

ADOPTION DO'S AND DON'TS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

AN ADOPTION EDUCATION
PUBLICATION



A LOVE BEYOND
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This article provides quick but invaluable tips for adults when trying to forge a relationship with their adopted children and/or the adoptive parents in their lives. Simple tips like “respect privacy” and “treat her like any other kid” may seem like no-brainers, yet we in the adoption field often witness adults — even adoptive parents — making simple yet hurtful mistakes like these. Be sure and share this list with family and friends who are a close part of your and your child’s life.

Do's:

- Do treat her like any other kid. It may be difficult and take a while for adopted children to feel like they belong within their extended families. Treating these children like they're “just like everyone else” can go a long way toward making them feel at home and

comfortable within the group.

- Avoid the temptation to spoil her because she didn't have everything that the other kids had in the first few months or years of her life. The most valuable gifts you can offer these children are patience, routine, acceptance, and consistency -- and most of all, unexaggerated expressions of love and devotion.
- Do support her when curious strangers ask questions. When curious (and sometimes thoughtless) strangers ask questions or feel the need to comment on the circumstances of the adoption, do not let them lead you into uncomfortable territory. Instead, gently steer them back to more suitable small talk or respond in such a way that shifts the conversation to positive adoption language that in turn lets the child know that you are on her side.
- Do respect her privacy. Adopted children have the same need for and the right to privacy as you do. They do not want their entire life story being told to strangers. If she hears you discussing the intimate details of her origins, she will likely feel embarrassed. Until the child is old enough to decide for herself how much information she would like to share regarding her background, please respect her privacy.
- Do treat prospective adoptive parents the same as expectant parents and tell your friends and family to treat you the same also. Adopting a child is just as exciting for soon-to-be parents as being pregnant. They feel the same way all expectant parents do -- overjoyed, overwhelmed, nervous, impatient, and most of all, excited. Don't be afraid to ask adopting parents about these feelings. After all, adoption is neither a secret nor a source of embarrassment or shame.
- Do acknowledge and celebrate the differences. One of the best things you can do to show your support as well as your love for the adopted child in your life is to learn a bit about the culture and history of her birth country. Read a couple of books, especially travel books. Even if you have no plans to travel there, there is no better way to get the feeling of another country.



Don'ts:

- Don't introduce the child as adopted. Adoption is a legal act that occurs once and is done, not who someone becomes. "She was adopted on January 15, 2007" is correct; "this is my adopted daughter" is not! The pain this inflicts on the child is obvious. The child is made to feel inferior, like she will never be considered a real part of the family. The rule is simple: Don't ever, ever do this.
- Don't tell her or others how "lucky" she is. Don't say that you "saved" her. After hearing this enough times, the child can be made to feel like a lifelong charity case, rather than the cherished child s/he is. Yes, the child is lucky, but so is any child who has a supportive, loving family. And we parents are lucky, too, to have been able to create this loving, supportive family.
- People should avoid assuming that adoption is a second choice. The reasons people choose to adopt are as varied and unique as the people themselves. While it is true that many choose adoption because of infertility, it is also true that many choose adoption for a myriad of other reasons as well. Many people choose to adopt not because they are out of other options, but rather because they believe that adoption is the best choice for them.
- Don't jump to conclusions about the birth mother. Often thought of as weak, irresponsible, cheap, and worthless, birth mothers often suffer a lifetime of pain far greater than that of childbirth. Please don't jump to the wrong conclusion that these women are any different than you and me or that they love their children any less.
- Most cross-cultural adoptive families know little or nothing about the circumstances that led their child's birth mother to relinquish her child. What they do know is that they can acknowledge their children's birth mothers with love and respect because they are a part of their children and it is because of them that their beloved children are who they are.
- Don't tell an adoptive parent that if, after adoption, they give birth they will have "one of your own" now. She is our own. Those parents who choose adoption because of infertility do not secretly harbor lifelong yearnings for a biological child. Having "our own" is now irrelevant; the child we have is the one we want and it is inconceivable that we could love or want any child more. Like all parents, we have the best.