Adoptive Families

A SCHOOL HANDOUT

Helping Classmates Understand Adoption

NOTE TO ADOPTIVE PARENTS: Distribute this handout to other parents at your child's school, or send it home with his classmates after an adoption presentation.

"Where's Billy's Real Mom?"

Children are naturally curious. Until now, your child probably assumed that being born into a family is the only way families are formed. If she learns that a friend or classmate was adopted, she'll have lots of questions. She'll want to know what adoption means and how it comes about. She might even feel anxious about the permanence of her own family.

If you're unsure of how or where to begin the discussion, start with this handout. We've compiled two pages of adoption facts, sample Q & As, and talking guidelines. Adoption is not shameful, nor is it secret. Adoptive families talk openly about adoption from the time their children are very young. Take the lead by making it clear that adoption is a wonderful and normal way to build a family, and your children will follow your cues.

ADOPTION Q & A

Child-to-Parent

When your child learns that a friend or classmate was adopted, chances are, he'll have questions. Here are responses to questions kids ask about adoption.

Q: Why doesn't Billy look like his mom?
A: Billy's family is an adoptive family. He was born in Ethiopia to a family who looks like him, but who couldn't take care of a baby when he was born.

Q: What happened to Billy's real mother?
A: Do you mean the woman who gave birth to him? She is Billy's birth mother. Sometimes a person has a baby but isn't ready to be a parent.

Q: Why isn't he with her?
A: She may have been too young to raise a child, or needed to work and didn't have anyone to take care of him. So she found a family who wanted a baby. Billy's mommy and daddy will be his parents forever.

Q: Do you think Billy's real mother misses him?
A: I think his birth mother probably does.

Q: Is Sara Billy's real sister?
A: Yes, they are brother and sister because they are part of the same family.

Q: Emily told me she was adopted. What is adoption?
A: Adoption is when a family who isn't able to take care of a child finds a family who will take care of her forever and ever. Emily's parents love her as much as we love you.

Q: Will Emily ever meet her real mother?
A: Do you mean her birth mother? That's a hard question to answer because I don't know. Sometimes adopted children meet their birth parents and sometimes they don't.

Q: Why did Emily's parents adopt her?
A: Because they wanted to have a family, and adopting a child is one way to do it.

Q: What did Emily do that was so bad that her real parent(s) didn't keep her?
A: I think you are talking about Emily's birth parent(s). Adoption is no one's fault. It is a decision made by grownups when they don't feel able or ready to be parents.

Q: Am I going to be adopted?
A: No, because I (or Daddy and I) was ready to be a parent when I had you. I will be your mother forever.

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Explaining Adoption to Young Children

Tell your child that families can be formed in many different ways. Children can live with the family they were born into, like her family, or with a family that adopts them, like her friend's family.

Let your child know that, sometimes, a parent who gives birth isn't able to raise the child. She looks for another family to take care of him. That family adopts the child and becomes his family forever. Reassure your child she will be part of your family forever.

Even if you know the specific circumstances of the friend your child is asking about, steer the conversation to a more general discussion of adoption. While adoption isn't a secret, each child's story is personal and is his to share. Some children are comfortable talking to friends and classmates about their adoption. Others prefer not to discuss it outside of their own family.

It's important not to cast adopted children as "special" or "different." Adoption is simply one of many ways to become a family.

ADOPTION Q & A

Child-to-Child

Even after you talk with your child about adoption, don't be surprised when he asks his friend questions that you may fear are rude. Don't worry—adopted children are used to being asked questions by other children. Here are some of the responses your child may hear.

YOUR CHILD: Is that your real mom (or dad)?
PEER: "Why are you asking?"
"Would I call her Mom if she wasn't?"
"Yes, a real mom is the person who takes care of you."

YOUR CHILD: Why didn't your real mom keep you?
PEER: "My birth mother couldn't take care of me, but my mom will always take care of me."
"This is stuff we talk about at home."
"I don't feel like answering that question."

YOUR CHILD: What are you?
PEER: "What do you mean? Do you want to know my ethnicity or where I was born?"
"I'm American, like you."
"I'm from outer space."

5 MYTHS & REALITIES ABOUT ADOPTION

1 **MYTH:** Birth parents can show up at any time to "reclaim" their child.
REALITY: Once an adoption is finalized, it is permanent, and the adoptive parents are legally recognized as the child's parents.

2 **MYTH:** Birth parents are irresponsible and don't care about their children.
REALITY: Birth parents want the best for their children. They make adoption plans because they know they aren't able to take care of a child.

3 **MYTH:** It costs a lot to get a child.
REALITY: While most adoptions involve fees, the fees are for services rendered. They are never in payment for a child.

4 **MYTH:** Adoptive parents don't love their children as much as parents in families formed through biology.
REALITY: The love is the same, regardless of how a family is formed.

5 **MYTH:** Adoption is second-best.
REALITY: Adoption may sometimes be a second choice, but it is never second-best.

Recommended Reading

Read these books about adoption, alternative families, and diversity with your child.

AGES 2 TO 6: *We're Different, We're the Same*, by Bobbi Jane Kates; *The Family Book*, by Todd Parr

AGES 3 TO 8: *The Colors of Us*, by Karen Katz; *A Mother for Choco*, by Keiko Kasza

AGES 4 TO 8: *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born*, by Jamie Lee Curtis; *Families Are Different*, by Nina Pellegrini

AGES 8 TO 11: *Lucy's Family Tree*, by Karen Halvorsen Schreck; *If the World Were a Village*, by David J. Smith

Find brief reviews of all of these titles, and links to purchase, at adoptivefamilies.com/books.

POSITIVE ADOPTION LANGUAGE

Words not only convey facts, they can unintentionally express negative feelings. Here are some positive terms to use when discussing adoption:

>> **Birth parent or biological parent**—rather than "real parent"
>> **Parent**—rather than "adoptive parent"
>> **International or intercountry adoption**—rather than "foreign adoption"
>> **Make an adoption plan**—rather than "give up a child" or "put up for adoption"
>> **Was adopted**—rather than "is adopted"

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Visit adoptivefamilies.com/clip.php to download this and other adoption handouts as PDFs.

Find many more school resources, including book lists and sample letters explaining adoption, at adoptivefamilies.com/school.