



AGE-APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION

● Birth to three-year-old children

- Attach to and bond with their primary caregivers.
- Make tremendous strides in the development of motor skills and language.

Your adopted child

- Learns words and vocabulary related to adoption as they are used in your home.
- Has not yet developed the cognitive ability to understand concepts like adoption.

As parents

- Talk about adoption in a comfortable and positive way with your child, family and friends.
- If possible, gather information and materials from your child's birth family such as pictures, letters and documents.
- Create a life story book for your child.

● Three- to seven-year-old children

- Are bursting with questions about birth and where they came from.
- Have difficulty knowing the difference between fantasy and reality.
- May have fears of being lost or abandoned.

Your adopted child

- Wants to hear his/her adoption story again and again.
- S/he can repeat it verbatim, but still has a limited conceptual understanding of adoption.

As parents

- Talk about where babies come from and how different kinds of families are formed.
- Find routine cozy times like bedtime to tell and retell the adoption story.
- Answer questions honestly and openly.
- Be truthful with your child. Present difficult information in an age-appropriate way.
- Help your child develop confidence by giving him/her lots of love and affection.
- Continue to create and share a life story book together.

● Eight- to twelve-year-old children

- Are gathering information and skills needed to gain independence.
- Feel a growing sense of belonging with family.

Your adopted child

- Has a clear understanding of the concept of adoption.
- Realizes that s/he had to lose something to be adopted and might begin grieving.
- Might have a sense of being different or not fitting in.



Eight- to twelve-year-old children *(continued from page 1)*

As parents

- Encourage dialogue about adoption without forcing the topic.
- Be sensitive to your child's readiness and interest in talking.
- Respond openly and honestly to your child's questions about his/her birth family and background.
- Let your child know that it's okay to love both sets of parents. There's no need to "choose."
- Continue to co-create and share a life story book together.

Thirteen- to seventeen-year-old teens

- Are working on establishing a secure sense of identity.
- Imitate role models and try on different "looks."
- Question authority and tend to be critical of themselves and others.

Your adopted teen

- Might experience anger over loss of control in his/her life and grief about his/her adoption.

As parents

- Help your teen access all birth information.
- Help your teen process information in his or her adoption story.
- Stay emotionally attuned to your teen's needs.
- Encourage your teen to seek out support from other adopted teenagers, either informally or in a group.
- Support your teen in exercising self-control when appropriate.
- Stay positive, even when your teen is angry.
- Continue to co-create and share a life story book together.

Eighteen- to twenty-one-year-old young adults

- Focus on developing intimate relationships.
- Might be anxious about growing up and leaving home.
- Might begin to establish their own families and lives apart from their parents.

Your adoptive young adult

- Might seek out contact with his/her birth family.

As parents

- Give your son or daughter practical support or advice about seeking contact with his/her birth family.
- Continue to keep conversations about adoption open and active.
- Support his/her efforts toward independence.
- Show that he/she can count on a loving relationship with you.
- Be sensitive to his/her feelings about intimate relationships with peers.