

TELLING YOUR CHILD'S BIRTH PARENT ABOUT YOUR DIVORCE

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS
AFTER THE ADOPTION PLACEMENT

Whether your adoption is open or semi-open, your child's birth family may appreciate learning about changes happening in their child's family system.



Why is this important?

Transparency Builds Trust

If your family was matched, in part, due to your family status, the child's birth family may view a subsequent divorce as a sign of dishonesty during the match process. Being up-front about your divorce is a way to build a foundation of trust as you clear up any fears it may cause.

The Birth Family is Part of the Adoptee's Family

Long after placement, your adopted child's birth family will continue to care about the health and wellbeing of the child they placed. Their adoptive family is a big part of what helps the child thrive. They will be interested in your life developments, especially those that affect their child.

PLANNING AHEAD TO PREPARE YOUR MESSAGE FOCUS ON EMPATHY

1. Get support from your adoption case team.
2. Don't procrastinate. Birth parents are more likely to appreciate the up-front news, rather than finding out that information was kept hidden.
3. Pick the right setting: private, safe, and in-person, if possible.
4. Practice beforehand with a friend or therapist, and get feedback on how to improve the message.
5. Put yourself in their shoes as you consider what to say.
6. Manage expectations about their response. They could be angry, fearful, confused, or even neutral about the news.
7. Prepare for questions that may come up:
 - + How are you preparing the child for the divorce?
 - + How will this affect our post-adoption contact?
 - + What supports are available for the child during this transition?



FEARS YOUR CHILD'S BIRTH FAMILY MIGHT HAVE

Birth parents often fear that they have made a mistake in choosing adoption. They want to know that their child is safe, healthy, and well-loved. A big change like divorce could leave birth parents fearful about the child's wellbeing during this tumultuous time. Birth parents may also worry about what this means for their post-adoption relationship with the adoptive family.

HOW TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

ALLOW SPACE FOR EMOTIONS

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 safe and comfortable to share, as well as your plans for how it might affect agreed-upon openness.
4. Give birth parents a moment or two for the news to sink in.
5. Express empathy through statements like "I imagine you're feeling unsure about what this means for your child or our commitment to you."
6. Offer appreciation and reassurance through statements like "This won't affect how much we love [the child] or how often we have contact with you. You're still an important part of our 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

Before having this conversation, consider the current post-adoption contact agreement and how often updates, photos, texts, calls, or visits are already happening. Ask yourself a few important questions:

- In what ways will we each take responsibility for contact with the birth family?
- How will adoption contact change if either spouse gets remarried and has future children?
- Is it feasible that we could each have separate annual visits with the birth family or can set our differences aside to attend those visits together with the child?
- Given the background of our child's birth family, will our divorce trigger any unpleasant memories for him/her?

Remember to include details and photos from your child's life in both parents' homes so the birth family can see that their child is still thriving.