



# Post Adoption Resource Center Newsletter Oakland & Macomb County

## Talking With Children About Adoption

By: Nicole Nicholls

A child's sense of self-worth and self-esteem can be greatly influenced by their feelings surrounding their adoption. Adoptive parents play a very important role in helping children understand what it means to be adopted. Talking to children as early as possible about adoption gives an opportunity to shape attitudes and expand knowledge before outside influences come into play. These discussions help to build self-esteem and give a sense of safety and security to a child.

Many parents find that talking to their children about adoption can be a daunting task, knowing that their child may feel rejected, sad, and hurt; however, avoiding the topic can be far more detrimental. Every child who was adopted should be able to talk about it. This is true even in placements where the child resembles the parents and adoption is not evident to observers. In such cases, parents are not likely to have adoption related conversations with people outside of the family and their children miss chances to listen and learn, thus parents should be creative in finding teachable moments.

Sometimes the best way to talk about adoption is to use a common experience as a teaching tool. For example, while out in the community, you might see someone with a new puppy. As your child talks about how cute the puppy is, you can point out how puppies need care day and night too, just like children.

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Orchards  
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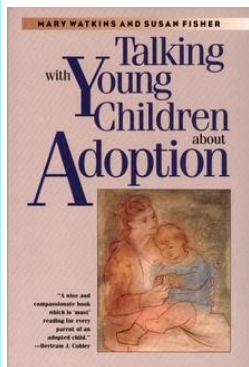
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For more information on the Post Adoption Resource Center please contact us at  
**313-530-9746**

Or visit our website at  
**PARC-orchards.org**

## Suggested Read

### Talking With Young Children About Adoption



Authors: Mary Watkins and Susan Fisher

In this book, a clinical psychologist and a psychiatrist, both adoptive mothers, discuss how young children make sense of the fact that they are adopted, how it might appear in their play, and what worries they and their parents may have. Accounts by twenty adoptive parents of conversations about adoption with their children, from ages two to ten, graphically convey what the process of sharing about adoption is like.



# Talking With Children About Adoption (Continued)

(Continued from pg. 1)

Someone must protect and shelter them. This might prompt your child to wonder aloud what it might have been like if the puppy had no one to take it to the veterinarian, to feed it, and to keep it warm. Together, you can share your relief and joy that this puppy now has a home and everything it needs to grow up healthy and happy. You can mention that children need care too and that you are thrilled to be his/her mother, accompanying your words with a hug or a quick kiss.

Other teachable moments may occur when your child notices a pregnant woman, overhears a comment or is directly asked about differences in his appearance from a parent, or when someone you know brings a new baby home. Using casual observations about everyday events can become feel-good lessons about adoption for your child.

Keep talks with your child simple and relaxed, using a calm tone of voice, laughter, and smiles to share the story of how your child came to be adopted into your family. Using snuggly times, like bedtime or reading time can also help your child associate pleasant emotions with the words, creating a strong foundation for later exploration of more complex issues. End each adoption talk with your child by reminding them of how happy you are to have adopted him/her. Your ease and comfort with discussing adoption lays the groundwork for a lifelong dialogue.

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## **Let your child lead the conversation when:**

- kids ask direct questions or make statements about adoption.
- outsiders ask questions about your family in front of your kids.
- adoption comes up as a school issue or in sensitive school assignments.
- hurtful incidents occur.

## **Follow your child's lead by asking:**

- What happened?
- How did it make you feel?
- When did it happen?
- If he/she is happy with how he/she responded.
- If there is anything you can do (or could have done) to help.

## **Initiate conversation:**

- When your intuition tells you to.
- When your child appears sad or contemplative.
- When your child experiences loss.
- On your child's birthdays.
- On Mother's Day and Father's Day.
- Whenever the subject of birthparents comes up in books, films, or casual conversation.
- Whenever there is an opportunity.

## **Additional tips:**

- Begin talking when your child is as young as possible. Early talks help your child to learn the language of adoption and to begin to grasp his own story.
- Keep your conversations developmentally appropriate.
- Be honest. The adoption story belongs to the child, and the child has a right to know that story. Developmentally appropriate story telling isn't license to replace missing facts or soften harsh ones.
- Talk often, and show that you're willing to talk whenever your child wants to. Children absorb concepts through repetition.
- Help children learn to express their feelings. Guide them in building an emotional vocabulary or using non-verbal expressions such as drawing, journaling, etc.

# Ages and Stages of Adoption and Development

Keep it simple:

-“Families are made in many ways. Babies can live with the family they were born in and some babies live with the family that adopts them.”

-“Sometimes a woman can’t grow a baby in her own tummy, so she adopts a baby.”

## Middle Childhood

At this stage in life, children are taking on new roles including student and friend. They begin to think more abstractly, questioning where exactly he/she fits in the world.

Children are able to differentiate between alternative ways of becoming a family at this age and they begin to recognize some of the more difficult and confusing aspects of adoption, including feelings of loss and of being different, sometimes causing increased feelings of uncertainty about themselves. At this age, a child’s main question is often “WHY?”

-If she didn't have enough money, why didn't she just get a job?

-If she didn't think a child should be raised by a single parent, why didn't she get married?

-If she didn't know how to be a mommy, why didn't she get someone to teach her?

Keeping an open dialogue with your child is important, both so you can understand how he/she has put this complicated picture together, and to offer alternative views that address his/her misconceptions.

## Preadolescence & Adolescence

These are the years when children assert their independence and distance themselves from parents in an effort to form their own identity. Adolescents seek the detailed facts about “why” and “how”. It is important to hear what your child is saying, allow him/her to have their own feelings, and being available to help with the struggles. The most important thing is to keep the lines of communication open with your teen. Ask open-ended (not yes or no) questions. Reassure Them! They want to know: Am I loved? Am I attractive? Am I smart and capable? Can I make and keep friends? Am I like my peers and my family? Was I adopted because my birthparents didn't love me? Is something wrong with me?

## Toddlers & Preschool Aged

Children at this stage in life are very curious, literal thinkers, and have not yet developed logical reasoning. At this age, children often believe that the world revolves around them and their needs. This is a great time to start talking about adoption because kids usually love their adoption story since they are the center of attention. Children accept as normal what we present as normal, thus the earlier positive adoption vocabulary can be introduced, the better.

The meaning of “adoption” does not really sink in at this stage in life but it is important for children to hear our respect and compassion for their birthparents. Even if we know troubling information about their birthparents, we should send the message that they did their best.

Young children need to know they are wanted and loved and that nothing they did or didn't do led to their being placed for adoption. Most importantly, our children need to know that we are here for them.

-Help your child gather what you know about their birthparents and highlight attributes he/she might share with them: “Your birthmother must be very beautiful and athletic.”

-Make a scrapbook or Lifebook.

-Normalize your family by socializing with other adoptive families.

-Be open to mixed feelings about having been adopted. You might say, “It's OK. We all feel sad when we've lost something or someone.”

-Show how to express feelings constructively: “It's OK to say you are mad. It's not OK to hit your brother/sister.”

-Reaffirm similarities and differences.

-Accept your child's anger. It's an easier emotion to express than sadness or hurt

-Be physically affectionate. Hugs connect us when words fail, strengthen our bond, and protect us against future friction.

-Use positive adoption language. Your attitude and words are the best models for your child.

*\*Information expanded from: Positive Adoption Conversations: An adoptive families Guide: AdoptiveFamilies.com*

## Beyond Consequences, with Joy Davies

**Saturday, March 2, 2019 & Saturday, March 9, 2019** from 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Facilitator: Joy Davies, MA, LLPC

Location: Orchards Children's Services: 24901 Northwestern Hwy, Suite 500, Southfield, MI 48075

Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control is a parenting model created by Heather Forbes, LCSW. The model covers in detail the effects of trauma on the body-mind and how trauma alters children's behavioral responses.

Joy Davies is a certified trainer in the Beyond Consequences Parenting Model, and is looking forward to the opportunity to share this information with you. This program is appropriate for children of all ages, inclusive of teens!

## Vicarious Trauma; Prevention and Support

**Tuesday, March 5, 2019 & Tuesday, April 2, 2019** from 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Join us for a two part training focused on Vicarious Trauma – the trauma that you, the care provider, can receive by being a care giver for a child who has experienced trauma.

**March 5, 2019:** Vicarious Trauma; Prevention and Support

**April 2, 2019:** Self Care – Recognizing Vicarious Trauma and what to do.

Location: Orchards Children's Services: 24901 Northwestern Hwy, Suite 500, Southfield, MI 48075

## Upcoming Trainings and Support Groups Dates

### Parent Training & Teen Support Group

5:30-7:30pm

24901 Northwestern Hwy.  
Southfield, MI 48075 #500

### Macomb Support Group

6:00-8:00pm

42140 Van Dyke  
Sterling Hts, MI 48314 #206

### Oakland Support Group

5:30-7:30pm

24901 Northwestern Hwy.  
Southfield, MI 48075 #500

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|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| ◆ March 5, 2019        | ◆ March 12, 2019     | ◆ March 18, 2019              |
| ◆ April 2, 2019        | ◆ April 9, 2019      | ◆ April 15, 2019              |
| ◆ May 7, 2019          | ◆ May 14, 2019       | ◆ May 20, 2019                |
| ◆ June 4, 2019         | ◆ June 11, 2019      | ◆ June 17, 2019               |
| ◆ July - No Group      | ◆ July 9, 2019       | ◆ July - Activity, date TBD   |
| ◆ August - No Group    | ◆ August 13, 2019    | ◆ August - Activity, date TBD |
| ◆ September - No Group | ◆ September 10, 2019 | ◆ September 16, 2019          |
| ◆ October 1, 2019      | ◆ October 8, 2019    | ◆ October 21, 2019            |
| ◆ November 5, 2019     | ◆ November 12, 2019  | ◆ November 18, 2019           |
| ◆ December 3, 2019     | ◆ December 10, 2019  | ◆ December 16, 2019           |

*\*Dinner and childcare provided.*

*\*For more details and to RSVP for any of our events,  
please contact Jennifer Harmon at 248-530-5381.*