



Adoption 101: for teachers

Each year, around 550 children are adopted by BC families. There are probably children in your class who have joined their family through adoption. We have prepared this information sheet to help you understand some of the issues that adoptees can face at school and how you can help them.

be adoption sensitive

There are many good reasons to be sensitive to adoption in the classroom:

- Thoughtless remarks about their family and origins by other children, and some school assignments, can cause great distress to children who were adopted.
- It's not uncommon—particularly in the case of transracially adopted children—for children to be asked if their adoptive parent is their "real" mom, or to have their status as a "real" child questioned. Some children are



even asked "how much money" their parents paid for them.

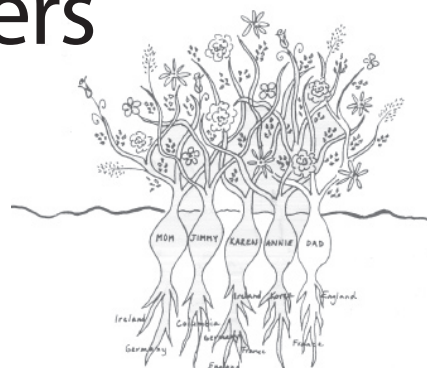
- Some children know very little, or nothing, about their birth parents. This can cause them distress and great feelings of loss. Of course, this is not always the case. Some children have very positive contact with birth family and are happy to talk about them.
- Other children, especially those who were in foster care before being adopted, may have experienced abuse by their biological parents. They may also have lived in several different homes. Explaining their family or birth history may be painful and challenging for them.



easy ways to help

You can create a safe and supportive environment for adoptees in your class by doing some very simple things:

- Set the tone for acceptance of adoption. Calm, thoughtful comments or responses to questions about adoption send the message that you feel adoption is a normal way to bring families together. When you have an accepting attitude toward adoption, it will go a long way toward nurturing that in the children in your class.
- Teach the children that adoptive families are just one of many family models (e.g., blended, step, single-parent, same-sex, foster) and that all the people in their lives are "real."
- If you know a child is adopted, talk to his or her parents for tips on how to approach a potentially sensitive assignment before going ahead.
- Children should be allowed to be in control of the information about their adoption story—take their lead about what they choose to share. Try to answer questions about adoption in a general way so that the other children learn not to intrude on fellow students' privacy.
- Have age-appropriate, adoption-themed books in your classroom (see back for ideas).
- If you are talking about families in general, include mention of adoptive families—this normalizes adoption for the children. Tell children about famous adoptees (see back).
- If a child agrees, or asks to do one, have an adoption show and tell. Check in with the child's parent or parents before agreeing.



> School assignments that address genetics, inherited characteristics, human development, or family heritage can be difficult for adoptees. Try to plan ways to teach that includes, rather than excludes, adoptees. A quick Google search will provide you with several examples, or call AFABC at 604-320-7330.

- If you are planning a family tree assignment, give the children other options such as including all the people in their lives who love them—rather than just relatives. Some children have no information about their biological families or no contact. On Mother's Day and Father's Day, allow the children to prepare a card or gift for whomever they wish, not just Mom or Dad.
- Some adopted children don't have pictures of themselves as babies or infants. Asking such a child to produce a photo for an assignment can be very upsetting. Try to find out if there are children in your class who may be in that situation.
- Some teachers ask children to bring in baby pictures so that children can guess through family resemblance which child goes with which parents. This can be upsetting for children who were adopted by parents of another race. The best way to handle assignments about family relationships or personal history is to broaden them so that all children and their types of families can be included.
- Invite an adoptive parent and/or an adoption expert to speak to the class. The Adoptive Families Association of BC can arrange a speaker in most communities. Call us at 604-320-7330.



A special cut-out supplement to give to your child's teacher—download another copy at www.bcadoption.com

what is adoption?

Adoption is a legal and social process whereby an adult person becomes the parent of a child. Once a child is adopted, he or she is the same as any birth children in terms of the law and parental responsibility to the child. The greatest advantage of adoption is the stability it provides for children.

adoption in British Columbia

There are three main routes to adoption in British Columbia: a small number of children are adopted as infants through one of BC's licensed adoption agencies. Around 300 children join families from the foster care system, and around 200 are adopted from other countries. Children are also adopted by step-parents and in many same-sex couples where one parent is the biological parent, the other parent adopts the child.

who can adopt a child in BC?

To adopt a child, you must be over 19 and a resident of BC. You can be single, married, or in a same-sex relationship. You don't need a particular income, education or religion. You do have to have the ability to commit to and love a child.

how adoption has changed

Adoption has changed a great deal over the last 20 or 30 years. Not only (as you can see from the above) has the type of people that can legally adopt a child widened, but the secrecy surrounding adoption has considerably lessened. These days, few adoptive parents fail to tell their children that they were adopted. Many adoptive parents now have contact with their child's birth parents and birth families—this is called openness. Openness can be simply a regular exchange of cards, photos or gifts, or frequent get-togethers. Openness is considered generally positive for children in terms of understanding their past and forming their identity.



famous people touched by adoption

- Superman (adoptee)
- President Bill Clinton (adoptee)
- Dalai Lama (adoptee)
- Sarah McLachlan (adoptee)
- Buffy Sainte-Marie (adoptee)
- Robert Munch (adoptive parent)
- Angelina Jolie (adoptive parent)
- Meg Ryan (adoptive parent)
- Sharon Stone (adoptive parent)
- Rosie O'Donnell (adoptive parent)
- Magic Johnson (adoptive parent)
- Joni Mitchell (birth mom)

adoption books for kids

These are just a few of the books available online at www.bcadoption.com. Order to read in your classroom or for your library.

■ We're Different, We're the Same

by Bobbi Jane Kates, for ages 2-6

■ Tell Me Again About the Night I was Born

by Jamie Lee Curtis, for ages 2-8

■ All Kinds of Families

by Simon Norma, for ages 2-8

■ Horace

by Holly Keller, ages 2-8

■ Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story

by Lori Rosove, for ages 4-6

■ Families are Different

by Nina Pellegrini, for ages 4-8

■ How I was Adopted,

by Joanne Cole, for ages 4-8

Over the Moon: An Adoption Tale

by Karen Katz, for ages 2-7

■ Let's Talk About It: Adoption

by Fred Rogers, for ages 4-6.

■ Look Who's Adopted!

by Michael Taheri, and James Orr, for ages 4-8.

■ Chance and the Butterfly

by Maggie de Vries, ages 4-8

■ My Family is Forever

by Nancy Carlsen, ages 3-8

■ Bullets on the Bundt

by Steve Whan, ages 7-12

■ How it Feels to be Adopted

by Jill Kremenz, 10 and up

■ All About Adoption:

How to Deal With the Questions of Your Past

by Ann Lanchon, 11 and up

adoption information online:

www.bcadoption.com

respectful adoption language

Out of Date:..... Respectful:.....

My Own Child, My Natural Child..... Birth Child.....

Real Parents, Natural Parents..... Birth Parents.....

Gave Up, Gave Away..... Made an Adoption Plan...

Keeping her Baby..... Parenting Her Child.....

My Adopted Son..... My Son.....

My Adopted Daughter..... My Daughter.....

Foreign adoption..... International adoption.