

Talking to Children and Others about Adoption

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Highlights

- Open Communication
- Language for adoption
- Developmental understanding
- Talking about adoption to others
- Group Discussion

Open Communication

- Essential in adoptive families
- Parents should raise topic even if children do not
- Self-initiated or other initiated
- Discussion based on child's developmental understanding
- Parental self-reflection: exploring your own feelings and emotions
- Non-reactive and normal tone in response to children's questions
- Children keen to picking up emotions in parents' voice
- Being honest: OK to not know the answer

Language: Choosing Words Wisely

What we say and how it is heard...
word choice makes a difference!

“Why don’t you have your own children”

“Why was he given up?”

“What do you know about her real mother”

The choice of one word instead of another has a significant impact on how people interpret interactions.

Language plays a key role in constructing perspectives.

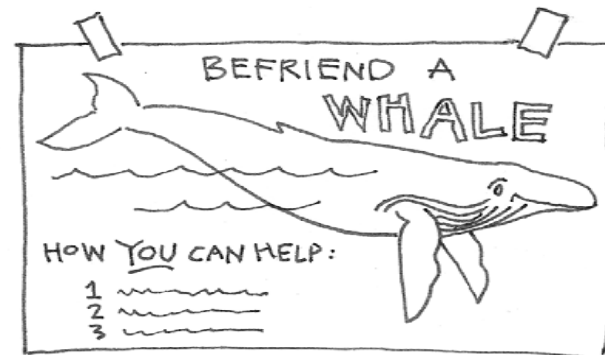
<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Gave up Given up Put up Surrendered for adoption	Chose or made an adoption plan. A child for whom an adoption plan was made.	The decision to make an adoption plan is extremely difficult and thoughtful.
Keep the child	Parent the child	People who choose adoption are not discarding their children but are unable to parent them.
Real/Natural parents	Birth parents	There are no imaginary or unnatural parents.
Real/Natural child Illegitimate child	Birth child Child born to unwed parents	All children are real, natural, and legitimate. Lack of a genetic link does not make someone unnatural or illegitimate.

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Own children	Birth children or children who were adopted	All parents consider their children their own regardless of how they became a family.
Foster Child Foster Youth	Child or youth who is living with a foster family or who has experienced foster care.	The emphasis should be on the child/youth and not the foster status.
Neglectful Parent	Parent who is unable to meet the needs of a child.	Children who have experienced foster care or adoption do not want or need to hear their birth parents criticized. It is important for children to understand what their parents were unable to do that resulted in their separation.
Abusive Parent	Parent who is unable to manage his/her own behavior.	See Above

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Drug Addict/Alcoholic parent	Parent who abuses substances which impacts their decision making and ability to be responsive and responsible.	Children who have experienced foster care do not want or need to hear their birth parents criticized. It is important for children to understand what their parents were unable to do that brought them into state custody.
Unfit parent	Parent who is unable to meet the needs of a child	There are many reasons that parents are not able to adequately care for children. Children would benefit from having a clear sense of those reasons.
Unwanted	Unable to be parented by a birth parent.	There can be a variety of reason people are unable to parent their children. Desire is usually not a common reason and being described as “unwanted” is detrimental to a child’s sense of self.

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Taken away	Placed in state custody	The state, guided by law, has decided to remove the child from their home for specific reasons.
Tracking down relatives	Search for information or relatives	Tracking down people could imply that they are unwilling to be found. Conducting a search can take many forms and can mean searching for information, people or both.
Reunion	Making or keeping contact with a birth parent	Having contact with birth parents and relatives can take many forms and does not always lead to being reunited.

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Adopt a highway Adopt a whale Adopt a playground Adopt a school	Sponsor a highway Sponsor a whale Sponsor a playground Sponsor a school	Parents may be uncomfortable and these may be confusing or hurtful to children. This use is for temporary relationships and fundraising purposes.



Developmental Understanding

- **Infancy & Toddlerhood**
 - Create story books to help layout child's story
 - Parents can begin to share child's story
 - Allows parents time to become comfortable with story and sequence
 - As language develops, child begins to have narrative of his or her story

Developmental Understanding

- **Three to four years old**
 - Children begin to tell their story to others
 - No conception of connection between birth and heredity
 - Children are very literal: don't appreciate metaphors about adoption
 - Parents can help children understand that all people grow inside other people

Developmental Understanding

- **Five to seven years old**
 - Joining families through adoption and birth
 - Begin to ask specific question about birth parents
 - Adoption is an adult decision: Not child's 'fault'
 - Share appropriate information about birth parents and adoption circumstances

Developmental Understanding

- **Eight to eleven years old**
 - Increasing curiosity about birth parents, adoption circumstances, and racial or cultural differences among family members
 - Parents can share what they know even if it is difficult
 - Understanding of multidimensionality of circumstances
 - Appreciate being able to access parents for information

Developmental Understanding

- **Adolescence**

- Exploration of identity and connections to others
- Youth vary on how much they want to discuss adoption, when and with whom
- More interest in searching for information
- Give adolescents space to explore adoption issues
- Reconfirm commitment as a family
- Parent-child relationship: dependence vs. independence

Talking to Others

- Family
- Friends
- Doctors
- Teachers
- Others