

Explaining Adoption to Your Child

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse

[Should I Tell My Child He's Adopted?](#)

[What Should I Tell My Child About the Birthparents?](#)

[What Should I Tell My Child About Why He Was Adopted?](#)

[Special Situations](#)

[Good and Bad Times To Talk With Your Child](#)

[Dealing with Feelings of Sadness](#)

[Helping Your Child Deal with Negative Attitudes from Others](#)

“I haven't told Amy she was adopted and she's going to start kindergarten soon! Is it too late? How can I tell her without upsetting her?” This was one distressed and panicky mother's dilemma. Many adoptive parents are concerned about when and how to talk about adoption with their children. In fact, one survey of adoptive parents showed that 82 percent wanted information on how to explain adoption to their children. Considering the many parents who attend workshops on this topic at adoption conferences, this is not surprising.

What This Factsheet Covers

Talking about adoption with your child is a very important issue, and we cannot cover everything there is to know in this factsheet. What we can do is provide you with some basic guidelines about when to tell your child about adoption, how to talk to your child, and what you should and shouldn't say.

This factsheet will also discuss your feelings about adoption and why it is important to address them. Children pick up on not only what you say but also on how you act and the emotions you display.

Finally, we will discuss helping your child deal with the attitudes of others, because the sad fact is that many people in our society are biased against adoption and adopted children.

Should I Tell My Child He's Adopted?

In the past, experts urged parents never to tell their children they were adopted and to maintain the fiction that the child was born into the *family*. There are several major problems with this advice.

Many experts believe that it's unfair to the child not to tell him or her about such an important issue. Not telling also forces loving parents to lie to their children--for example, when a 3- year-old asks his adoptive mother, "Did I grow in your tummy?" In addition, other people such as relatives and friends will know about the adoption and may accidentally or intentionally tell the child about it. Or the child could discover the information on his own by finding an adoption decree or other revealing document. The child could be quite upset about this and may wonder what else you have lied about.

How Do I Get Started?

As in talking with your child about sex, religion, and other complex topics, many experts suggest you introduce the information little by little, in a building block fashion. This allows your child to absorb the information gradually over the years, as he or she becomes better able to understand difficult concepts.

When your child is young, questions can be answered very simply. If he asks where he came from, he may mean "Chicago, Illinois," not his birthmother's womb. Try to understand what it is the child is seeking. If the child wants more information, it will be requested. Sometimes adoptive parents rush in with a confusing load of information that the child isn't ready for.

Make it an Ongoing Process

Talking with your child about adoption shouldn't be a one time thing. Children often need to have information repeated to them more than once before they can grasp it. Some experts, such as psychologist David Brodzinsky, believe that this is caused by the way children's thinking abilities develop as they get older. According to Brodzinsky, parents should not become anxious or confused if their children don't fully grasp their explanations the first time. So don't worry if you explain adoption to your 4-year-old child and then have to explain it all again when the child reaches 7 or 8. It doesn't mean your explanations were inadequate or wrong. It may just be that your child wasn't ready to grasp such a complex concept as adoption.

Although you shouldn't expect to tell your child about adoption when she is 3 and never mention it again, it need not be a weekly or even a monthly subject. You know your child best, so use your own judgment about when and how to talk about adoption, despite what the experts say. And remember that each child will learn the information at his own pace.

What If My Child Gets Upset?

It is important to accept that you can't protect your child from all pain--no matter how much every parent would like to. Just as you can't stop Ryan or Lakeisha from getting scraped knees, neither can you shield them from some feelings of pain, loss, and confusion upon discovering that he or she was adopted. However, sharing the information in a positive and caring way can help minimize the hurt.

Show your child that you are willing to answer questions and admit it when you do not know the answers. Just letting your child know that it is okay to talk about adoption will also help a great deal. Studies strongly suggest that the more willing the parent is to answer adoption-related questions, the better the environment is for the child.

What If I Say the Wrong Thing?

Many adoptive parents feel anxious about talking with their children about adoption. They worry that they will say the wrong thing or not have all the answers. They may clutch up every time someone brings up the subject of adoption. Experts say adoptive parents worry about these things partly because they think they should be perfect parents.

Being an adoptive parent means that you probably went through a lot more scrutiny than most biological parents, such as a home study or adoption study. You probably also wanted a child very intensely, and you may have waited for years for your child. As a result, you may feel that you must do everything just right and be the best parent on the block. In addition, some adoptive parents suffer from feelings of guilt because they feel they have kidnapped the child from the birthparents and deprived them of rearing this wonderful child. This leads them to think that they have to be super-parents to prove their worthiness.

Assuming that you adopted your child lawfully, there is no reason to feel guilty. Perfectionism is burdensome and self-defeating. Try to accept imperfection in yourself, and you won't burden yourself (and perhaps your child) with unrealistic expectations. No parent is perfect, and your best should be good enough.

This also applies when you talk to your child about adoption. No one has all the answers, and there are no perfect responses. Some of your child's questions may pull on your heartstrings and really disturb you. This response is normal and should be expected. Remember, if you believe you have made a mistake in explaining adoption to your child, in almost all cases it can be corrected.

At What Age Should I Begin?

Experts differ markedly on when a child should be told about adoption, although most agree that it should be prior to adolescence. Some experts recommend waiting until the child is between 8 and 11 years old and can understand such a complex subject. Others believe that children should be told as young as age 3 or 4.

Infants

Experts disagree quite strongly about whether adoptive parents should use the words “adoption” or “adopted” around infants. Some experts believe that repeating, “Ah, you are my beautiful adopted baby” to your baby while rocking her to sleep is affirming and can help you get used to saying the word “adoption” in a warm and positive way.

Other experts believe that such statements could harm your feelings of entitlement as a parent. In his book *Healing the Hurt Child*, psychiatrist Denis Donovan says that “Babies have no need to ‘know’ about adoption. They need love, care, nurturance, safety, and challenge.” In any case, the main advantage, if any, is probably to the adoptive parent rather than to the child.

Preschoolers

Experts disagree about whether to explain adoption to preschoolers. Psychiatrist Herbert Weider feels very strongly that telling your child he’s adopted too early can cause permanent emotional damage. Says Welder, “My clinical data unequivocally demonstrate the traumatic effect of the early communication and its participation in anxiety, confusion, and regression.”.. “the needs and development of a child of 2 or 3 years are not well served by revelation of his adoptive status. Rather than ‘forgetting’ the story, my patients continued to be obsessed with the theme.” According to Anne Braff, “Modern, educated adoptive parents are so eager to be right, so determined to make no mistakes. Driven by a compulsion for truth, they rush to tell their child the secret of their anguish and joy. Inevitably, they are too truthful, too joyful, and too soon.”

Other experts disagree. According to David Brodzinsky, “In the preschool years, when most adoptive couples begin to disclose adoption information to their children, there is little evidence of any immediate, adverse reaction to the information. In fact, young adopted children often have a very positive view of adoption.. First they generally are told about being adopted in the context of a warm, loving, and protective family environment. Thus, the emotional climate surrounding the telling process is one which fosters acceptance and positive self-regard.”

Brodzinsky finds that the main problem with early explanations is that they often don’t stick because the concept of adoption is too complex for a small child to grasp. Most experts agree that preschoolers won’t be able to understand the concept of adoption, even when explained at a very basic level. The problem with this is that it can cause the parents to mistakenly believe that their child will need no further explanations and will continue to view adoption positively throughout his or her life. In fact, a team of British therapists speculated that “It seems almost as though there is a wish that the child’s early incomprehension should anaesthetize him against the element of pain that is part of the information, and that this anesthesia should persist and spare him pain when he does comprehend. We would argue that some pain is inseparable from comprehending that one is adopted.”

One problem with delaying the adoption explanation until a child is around 8 years old is that young children often know the basic facts of life well before then. Children as young as 2 or 3 notice pregnant women and ask questions. A child may ask whether he grew in his adoptive mother's tummy. Many adoptive parents simply tell the child that Mommy did not give birth to him—that another woman, the birthmother, gave birth to him, and then he was adopted. Other parents avoid the issue by lying to the child, which can backfire on them later on. Probably the worst thing you can do is ignore the question altogether. Small children have extremely vivid imaginations and may dream up an explanation much more outrageous than the actual situation. Children need to know that all children are born, but not all children are adopted.

If you decide to explain adoption to your preschooler, simple explanations are the best. Do not burden your child with the reasons why the birthparents chose adoption, or your agonizing soul-searching about whether to adopt a child. Remember that preschool children think in very simple, concrete terms and tend to take everything quite literally. The main idea you should try to convey to your child is that he or she was very much wanted by your family. Try to describe how you felt when you first learned about your child. What were you doing when the social worker called to tell you to come and pick up your child? Were you so excited that you ran out in your bathrobe? Simple facts like these, with a positive emotional overtone, are what your child needs to hear.

Pre-Teens

Between the ages of 8 and 11, most adopted children will start to ask questions about adoption. They may ask, "Who arranged the adoption? How was it arranged? What does my birth certificate look like?" It is a good idea to show children their birth certificate (that is, the one you have; probably the original birth certificate is sealed), and to share much of the information you have, depending on individual circumstances.

Your child may have seen single parents on television, and some of his friends may live with only one parent, so the idea of a woman placing a child for adoption simply because she is unmarried may not make much sense to him. Children at this age are likely to be very judgmental and see issues in terms of good and bad--there is no middle ground for them. Still, they can begin to understand that sometimes children need to be adopted and that adoption is a good way to form families.

It is a good idea to bring up the subject of adoption periodically at appropriate moments. For example, if a relative becomes pregnant, a child may start to think and wonder about her own birth. Or on your child's birthday, she may be a little sad and reflective and may wonder about her birthmother. Social worker and adopted adult Carol Demuth says that birthdays are "...a natural day to 'connect' with the birthmother psychologically. As the adopted person reflects on his own birth, he will wonder if his birthmother is thinking of him too." Rather than asking the child directly, "Are you thinking about your birthmother?", you might state, "I'm very proud of you. And you know what? I think your birthmother would be proud of you, too." This will give your child an opening for bringing the subject up.

Do understand, however, that sometimes the child will not want to talk about adoption. In this case you should back off. As long as the child knows you are open to questions and discussions, then he or she will ask questions when the need arises.

Adolescents

Because of their developing sexuality, questions about their identity, and attempts to break away and become adults, adolescents are particularly likely to have questions about adoption. They are able to understand adoption more fully than younger children, yet they do not have the maturity of adulthood.

Adolescents can begin to understand some of the reasons why birthparents are sometimes unable to parent a child, such as being too young, lack of family acceptance, or financial problems. Your adolescent may be ready to hear all or most of the information you have on the birthparents and their reasons for choosing adoption. Remember, however, that many adolescents have fragile egos, and some negative information might better be revealed when the teenager is older and more mature—for example, if the child was the result of a rape or if the birthparents had severe problems with alcohol or drug abuse.

What Should I Tell My Child About the Birthparents?

It is important for you to sort out your own feelings about the birthparents before you talk to your child. Be assured that no matter what you say about the birthparents, the child will pick up on your real feelings. According to expert Beverly McKay Zimmerman, adoptive parents “...may feel threatened, jealous, grateful to, disapproving of, or superior to this unknown couple.” Do you think you know why the birthparents chose adoption? Can you imagine yourself in the same situation? Zimmerman says it is crucial to examine these kinds of feelings and accept them.

It is best not to depict the birthparents as bad people. If the birthparents are perceived as bad, the child will conclude that maybe she is bad too. Even if the birthparents were highly abusive, it is better (and still true) to simply say that they were not able to handle being parents.

The overall goal in describing birthparents should be to present them as real people. While adopted children may fantasize that their birthparents are either wonderful and exciting people, or that they are drug addicts or criminals, the reality is that most birthparents are regular, normal people. They could not parent the child and so they chose adoption. Whether they were abusive, drug-dependent, poor, too young, or whatever—the bottom line is that they could not parent the child.

If the child wonders what a birthparent looked like and you know, tell the child. You may have a photograph of the birthparent which you can show the preteen child. If the child has questions and you are not sure of the answers, you may be able to obtain additional information from the child placing agency. Many agencies now offer post placement services for families.

If the child expresses worry over the birthmother, speculating that she is dead, reassure your child that the birthmother is probably healthy and safe. It is also important to reassure your child that the birthmother will not attempt to reclaim the child—another common fear of adopted children.

The child may express anger at his birthparents. One 10-year-old child told his adoptive mother that he was very angry at his birthparents for neglecting him and his siblings, who were later all adopted together. She replied that his birthparents were just not able to be parents and had never learned how. The child said that in that case, he was mad at his grandparents. The mother replied that perhaps his grandparents had not learned either. The child thought and thought and then he said “Okay, then. If there was anybody who KNEW and still didn’t teach the others, then that is the person I am mad at.” Apparently this explanation satisfied the child and his anger lessened.

What Should I Tell My Child About Why He Was Adopted?

“Your Birthmother Loved You But...”

Some social workers and some children’s books encourage adoptive parents to tell their children that they were placed for adoption because the birthmother loved the child greatly, even when the child was severely abused. Experts strongly disagree.

Dr. Denis Donovan argues that many of his clients are in therapy because of such statements. “The ‘two mother dilemma’ and the exculpatory ‘she really loved you but...’ explanation of the circumstances of relinquishment place a totally irrational cognitive burden on the immature and developing mind. Through these ‘explanations,’ love comes to be equated with abandonment very early in the child’s life, thus creating potentially serious blocks to attachment and a sense of unreality and in genuineness.”

Donovan also argues that telling the child the birthmother chose adoption because she loved him can cause the child to come to the conclusion that “... there must have been something wrong with the child—since what reasonable adult would have given away a perfectly good baby!”

Another problem with this explanation is that you love the child too. Does this mean you might place the child for adoption some day? The child may also feel that he must be extra good to merit the sacrifice made by the birthmother—a sacrifice in which he had no decision making power.

The birthmother may have been a wonderful and caring person, but the bottom line was that she could not parent the child. She may have loved the child, but that was not her primary reason for placing the child. Her primary reason was whatever prevented her from being able to rear the child.

“The Birthparents were Poor”

Sometimes adoptive parents are advised to tell their children that they were adopted because their parents were poor, or that they were abandoned at an orphanage. Although it may be true that the birthparents were poor, it is best not to emphasize their socioeconomic status. (In fact, in the United States most birthparents come from middle- class families.)

The poverty explanation may cause all sorts of negative feelings in the child. If they were poor, why didn't someone help them? The child is likely to feel sorry for the birthparents and feel guilty about being adopted. This is particularly true in the case of international adoptions. Children adopted from other countries because of conditions of poverty may begin to feel a kind of survivor guilt as they grow into adolescence. They may wonder why they were adopted while the other kids in the orphanage had to remain.

Poverty and abandonment explanations seldom give the whole picture and may be unfair to the birthparents. In some foreign countries, birth control may be hard to come by, and single parenthood may be frowned upon by the culture. Thus, social disapproval could have been a major factor in the adoption decision. Abandoning the child at an orphanage may have been the only way the birthmother knew (or the only legal way) to cause the child to be adopted.

Another problem with the “birthparents were poor” explanation is that if you should suffer a financial loss, get laid off from your job, or even unthinkingly complain about not having enough money, your child might conclude that he will be placed for adoption again. After all, you told the child that poverty was an acceptable reason for placing a child for adoption. This is an unspoken and unnecessary fear for your child to suffer. If you must emphasize poverty as the reason for your child being placed for adoption, you should at least be certain to tell your child that financial problems would never cause you to consider adoption.

In summary, it is all right to agree with the child, if she brings it up, that poverty may have been a problem for the birthparents, but it is generally not a good idea to say that poverty was the only reason for the adoption.

Other Do's and Don'ts

It is important to convey to the child that the circumstances leading to the adoption were not the child's fault. Magical thinking is common in young children, who often believe that when a parent dies or divorces, they made it happen by bad thoughts or deeds. Consequently, they are stricken with horror at what they have caused.

In one case cited by a psychiatrist, a child was totally convinced that he was placed for adoption because he was bad until a therapist literally backed him into a corner and forced him to hold an infant. The therapist asked the child how a baby like this could possibly be bad, and the child suddenly realized that it could not, and that he couldn't have been bad either.

Children also sometimes believe they were placed for adoption because they were not good enough to be kept. If the child was adopted as an infant, emphasize the fact that birthparents often choose adoption long before the child is even born. This will show the child that it could

not possibly be his fault that he was adopted, and that it had nothing to do with his appearance, behavior, or any other characteristic.

If the child was adopted as an older child, the emphasis is more likely to be on the fact that the parent was unable to be a parent because of various problems in the parent's life. Stress the fact that these problems were unrelated to the child but made the parent incapable of being a good parent to any child at that time.

Avoid depicting your family as saviors of the child, even if that might be society's view. This places too much of a burden on the child. If others heap accolades on you for adopting, especially in the child's presence, explain politely that the entire family gained from the adoption, and the child was very much wanted.

Telling your child that he is "special" or "chosen" can also be problematic. In most cases the child was not specifically chosen. Also, being special could be burdensome for the child, who may worry whether he or she can live up to this label. Instead, tell your child your family was formed by adoption, which conveys the specialness idea.

If you are religious, you may want to say that God sent the child to you, and that God sends some children biologically and others through adoption. Many adoptive parents strongly believe in the truth of this statement.

Special Situations

When Your Child Is of a Different Racial/Ethnic Heritage Than You

If you have adopted a child from another country or of a different racial or ethnic background, the child may have many questions, typically from the preschool years on. Why is her skin brown and yours a tan color? How come you have straight hair and hers is curly? As a result, you will need to explain that there are many different kinds of people, some with curly hair, some with straight, and some with brown skin and some with beige skin. Let her know that all colors and textures are attractive. Explain that skin and hair colors come from the birthparents and that sometimes children grow up with the parents they were born to and sometimes children grow up with parents who adopt them.

The child's racial heritage usually won't cause problems until she begins school. Teachers and parents may be very surprised to see a parent who does not resemble the child. There may be cruel remarks and tears. You should be prepared to always strongly support your child in the face of a sometimes-uncaring world.

When Your Child Was Adopted as an Older Child

In this case, your child may have experienced many foster care placements as well as a chaotic life with his biological parents before he finally came to your family. He knows his name and the

name of his parents, but he will probably still be confused and angry about the situation.

Children who were abused by their birthparents may still long for their love and may believe that love was withheld or distorted due to some fault of their own.

It is important to discuss adoption with your older child. It can also be very helpful for him or her to meet other adopted children at social functions of adoptive parent groups.

Open Adoptions

In open adoptions, the identities of the birthparents and adoptive parents are known to each other, and there may be some type of ongoing contact. Thus, the child not only knows he was adopted, but may even speak to the birthparents on a regular basis.

At first thought, it may seem unnecessary to explain adoption to a child under these circumstances. However, adoptive parents must still explain to the child why he was adopted. Just remember to keep in mind your child's emotional maturity and not give him more information than he is able to deal with.

According to Judith Schaffer and Christina Lindstrom, authors of *How to Raise an Adopted Child*, often the birthmother in an open adoption has a relationship with the child similar to an aunt or friend of the family and the adopted child generally calls the birthmother by her first name. When the child is older, he or she may refer to the birthmother as "the woman who gave birth to me."

Sharon Kaplan and Mazy Jo Rillera, who are strong supporters of this type of "cooperative adoption," state that the child experiencing this dynamic may need assistance in integrating information. They also point out that "it will be important as (s)he grows that there is a clear understanding of who is the parent in charge."

For more information on this topic, refer to the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse factsheet on "Open Adoption."

Infertility

If you chose to adopt a child because you or your spouse is infertile, this information can be shared with your child at any age, tailored to what the child can understand. You may wish to skip over this fact or brush aside that it was painful for you to face infertility, because you do not want your child to feel second-best. Don't worry! When you were seeking a biological child, you had no idea that some day you would be blessed with your adopted child. This concept can be conveyed in words, gestures, and by your overall attitude.

Be sure to explain that once you realized you could not have a child biologically, your strong desire to be a parent remained and you realized that through adoption, your family could be made complete. And so you learned about adoption and ultimately succeeded by having the right child placed with you: the child you adopted.

Good and Bad Times To Talk With Your Child

Experts say that parents should do their best to answer a child's questions about adoption when they are asked. This is not always possible. If you are in the middle of a task requiring complete concentration, assure the child you will talk to him or her later, then do not forget to follow up.

The best times are calm moments (yes, they do occur!) when you are not distracted by other things. If your home is too busy, you could take the child to the park or on a low-key outing.

When you are looking at family albums or videos, it may also be a good time to discuss adoption. It is always important to remember, however, that you should observe the body language of your child. If it is very clear from what your child says and how he acts that he does not wish to talk about the issue, then drop it. Occasionally some well-meaning parents bring up the subject of adoption too much, and this annoys the child.

Looking at photograph albums or making a lifebook with your child can provide more opportunities to talk about adoption and elicit and respond to questions. A lifebook is a special kind of scrapbook that documents all the places a child has lived and the people that have been important to him, up to and including the adoptive family. A listing of books, including some about how to make a lifebook, is included at the end of this factsheet.

Adoptive parent groups can provide an opportunity for the child to meet and mingle with other adopted children and learn that he or she is not the only adopted child in the world. Being told that is one thing; seeing it is another.

Another way to provide information on adoption is to offer books to your child. When the child is young, picture books such as *Susan and Gordon Adopt a Baby*, *Why Was I Adopted?* and many others may be read to them. When they are older, there are other more advanced children's books which can be read to them or which the child may read to him or herself.

One of the best ways to convey positive yet realistic attitudes about adoption is to talk to your child about adoption in general. Use natural opportunities. For instance, if you hear about an upcoming television show with a favorable adoption theme, try to watch it together and talk about it afterwards. Your child will often hear you talk to other people about adoption. If you sound positive, your child will pick up on this attitude. If you become easily offended or angry, your child will sense that adoption can be problematic.

If a happy medium can be achieved, with the child knowing about the adoption, understanding that it is an important part of her life, and knowing she can ask questions about it, but not believing it is the primary family topic that underlies everything, then such a happy medium is best.

There are also bad times to talk about adoption. When your family is in a crisis because of financial problems, family problems, health problems, or some other distressing situation, it is not a good time to sit down and talk to Ashley about how, when and why she was placed for adoption. If Ashley herself is demanding an explanation then, tell her that you need time, whether it is hours or days, to compose yourself so that you can concentrate on what she is asking you.

Never discuss adoption when you or your child are angry or upset. You may be upset due to the problems mentioned above. Or you may be very calm but your child may be distraught over a bad report card. This is not the time to bring up a discussion about her birthparents. If you bring up adoption while you're discussing the report card, she may believe that you think she is not as bright as her adoptive family. Otherwise, why would you bring it up at this time?

The adoption explanation should never be used as an attack. One adopted adult remembers with great pain an argument he had with his parents when he was 18. At the height of the argument, his father blurted out, "Well, you're adopted!" The relationship was troubled for years thereafter. It would have been much better if his parents had told him about his adoptive status in a quiet and calm moment. It still would have been a shock, but it probably wouldn't have caused a serious break in his relationship with his parents.

Dealing with Feelings of Sadness

Although experts disagree about whether or not a primal attachment to the birthmother exists (there is no scientific proof of such an attachment), it is true that there will be times when you and your child may feel sad about the adoption.

Small children may feel sad upon learning that they were not actually born from their adoptive mother's womb. Some may express a wish to climb back into the mother's womb and then be born from her. This comes from the child's love for the adoptive mother. You will not be sad that you adopted the child, but you may also wish the child could have been born to you. Sharing this wish can be a very positive and bonding experience for both parent and child.

The child may feel sadness because his biological parents are unknown, and he may wonder about why they really chose adoption, despite what you tell him. Children often fantasize about birthparents, particularly when they are angry with their parents, or at certain ages such as adolescence. Virtually all children at some point in time wish they had parents who were richer, more beautiful, and certainly less strict than their own parents. Adopted children are further burdened by knowing that they do have another set of parents, the birthparents.

While sad feelings may be difficult to confront, they are not going to be present all day, every day. They can be dealt with, and then both you and your child can get on with the business of life. They may resurface many times, but they need not prevent a happy, fulfilling family life together.

Helping Your Child Deal With Negative Attitudes from Others

Nearly all adoptive parents will have to deal with situations when others use negative or insulting terminology, such as “Your Mom gave you away.” The helplessness and rage many parents feel when they hear people say these things can be difficult to handle. A normally peaceful person may become quite angry and aggressive in this scenario.

Children will learn, whether you tell them or not, the sad truth that society in general does not view adoption very favorably. Your child will hear upsetting remarks and negative comments about adoption on the TV, from other children, from adults, and perhaps even from teachers. In your own home, hopefully you will use positive adoption language and talk about “birthparents” instead of “real parents,” and “chose adoption” instead of “gave up” or “gave away.” But unfortunately these negative terms are used by the public and they do hurt. Helping your child to realize that not everyone understands adoption is important and will help him deal with the negativity that (sadly) he is likely to encounter throughout life.

If someone tells your child he was “given away,” you need to explain that children cannot be given away. What actually happened was his birthparents chose adoption because they were not able to be parents, and the adoption was approved by a social worker and a judge. The complexity of this fact may be difficult to convey. What you need to stress is that your child was not discarded because he was of no value. Place the responsibility for the adoption where it truly lies. It was a decision made by the birthparents or the State authorities, and by you, the adopting parent.

Sometimes people will ask intrusive and hurtful questions in front of your child, such as “Do you know anything about her real mother?” Even 2-year-olds can sense a negative message. Simply state that you are the parent. If you want to say more, keep it simple. Always try to include the child in the conversation if it is about her so she doesn’t feel like an object being discussed. And don’t feel compelled to answer questions merely out of politeness. Deflect intrusive questions by saying, “Why would you want to know that?” or “Why would you ask such a personal question?”

Author Lois Melina stresses that “information about children’s birth families and their preadoption histories should never be shared with those outside the family, unless it is needed by a professional caring for a child. Parents who provide that information without discretion are violating their children’s privacy, regardless of whether the information is positive or negative.”

Conclusion

This factsheet has offered some basic advice and information for adoptive parents on explaining adoption to your child. Adoptive parents should take into account how they feel about adoption, how their child feels, and the child’s emotional maturity. In other words, read the advice of experts and then make your own educated decision about when and how to explain adoption to your child.

Studies indicate that the best attitude is a willingness to answer questions and approachability on the part of adoptive parents. In spite of your best efforts to handle this situation, sometimes your child will be sad or angry about being adopted. This does not mean you have failed. Some negative feelings are normal and can usually be worked through. Remember that most adopted children grow up to be well-adjusted adopted adults. *This factsheet: was written in 1993 by Christine Adamec for the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. Ms. Adamec is an adoptive parent and well-known writer on adoption whose works include The Encyclopedia of Adoption and There Are Babies to Adopt.*

Resources

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<http://www.calib.cOm/flaic/>

Adoption.com

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