



Preparing for Your Child to Go to School

School is a place where children and parents alike can learn a lot about adoption. Maybe you laugh to yourself as you overhear your child playing house and asking her friend, “When is the social worker coming to bring your new brother?” instead of the more traditional scenario where one person has a pillow under her shirt and the other child asks when she will go to the hospital to have the baby.

Or maybe your child shows an increased sense of pride about his or her ethnic heritage after learning about it in school. A child may begin to notice when a multicultural or non-traditional family is featured in a book or movie.

All of these things are opportunities to learn from each other about adoption. It’s also an opportunity to educate their teachers, peers and other parents.

Preparing Your Child for School

Before school starts each year, most of us get wrapped up in all that we need to do: buy school supplies, schedule doctor visits, sign up for activities. While doing all of that, it’s also a good time to start talking with your children about what the new school year will bring for them. It’s a great time to talk about

how your children can best be prepared for answering questions about their adoptions, as well.

Although adoption is not a foreign concept to most adults, children tend to be less familiar with it unless their family has been touched by adoption. Most elementary school children assume that all of their classmates came to be part of their family the same way that they did, which may lead to confusion during playtime or when parents are present who look different from their children.

Your child who was adopted may assume that all children have birth and adoptive parents, while children parented in birth families may not

understand the purpose of adoptive parents.

As we know, families are formed in different ways and look different from one another. Here are some ways that you can reinforce this idea to children of any age:

- Read books and watch movies that reflect differences in families.
- Make a point to interact with at least one family who’s different in some way than a traditional

Continued on page 2



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Milwaukee, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforfyf.org

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family.

- Use inclusive language that respects all families and their members. Conversely, gently teach others not to use phrases like, “real mom.”

Setting Boundaries

Most adoption experts recommend that children who are adopted have access to information about their adoption story. When children are younger, they have less ability to understand what information should be shared with others and what should be kept private. If there are details that you think should be private, practice keeping it that way by role playing.

Pretend that you are a classmate and ask your children a question to help them determine if the answer is private. If so, how can they deflect the question?

Sometimes this is referred to as a “cover story.” The cover story will provide enough information to satisfy the questioner without providing too much detail. Practicing this story will help your child to feel more at ease when and if it really happens.

You can reinforce the idea of setting boundaries by modeling this behavior in front of your children. When someone asks a question in front of your children, you can provide the same cover story.

If you decide to discuss your children’s adoptions with their teachers, ask your children what parts they feel comfortable with you sharing and which pieces of information they would prefer were kept private. For more about this, check out the

W.I.S.E. Up Powerbook, which you can find in [our library](#).

Preparing Your Child’s Teachers

When you share some of your children’s adoption stories, the information will allow their teachers to better instruct your kids in the classroom. They may be able to anticipate triggers that will single out your child and then either make modifications or contact you.

When you speak to your child’s teachers, mention the use of adoption inclusive language, such as the [examples found at Adoptive Families](#).

This can help your child’s teachers to be reflective on the powerful impact of words and provide them with empowering choices of words that are adoption friendly and inclusive.

Rather than discussing that, “You all came from your mommy’s belly,” the teacher can rephrase and discuss the “different ways that families are created.”

If your children have any challenges in the classroom that may be related to their adoption, talk to their

teachers. This may help them in determining if any interventions are necessary.

Depending on the age of your child, you may want to offer to read a book about adoption or do an art project with the class as a way to talk to them about adoption. For older children or teenagers, you may suggest a book or movie clip that contains the topic of adoption for

Continued on page 3



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integration into a class project or assignment.

You may also want to bring our tip sheet, [*Education and Adoption: Issues to Keep in Mind When Working with Students and Families*](#), to show to your children’s teachers. It was written specifically for educators.

Educating the Educators

Talking to your child’s teachers early on allows time for open communication between the teacher and other children. It will also give the teacher an opportunity to plan ahead when teaching sensitive topics.

An uniformed teacher may not be able to defuse potentially sensitive questions.

Challenging School Assignments

The following traditional school assignments are examples that may create difficulties for children who were adopted or are in the process of being adopted. Bring these ideas along when you meet with your children’s teachers or bring your own ideas to share.

Family Tree

Challenge: Family trees typically require that a child input information from only one family—either birth or adoptive. The templates that are used rarely plan space for step families, same-sex parents, relative parents, and other scenarios.

Alternative: Provide a template that is more inclusive or allow children to first design the template for their family tree in

whatever way allows for all of their family members to be listed. You can find [a good and simple version of a family tree template](#) here.

Autobiography:

Challenge: Autobiographies often require that you share personal information and this may be something that your child is uncomfortable sharing. It may also highlight the differences between adopted and birth children.

Alternative: Give the students the opportunity to write a biography about someone in their family, including themselves if they wish.

Mother’s/Father’s Day Projects

Challenge: These days may bring up emotions for children about birth parents. Some children

may wish to include more than one mother or father.

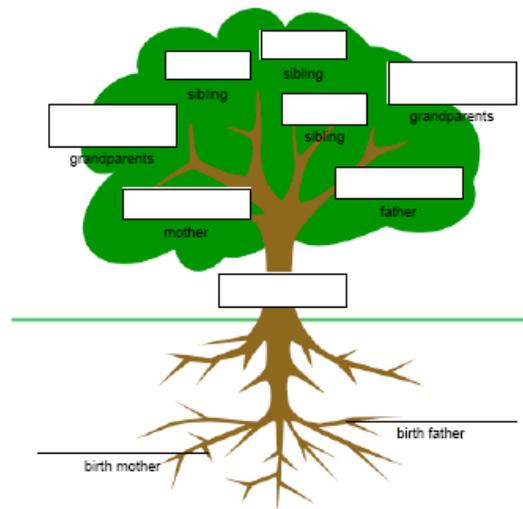
Alternative: Allow students to include multiple parents in the assignment or even to use someone non-related who they’d like to honor.

When back to school days come around, add “adoption talks” to your long “to do” list. Talk to your kids, and talk to their teachers. You’ll likely all come away with new insights. It may also prevent challenging situations from occurring.

Feel free to contact us at 800-762-8063 or info@coalitionforcyf.org for more information or help.

Continued on page 4

My Heritage



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Milwaukee, WI 53214
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info@coalitionforcyf.org

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Resources

From our [Lending Library](#)

- *An Educator's Guide to Adoption*, by Celebrate Adoption, Inc
- *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child*, by Betsy Keefer & Jayne Schooler
- *Parent Guidebook for the W.I.S.E. Up! Powerbook*, (DiscussionGuide) Marilyn Schoettle & Ellen Singer
- *W.I.S.E Up Powerbook For Children In Foster Care*, by Marilyn Schoettle, MA
- *W.I.S.E. UP PowerBook*, (for kids who were adopted) by Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc.
- *Oh No, School!* by Hae-Kyung Chang
- [Helping Achieve School Success](#)

Other Web Resources

- [Adoption Awareness in School Assignments: A Guide for Parents and Educators](#)
- Center for Adoption Support and Education
- [Tips for Teachers](#) (video)



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