

When children enter elementary school or a new school for the first time, inevitable questions about their families are bound to follow. This can be very difficult for children who have been adopted from birth or foster care. Often, adopted children are teased by their peers, are told they are not wanted by their families, and that they must have done something wrong to make their parents want to give them up. A lot of blame is placed on the child, and they may feel unwanted. In turn, this affects their self-esteem and their performance and behavior in school. Talking with your child about tough questions that may arise and working with school administration is critical to make sure that your child has a smooth transition into school and to minimize any problems that may arise.

Day Care/Kindergarten

At this age, kids are not really prejudice, unless they have been taught by their parents. The stigmas that are attached to adoption and foster care are not known unless taught. At this age, all kids know is that families who are together love each other.

Elementary School

At this age, children begin to think about what it means to be adopted, and may realize some of the stigmas that are attached to it. As a result, they may feel a sense of loss or abandonment and negative feelings about why they were adopted, including that they were "given up" because they were bad, not smart enough, they weren't wanted, etc. This causes them to lose concentration in school, and inhibits their learning. To help your child through this transition into school, it is important to talk to your child's teacher. Let them know that your child is adopted, but you do not have to go into great detail. This will allow for your child's teacher to keep an eye on your child and their behavior, and make sure that they are fitting in nicely, making friends, and have high self-esteem. Talking to your child's teacher about art projects like making a family tree is also important. During this activity questions will be raised about the child's past, and it could put them in an uncomfortable situation and invite questions that they may not want to answer. If you have pictures of your child's biological parents, encourage them to put the pictures on their tree if they would like. Other activities may include describe your family, think about what you are going to look like in a few years, etc. Any activity that involves families may be hard for your child. Another common activity in classrooms for children at this age is to bring in a picture of themselves as babies. This can be difficult if you do not have any pictures of your child as a baby. Again, talking to your child's teacher beforehand may ease any sense of uncomfortableness or negative feelings. Letting your child draw a picture of themselves or bring in a recent picture are two possible solutions.

Talking with your child at an early age about adoption, talking with your child's teacher, and utilizing the school counselor or other professionals are all ways to make sure your child is well-equipped to do well in school and feel comfortable with their past. Being open and honest with your child about their adoption is the best; keeping things from them will only make the truth harder later on. However, keep the information age appropriate. If your child asks you questions about their adoption or biological family, encourage them to ask and talk to them about it. The more open you are with your child about adoption, the more comfortable they will be, and they will have an easier time with it at school.

Answering Tough Questions

Practicing answering tough questions with your child is one of the best ways to help make your child's transition into school smooth. It is important to practice answering tough questions because it gives the child a chance to learn to establish boundaries about what they want to share and what they don't have to. This can be difficult for some children, especially those who have been abused, as they may feel like they are people's property and have to share everything about them. In addition, it teaches the difference between privacy and secrecy. You should tell your child that they do not have to answer every question they are asked, and that adoption is their business only. Using humor can also be a good strategy to not answer a hard question and change the subject without creating a more uncomfortable situation. The following are some tough questions that your child may be asked and how they can answer them:

- "Why are you in foster care": your child can answer in a few ways, by saying that they need to live where it is safe for now; they can walk away; or say that they do not want to share personal information.
- "Why didn't your mom want you/do you know your real mom": your child can say that they don't want to talk about this; it is no one's business; or that they are wanted by their family and that is all that matters.

Answering honestly and simply is the best method. It does not lead to more questions, and it does not put your child in a very uncomfortable situation.

Resources

The Impact on Adopted Children at School:
<http://www.localschooldirectory.com/k-12-articles/61>

Adoption Institute:
<http://www.adoptioninstitute.org>

Adoption Institute-Resource guide for educators:
<http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/proed/educators.html>

From Adoptive Families

Tackling Tricky Assignments
<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=295>

The Family Tree
<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=888>

Adopting.org

Telling the Teachers

<http://www.adopting.org/adoptions/telling-the-teachers-adoption-and-school.htm>

Child Adoption Matters

How Adoption Impacts Children in School

<http://www.child-adoption-matters.com/adoption-and-school.htm>

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