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## Family Life

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### Questions About Adoption

## 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?"

### 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.

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