

Adoptees at School



PREPPING FOR SUCCESS

The Elementary Years

Elementary school may be the adoptee's first opportunity to control their own adoption narrative, but may find it challenging if their teacher or classmates aren't adoption-sensitive.

Consider writing a letter to your child's teacher to give him or her a heads up about your child's status as an adoptee. Respectfully ask for assistance in protecting the child from assignments the child might find triggering, such as "All About Me" boards, autobiography writing, family trees, and person-of-the-week presentations. Ask for alternative assignments to be offered so the child can protect their privacy.

Main Ideas in this Handout:

- Schools are filled with many family types
- Adoptees may want to keep their story private
- Teachers can be your ally



HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD

Teach your child the W.I.S.E. Up strategy for talking about their adoption if people ask questions or make comments:

- W Walk Away or Ignore what is said
- I It's Private and I don't have to answer
- S Share something about my adoption story
- E Educate others about adoption in general

Make sure you're an open book when your child brings up adoption questions, grief, or concerns. This will help them feel comfortable telling you about uncomfortable assignments or intrusive comments.

The Teen Years

Your teen adoptee may feel more complex emotions about their adoption identity when they reach junior high or high school. They are becoming more capable of critically-thinking about the choices made by their birth parents, and may feel complicated emotions about their adoption identity. Struggles with identity, belonging, and rejection may surface in fresh ways.

As their parent, it will be harder to advocate with teachers, especially as teenagers are craving more independence. Be prepared for those moments when your teen invites you into their world or asks for your help navigating uncomfortable experiences.



**Growing
Independence**

Core Issues in Adoption that Affect Adoptees

- Grief
- Loss
- Rejection
- Identity
- Intimacy
- Shame and Guilt
- Mastery and Control

HOW TO HELP YOUR TEEN

Keep the doors to communication open with your teen, especially if they're faced with challenges or opportunities which trigger adoption issues to emerge in fresh ways.

Periodically bring up their adoption to discuss their feelings and answer fresh questions they may have. Validate their emotions, even if those emotions are difficult.

Check-in with transracial adoptees about micro-aggressions, racist comments, and how they feel they are fitting in with peers.

Alternative Assignments

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

The Elementary Years

"All About Me" boards

Give instructions allowing all students to only include details that feel comfortable and safe to share with their peers.

Family tree

Allow students to draw a family tree based on a book character or famous person whose family system is well-known (like Laura Ingalls Wilder). Students who are comfortable sharing their adoption story may complete a modified family tree that includes a root system to give space for members of their birth family.

"Family Portrait" drawings

Encourage all students to include the people who feel like family to them, including step-parents, grandparents, birth family, and others.

Baby picture activities

Remember that many children don't have access to baby pictures due to their family circumstances or lack of funds to print photos.

The Teen Years

Genetics and/or Punnett Squares

Many students don't have access to one or both biological parents. Assignments based on the student's biology might be impossible to complete. Instead, choose a famous person whose parents are also well-known and print photos of both. Use their characteristics to complete genetics assignments.

Autobiography writing

Writing an autobiography can trigger a student who has experienced trauma or significant losses. Provide alternative assignments such as writing a biography based on someone known to the student. If a student chooses to write an autobiography, give them an opportunity to edit their draft with you, instead of peers. This allows their privacy to be protected from other students.