

**NOTE TO ADOPTIVE PARENTS:** Distribute this handout to other parents at your child's school, or send it home with classmates after an adoption presentation.



## “Where’s Billy’s Real Mom?”

Children are naturally curious. Until now, your child probably assumed that being born into a family is the only way families are formed. If she learns that a friend or classmate was adopted, she’ll have lots of questions. She’ll want to know what adoption means and how it comes about. She might even feel anxious about the permanence of her own family.

If you’re unsure of how or where to begin the discussion, start with this handout. We’ve compiled two pages of adoption facts, sample Q & As, and talking guidelines. Adoption is not shameful, nor is it secret. Adoptive families talk openly about adoption from the time their children are very young. Take the lead by making it clear that adoption is a wonderful and normal way to build a family, and your children will follow your cues.

## Adoption Q & A CHILD-TO-PARENT

When your child learns that a friend or classmate was adopted, chances are, he’ll have questions. Here are responses to questions kids ask about adoption.

**Q:** Emily told me she was adopted. What is adoption?

**A:** Adoption is when a family can’t take care of a child. They find a family who will take care of her forever and ever. Emily’s parents love her as much as we love you.

**Q:** Why did Emily’s parents adopt her?

**A:** Because they wanted to have a family, and adopting a child is one way to do it. They will be together forever.

**Q:** What did Emily do that her real parent(s) didn’t keep her?

**A:** I think you are talking about Emily’s birthparent(s). Adoption is never a child’s fault. It is a decision made by grownups when they don’t feel able or ready to be parents.

**Q:** Will Emily ever meet her real mother?

**A:** Do you mean her birthmother? That’s a hard question to answer because I don’t know. Sometimes adopted children meet their birthparents and sometimes they don’t.

**Q:** Why doesn’t Billy look like his mom?

**A:** Billy’s family is an adoptive family. He was born in Guatemala to a family who looks like him, but who couldn’t take care of a baby when he was born.

**Q:** What happened to Billy’s real mother?

**A:** Do you mean the woman who gave birth to him? She is his birthmother. Sometimes a person can have a baby without being ready to be a parent.

**Q:** Why isn’t he with her?

**A:** She may have been too young to raise a child, or needed to work and didn’t have anyone to take care of him. So she found a family who wanted a baby. Billy’s mommy and daddy will be his parents forever.

**Q:** Do you think Billy’s real mother misses him?

**A:** I think his birthmother probably does.

**Q:** Is Sara Billy’s real sister?

**A:** Yes, they are brother and sister because they are part of the same family.

**Q:** Am I going to be adopted?

**A:** No, because I (or Daddy and I) was ready to be a parent when I had you. I will be your mother forever.

## Explaining Adoption to Young Children

Tell your child that families can be formed in many different ways. Children can live with the family they were born into, like your family, or with a family that adopts them, like her friend's family.

Let your child know that, sometimes, a parent who gives birth isn't able to raise the child. She looks for another family to take care of him. That family adopts the child and becomes his family forever. Reassure your child she will be part of your family forever.

Even if you know the specific circumstances of the friend your child is asking about, steer the conversation to a more general discussion of adoption. While adoption isn't a secret, each child's story is personal and is his to share. Some children are comfortable talking to friends and classmates about their adoption. Others prefer not to discuss it outside of their own family.

It's important not to cast adopted children as "special" or "different." Adoption is simply one of many ways to become a family.

## Adoption Q & A CHILD-TO-CHILD

Even after you talk to your child about adoption, don't be surprised if he has some lingering questions. His friend's responses may vary from serious to dismissive, according to his mood and the situation. Here are some of the responses your child may hear.

- YOUR CHILD:** Is that your real mom (or dad)?  
**PEER:** "Why are you asking?"  
"Would I call her Mom if she wasn't?"  
"Yes, a real mom is the person who takes care of you."
- YOUR CHILD:** Why didn't your real mom keep you?  
**PEER:** "She couldn't take care of me, but my mom will always take care of me."  
"This is stuff we talk about at home."  
"I don't feel like answering that question."
- YOUR CHILD:** What are you?  
**PEER:** "What do you mean? Do you want to know my ethnicity or where I was born?"  
"I'm American, like you."  
"I'm from outer space."

## POSITIVE ADOPTION LANGUAGE

Words not only convey facts, they can unintentionally express negative feelings. Here are some positive terms to use when discussing adoption:

- "Birthparent" or "biological parent" .....rather than "real parent"
- "Parent" .....rather than "adoptive parent"
- "International" or "intercountry adoption" .....rather than "foreign adoption"
- "Make an adoption plan" .....rather than "give up a child" or "put up for adoption"
- "Was adopted" .....rather than "is adopted"

## 5 Myths & Realities About Adoption

- 1 MYTH:** Birthparents can show up at any time to "reclaim" their child.  
**REALITY:** Once an adoption is finalized, it is permanent, and the adoptive parents are legally recognized as the child's parents.
- 2 MYTH:** Birthparents are irresponsible and don't care about their children.  
**REALITY:** Birthparents want the best for their children. They make adoption plans because they know they aren't able to take care of a child.
- 3 MYTH:** It costs a lot to get a child.  
**REALITY:** While most adoptions involve fees, the fees are for services rendered. They are never in payment for a child.
- 4 MYTH:** Adoptive parents don't love their children as much as parents in families formed through biology.  
**REALITY:** The love is the same, regardless of how a family is formed.
- 5 MYTH:** Adoption is second-best.  
**REALITY:** Adoption may sometimes be a second choice, but it is never second-best.

## Recommended Reading

Read these books about adoption, alternative families, and diversity with your child.

**AGES 2 TO 6:** *The Day We Met You*, by Phoebe Koehler; *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born*, by Jamie Lee Curtis; *A Mother for Choco*, by Keiko Kasza; *The Family Book*, by Todd Parr

**AGES 5 TO 8:** *How I Was Adopted*, by Joanna Cole; *We Wanted You*, by Liz Rosenberg; *Families Are Different*, by Nina Pellegrini; *The Colors of Us*, by Karen Katz;

**AGES 8 TO 11:** *Lucy's Family Tree*, by Karen Halvorsen Schreck; *If the World Were a Village*, by David J. Smith

All of these titles are available for purchase from [www.adoptivefamilies.com/books](http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/books).

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