

# TELLING YOUR CHILD HARD NEWS ABOUT THEIR BIRTH PARENT(S)

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS  
AFTER THE ADOPTION PLACEMENT

Whether your adoption is open or semi-open, your child will continue to have a connection with their birth family and will need open, honest communication about significant developments or difficult outcomes.



## Why is this important?

### Transparency Builds Trust

It can be tempting to try to protect the adopted child from difficult news, especially if they already struggle with grief and loss, rejection, shame and guilt, attachment, or other adoption-related issues. In the long run, however, being honest about difficult news can build trust within the adoptee.

### The Birth Family is Part of the Adoptee's Family

Long after placement, your adopted child will consider their birth family to be an important part of their identity. They will continue to care about the health and wellbeing of their birth family members, especially if they have regular contact with them. Adoptees benefit from information, even if it is difficult news.

## PLANNING AHEAD TO PREPARE YOUR MESSAGE FOCUS ON EMPATHY

1. Get support from your adoption case team.
2. Don't wait too long. Adoptees feel a sense of trust when they know their adoptive parents are being honest and up-front.
3. Pick the right setting: private and at a time when the child isn't distracted or stressed.
4. Practice beforehand with a friend or therapist, and get feedback on delivering the message as compassionately as possible.
5. Consider which details the child needs to hear at their current developmental stage and which can wait until they're a bit more mature.
6. Manage expectations about the child's response. They could be angry, fearful, confused, or even neutral about the news.
7. Prepare for questions that may come up.
8. Consider what immediate options you can offer the child, such as decorating a "get well" card for a seriously-ill birth parent or making plans to attend a recently-deceased birth parent's funeral.



## FEARS YOUR ADOPTED CHILD MIGHT HAVE

Every adoptee handles difficult information differently. There's no "one size fits all" expectation. Some adoptees will take the news relatively nonchalantly, while others may blame themselves for the difficult thing their birth family member has experienced. They may also worry about what this means for their post-adoption relationship with others in their birth family. It may also trigger a new "season" of grief for the adoptee.

### HOW TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

#### ALLOW SPACE FOR EMOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

1. Use the right tone: gentle, empathetic and understanding.
2. Share the "bottom line" up-front rather than beating around the bush.
3. Be transparent with details that are appropriate to share, depending on the child's developmental level.
4. Give the adoptee a moment or two for the news to sink in.
5. Express empathy through statements like "This news is sad and scary. You might be worried about what this means for you."
6. Offer appreciation and reassurance through statements like "This won't affect how much your birth family loves you or how often we have contact with them. You're still an important part of their family and that won't change."
7. Allow for an emotional response by checking in: "How are you feeling about this news?"

### Be realistic about how this might change the relationship with your child's birth family

Consider the current level of post-adoption contact. Ask yourself a few important questions:

- Will this difficult situation impact ongoing contact with the child's birth family?
- If the birth family is seriously ill, will they be able to keep up with contact and visits or do we need to make adjustments?
- If the birth parent is no longer available to us (through death or incapacitation), is there someone else in the birth family we might reach out to so our adopted child can remain connected to their birth heritage? Do these other birth relatives know about the adoption?
- Given this new information, what is our child's preference for the future?

**Difficult news may open up new and unexpected challenges. Remember to lean on your LFCS post-adoption team for support.**