



## Beyond Their Story: Educating Children to be Part of the Adoption Community

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This is an active time for anyone who believes there is a need to educate others about adoption! People in the adoption community are reaching out to promote acceptance of adoption as just one of the many ways to form families. Some are enlightening people in their neighborhoods by holding special events, writing articles, or simply informing individuals who need to know more facts. Others have chosen to contact journalists or TV and movie producers when they feel that adoption is not presented accurately through the media.

The adoption community is committed to these efforts because an increase in generalized knowledge about adoption can help to foster use of positive language and greater sensitivity to appropriate boundaries around private information. A more widespread emphasis on the positive outcomes of adoption can also promote understanding and acceptance by young people who are increasingly likely to encounter classmates and neighbors in adoptive families. Many parents are hoping that teachers will utilize their skills to help with the task of educating the next generation.

While the need to educate others about adoption is clear, there is also a need for education within the adoption community. Parents and professionals will be better prepared to talk in generalities, rather than about personal stories, if they are aware of basic facts about the different ways to adopt, the number of adoptions each year, and even something about history or current legislative activity about adoption.

The same need for education about adoption exists for children. Although most of the world expects children who joined their families through adoption to be experts on any and all aspects of the subject, their personal experience is usually only one slice of a big pie. There are good reasons to inform adopted children about adoption *in general*. That information will help them, when they are asked personal questions, to choose the E in W.I.S.E. UP!\* and educate others in a way that does not reveal private details of their own adoption stories. In addition, adopted children will be more likely to find connections with other adoptees if they have been prepared to understand the experiences of other adopted children. Most parents would agree that connections with other adopted children or adults can prove to be a critical source of support for their children throughout their lives.

What are some ways to educate adopted children about adoption in general? Here are some suggestions:

- Help your child meet other children in different kinds of adoptive families through organizations such as C.A.S.E., where families from a range of adoptive backgrounds come together. Another possibility is to attend events held through your adoption agency or a local parent organization that include different adoptive families.
- Visit a library, bookstore, or to easily access a wide range of choices, [www.tapestrybooks.com](http://www.tapestrybooks.com), and obtain age-appropriate books that highlight adoption stories which are different from that of your child. Explore how there are some commonalities in all adoptions. Point out that children may be adopted at birth or even when they are teens. Remember to note that some children are adopted by family members. As your child gets older, include information about the laws and legal processes that protect children in any adoption. When children reach their teens, you may want to draw on adoption-related stories in the press or on TV to broaden your child's perspective about how birth parents and/or social workers make decisions in the best interest of the child. The complexities and challenges of different adoption stories can help your teen to gain perspective about his/her own story.
- Find ways to reach out to adoptive families in your school or neighborhood. Adults can model for children that the adoption connection can be a quiet bond—something that may bring people together

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because of shared experiences, but not necessarily something that needs to be the focus of a relationship.

- Be sure to introduce information about foster care—in the United States and also in other countries—so that your child is aware of its important role for many children, some of whom move on to adoption. Additionally, provide your child with facts about orphanages—their history in the United States, and also which countries continue with this system of caring for children who need homes. An interesting and poignant way to learn about part of the history of adoption and social welfare in our country is to read about the orphan trains which ran from the late 1800s to early 1900s. ([We Rode the Orphan Trains](#) by Andrea Warren is a good place to start.)
- With the basic knowledge of various ways in which adoptive families are formed, build your child's sensitivity to other kinds of families (step families, single parent families, families with gay or lesbian parents). Find opportunities to teach appropriate language and respect for boundaries.
- If your child is interested in sharing his/her knowledge about adoption in a group situation (at school, church, Brownies), or if there is a school assignment that has the potential to focus on his/her adoption story, prepare your child to speak in generalities. (This amounts to ensuring that your child has the knowledge to help him choose the E in

W.I.S.E. UP!) For example, a child who is asked an intrusive question about the reason he/she was placed for adoption can turn the focus from the personal to the general: "Sometimes mothers and fathers are not able to care for their children. This happens everywhere in the world. Adoption has been a way to solve that problem for thousands of years!"

\*W.I.S.E. UP!<sup>SM</sup> is a program developed by C.A.S.E. to help children and teens respond to questions and comments about adoption. For more information or to order W.I.S.E. Up!<sup>SM</sup> go to [www.adoptionsupport.org](http://www.adoptionsupport.org).

