

Adoption in Schools

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As with every child, specific needs of an adopted child should be discussed with the child's school to ensure that they receive the appropriate support and services.

The goal is the same for every child =
To set them up for success.

All ASPs should think about how they can work in their own community, and directly with adoptive families, to support adoption sensitivity in the school setting, from daycare up to high school.

- Encourage families to inform schools about their child's adoption history so school personnel can provide appropriate support.
- Help parents who may be resistant to this idea to think through their decision

School & Adoption

- What can we hope for from schools and why is it important for agencies/families to work with them?
 - Schools play a LARGE role in child's day to day life
 - Impact how children form their feelings about their families and shape their own self-worth

ALL schools benefit from being educated about adoption

- 2010 U.S. Census: 2-4% of US adopted
 - Didn't include adults, stepchildren, or informal adoptions
- U.S. Today: 5 million folks who were adopted
- Over 70,000 children are adopted each year
- 40% of all Americans have a personal connection to adoption; 65-84% view it favorably
- Adoptees can be marginalized by a larger social narrative of "normal" and "abnormal"

Adoption: Starting with the Basics

Adoption is just one of many ways to create a family!
Basic Emotional Messaging: adoption means a child is loved & an adoptive family is a "real" forever family

Agencies should assume that schools have little if any information or understanding about adoption and topics relating to adoption. For educators, knowing some basic language and having a base level of comfort normalizing adoption can be very helpful and can prevent disseminating false information.

What is Family?

- Merriam-Webster:
 - A group of individuals living under one roof and usually under one head
 - A group of persons of common ancestry; a people or group of peoples regarded as deriving from a common stock
 - A group of people united by certain convictions or a common affiliation
 - The basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children; also any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family

What is Family?

- Urban Dictionary
 - A group of people, usually of the same blood (but do not have to be), who genuinely love, trust, care about, and look out for each other. Not to be mistaken with relatives sharing the same household who hate each other. REAL family is a bondage that cannot be broken by any means.
 - A bunch of people who hate each other and eat dinner together
 - People you love and love you back, not necessarily blood or biological, but you trust them and they trust you, and they take care of you and you take care of them
 - A word used to force you to do things you don't want to do
 - Eaters of my meals and unwanted sharers of my dessert

Question for school to ask themselves:

When talking about family in curriculum, is adoption included in the discussion?

Is the topic of adoption included in the or within books, movies, and other resources?

Adoption is COMPLEX

- Domestic
- International
- Foster to Adopt
- Kinship
- Infant vs Older Child

- Feelings of anxiety or grief based on relational loss is normal.
- Identity: self, race, biological history, heritage, culture
- Each family story and system is unique

Adoption is also SIMPLE

- An adoptive family is just like any other family
 - Same as with other non-traditional family structures (i.e. multiracial/multicultural families as well as children with single parents, same sex parents, divorced parents, step parents, etc.)
- Same struggles as any other family
- Same triumphs as any other family
- Same love as any other family

Language

- Shapes and Reveals Our:
 - Beliefs
 - Intentions
 - Assumptions
 - Expectations

Adoption Positive Language

- Contributes to child's positive sense of self-confidence and identity formation.
- Appropriately honors the birth family, culture, and race.
 - Special considerations for children adopted from foster care system
- Values the adoptive parents and family.
- Protects private information.
- Plays vital role in accurately presenting the adoption process and adoptive families as legitimate.



ADOPTION LANGUAGE



POSITIVE

Birthparent
Biological Parent
Birth Child
My Child
Born to unmarried parents
Terminate parental rights
Make an adoption plan
To Parent
Waiting Child
Biological Father
Making contact with
Parent
Adoption Triad
Permission to sign a release
Search
Child placed for adoption
Court Termination
Child with special needs
Was Adopted

NEGATIVE

Real Parent
Natural Parent
Own Child
Adopted Child; Own Child
Illegitimate
Give Up
Give Away
To Keep
Adoptable Child, Available Child
Real Father
Reunion
Adoptive Parent
Adoption Triangle
Disclosure
Track down parents
An unwanted child
Child taken away
Handicapped Child
Is Adopted

AdoptionMamaBlog.com

Special Considerations with Adopted Children

- When may Assessments/Individual Education Plans be beneficial even if no apparent learning challenges ?
 - Emotional Needs
 - Behavioral Challenges
 - Chronological Age vs. Developmental Age
 - Supportive Services (i.e. ST, PT, OT)
 - Language Barriers
 - Child's History (i.e. grief, loss, trauma)

Transracial/Conspicuous Family – Special Considerations

- Issues of Race/Ethnicity.
 - Children start to notice physical differences such as skin color around age 3.
 - As with other nontraditional families, peers may question whether the child is “really” a part of their family
 - Educators taking a colorblind approach may discredit the child’s very real experiences
- Teachers discussions about family are key
 - Support children understand that families come in all different ways, shapes, sizes, and colors
 - Promote multiculturalism and celebrate diversity

Trauma History

If the child has a history of trauma, it is beneficial for all school personnel working with the child to understand how trauma can impact the child.

They should be encouraged to take this into account so they can create a safe, supportive environment for the child:

- May require accommodations in the classroom (additional time for transitions, clear schedule)
- If child is dysregulated, assist child to calm down prior to discussing consequences for the behavior
- Appropriate disciplinary techniques and behavior modification methods.
- Isolating the child may not be best approach (i.e. time outs)

Support in School:
Needs Change as the
Child Grows

Ages 0-3

- Are parents talking to child about family story?
 - If so, what language do they use?
 - Awareness of sensitive family story or dynamics
- Children pick up on tone of voice long before understand the words
 - Even if they say they are adopted, children generally do not understand what adoption means until they are around 4 -6 years old.

Ages 0-3 cont...

- How should Childcare/School talk about adoption?
- Be positive, encouraging, and comfortable. Laying foundation for later conversations.
- Consider what you say in front of child to others in regard to these themes
- Basic Emotional Message = family means that they are loved

Ages 3-5

- Questions from children related to adoption may begin to come up
- Preschoolers are literal thinkers, cannot understand abstract concepts until they are closer to 5 or 6 years old
- Goal is to support children to achieve a level of comfort and confidence with their family story
- Don't have to know everything... mostly just normalizing these types of questions and having some basic knowledge

How Schools Should Talk About Adoption with Young Children

- Follow Child's Lead: questions usually pretty specific
- Follow Family's Lead: use language family uses
- Be Brief: one concept at a time, stay simple and honest
- Give The Child Time: sometimes takes several days for processing and more questions may pop up
- Get Active: draw, play, pretend, let them lead
- Share a Book or Movie: lots of resources (will discuss later)

Ages 5-7

- Most children can understand pregnancy and birth and have the capacity to comprehend what adoption means.
- Often children question how they came to be adopted and begin to feel the loss of their birth family
 - They may blame themselves and think that they did something wrong

ASPs should provide teachers with tools to help them reshape the curriculum and respond appropriately to questions and comments that come up.

Ages 8-12

As with all other preteens

- Separating from Parents
- Social Life and Peers Increasingly Important

Thoughts and feelings about adoption are more complex

- May experience a range of emotions (sad, angry, ashamed, guilty, etc.)
- May begin to grieve the loss of their birth family
- May cause changes in their behavior in the classroom

Teenagers

Adolescence = Identity Formation

Children may feel “different” from their peers

Children may be triggered during talks about drugs, sex, mental illness, etc. birth family history

- Teachers may say drugs are bad, but should not say that people who use drugs are bad

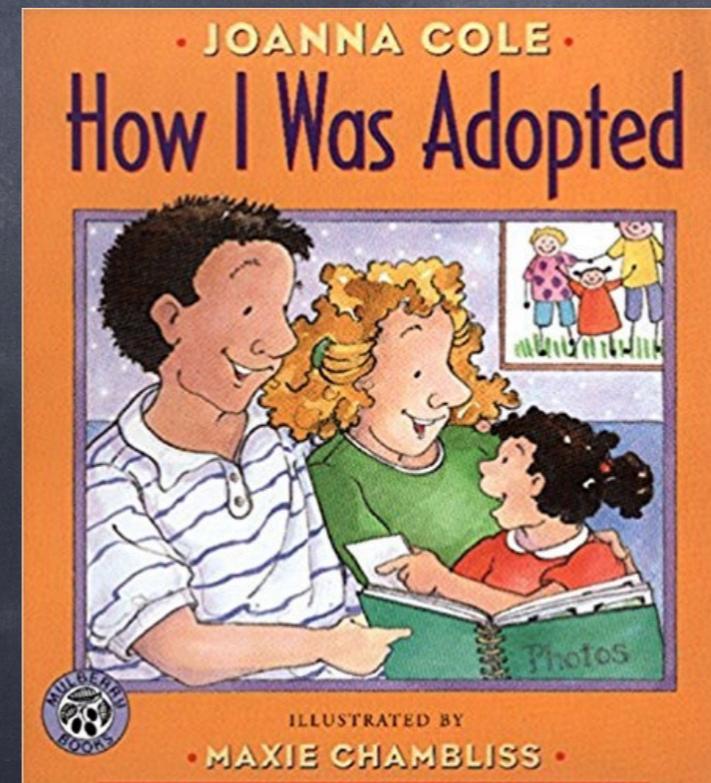
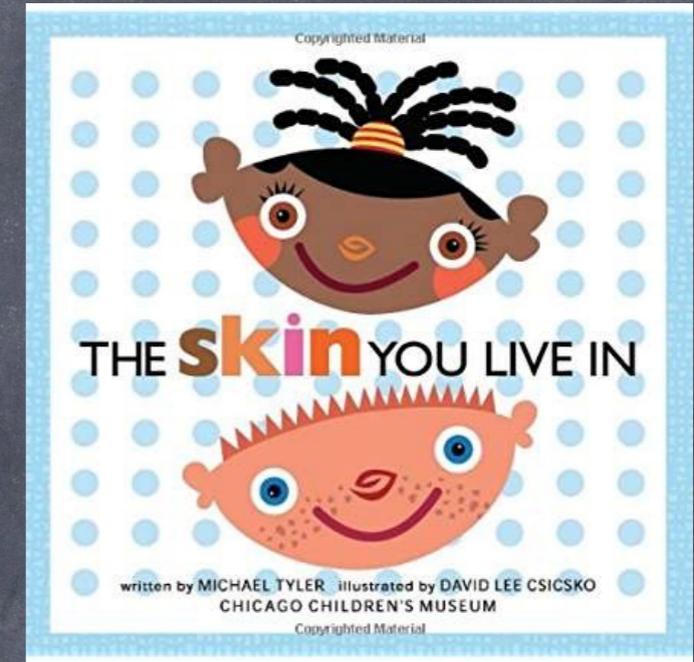
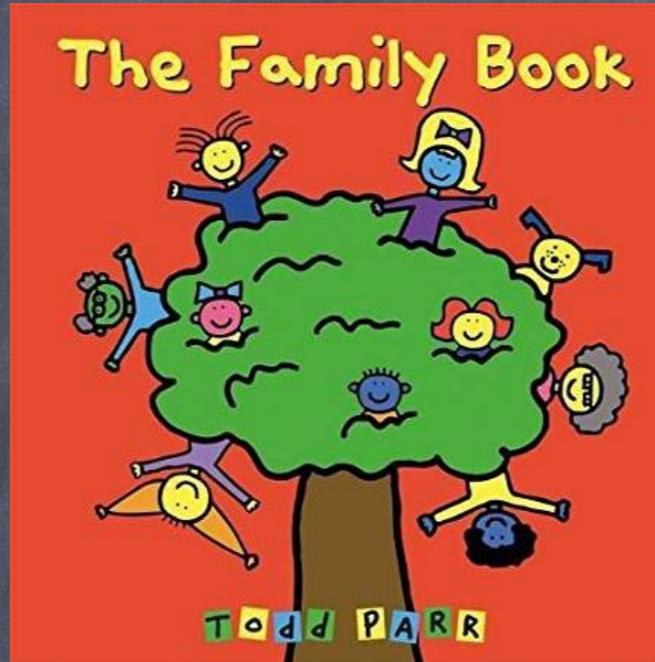
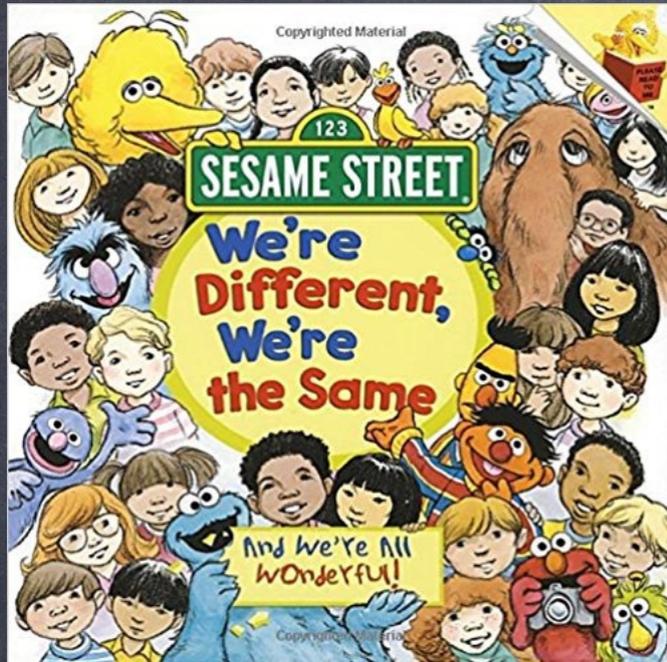
General Curriculum Considerations

Some topics may be difficult for children who were adopted.

- Self-Identity vs. Baby Pictures
- Family Story vs. Family Tree
- Cultural Heritage vs. Cultural Exploration
- Medical Histories
- Adopt-a-_____ Projects

What are your favorite
adoption books for
younger children?

Some of our Favorite Children's Books



What about for older
children?

Ways to Identify Good Books

- Creating a Family - books for adults and children divided out by age/topic
<https://creatingafamily.org/adoption/adoptionsuggestedbooks/>
- Tapestry Books (adoption-related books and resources)
- Other suggestions?

Sources

GOOD NEWS – you don't need to start from scratch!

- **AdoptiveFamilies.com:**

- Adoption Through a Child's Eyes (Melina)
- Helping Classmates Understand Adoption (Mintz & Diamond)
- Tackling Tricky Assignments

- **QIC-AG:**

- What Teachers Should Know about Adoption

- **NCFA Adoption Advocate:**

- Back to School: A Guide to Making Schools and School Assignments more Adoption-Friendly (Mitchell)
- Creating Trauma-Informed Classrooms

Downloads on Adoption Learning Partners

- Adoption and Classroom Success: Beyond The Basics
- A Lot to Learn
- Adoption Language for Schools
- Helping Classmates Understand Adoption
- School's In Session! Tackling Tricky Assignments -
- School's In Session! 4 Keys to Help Your Adopted Child Thrive at School
- How I Explained Adoption to the First Grade -