



# Adoption Council of Ontario

## Talking with your children about adoption

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Adoptive parents often express concern about how they will talk to their child about their adoption story. They understand the importance of openness and they want their children to always come to them with concerns and queries. However, children don't always pick the most opportune time to ask questions. It is often difficult to know how much information to give at any one time. Parents have to get "A" word out. Here are some tips that may be helpful.

1. **Begin early**- even if your child is too young to understand what adoption means, start talking about adoption. Practice helps you to feel more comfortable with the story yourself.
2. **Be aware of your own feelings about the adoption story**-Accept that you also have feelings about the circumstances that created the decision to adopt. You may feel sad when you think of your infertility journey. You may find it hard to even think about your child's experiences before placement with you. Children don't always pick the most opportune times to ask questions. You want to be clear and open with your child but may find that some information elicits strong emotional reactions for you. This is why practicing your words to your child will help you to be prepared for your child's questions and ensure that your own feelings don't interfere with the information you need to provide for your child.
3. **Use positive adoption language**- Be sensitive to your child's need to feel good about their story and about their birth family. Children's books about adoption are a great way to learn about topics that may come up and language that is simple and clear.
4. **Answer the questions your child asks**- answer questions directly. Young children often need short, simple answers and when they ask for more details, give them more. Be sure to clarify, what the question is if you don't know what they mean.
5. **Include information about your child's actual birth if you have this**- some adoptees report growing up thinking that they were not born like everyone else. *Be sure to let your child know that they are born the same way as every other person.*
6. **Don't wait for your child to raise the subject**- *Raise the subject every once in a while to introduce the language, but don't push the conversation.*
7. **Once is not enough**- as your child grows so does their understanding of the subject. Children can only integrate a little information at a time and they need time to ponder their thoughts. This is the good news – you don't need to panic when your child asks –“what is adoption” – answer the questions you can. Be open to listening and assure your child that this is a topic that is open for discussion always.



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8. **Paint a positive picture of your child's birth parent-** promote the notion that someone can have two sets of parents. Speak positively about birth parents as it is important to building your child's self esteem
9. **Acknowledge and accept your child's feelings-** it is normal for your child to display negative emotions. Stay positive and encourage your child to ask questions. Make your child feel comfortable, acknowledge their feelings, and talk about them
10. **Prepare a life book of photos and the adoption story-** include all information you have about the journey thus far. Read it often. You will find that your child understands the information differently at different stages of their life. Keep the book safe and treat it as a family treasure. However, allow your children to add information as they grow. This will help them to integrate their story with their current life and their two families become one.
11. **Check your child's understanding from time to time-** check in by asking your child about their conception of adoption
12. **Reach out to others-** talk to other people- parents and adopted adults. Share your thoughts and experiences with others. Get advice from adoption professionals when you have particularly difficult information to share with your child.

Parenting is a lifelong task – don't be concerned if you don't "get it right" the first time. Your children will give you lots of opportunities to tell their story to them over the years. The important thing is to accept that this is an important part of your job as an adoptive parent. Your positive intent and your concern for your child will support you. Your child will benefit from your understanding openness and willingness to support them.



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