

From: Scott Corcoran [scott@afamilyforeverychild.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2013 4:30 PM
To: scott@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: School Transitions



Dear ,

When your child enters a new school for the first time, questions about their family are bound to come up. These questions can be very difficult for kids who were adopted, due to the circumstances surrounding their adoption or because they don't know the answers. Adopted children may also be teased by their peers for being different, and may be told their family doesn't want them, and they must have done something wrong because they were adopted. This places a lot of blame on your child, and they may feel unwanted. This will affect their self-esteem, school performance, and behaviors. It's important to talk to your child about any questions that may arise, and make sure to work with the administration to ensure that your child has a smooth transition and minimizing any problems.

In day care or kindergarten, children are not really prejudice towards others unless they have been taught that behavior by another adult. Kids this age may not be aware of any stigmas attached to adoption. All they understand is that families who are together love one another.

In elementary school, children start to think about what it means to be adopted, and may learn some of the stigmas that are attached. They may feel a sense of loss and negative feelings about the circumstances surrounding their adoption. These feelings can have a negative impact on their school performance and their peer relations. To help your child transition into school, work with their teacher. Let them know that your child is adopted. You don't have to reveal all the details surrounding their adoption, but by telling the teacher that your child is adopted will allow them to keep an eye on your child and make sure they are fitting in, making friends, and have high self-esteem. You should also talk to your child's teacher about any art projects that surround making a family tree, bringing in pictures of children as a baby, describing their family; projects that may prompt questions from a child's peers and make them uncomfortable. Talking to your child's teacher ahead of time can allow them a chance to come up with an alternative project or solution so your child can still participate but not feel uncomfortable. Examples include having your child draw a picture of himself/herself, or allowing pictures of a child's birth parents on their family tree.

Talking to your child at an early age about adoption, talking to their teacher, and the school counselor are all solutions to making sure your child is equipped to feel comfortable with their past and answering any tough questions that come their way. Keep adoption information age appropriate, but make sure you are open and honest with your child about their adoption, as keeping secrets from them will only make the truth harder. Encourage your child to ask questions and talk with them openly. The more comfortable they are with their adoption, the more comfortable they will be at school.

Ten Ways to Encourage Your Child During the School Year

1. Attend parent-teacher conferences.
2. Let them hear you praise them in front of their teachers.
3. Talk to them about their day.
4. Help them study.
5. Show up for any concerts, plays, sporting events, field trips, or awards ceremonies.
6. Hang their artwork on the fridge.
7. Show understanding when they have a hard day at school.
8. Communicate frequently with their teacher about their progress in the classroom.
9. Surprise them with notes in their backpack or lunchbox.
10. Celebrate their successes.

Source: [Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association \(IFAPA\)](#)

Easing the Transition Back Into School

The following are some suggestions for how to make your child's transition back into school easier on your entire family:

Medical Records- Check to make sure your child is up to date on his/her vaccines, physical, and other information the school requires. Use the child's doctors if possible. If not, schedule an appointment with a doctor or pediatrician in your area. If you do not have

a child's immunization records, ask the child's caseworker or former foster parent(s) if they have any record of them.

Other Paperwork- Make sure you have the name, address, and phone number of the last school your child attended, plus any other required information.

Education Plans and IEPs- Talk to your child's caseworker about any education plans or services that were in place at your child's last school that they will need again. Confirm with the school's registrar and counselor that they have everything they need. If possible, talk to your child's teacher about their IEP and make sure they will be able to work with your child to get any additional assistance he/she needs.

Contact Card- Create a small card for your child to carry with them containing your address, phone numbers, his/her bus number, and the name and number of a neighbor or relative to contact in case of an emergency; information he/she may not have yet memorized. Make a couple of copies and laminate them so they don't get destroyed. Have your child keep them one in their coat pocket and pin another into the inside of his/her backpack.

Take a practice tour- Show your child where they will be picking up their bus, or where you will be dropping them off and picking them up at school. Give your child and the school the name(s) of an approved friend or relative that is allowed to pick them up at school if you are unable to. Talk to your child about stranger danger and about never taking a ride from someone they don't know and who is not approved to pick them up from school. If possible, take a tour of the child's school and show them where they will eat lunch, what classroom they will be in, where their locker is, and where they will have recess.

Prepare an adoption story- Work with your child on coming up with a story about their adoption that will answer any prying questions from peers but will still allow the child to maintain their privacy.

Source: [Foster Parent College](#)

Answering Tough Questions

Practice answering questions your child may be asked at school. The more prepared your child is, the more comfortable they will be answering questions from their peers and friends and with establishing boundaries. This can be challenging for some children, especially if they were abused and left with the feeling that they have to do everything they are told. Practicing answering questions can help your child learn the difference between privacy and secrecy. The following are some common questions children may be asked, and how to answer them:

-*"Why were you in foster care?"* Your child can choose not to answer by walking away or by saying that's private information, or they may simply say they needed a safe place to live.

-*"Why didn't your mom want you?"* or *"Do you know your real mom?"* Again, your child has few ways they can answer. They may simply walk away, say they do not want to talk about it, or say they have a family that loves them and that's all that matters.

-*"Why don't you look like your mom/dad/brother/sister?"* Your child can state that not all families look the same, and the only thing that matters is that their family loves each other.

Answering simply and honestly is your child's best chance at avoiding more questions and leading into awkward situations.

The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) has a publication called *W.I.S.E. Up! Powerbook* that goes over questions your child may be asked and how to answer them. You may order the book [here](#).

Resources

Here are additional resources you may find helpful:

LocalSchoolDirectory.com: [Impact on Adopted Children at School](#)

Adoption Institute: [Resource Guide for Educators](#)

Adoptive Families: [Tackling Tricky Assignments](#)

Adoptive Families: [The Family Tree](#)

Adopting.org: [Telling the Teachers](#)

Child Adoption Matters: [How Adoption Impacts Children in School](#)

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD): [Back-to-School Kit for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities](#) (PDF)

NCLD: [Building a Good Relationship with Your Child's Teacher](#)

NCLD: [Making Technology Part of your Back to School Planning](#)

NCLD: [Keeping Track of School Performance Records](#)

Nora Sharp
Matching Assistance Coordinator
A Family for Every Child
nora.sharp@afamilyforeverychild.org

