

Adoption:

Guidelines for Parents

Part III Additional Resources



“Who are my real parents?”

Early on, many parents find themselves dealing with the question of who the child’s “real” or “natural” parents are. Relatives or friends may ask if you have met the child’s “real” parents. Your child herself may even ask about her “real” mother or father. 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. She takes care of the child’s needs every day, changes the diapers, and dries the tears. Being a father also can have different meanings.

Find other words that everyone in your family is comfortable with. The terms birth mother and father are very common. Biological parents is also used frequently. Remember, both sets of parents are “real” and deserve to be recognized for who they are and the roles they have played in the child’s life.

A note from your pediatrician... international adoptions

Parents who adopt children from other countries need to be aware of the special medical needs their child may have. Your pediatrician recommends the following:

- Immunizations should meet US standards.
- Test for infectious diseases (such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis, tuberculosis, and parasites) and nutritional disorders (such as lead poisoning, anemia, rickets, and iodine deficiency), even if testing was done in another country before the adoption.
- Have your child’s vision, hearing, and developmental abilities (such as language) assessed as soon as possible.

“You are special because...”

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 confusing to the child.

For most parents, adoption is not the first choice. Most adoptions in the United States are by parents who first tried to conceive and were unable to do so. Sooner or later, children learn this. Telling the child she is even more special because she is “chosen” may be recognized by the child as bending the truth. Some children may feel that being chosen means they must always be the best at everything.

Being told she was given up out of love may raise questions about what love is and whether others who love her will leave too.

The most important thing for your child to know is that she is wanted—not any more than a biological child would be and not any less. Any attempt to make the adopted child feel more special than a biological child may have quite a different, unintended effect.

Every child in the family should be treated the same by you, your spouse, the siblings, and your relatives. Children who are adopted may feel different from other members of the family. Her appearance, her performance in school, or her athletic ability may be quite different. But she is, first and foremost, your child. What makes her special is not that she was adopted, but that she is yours.

A word about...open adoptions

When there is contact between birth parents and adoptive parents during the adoption process, it is considered an “open adoption.” This can mean simply exchanging names and addresses or, in fully open adoptions, the birth parents may have ongoing communication with or even visit the child.

In an open adoption, your young child may not understand the relationships between the two sets of parents. There are fewer secrets in an open adoption, but just as many difficult questions. It is important to address the issues mentioned in this brochure and provide your child with the guidance and support she needs.

For more information

There are many quality resources available to find out more about adoption. The following are just a few:

Books

Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special-Needs Kids; by Gregory C. Keck, Regina M. Kupecky (Pinon Press, 1998)

The Adoption Triangle; by Arthur D. Sorosky, Annette Baran, and Reuben Pannor (Corona, 1989)

Being Adopted; The Lifelong Search for Self; by David M. Brodzinsky, Marshall Schechter, and Robin Marantz Henig (Anchor, 1993)

Birthmothers: Women Who Have Relinquished Babies for Adoption Tell Their Stories; by Merry Bloch Jones (Chicago Review, 1993)

How It Feels to Be Adopted; by Jill Krementz (Knopf, 1988)

Journey of the Adopted Self; by Betty Jean Lifton (BasicBooks, HarperCollins, 1995)

Let's Talk About It: Adoption; by Fred Rogers (Paper Star, 1998)

Raising Adopted Children; by Lois R. Melina (HarperCollins, 1998)

Real Parents, Real Children; by Holly van Gulden and Lisa M. Bartels-Rabb (Crossroad, 1995)

Talking With Young Children About Adoption; by Mary Watkins, Susan Fisher (Yale University Press, 1995)

Organizations

Adoptive Families of America (AFA)
2309 Como St
St Paul, MN 55108
800/372-3300
<http://www.AdoptiveFam.org>

American Adoption Congress (AAC)
1000 Connecticut Ave, NW
Suite 9
Washington, DC 20036
202/483-3399
<http://www.american-adoption-cong.org>

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
440 First Street, NW
Third Floor
Washington, DC 20001
202/638-2952
<http://www.cwla.org>

North American Council on Adoptable
Children (NACAC)
970 Raymond Ave, Suite 106
St Paul, MN 55114-1149
651/644-3036
E-mail: NACAC@aol.com

These resources were chosen to represent a broad range of viewpoints. Inclusion on this list does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The Academy is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned above. Addresses and phone numbers are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

