



BRIGHT FUTURES

SHARING INFORMATION TO PROMOTE
SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION AND PARENTING

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GLADNEY CENTER
for ADOPTION



BACK TO SCHOOL:
TIPS TO
SCHOOL
SUCCESS

What can you do to ease your child's school days? How can you empower your child and his teacher? Do you tell the teacher that he is adopted? How do you handle adoption-related assignments? Should you help his teacher become more adoption friendly? Here are a few tips to help.

His school supplies are packed away. He's made new friends. His first few weeks of school have flown by.

Timmy's settled in for the school day, until out of the blue, his friend asks, "Why did your real mother give you away?" Timmy is ready to answer, yet his teacher steps in instead. "Timmy has a real mother who cares for him everyday. His birth mother made a plan for him to be adopted by Timmy's parents. Timmy can tell you more if he wants or he can tell you it's private information.*

Can your child answer this question? Can his teacher step in and help?

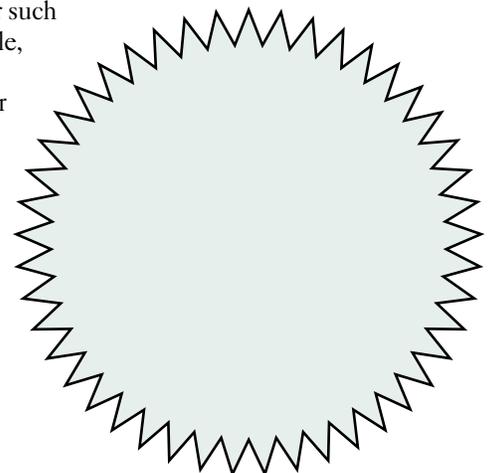
Pattye Hicks, an adoptive parent and Gladney's Director of Post Adoption, hopes the answer is yes. "Our role as adoptive parents is to be adoption advocates and to help make the world more adoption friendly. We must educate our family, our friends, our children's friends and their teachers. But, before we can begin, we must first prepare our children. As with any child and situation, preparation and education are the keys to success."

I. PREPARE YOUR CHILD

As an adopted child starts school, leaving the safe confines of the home and family, many face his first hurtful comments. "School is usually the first time our little ones are exposed to the reality of adoption. It's often the first time that they associate with children who don't understand adoption. Like Timmy's, friends can be very curious and ask lots of questions," Hicks says.

Role playing is essential to preparing your child for such encounters. For example, Timmy's friend might also ask, "Where is your real mother?" After some coaching, Timmy is ready to reply, "Well, where do you think she is. She is my Mommy and she's waiting for me at home."

Authors Judith Schaffer and Christina



TIPS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Lindstrom agree with Hicks. In their book "How To Raise An Adopted Child" they too suggest role playing. "If your child seems a little thrown by having to respond to such a question, reassure him that all kids are curious about any way they differ from others. Before you suggest how he should handle it, ask him what he would like to say. In his childhood interaction with others, it will often be a good idea to help him work out and rehearse a response to anything requiring a reaction," they say.

Prepare your child. Don't let them be caught off guard.

2. LET YOUR CHILD DECIDE

Many adoptive parents struggle with the dilemma of telling or not telling their child's teacher that he is adopted. In either case, it should be the child's decision. But, at what age? Hicks says it's never too soon to prepare. Even before the first long-awaited school day, adoptive parents can begin by laying the proper groundwork. They can ask, "Do you want to tell your friends at school that you are adopted?" By taking this approach, the child begins to learn that it's their personal information to tell not their parents.

By the ages of 8, 9, and 10, most children fully understand what it means to be adopted and should be involved in the decision making process. If the adopted child decides to tell, teachers should be told early on in the school year — the meeting should be informal. Some children want to tell their teachers themselves. Others want their parents to tell. Hicks says that's okay as long as the child's involved. "Your child must have a voice in whether it's told or not. Adoptive parents must respect their decision . . . if you want your children to respect your private family information, you must have the same kind of respect for your child," she says.

It's your child's decision to tell.

3. USE ASSIGNMENTS

During the whirlwind of shopping for school supplies and getting ready for the first days of school, many adoptive parents fail to familiarize themselves with potential adoption-related school assignments.

BOOKS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

General Information

Adoption Resource Book by Lois Gilman
Communicating With the Adopted Child
by Dr. Miriam Komar
Supporting an Adoption by Pat Holmes

Younger Children's Books

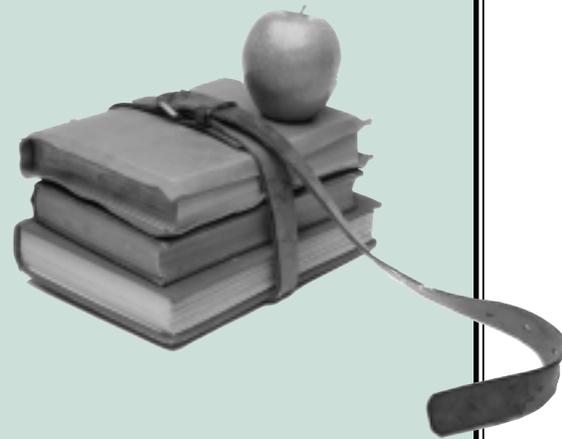
Mr. Rogers - Let's Talk About It! Adoption
by Fred Rogers
Adoption is for Always
by Linda N. Girard
The Chosen Baby by Valentina P. Wasson
A Family for Jamie by Suzanne Bloom
The Mulberry Bird by Anne Brodzinsky
Susan and Gordon Adopt a Baby
by Judy Freudberg and Tony Geiss
Tell Me Again About the Night I was Born
by Jamie Lee Curtis

Older Children's Books

Being Adopted by Maxine Rosenberg
Filling in the Blanks: A Guided Look at Growing Up Adopted by Susan Gabel
How It Feels To Be Adopted
by Jill Kremetz
So You're Adopted by Fred Powledge

International Adoption Books

Chinese Eyes by Majorie A. Waybill
Horace by Holly Keller
A Mother for Choco by Keiko Kasza.
Story of an Adoption: Why Do I Look Different? by Darla Lowe
Where the Sun Kisses the Sea
by Susan Gabel
Allison by Allen Say
Beginnings . . . How Families Come To Be by Virginia Kroll
Seeds of Love by Mary E. Petertyl
Pavlova's Gift by Maxine Trottier



They often cringe or become enraged when their child comes home with an assignment which will exaggerate the differences in their background, reveal private information or highlight missing information. Potential assignments include family trees, autobiographies, family holidays, family heritage & history, geography lessons, medical history, baby pictures, personal time lines, inherited characteristics, etc. Many parents wonder, "How could the teacher be so insensitive?" Or ask, "Why does my child need to complete this assignment?"

Some of these popular assignments can be baffling for non-traditional families, especially those built by adoption. But, these popular assignments don't have to be difficult or dreaded. For instance, many adoption experts and teachers believe that the family tree assignment is a valuable lesson. "Parents should think of it as a lesson in creativity and an opportunity to talk with your child about adoption. There isn't a right or wrong way to

draw a family tree," Hicks says.

Family therapist Margaret Gill agrees. She believes adoptive parents should help their child create a family tree even without the class assignment. It provides a valuable opportunity to discuss the child's dual heritage – genetic and adoptive. As a parent, it's also important to recognize when an assignment is too awkward and difficult for an adopted child to complete. "Visit with the teacher, but with your child's knowledge. Tell the teacher that this is not working for your family. Ask what else your child can do," Hick says.

Teacher Christi Smith appreciates the candor and says that flexibility is the key. "A good teacher is never going to ask a child to complete an assignment with which they are not comfortable."

Be creative . . . use assignments as a chance to talk with your child about adoption.

TIPS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

4. EDUCATE OTHERS ABOUT ADOPTION

If their child decides to tell their story, many adoptive parents want to help teachers become more adoption friendly. But, most aren't sure how to go about it. "Some are concerned that they won't have enough time to fully discuss the subject or that to do so, they will have to ignore other important issues of their child's education. They worry that they are giving the teacher the impression that adoption is a serious problem, when what they really want is for the teacher to be more alert to the subtle ways adoption may be a factor in certain situations," says adoption educator Lois Melina.

Hicks believes that's true, but also feels that it's the responsibility of adoptive parents to help teachers become more adoption friendly. "As adoptive parents, we must advocate adoption . . . that's what we are here to do. Some adoptive parents feel comfortable and talk about it openly, others need help," Hicks says.

Whatever the case, Gladney can help by identifying potential speakers or providing materials. Scads of information is also available — posters, videos, handouts, etc. Information is also available on

Gladney's two Web sites. Gladney's new interactive adoption education Web site, www.adoption-education.com, provides teen pregnancy statistics, frequently asked questions, birth mother testimonials and changing adoption trends. A video and study guide are also included on the site. These guides can be passed on to teachers planning adoption education presentations. Gladney's regular Web site — www.gladney.org is another great resource for adoption-related information. (For more information, contact Jennifer Lanter, Gladney's Outreach Coordinator, at 817-922-5968 or email her at jlanter@gladney.org.)

Several additional resources are provided in this issue of *Bright Futures*: a guide to constructive adoption language, names of famous people of adoption, suggested Internet sites and suggested books. These resources can help teachers appreciate how families are built by adoption, give them tools to help answer adoption questions, and provide resources for assimilating adoption information into their lesson plans.

Adoptive parents must advocate adoption.

* Source: *An Educator's Guide To Adoption, Celebrate Adoption, Inc., 1999.*

FAMOUS PEOPLE OF ADOPTION

Source: *An Educator's Guide to Adoption* (Celebrate Adoption, Inc., 1999)

Adoptees

Edward Albee, playwright
Kitty and Peter Carruthers, Olympic silver medal ice skaters
Nat King Cole, singer
Faith Daniels, TV news anchor
Ted Danson, actor
Melissa Gilbert, actress
Scott Hamilton, Olympic medal figure skater
Steven Jobs, founder of Apple Computer
Art Linkletter, TV host
Charlotte Ann Lopez, Miss Teen USA 1993
Greg Louganis, Olympic gold medal diver
Sarah McLachlen, singer
James Michener, author
Tom Monaghan, founder, Domino's Pizza
Dan O'Brien, Olympic decathlon
Jim Palmer, baseball player
Dave Thomas, founder of Wendy's restaurants

Birth Parents

Albert Einstein, physicist
J.C. Watts, U.S. Congressman
Robert Fulgham, author
Joni Mitchell, singer
Roseanne Barr, comic
Pauline Collins, actor
David Crosby, musician

Adoptive Parents

Lloyd Benston, former Secretary of the Treasury
Connie Chung and Maury Povich, TV journalists
Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, actors
Jamie Lee Curtis; author, actress
Ted Danson, actor
Robert Fulgum, author
Jesse Helms, U.S. Senator
Patti LaBelle, singer/actress
Magic Johnson, basketball player
George Lucas, film producer
Willie Mays, N.Y. Yankees
John McCain, U.S. Senator
Ed McMahon, TV host
Rosie O'Donnell, actress/talk show host
Marie Osmond, singer
Michelle Pfeiffer, actress
Kirby Puckett, baseball player
Steven Spielberg, producer
Parker Stevenson, actor
Barbara Walters, TV journalist

A GUIDE TO CONSTRUCTIVE ADOPTION LANGUAGE

Source: *An Educator's Guide to Adoption* (Celebrate Adoption, Inc., 1999)

Current Positive Language

Birth parent
Birth child
Born to unmarried parents
Termination of parental rights
Make an adoption plan
To parent
Child in need of a family
Meeting, making contact with
Parent
International/intercountry adoption
Adoption triad
To locate, contact
Child in need of adoption
Adoption agreement
Child with special needs
Child from another country
Genetic relatives
Was adopted

Outdated/Negative Language

Real parent, natural parent
Own child
Illegitimate
Give up, taken away
Give away, give up, put up
To keep
Adoptable, available child
Reunion
Adoptive parent
Foreign adoption
Adoption triangle
Search, track down
An unwanted child
Surrender
Hard to place
Foreign child
Blood relatives
Is adopted*

* Adoption is a one time event, not a definition of a person.