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ADOPTION AND THE SCHOOLS

THE DREADED “FAMILY TREE”

September is the time when children return to school; refreshed from summer fun, time away from school and possibly home.

For many, September is a time of “new beginnings,” a new school outfit, a new teacher, new friends, a new season.

September is also the time for your kids to reconnect with old school friends and to start new relationships with classmates and teachers.

As an adoptive parent, you may think: is this the year of the dreaded “family tree” assignment? Will your child’s teacher request her first baby picture? Will your high-schooler be asked to be a part of a “family genetic analysis” in science? How do you plan to deal with these types of class projects?

The following are excerpts from the North American Council of Adoptable Children (NACAC) on *Adoption and the Schools* <http://www.nacac.org/pdfs/Adoption%20101.pdf>. These ideas could greatly assist your child’s adjustment in her classroom as well as help lead the path of adoption education within your particular school or district.

Strategies for Parents: Not all teachers and school administrators are equally informed about adoption, and because of this, adoptive parents must often take the lead to educate the teachers. Here are some tips that could be helpful in educating both the children and teachers in your child’s school.

Be Prepared: Before school starts, think about what you and your child need to talk about so he can respond to

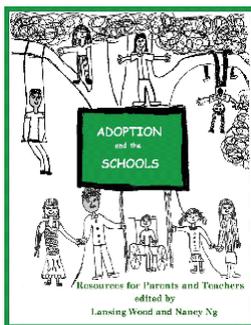
issues that may be raised at school. Give your child the tools he needs to respond to comments from classmates. For tips log onto: <http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/school/index.php>

Be Connected: Try to connect with other adoptive parents within your school or district. Together you may be able to help communicate appropriate behavior and teachings about adoption.

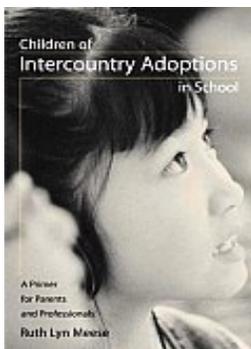
Be Proactive: If you want it known that your child is adopted, inform each new teacher. Meet with the teacher at the beginning of the school year. Use your judgment about how much history is appropriate to share; it’s not necessary to share personal details, but general information can be important to help get the year off to a good start.

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If you would like copies of any of the articles mentioned, please contact our Warm Line at 877-4ARCHNJ



**ADOPTION AND THE SCHOOLS;
RESOURCE FOR PARENTS AND
TEACHERS
BY WOOD AND NG**



**CHILDREN OF
INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS
IN SCHOOL
BY RUTH LYN MEESE**

ADOPTION AND THE SCHOOLS (Continued)

(Continued from Page 1)

Be an Educator: Provide teachers and administrators with positive adoption language as well as an explanation of why it's important to use positive language. Provide a list or donate books or movies that have positive adoption themes to the school library or your child's classroom. For a sample list of adoption-appropriate words see: <http://www.nacac.org/AdMoGuide/education.pdf>; page 3.

Be Realistic: Remember that teachers are responsible for working with a classroom of children and each child has their own individual needs. Be realistic in what you think your teacher can do or teach about adoption.

Define Success: Children develop at their own pace, sometimes excelling, sometimes struggling. Be open to the highs, lows and plateaus in learning and be prepared to support your child through all these stages. Be clear about how you and your child define success and look for ways to celebrate that success.

Be an Advocate: Find out about the services that your child may be entitled to, including special education

services, one-to-one or small group help or tutoring.

Be Supportive: Let your child know that you are there for her, and that you want her to enjoy school. Also make it clear that you will work with her school to increase the appropriateness of assignments, educate teachers on adoption issues and be available to explain adoption to classmates and other families if desired. Be sure that she knows that she can talk to you if she feels embarrassed, hurt, joyous or confused about having been adopted.

Work as a Team: Establish a partnership with your child's teacher, counselor, social worker and principal. Sometimes an adult outside the classroom can effectively help a child solve problems.

Continue to Learn: As you live and grow with your children, new information is often revealed to you. For example, sometimes suspicions of past abuse and neglect in older adopted children may be revealed as truth. Perhaps fetal alcohol syndrome or effects become evident with time. It would be helpful to read and seek information about your concerns and alert the school if you feel the new information may affect your child's performance in school.

Join a Parent Support Group: If you have drifted from a group, either reconnect or find another that suits your needs. Use the group as a safe place to talk out school concerns and solicit help from the group. Bring a friend or group member with you to school meetings if you need support talking to a teacher and working through difficult issues.

Plan for the Future: If you sense that your child might be moving into a difficult age, check ahead to see if there are teachers in the upcoming grade level who understand adoption. A teacher who has adopted, or is gifted working with adopted or special needs, children may be a good mentor. Make a request to have your child placed in such a teacher's room.

For books that can assist you in working with your child and teacher on various assignments, consider *Adoption and the Schools; Resources for Parents and Teachers* by Wood and Ng. To order, log onto <http://www.fairfamilies.org/>. Another excellent book you can order from Tapestry Books is *Children of Intercountry Adoptions in School* by Meese.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND RESOURCES

The following are some great books and resources for your school or public library. You can also borrow these and other books from our NJ ARCH Lending Library.

For Children:

A Mother for Choco by Keiko Kasza – ages 2- 8

Families are Different by Nina Pellegrini – ages 4-8

How I Was Adopted by Jonna Cole – Ages 4 -8

I Love You Like Crazy Cakes by Rose Lewis – ages 4 – 8

Tell Me Again About the Night I was Born by Jamie Lee Curtis - ages 2- 8

We're Different, We're the Same (Sesame Street) by Bonni Jane Kates – ages 2- 6

For Adults:

Being Adopted: A Lifelong Search for Self

by David Brodzinsky, PhD, Marshall Schechter, M.D., and Robin Hening

Inside Transracial Adoption

by Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall

Making Sense of Adoption: A Parent's Guide

by Lois Ruskai Melina

Real Parents, Real Children

by Holy van Guilden and Lisa M. Bartels-Rabb

Talking to Your Young Children about Adoption

by Mary Watkins, PhD and Susan Fisher, M.D.

Resources for Parents:

Child Welfare Information Gateway

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/>

NJ's Waiting Children:

<http://www.state.nj.us>

North American Council on Adoptable Children

www.nacac.org

Child Welfare League of America

www.cwla.org

800-ASK-CWLA

Children Awaiting Parents

www.capbook.org

Joint Council on International Children's Services

www.jcics.org

National Adoption Center

www.adopt.org 800-TO-

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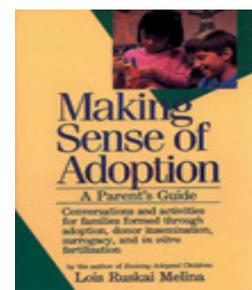
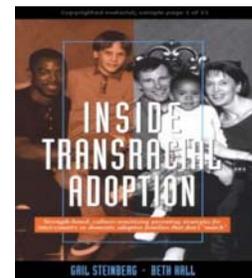
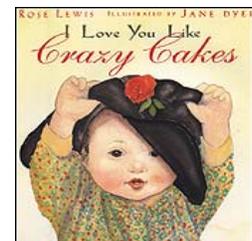
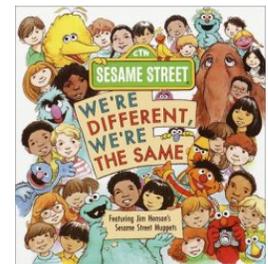
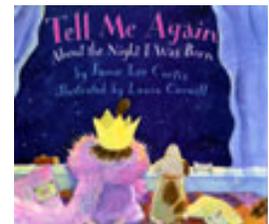
The Evan B. Donaldson

Adoption Institute

www.adoptioninstitute.org

DID YOU KNOW?

YOU CAN BORROW THESE OR OTHER BOOKS FROM NJ ARCH'S LENDING LIBRARY:



EDUCATING CHILDREN TO BE PART OF THE ADOPTION COMMUNITY

The following are excerpts from the *W.I.S.E UPI Program* developed by C.A.S.E. to help children and teens respond to questions and comments about adoption.

It is important to educate parents, educators and the children that adopted children go to school with.

The following are some ways to educate your adopted child

about adoption in general:

- Help your child meet other children in different kinds of adoptive families through support groups, and other adoption-related organizations.

- Visit a library, bookstore or easily access a wide range of choices such as the NJ ARCH Library or

www.tapestrybooks.com and

obtain age-appropriate books that highlight adoption stories that are different from your child's adoption.

- Find ways to reach out to adoptive families in your school or neighborhood. Adults can model for children that adoption connection can be a quiet bond -

(Continue to page 4)

DID YOU KNOW?

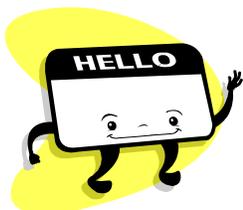
Want more information about adoption? Consider attending one of the many area conferences:

*September 15/16, 2006:
Adoption Crossroads:
Shedding Light on the Adoption Experience
Fordham University, NYC*

*October 13/14, 2006:
St. Johns University:
Families without Borders? Adoption Across Culture and Race
NYC, NY*

*November 4, 2006:
Concerned Persons for Adoption (CPFA)
25th Annual "Let's Talk Adoption" Conference
Piscataway, NJ*

To find out more information, log onto our website or call the Warm Line.



EDUCATING CHILDREN TO BE PART OF THE ADOPTION COMMUNITY (con't)

(Continued from page 3)

something that may bring people together but not necessarily something that needs to be the focus of the relationship.

Introduce information about foster care in the U. S. and in other countries as well as orphanages. An interesting way of learning about this is to read about part of the history of adoption and social welfare in the United States, beginning with the "orphan trains" which ran from the late 1800's to the early 1900's. A good book to read is,

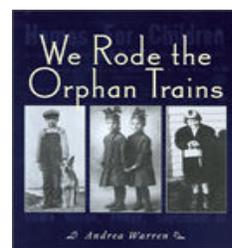
We Rode the Orphan Trains by Andrea Warren.

- Discuss the various ways in which adoptive families are formed, including step families, single parent families, families with gay and lesbian parents, etc. Find opportunities to teach appropriate language and respect for boundaries.

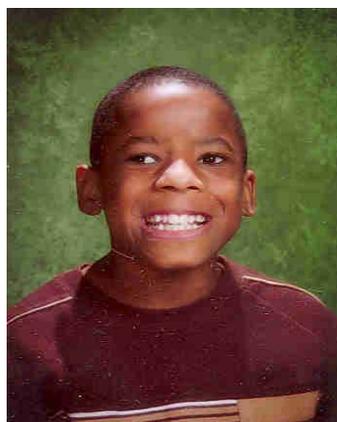
- If your child is interested in sharing his or her knowledge about adoption in a group situation (school, church, Brownies), or if there is a school assignment that has the potential to focus on his

or her own adoption story, prepare your child to speak in generalities.

For example: "Sometimes mothers and fathers are not able to care for their children....adoption has been a way to solve that problem for thousands of years!"



DYFS WAITING CHILD: MELVIN



Melvin - DOB: 7/22/94

Melvin is an extremely likeable youngster, who has captured the hearts of his foster family, school staff, and neighbors. Although he requires constant supervision and assistance to

complete most activities both at home and in school, he does enjoy riding his bicycle, and is fascinated with televised car racing. He is enrolled in a special education program, where his global developmental delays are addressed with daily speech, occupational, and physical therapies. Melvin puts forth his earnest effort in school and has made progress in learning to recognize the alphabet and speak in short phrases. His foster mom works with him on personal hygiene and exercises to relax and strengthen

his muscles and improve his dexterity. An Intensive behavior modification program is in place to reduce his repetitive and self-injurious behaviors and to increase his communication skills. Melvin needs a patient, highly structured family, who will be willing and able to commit to provide him with nurturance and a predictable daily schedule throughout his adulthood.

To learn more about Melvin, call 800-99-ADOPT.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADOPTIVE MOTHERS CLUB OF MORRIS COUNTY



Celebrating over 50 years as an adoption support group, *Adoptive Mothers Club of Morris County* has been serving NJ's adoptive mothers for generations.

Originating from NJ's Children's Aid and Adoption Society, (now known as Children's Aid and Family Services), this post-adoption support group has assisted numerous domestic and internationally adopted children and parents alike.

Currently run by Lucy Kays, with the assistance of Alaina Foote and Ylesa Eisenberg, they strive to meet the needs of the membership. "We used to meet each

month at a community church in Denville, but due to the increased insurance and other associated fees, we decided to meet at members' homes or out at venues." Without the yearly membership fee, the group continues to run informally but effectively.

With a monthly newsletter sent to their current 20 plus members, communication about their discussion groups and social events is swift.

They offer a "very willing ear and lots of support," says Ms. Kay. "We don't cater to little kids; we offer monthly discussions and a few

family and couple events per year." They even offer a "Men's Club" where the adoptive dads can go out to dinner, talk and socialize.

"We are a friendly, caring and compatible group of women," states Ms. Keys, who is a licensed MSW, and whose clinical and facilitation skills help tremendously in leading meaningful discussions and support.

For more information about this group or to obtain a copy of their newsletter, contact Lucy Kays at 973-729-3009 or e-mail her at skays1@mindspring.com.

DID YOU KNOW?



For a full description of how you can assist your child in creating these adoption-friendly "family trees", call our Warm Line at 877-4ARCHNJ or log onto www.njarch.org and view these and other school-related ideas in the box on the Home Page.

"A FOREST OF FAMILY TREES"

Need ideas in alternative "Family Trees? Consider these:

The Caring Tree: Have your child hand draw a tree with each branch representing her "caring adults" and what role they play in her life (e.g. Mom, Sue: helps me with my homework), etc.

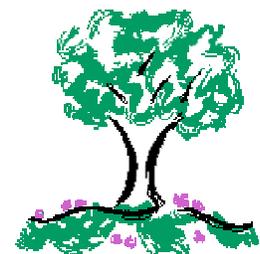
The Peony Bush: Have your child draw a bush with bulbs

with roots and flowers. Each bulb is labeled with each family member nationality or ethnic background (including the child's); e.g.: Korea for child, Germany for Dad and England for Mom. Have her draw various beautiful flowers that are intertwined into a beautiful garden.

History Tree: The concept here is the roots and branches

of the tree. Roots representing the child's birthparents, grandparents, etc. prior to being adopted into your family. The child's name is on the trunk and the branches are names of everyone in his or her adoptive family.

My Family: Use houses instead of trees to show her family relationships. *

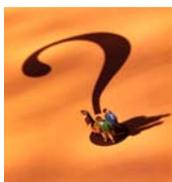


* Information found in this article originated from "FAIR: Families Adopting in Response" and NACAC



Barbara A. Rall, LCSW

Have a question that needs expert advice? E-mail or call the warmline; we would be happy to assist you! Frequently asked questions and responses from the staff will be published in future newsletters.



ASK OUR EXPERT

E-MAIL US YOUR QUESTIONS AT WARMLINE@NJARCH.ORG

My son is five years old. We adopted him as an infant. Coincidentally, we moved to a new community last year due to my husband's job relocating. No one here knows he's adopted and since his coloring is similar to ours, no one would suspect. My son has never asked about his adoption and he has never lived with anyone other than my husband and me. I read somewhere that parents should tell their kids about adoption, but I'm wondering whether we should do that. Wouldn't it make him feel insecure and I don't think he's old enough to understand it now anyway.

Telling your child about his adoption story is always a dilemma for parents. You find yourself wondering what your child's reaction will be and whether this is the "right time" to share this information.

Most adoption experts believe that children should be told "from the beginning" about their adoption status. There are a number of good reasons for this thinking which I will enumerate.

1. Secrets are dangerous.

There is always someone in your life who knows your child is adopted. You do not want your child to hear this infor-

mation from anyone but you. And, often children know more than we think. They overhear adults talking or they discover information somehow. It's important for your child to get the age appropriate facts from you and to be able to discuss any feelings and concerns with the people he trusts most.

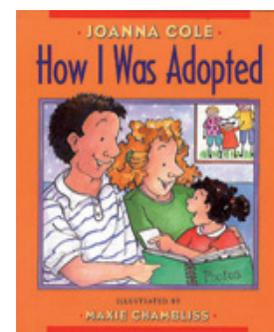
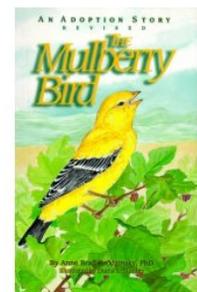
2. Not talking about

adoption sends the wrong message. Parents often tell me their kids never bring up the subject of adoption. On the other hand, young adults tell me there wasn't a day they didn't think about their adoption, but they felt their parents were uncomfortable talking about it, so they tried not to bring it up.

3. The longer you wait,

the harder it is to tell. When children are young, they accept what their parents tell them without question. If adoption is presented in a positive light, the child will feel good about himself. Telling early and often gives children a chance to assimilate their adoption story in small pieces as they develop the cognitive ability to do so. It gives parents the chance to tell the story over and over, adding details over time.

The first time you talk about adoption you may feel a bit uncomfortable or unsure of yourself. You may want to borrow some children's books about adoption from the NJARCH library. You can also create a scrapbook, often referred to as a life book, that describes in pictures and simple text how your child joined the family. Most children enjoy hearing their adoption story over and over. As time goes on it will be easier and easier to discuss adoption with your child and he will feel comfortable coming to you to discuss concerns and feelings.



NATALIE'S LIBRARY CORNER

Hello, Readers! Welcome to Natalie's Library Corner.

Speaking from the viewpoint of an adopted adult, *A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life*, by Dana Reinhardt, is an account of a young woman's life to which I can relate on many levels. There are significant parallels to my own life.

Simone is an adolescent who is going through the normal growing pains of those years. She has a mother, father and a kid brother, Jake. Her parents are both professionals who are definitely progressive in their thinking. Jake is a typical pre-teen boy who worships his sister and wants to know everything that goes on in her daily life at high school.

The difference between Simone and the rest of her family and friends is that she is adopted. This is immediately apparent from her physical appearance. Adoption is a subject that is readily accepted and easily spoken about in their home.

One day Rivka, Simone's birthmother, telephones her parents. She would like to have contact with her daughter. Her parents encourage the contact, asking Simone if she has called Rivka yet every time they

talk with her, driving her crazy. She cannot understand why they are placing such importance on her connecting with her birthmother.

Who is Rivka anyway? Why is she calling after so many years? Simone has always known that she is adopted and has been very happy with her family. She never wanted to know anything about her beginnings.

Communication between Simone and Rivka finally occurs. Visits take place. A friendship develops. The friendship becomes a warm and loving relationship.

I mentioned that this book bears parallels to my own life. In particular, Simone's desire to know about Rivka's religious customs and traditions, so different from her own, captured my attention. Simone and her family are non-practicing Christians. Her birthmother is from an Orthodox Jewish background. Rivka was formerly a Hasidic Jew who tailored her religious beliefs after her out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

I feel that religion, or the lack of it, is a big part of one's identity. Confusion arises when an adoptee struggles with the life

he/she could have lived versus the life he/she is living.

Reunion with my birth family brought the cultural and religious differences between my two families to the surface. What I often refer to as "my crisis of faith" followed. I grew up in a Jewish home and my birth family is affiliated with the United Church of Canada, closest to the United Methodist Church in the U. S. Embracing our differences has helped to make me a composite of my faiths and cultures. Like Simone, I have many blessings. I have also found peace.

As you can see, I have struggled with adoption issues throughout my life. Adoption-related novels can bring up such issues in ways that foster discussion. Conversations about sensitive topics can be easier when they are not first person accounts.

I highly recommend *A Brief Chapter in my Impossible Life* to my kindred spirits in adoption, both the very young and the older, as well as to non-adopted persons who seek to understand the complexities of adoption.

To Dana Reinhardt, congratulations on a great first book! You really "get it!"

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76 SOUTH ORANGE AVENUE
SOUTH ORANGE, NJ 07079

VISIT US AT WWW.NJARCH.ORG

EDITOR:

DANA WOODS FRIED
973.763.2041

WARMLINE
877.4.ARCHNJ
OR
877.427.2465

FAX
973.378.9575

EMAIL

WARMLINE@NJARCH.ORG
LALINEACALUOSA@NJARCH.ORG

WWW.NJARCH.ORG



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