



> School 101: for adoptive parents

Starting school for the first time, or a new school year, can present challenges for adoptive parents and their children. We have prepared this brief guide to help prepare you and your child for the school experience and, hopefully, circumvent some of the problems you may encounter.

Preparing for school

- If you're not familiar with the school that your child will attend, ask if you can sit in on a school assembly. This is a good way to get a feel for the school in terms of its diversity. Talk to the principal about how the school approaches the subject of different kinds of families.
- Attend an open PAC meeting. Once your child is at the school, PAC meetings are also a great place to promote awareness of adoption and adoption sensitivity.
- Make an appointment to meet with your child's teacher in September. It may be wise to explain that your child is adopted and that sensitivity around assignments about the family, or children sharing information about their history, is needed.



- If you decide to explain that your child was adopted, share only relevant information; in most cases, you can explain your child's needs without providing all the background details.
- Encourage principals, counsellors, and teachers to use positive adoption language. Provide them with the information on this page. Give them a handout on adoption myths. (see www.bcadoption.com in the books & resources section).
- Donate a book about adoption to your school's library. Suggest other adoption-related titles for the librarian to include in the next order of new books.



- With the permission of your child, make a presentation about adoption to your child's class or to teachers at a faculty meeting. Perhaps you will want to work with an adoption worker from a local agency or from AFABC (call 604-320-7330).
- Scout out other adoptive families in the school. Your children may make friends with other adoptees and you will have other adoptive parents to share ideas and solve problems with.

Newly adopted older kids

- If you think your child needs to spend more time attaching to you, or is immature for his or her age, consider delaying entry to Kindergarten or skip it altogether—kids don't have to attend until Grade 1.

- Take your child to the school before the first day to look round and meet the teacher. This is especially important for children who have had lots of disruption in their lives and who find change and transitions hard.
- Be realistic about your child's abilities. Interruptions in attachment, early deprivations, cultural differences, and multiple moves can cause a child to act younger than he or she is; your child may not be able to learn as fast other classmates.
- If your child has attachment, grief and loss, or abuse issues, make sure that the school counsellor and teacher are aware of this and that they have information on the effects of such problems.
- If your child has FASD, make sure that the teachers he or she comes into contact with are familiar with FASD. If they are not, they may assume that your child is misbehaving when in fact he or she is struggling because of FASD.

- If you think your child needs services not normally provided in the regular classroom, you need to advocate for them. Each child with special needs is entitled to an **Individualized Education Plan**, which should meet their learning and developmental needs.
- If your child has special needs that have already been identified, bring all available

positive adoption language

Out of Date:.....	Positive:.....
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.....
Is adopted.....	Was adopted.....



medical records, psycho-educational assessments and Individualized Education Plans to the School Reception Centre (each school board has one) when you register.

International adoption

■ When you register your child at school, bring along your child's birth certificate (if you have one) and any immigration documents such as a citizenship card.

■ Be prepared to advocate to get the best services for your child. Unfortunately school staff are often unaware of the needs of internationally adopted children, (visit www.bcadoption.com books and resources section for **Adoption 101 For Teachers**).

■ Provide school staff with information on the effects of orphanage life on learning and development. In many cases, the child will be developmentally behind children of the same age.

■ If your child does not yet speak English, explain to the teacher that this means the child is also likely to be behind in language skills in their language of birth.

■ Though the school may insist that your child joins a grade consistent with his or her age, if that doesn't seem right, insist he or she is put in a lower grade.

■ Don't rush your older child straight into school—especially if he or she doesn't speak English. Allow your child to get used to the new home, community, and family. This will help your child gain some basic English speaking skills.

■ Expecting older adopted children to develop proficient English language skills within one or two years of adoption is unrealistic.

■ Most schools have ESL classes. They also have language support programs for students who are more advanced in their English language learning. High schools have learning resource centres which children can attend to get help with work they are having trouble with.

One mom's method

by Susan Waugh

Every September, I speak to my daughters' teachers about adoption. I always bring a copy of AFABC's "Positive Adoption Language" with me, and I set privacy boundaries for the teachers around publicly discussing our daughters' circumstances. This visit also gives me an opportunity to find out about any family-related assignments that might impact the girls. I'm careful to point out to teachers that the adoption language sheet will help them when discussing family circumstances with same-sex families, single parent families, and separated, divorced or blended families.

Last year, in the spring, my younger daughter's teacher gave me a heads-up about an upcoming family tree assignment. He explained that we could alter the assignment to make sure it was inclusive of our family makeup.

Within the next few days, I gave him a couple of articles about school assignments and adoption issues. To my delight, he took the advice in the articles to heart, and the as-

ignment was changed for the entire class. He explained that reading the articles made him realize that a family tree can be problematic for many children, not just for adoptees, and that altering the assignment would make it more inclusive for all kinds of families. He even ordered some of the adoption books referenced in the articles for the school library.

Even a brief conversation about adoption can have positive effects:

■ It opens the door to the topic, and lets teachers know it's ok to talk to you about adoption.

■ It raises their awareness about invasive questions your children may be facing from their peers, or even from their teachers, and the need to respect even a very young child's privacy.

■ It models a respectful way, and non-judgmental terms for them to use with all kinds of families, when discussing family structure.

■ Finally, it makes teachers sensitive to the fact that some assignments may be problematic for children in non-traditional families, and that they themselves need to think creatively when it comes to being inclusive. ■

Racism and school

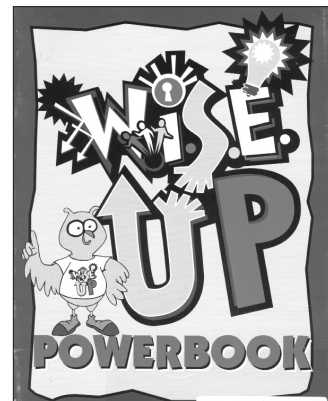
■ No matter how uncomfortable, you will have to prepare your child for hurtful and racist comments at school. Make sure your child knows that you are always available to talk to about such incidents. Offer comfort, validate feelings and help your child understand that no one else can define who he or she is. Teach your child strategies to deal directly with racist comments.

■ When racist situations occur, talk with the principal, teachers and counsellors. Work out how to handle them and make sure they follow up.

■ Other transracial adoptive families have already had to handle racism at school—they can be a great source of advice. Join a local adoption group or call AFABC for a buddy parent in your area.

➤ Find books on racism and kids at www.bcadoption.com

Kidpower!



Wiseup Powerbook teaches kids the skills they need to handle typical adoption-related situations that they must deal with in school and in their neighbourhoods. Highly recommended. Order at www.bcadoption.com, or call 604-320-7330 ext 107. BUY FOR \$28. AFABC Library # CH0.3.S05.2