

ADOPTION 101: FOR TEACHERS



Each year approximately **250-300 children and youth** find a permanent family through the Adopt BC Kids program, facilitated by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). This information sheet is intended to help teachers understand issues adoptees face at school and how they can help the adopted children in their class.

BE ADOPTION SENSITIVE

In addition to adopted kids, your classroom may also include foster children, or kids who are living permanently with extended family members, friends, or other caregivers. These tips can help create a supportive classroom environment for them as well.

1. Other children may make unintentionally hurtful remarks about the child's family and origins. Watch for opportunities to support the child and gently correct the other students.

2. It's common for adoptees to be asked about their "real" (birth) family, or to be told their adoptive parents aren't their "real" parents. Sometimes they're even asked how much money their parents paid for them.

3. 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. Open adoptions are the norm now, and many children have very positive contact with birth family and are happy to talk about them. Let the adoptee take the lead on if and how they talk about their birth family.

4. Sadly, some children experience abuse, neglect, or other traumatic events before being adopted. They may also have lived in several different homes. Explaining their family or birth history may be painful and challenging.

EASY WAYS TO HELP

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

1. Set an accepting, positive tone. Calm, thoughtful comments or responses to questions about adoption send the message that 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.

2. 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.

3. Children should be in control of 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.

4. Have age-appropriate, adoption-themed books in classrooms. See our resource guide (pg. 10) for ideas!

5. Normalize adoption by including adoptive families whenever you talk about families in general. Tell children about famous adoptees. To name a few: Superman, Dave Thomas (founder of Wendy), Simone Biles (USA Olympian), and Colin Kaepernick (NFL football player).



WHAT IS ADOPTION

Adoption is a legal and social process whereby an adult person becomes the parent of a child. Once a child is legally adopted, they are same as any birth child in terms of the law and parental responsibility to the child.

ADOPTION IN BC

There are a few main routes to adoption in BC:

1. Only a small number of children are adopted as infants in BC. Most children waiting for adoption are school-aged (ages 4-18).
2. Each year, 250-300 children join families from the BC foster care system, and around 50 are adopted from other countries.
3. Children are adopted by step-parents, relatives or family friends, and foster parents, or join families through other forms of permanency, such as legal guardianship and kinship adoption.

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 or partnered. You don't need a particular education, language, culture, religion, or type of home. 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. Secrecy is a thing of the past, and many adoptive families have contact with their child's birth parents and birth families. This is called openness.

An open relationship with birth family can range from a regular exchange of cards, photos or gifts, to more frequent get-togethers. Openness is usually a good thing for everyone—it means more people to love and be loved by, and it helps children understand themselves and their story.

A SPECIAL CUT-OUT TO SHARE WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

ADOPTION AND SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS

1. School assignments that address genetics, inherited characteristics, human development, or family heritage can be difficult for adoptees. Here are a few ways to adapt lesson plans to be more inclusive of adoptees.
2. If you are planning a family tree assignment, give the children options such as including all the people in their lives who love them, rather than just relatives.
3. Some adopted children don't have pictures of themselves as babies or infants. Asking them to produce a photo for an assignment can be upsetting. Plan to teach about topics such as family and identity in ways that include adoptive families—and all other types of families, too!
4. Invite an adoptive parent, an adult adoptee, 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 or send us an email at info@bcadoption.com.
5. Celebrate Adoption Awareness Month in November to bring awareness to the adoption and permanency community.
6. Consider adapting your permission slips, school forms, etc. to reflect all the diverse families in your class. Retire the terms "mother and father" in favour of "parent(s)/guardian(s)".