

A Walk in the PARC

Post Adoption Resource Center of Southern Wisconsin



KIDS' QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

* Notice *

Effective 2015, the PARC newsletter will only be sent via email. If you are not currently on PARC's email database and would like to receive the newsletter, please send an email to: postadoption@ccmadison.org or call (800) 236-4673

If you do not have email and would like to continue to receive the newsletter through regular mail, please call toll-free: (800) 236-4673.

What's the best way to handle my child's questions about her adoption?

Many parents want to know when is the best time to tell a child she is adopted. The answer is that it is never too early to talk to your child about adoption. Before age 3, include age-appropriate children's books on adoption as part of your child's reading routine. Give your child information little by little, as much as she can understand. It may take years for your child to fully understand what adoption means. These early talks will give you practice in talking about adoption. They will also show your child that it is OK to bring up the topic.

Here Are Some Tips On How To Talk About Adoption In Your Everyday Life: Tell the story

Just as any child delights in the story of the day she was born, a child who is adopted will love to hear the details of how she came into the family. Share with your child the joy you felt at bringing her home that very first day. Talk with her about the many ways children join families—whether by adoption or birth, or in foster care or stepfamilies.

Share the memories

During the adoption process, keep a scrapbook or journal the same way an excited mother does during pregnancy. Keep track of important dates and steps in the process. Take pictures of the people and places involved in your child's earlier life. These

details will help make the adoption easier for your child to understand. You may want to place pictures in your child's room to encourage her to ask questions about her adoption. If you have an open adoption, you could frame a picture of her birth parents. If she was adopted internationally, maybe frame a picture from her place of origin.

Use the words

The word adopted should become a part of your child's vocabulary early on. Find other words that everyone in your family is comfortable with. The terms *birth mother* and *birth father* are very common. *Biological parents* is also used frequently. Let your child know that the words *mother* and *father* have more than one meaning. A mother is someone who gives birth to a child, but a mother is also someone who loves, nurtures, and guides a child to adulthood. Being a father also can have different meanings.

Adoptive parents often tell their child she is special because she was "chosen" or that she was "given up out of love." Though the parents mean well, these statements may be very confusing to a child. Some children may feel that being chosen means they must always be the best at everything. This can lead to problems when they start to realize this is not possible. Telling your child she was given up out of love may raise questions about what

love is and whether others will give her up too. Some families use the term "making an adoption plan" instead of "giving up" their child.

Don't wait

The longer you wait to talk about adoption with your child, the harder it will be. Any level of openness you can build when your child is young will help encourage her to ask more questions about her adoption as she gets older.

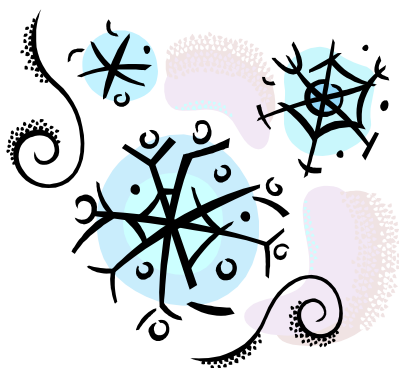
Ask for help

If talking with your child about adoption is difficult, talk with your pediatrician. He or she can be a valuable source of support, understanding, and resources.



Questions Your Child Might Ask

Even if you talk about adoption early and openly, at some point your child may begin to ask questions such as "Did I grow in your body, Mommy?" "Why did my birth mother give me away?" "Did she and my birth father love each other?" "What was my name before I was adopted?" "What nationality am I?" "Do I have brothers or sisters?" "How much did it cost to adopt me?"



We know a mother and father can love more than one child, so why is it so hard to understand that a child can love more than one mother and father?



KIDS' QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION (CONT.)

Be honest and open

If your child feels that you are not telling the whole story, he may look for answers somewhere else, like from a relative or friend who may not know or may not share accurate information. Show your child that you are willing to talk about the adoption. Tell him it's OK to bring it up with you.

Avoid responding with your own worries

like "Why do you want to know?" or "Are you unhappy with our family?" Your child's curiosity is healthy and natural. It should not be discouraged or seen as a threat to you. Also be sure to only answer the questions the child has asked, not what you think he should know.

Don't force the issue on your child

Some children are curious from the very beginning. Others may be afraid to bring it up. The best you can do is let your child know it is OK to talk about it. When your child is ready to know more, he will ask.

Questions Others May Ask

Other people might ask questions that your child will not be able to answer, from innocent questions like:

- "Where did you get those big, blue eyes?"
- "Do you look more like your mom or your dad?"

To important medical questions such as:

- "Do you have a family history of heart disease, cancer, or diabetes?"
- "What is your ethnic background?"

Questions from strangers can be tricky. You do not have to tell everyone your child is adopted. However, if a question comes up about differences in appearance or ethnicity, offer a simple but honest explanation. When you are proud of your child's identity, she too will learn to appreciate her own value. Be aware that your attitude about adoption will show in your answers. How you respond can set an example as to how your child may choose to answer these questions in the future. Also, let your child know that she does not

have to give specific answers to strangers if she does not feel comfortable. It is her choice to share whatever information about her adoption that she chooses. It is fine for children to learn that information about their adoption is theirs to share over time.

The Gift of Each Other

Helping your child accept the fact that she is unique, yet just like everyone else, may not sound easy, but it is important to try. Talking openly and truthfully with your child about her history of adoption, her birth parents, and her feelings is the key. Adoption gives both you and your child a tremendous gift—the gift of each other. With love, honesty, and patience, you and your child will form a relationship that is as deep and meaningful as any bond between a parent and child.

To read more, please visit:

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/adoption-and-foster-care/Pages/Questions-About-Adoption.aspx>

PARC's Lending Library Resources "Questions About Adoption"

- The 125 Most Asked Questions About Adoption by Paul Baldwin
- All About Adoption: How to Deal with Questions of Your Past by Anne Lanchon
- Being Adopted by David M. Brodzinsky, PhD
- The Complete Adoption Book by Laura Beauvais-Godin & Raymond Godwin
- How it Feels to Be Adopted by Jill Krementz
- Pieces of Me—Who Do I Want to Be by Robert Ballard
- Questions Adoptees are Asking by Sherrie Eldridge
- Twenty Life Transforming Choices Adoptees Need to Make by Sherrie Eldridge
- Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew by Sherrie Eldridge
- When Friends Ask About Adoption by Linda Bothun
- Why Didn't She Keep Me by Barbara Burlingham-Brown

These books, as well as others, can be viewed online at PARC's website: www.ccmadison.org

PARC's New & Improved Website

**Please visit PARC's website
for information about...**

PARC Resources

- **Quarterly Newsletter**
- **Lending Library Listing**
- **Respite Provider List**
- **Therapist List**

As well as information on...

Adoption Training and Events

Support Groups

Resources

Please visit: ccmadison.org

Click on "Program and Services".

Click on "Nurturing Children, Strengthening Families".

Click on the tab on left "Post Adoption Resource".

An Adoptee's Perspective: 10 Things Adoptive Parents Should Know

By Christina Romo

Adoption is not possible without loss. Losing one's birth parents is the most traumatic form of loss a child can experience. That loss will always be a part of me. It will shape who I am and will have an effect on my relationships—especially my relationship with you.

Love isn't enough in adoption, but it certainly makes a difference. Tell me every day that I am loved—especially on the days when I am not particularly lovable.

Show me—through your words and your actions—that you are willing to weather any storm with me. I have a difficult time trusting people, due to the losses I have experienced in my life. Show me that I can trust you. Keep your word. I need to know that you are a safe person in my life, and that you will be there when I need you and when I don't need you.

I will always worry that you will abandon me, no matter how often you tell me or show me otherwise. The mindset that “people who love me will leave me” has been instilled in me and will forever be a part of me. I may push you away to protect myself from the pain of loss. No matter what I say or do to push you away, I need you to fight like crazy to show me that you aren't going anywhere and will never give up on me.

Even though society says it is PC to be color-blind, I need you to know that race matters. My race will always be a part of me, and society will always see me by the color of my skin (no matter how hard they try to convince me otherwise). I need you to help me learn about my race and culture of origin, because it's important to me. Members of my race and culture of origin may reject me because I'm not “black enough” or “Asian enough”, but if you help arm me with pride in who I am and the tools to cope, it will be okay. I don't look like you, but you are my parent and I need you to tell me—through your words and your actions—that it's okay to be different. I have experienced many losses in my life. Please don't allow the losses of my race and culture of origin to be among them.

I need you to be my advocate. There will be people in our family, our school, our church, our community, our medical clinic, etc. who don't understand adoption and my special needs. I need you to help educate them about adoption and special needs, and I need to know that you have my back. Ask me questions in front of them to show them that my voice matters.

At some point during our adoption journey, I may ask about or want to search for my birth family. You may tell me that being blood related doesn't matter, but not having that kind of connection to someone has left a void in my life. You will always be my family and you will always be my parent. If I ask about or search for my birth family, it doesn't mean I love you any less. I need you to know that living my life without knowledge of my birth family has been like working on a puzzle with missing pieces. Knowing about my birth family may help me feel more complete.

Please don't expect me to be grateful for having been adopted. I endured a tremendous loss before becoming a part of your family. I don't want to live with the message that “you saved me and I should be grateful” hanging over my head. Adoption is about forming forever families—it shouldn't be about “saving” children.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. I may need help in coping with the losses I have experienced and other issues related to adoption. It's okay and completely normal. If the adoption journey becomes overwhelming for you, it's important for you to seek help, as well. Join support groups and meet other families who have adopted. This may require you to go out of your comfort zone, but it will be worth it. Make the time and effort to search for and be in the company of parents and children/youth who understand adoption and understand the issues. These opportunities will help normalize and validate what we are going through.

Adoption is different for everyone. Please don't compare me to other adoptees. Rather, listen to their experiences and develop ways in which you can better support me and my needs. Please respect me as an individual and honor my adoption journey as my own. I need you to always keep an open mind and an open heart with regard to adoption. Our adoption journey will never end, and no matter how bumpy the road may be and regardless of where it may lead, the fact that we traveled this road together, will make all the difference.

Christina Romo is an adoptee who was adopted from South Korea at age 2.

*She works for a child welfare organization and lives in Minnesota with her husband and their two sons. This piece was posted on her blog, **Diary of a Not-So-Angry Asian Adoptee** (<http://diaryofanotsoangryasianadoptee.wordpress.com/>).*



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Support Groups

Knit Together Adoption Support Group

Led by Pastor Jeremy & Nicole Straus (adoptive/foster parents). Meet every 1st and 3rd Saturday, 6:00-8:00 pm at Grace Evangelical, 4127 County Road AB, Madison, WI. 1st Saturday of each month = Family, Food, & Fun 3rd Saturday of each month = Helpful Hand (free child care). Contact: (608) 222-1605 or knit-together@hotmail.com

Heart to Heart Support Group

Meeting times vary. Meet in Janesville. Concentrates on doing community, family-oriented activities. Contact: Misty Thomas at (608) 755-0368.

Wisconsin Family Ties

Parents who are raising children who have emotional, behavioral, mental and/or substance abuse issues. Contact: Linda Kustka (608) 232-0277 or linda@wifamilyties.org

Latin American Adoptive Families of Wisconsin (LAAF-WI)

Support, guidance & information for families wishing to or have adopted from Latin America. Over 400 members statewide. Contact: Tami Stubbe, LAAF's Southern WI regional representative, SouthwestRegion@laafwi.org

FACE-Kids

Quality mental health group counseling services for children who are in need of supportive group counseling. Community partner agencies: Catholic Charities (lead agency), Children's Service Society, Family Service Madison, Agrace Hospice, Lutheran Social Services, Journey Mental Health, and Rainbow Project. Contact Jessica Wright at (608) 256-2358 or jwright@ccmadison.org

Families Through Korean Adoption

Meets at various locations to provide support in a social setting to families in the process of or who have already adopted children from Korea. Contact: Amy Kasper at akkasper2002@yahoo.com or FTKAmadison@gmail.com or see ftkamadison.blogspot.com

Madison Families with Children From China

Contact: Joan Tillett (608) 831-4889 or madisonfamilieschinesechildren@gmail.com

Milagros de Guatemala

Support network for families who have adopted from Guatemala. Contact: Lori DuRussel at (608) 833-4211 or druss@yahoo.com

RAD Support Group

Parents who are raising children with Reactive Attachment Disorder. Meets the last Sunday of every month at 4 pm at Lake Redstone Realty in LaValle, WI. Contact: Tish at (608) 495-0117 or tish@lakeredstonerealty.com

The Rainbow Project, Grandparents & Other Relatives as Parents

Contact: (608) 255-7356 or <http://therainbowproject.net/programs>

FRUA (Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption) - including neighboring countries

Contact: Sharon Katovich at (608) 836-0284.

Canopy Center's—Parent Stressline

Listening line open to callers 18 hours a day, from 6:00 am to midnight, 365 days a year. (608) 241-2221

For more information, please visit PARC's website at : www.ccmadison.org