hope: You don't have to be chained to your past pain! To those of you who think you don't have the ability to heal from your past hurts, we offer encouragement: The techniques offered in the following pages are not difficult to master – you can do it! And, to those of you who believe that you just don't have the requisite knowledge in order to

build healthy attachment relationships with others, we offer guidance: The approaches presented in this book are empirically rooted, clinically derived, and, most importantly, easy to use.

Part I of this book is a story intended to draw in the person struggling with attachment issues. It is written from the perspective of a 13-year-old, and the featured character in the story, Caleb, is a composite figure based on experiences with several clients that Kathleen had the privilege to walk with in their healing processes. The story – which we call *Caleb's Story* – is written at a level that a young child can understand. However, because resolving attachment issues requires a person to deal with her or his past – making it necessary to “get in touch” with the younger, wounded self – *Caleb's Story* is also applicable to adolescents and adults who want to overcome their attachment problems. A unique healing technique for working through attachment problems – the SAFE TREE HOUSE – is presented in this story. The SAFE TREE HOUSE can be used by people ranging in age from young childhood through adulthood.

Part II provides numerous resources for working with attachment problems. We have provided attachment tables, tools, and techniques that we offer to anyone who is working with people grappling with attachment issues, or to those individuals who desire to overcome their own attachment problems. There are also additional guidelines for using the SAFE TREE HOUSE technique. No part of this book, however, should be considered a substitute for professional advice.

How to use this book

Although the first part of this book appears to be intended for children and teenagers, we believe that people of diverse ages can profit from its content. It is important to remember that attachment disorders usually have their origins in the early childhood years, so it is necessary to explore those early years in order to find meaning and healing later in life. Following are some age-appropriate guidelines for getting the maximum benefit from this book.

Use with children

Younger children will profit most from the use of this book if *Caleb's Story* is read along with parents or other caregivers. While the story is being read, the adult should explain novel concepts, such as the HURT SELF (a glossary of terms is presented in the back of the book), and encourage children to ask questions and

share their thoughts and feelings. Very young children may find it difficult to maintain their attention through the six chapters of *Caleb's Story*. Therefore, we suggest going through only one or two chapters a day. For the older child we suggest that adults working with the child be present with her or him during the first reading of the story to provide emotional support and to answer questions. However, many children may feel too overwhelmed or threatened during the first reading to respond to adult questions or to share what they are feeling and thinking. Thus, it may be helpful for the adult to take a more passive role during the first reading and then to encourage the child to read the book again on her or his own. A later time can be arranged where the child's reactions to the story can be discussed.

Children of all ages will likely need help in using the SAFE TREE HOUSE and the HEALING KEYS. Other healing techniques in Part II can be adapted for use by children.

Use by adolescents

A serious mistake parents (and other caregivers) can make with adolescents is to withdraw from parenting. Relinquishing parental responsibilities can easily be misinterpreted by adolescents as signifying a lack of care for them. For adolescents struggling with attachment problems, this misinterpretation can cause further damage to their ability to form healthy relationships with others. Therefore, we strongly encourage parents and caregivers of adolescents to take an active role in facilitating the healing process.

Adolescents may wonder what a story by a 13-year-old has to do with them. We suggest that adolescents familiarize themselves with a brief background about attachment disorders before they read *Caleb's Story*. The information presented in the first attachment table (page 74) is a good place to start. Furthermore, *Caleb's Story* will be read with greater understanding if the following points are kept in mind:

- Attachment problems usually have their origins in early childhood. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit that time in life in order to get to the root of the problems.
- The best way to understand the early childhood years therapeutically is to "see" those years through the eyes of early childhood experience. *Caleb's Story* is simply a technique to facilitate that process.

- The healing techniques presented in *Caleb's Story*, such as the SAFE TREE HOUSE and the HEALING KEYS, are intended for use by people of diverse ages, not just children. Furthermore, the healing techniques in Part II are applicable to people of diverse ages.

Use by adults

What older people have in common with adolescents and children is that their attachment problems usually began in the same period of life: early childhood. Therefore, what matters most in reading *Caleb's Story* is not how old you are, but how young you can be. What we mean by this is that because attachment breaches and hurts occurred early in life, it is therapeutically important to rediscover the “young child” inside the adult. If the early losses and traumas can have a negative impact on an adult's life, then there is something remaining of those early years in an adult's life. *Caleb's Story* and the other healing techniques presented in this book are designed to help a person get into those memories and predispositions – what we call the HURT SELF – in order to heal it (through cognitive and affective restructuring). Once the HURT SELF begins to heal, the impediments that hindered the development of good relationships start to break down, and a new foundation, one that is conducive to the development of healthy relationships with others, is built.

We thank all of the people who have shared their stories of relational hurt and pain with us, and for showing us that healing is possible. We would also like to encourage all of our readers that, as you take the courage to walk this journey of recovery, know that victory over attachment problems is possible! You are not alone!

Chapter 1

Hurting Beliefs, Hurting Behaviors

Hello! My name is Caleb, and many sad and scary things happened to me when I was younger. These things are sometimes very difficult for me to talk about. Sometimes I want to pretend like they never happened. Other times, I think about them when I don't want to. There are nights when I dream about those times and I feel lonely, scared, or really angry. At times I may feel so sad that I don't think I can ever get up in the morning. There have been times when I got so mad that I just wanted to hurt people or pretend that I hate them – all of them. I would hurt animals (including my own pets) and people, for no reason. Sometimes I even hurt myself. All of this has been a long journey, but after a lot of hard work I have found some peace. If you have had scary, sad, or confusing things happen to you, remember there are other folks just like you and me: we are not the only ones who have had sad things happen to us. But the good news is that things can get better! Let me tell you about my life when I was little, many of the things that I lived through, and how my life changed for the better.

When I was seven years old, my new family learned that I had problems with attachment. I said, "What? What is attachment?" I have since learned a lot about attachment, which is a big word that means that people have had bad things happen to them in their pasts, usually when they were little by people they loved. As a result, they are afraid to feel close to other people, or to trust others. In other words, because of their



hurts, they don't feel safe with or comfortable around people. When I was younger, I was **very scared** of getting close to people, and this fear kept me from wanting to love others and getting love back from them. But, the good news is that I have found some ways that worked for me to feel safe – *on the inside* – so that I can enjoy people like others do instead of feeling how I used to. Do you have problems feeling safe on the inside, and are you sometimes afraid to love others? If so, please read on!

I was adopted by the Smith family when I was almost four years old. I can remember some things about my life before my adoption and others have told me stories about those times. There are a few pictures in my mind of my birth mom and the homes I lived in before I came to live with the Smiths. I can remember how the sun would shine



across our living room floor early in the mornings when I was the only one up, and how warm and safe I felt in the sun's rays on those mornings. I remember how the neighbor lady's large dog barked loudly when I walked near him. I can still smell the breakfast foods on my birth mom's clothes when she came close to me, and I can remember the taste of the old crackers I sometimes ate for breakfast. I kind of miss those old smells, sights, and sounds – they never seem to go away.

Then one day I was taken away from this home and I really didn't know why. I only saw my birth mom one more time after that and she was crying and told me, "Be a good boy for Mommy, Caleb."

I never went back to that house again. Nobody ever really explained why I was not going to live with my mom anymore. I guess they all thought I already knew. So I never got to smell my birth mom's dresses again or feel the sun's rays in that living room. Those days were gone forever and my heart was broken – I thought forever. I miss my birth family a lot. I thought for a long time that if I was a good boy, my birth mom would come and get me and take me back with her. Many people said life was going to be better now, but I still hoped she would come.



I also remember other things about my time with my birth mom that are not so fun to remember. I have memories of lots of yelling and hitting and other types of hurting, pains of stomach aches from being hungry, nasty smells of beer and cigarettes, and fears of seeing no grown-ups around when it was dark.

There are some things that I have very little memories about. For example, I also had a baby sister named Kelly. I do not remember her much, but I do remember that my mom would let me feed her when mom was sleeping, and how she would smile a lot when I tickled her.

My sister and I had different dads, but I don't remember either of them. I miss my mom and sister a lot, but I have learned that I can love lots of people and you can too. Do you have sights, sounds, smells, and feelings from when you were little that bother you sometimes? It is okay to have your own memories – even if some memories are not fun to remember. Some kids have no or few memories before their adoption or before big changes happened in their lives. Remember, not all kids are the same and that is okay too.



Not all kids have had the same bad things happen to them either. There are lots of different types of hurts. On the following pages are some things that have happened to other children like you and me.

What are some of the bad or sad things that have happened to you?

For a long time, I kept waiting for my mom to come back for me. But she never did. I really started asking myself, **“Why? Why did all this happen to me?”** When I asked people this question and they told me their answers, it didn't really help me. They tended to use big words or not really answer my questions. Maybe I just didn't want to listen or maybe other people just didn't really understand.

