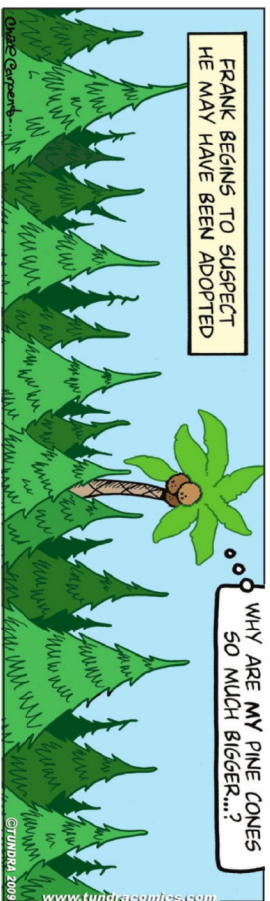


November Is National Adoption Month:

# What to Tell Your Adopted Child

By Lucy Rimalower, M.F.T.



A tip of the Family Mag hat to Tundra by Chad Carpenter / www.tundracomics.com

## How do you respond to an adoptive child's questions about origins: Why do I look different than you? Where did I come from?

The dynamics of adoption are changing. There has been a shift towards open adoptions, in which children and their biological parents maintain connection and/or communication on some level. When open adoption is not possible or biological families are not able to remain in contact, children and their adoptive families are faced with sometimes unanswered questions about their origins. This leads to two interesting trends unique to our area in 2009. First, we live in a melting pot that models diversity and co-existing, which is a new paradigm for families integrating both biological and adoptive roots. Second, getting information about and access to biological parents and/or biological children is a much more accessible process than it once was. With the

growth of social networking sites like Facebook, I hear story after story about people getting reconnected, by choice or intrusion, with biological relatives and birth parents.

Information about birth parents is no longer relegated to locked boxes on dusty shelves at adoption agencies. Children adept at Google and search engines to gather information. While not all adopted children know their birth parents' names, this new accessible communication can work in both directions, with birth parents seeking out children for whom they terminated parental rights. As such, decisions about communication made at the time of adoption may be difficult to uphold. Facebook didn't exist ten years ago. How can parents prepare their children and themselves for the role

of the Internet and widespread new media literacy in relation to adoption?

### Dialogue openly about adoption

Regardless of whether an adoption is open or closed, creating an open dialogue about origins will facilitate closeness, reduce the potential of stigma of adoption and mitigate the impact of planned or unexpected contact with birth relatives. Here are some strategies:

Establish adoption as a story of love and family. Focus on your communication made at the time of adoption may be difficult to uphold. Facebook didn't exist ten years ago. How can parents prepare their children and themselves for the role

best interests.

Be receptive. If your child expresses curiosity about his birth parents, encourage him to ask questions and share feelings. Ask him about his thoughts and ideas about his origins.

Be non-defensive. Although it might touch a nerve for adoptive parents to hear their children wondering about birth parents, take a deep breath and let him/her express feelings and curiosity.

I spoke with Bob, aged 60, who adopted his 12-year-old son Danny at birth. When asked about how he would respond if Danny's birth parents made contact with Danny on Facebook, Bob said, "We wouldn't get freaked out. We'd help him deal with it."

While Danny's was a closed adoption, Bob and his wife have always been very open with Danny about the fact of his adoption. They have also expressed to Danny their unwavering certainty that they were, as Bob poignantly shared, "destined to be his parents."

### It's a diverse world out there

Speaking to the first trend I mentioned, Bob has noticed that Danny is beginning to explore the integration of his adoptive family's identity and the known parts of his biological origin. A question on the table is whether or not Danny should have a Bar Mitzvah. Although Bob and his wife are Jewish and raised Danny in a Jewish household, Danny has stated that he doesn't want a Bar Mitzvah, citing that his biological parents were not Jewish. It's imperative that adoptive parents find affirmative ways to incorporate their children's history and roots. But how can adoptive parents create room to honor their traditions as well as their child's biological culture?

Living in the multicultural, pluralistic culture of Los Angeles, Bob looks at Danny's school as a model for integrating diversity, including the element of adoption. "Danny's in a class where there are kids from multiracial, multiethnic backgrounds, kids with two mommies or two daddies...

being adopted is no big thing."

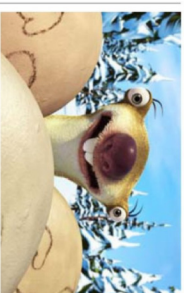
The stigma of adoption from earlier generations has changed along with this shift towards including a broader range of family structures. Danny and his family can embrace his biological and adoptive background, and can view his adoption in the context of a diverse community. While that might not give them an answer to the Bar Mitzvah question, it certainly provides them the flexibility to consider all possibilities.

Given this more inclusive era with more diverse family structures and the advent of new media technology, the

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meaning of this experience simply and powerfully: "I don't say, 'This is my adopted son.' I say, 'This is my son.'"

Lucy Rimalower is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice in Los Angeles. She works extensively with adolescents and teens dealing with body image and eating disorders. She also works with families with same-sex parents. She has served as a speaker throughout the Los Angeles area and conducts groups on critical adolescent issues.



## Adoption On Ice

Coinciding with the Oct. 27 bow of "Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs" on DVD and Blu-ray – and Adoption Month – Fox Home Entertainment rolled out an extensive Public Service campaign supporting family adoption.

TV spots in 15-second, 30-second and 60-second formats are appearing on various Fox stations in English and Spanish. The goal for the campaign, in partnership with the Ad Council, is to underscore the importance of adoption, which is one of the themes of the movie.

In one spot, Ice Age character Sid accidentally loses some character eggs in slippery snow. He struggles to catch them, but the eggs crack open with baby dinosaurs that are safe and sound. The message of the spot is, "You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent."

The campaign ads direct viewers to Visit AdoptUSKids.org.

Thinking about adoption? Here are some resources:

**Adopt US Kids**  
www.adoptuskids.org

**Administration for Children and Families**  
www.acf.hhs.gov

**Adoption Institute**  
www.adoptioninstitute.org

**The Center for Adoption Support and Education**  
www.adoptionssupport.org

**The Center, Links, Information, Support, and Ideas for LGBT parents**  
www.gaycenter.org

**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
www.childwelfare.gov

**Child Welfare League of America**  
www.cwla.org

**North American Council on Adoptable Children**  
www.nacac.org

**Vista del Mar Adoption and Foster Adoption Services**  
www.vistadelmar.org