



by Beth O'Malley M.Ed.

Talking About Adoption

It's as much a parenting task as doctor visits, reading bedtime stories and providing transportation. Just like answering the preschooler's "Why?" for the 54th time, we need to help our children make sense of their life – before, during, and after they leave their first family.



Why Do We Do This?

1. We believe our kids do better in life by grappling out loud with the question "Who Am I?" or "Why am I in this family?" than struggling alone and in silence.
2. We realize we can't fix or take away their pain.
3. It helps to be comfortable with our child's individual story as well as basic adoption concepts.

What's Your Style When Talking Adoption-Related Stuff?

Can you reel off answers off the top of your head? Do you prefer being spontaneous? If so, consider yourself lucky. Not me. I have to think and figure out what I want to say. This is where the lifebook process was invaluable. It forced me (and many others) to take the time to nail down life-story wording and process feelings.

Let's assume we have done our grown up homework and can answer 7 out of 10 questions that come at us during a car ride without batting an eye. Great. The bad news? There's more work to be done.

The goal: Keep the life story alive.

The older your child, the harder this becomes.



Don't Confuse Silence with Acceptance

School-aged children think more and talk less about adoption. The THINK MORE part is important. They have figured out that being 'chosen' also requires being rejected by someone else first.

Adoption means they are different than their friends - and their family may look very different as well. The teen will act it out, just like in their toddler days. Can you hardly wait?

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Arm Yourself with Humor

As you juggle everyday life and adoption issues - never underestimate the power of a good belly laugh. Remind your child of the time they said something funny. What teen doesn't like hearing stories about their child self? Weave in humor wherever you can.



*Please remember to never – Never – NEVER wait for questions.
You must take the lead.*

Growing up adopted, I could barely figure out what I was feeling, let alone ask a question. *You must start the talking!*

Fueled by My Personal Adoption Experience

As an adopted adult I can see how my perceptions and emotional equilibrium have evolved over time. Maybe 20 years from now our kids will complain that we talked too much about loss/sadness/why/racism.

I, for one, am willing to take that chance. Please join me!



Beth O'Malley, M.Ed. is a lifebook expert, adoptee, adoptive mom and professional in the field of adoption. With a Masters in Counseling, she relies on her instincts and experiences as an adult adoptee and as much as her professional skills when writing and working on lifebooks.

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