

What Not To Say

- **Anything negative about birth family, birth country (even politics), birth culture** - The child will interpret your negativity as negative beliefs about him or her.
- **Oriental, wetback, Negro, nigger, monkey... or any other derogatory or racist language** - Avoid any and all prejudice. If you hold any prejudice (we all do), a child understands that you can also discriminate against him or her.
- **Real or natural parent or child** - These suggest that the relationships by adoption are not of the same quality or second-class.
- **Foreign adoption, foreign child, foreign country** - These can make a child feel abnormal, like an alien, and as if he or she does not belong.
- **Blood relative** - Blood can be "icky". This term can suggest that blood is more important than love and relationship. Don't you have "blood relatives" with who you have very little relationship by choice?
- **Get, obtain** - These project ownership or a right and strip child of right to grieve what has been lost.
- **Gotcha Day** - Not only does the term "gotcha" reflect ownership, it has other negative connotations. Most importantly celebrating this day brings to attention all the pain and loss that occurred prior to the adoption. Not all children will want to celebrate this day, but they may feel obligated due to parents' enthusiasm. Celebrating such an anniversary can create negative feelings in biological children or be complicated when a family adopts more than once. If your child chooses to celebrate this anniversary, consider terms like "family day" rather than "gotcha day".
- **Bad boy or bad girl - A child's value is never based on behavior. It also introduces the idea that behavior may have been the reason for "rejection" by birth mother.**
- **Is adopted** - While the impact of adoption is on-going, the legal process is (eventually) completed, and the child is a full member of the family. Discussing adoption as on-going continues instability and anxiety for the child.
- **Giving away, giving up, adopt out, keep, "a gift"** - These suggest that the child was not loved or loved enough by the birth mother, and that the child is something that can be given away or given up on. Life-shaping decisions were made by others for this child, leaving him or her feeling out of control.
- **Lucky** - Before a child can be adopted, he or she must lose so many things. You do not feel "lucky" to inherit money if it means a loved one has died.
- **Unwanted, problem, accidental pregnancy** - This can cause the child feel like a problem, an accident, and unwanted.
- **Adopted child** - It is not necessary to identify the child as adopted most of the time; it is not the most important aspect about that child. If adoption needs to be identified, use person-first language: "son that was adopted".
- **Adoptable, available** - You do not shop for children at Wal-Mart or bid for them on E-bay! They are not a commodity.
- **Do not discuss the cost of adoption** (see back)

Be Careful Saying These Things

- **Chosen** - In order to be chosen by the adoptive family, the birth mother must first chose not to parent, thus being chosen also means being not chosen. No one wanted to be chosen last for dodgeball.
- **Good boy or good girl** - If a child can be "good" (valued) based on behavior, then, in turn, he or she can also be "bad" (unvalued) based on behavior.
- **Birth mother/birth family, biological mother/family** - Some families will prefer to identify "Chinese family", not cutting off the relationship at birth.

- **Mine, my child** - This can project ownership or a right to this child, stripping him or her of the right to love and grieve what has been lost; however, it also identifies for the child that he or she does have an important place in your family.
- **Adoptive parent** - While a parent may choose to identify with adoption as a factor that impacts their parenting, he or she is a parent and a parent first.
- **Adoptee** - Never use for a child; only use if the person self-identifies as an adoptee, using the term first. This term identifies adoption as the most important aspect about him or her.

What to Say

- **Was adopted** - The legal process is complete, the child is a full-fledged member of the family
- **Identify ways child is like family members** - Consider behaviors, preferences, skills, and even physical features
- **Born in _____(country), international adoption, inter-country adoption**
- **Joined our family**

Please examine the *possible meanings or feelings that could be perceived behind every word you use.*

The Cost of Adoption

The cost of adoption is difficult for many adults to understand, and can be confusing emotionally for children that have been adopted. Ethical, legal adoptions do not include any fees for a child. The fees involved are for professional services and filing paperwork with various governmental bodies. An adoption requires professional services from attorneys, social workers, translators, and many others. The vast majority of the funds collected by an adoption agency are paid out on the adopting families behalf or cover necessary items such as postage and paper.

When the cost of adoption is discussed, a child is not able to understand filing fees and professional services. Rather than interpreting his or her worth, the child is most likely to hear either that he or she is a commodity to be purchased and owned, not an individual, or that he or she was a strain to his or her parents and may owe them something in return. These are not healthy beliefs for a child. When fundraising is discussed, a child may feel like his or her parents cannot afford to support him or her, creating fear of separation, especially for those born in a poor country where poverty is often a reason for relinquishment. Discussions of fundraising can also cause a child to believe that part of him or her is owned by other adults who made a donation.

While our culture is sharing information more and more frequently, money is often a sensitive subject. Many find it inappropriate or offensive to discuss financial matters, and this includes the cost of adoption. Parents, you do not need to warn others about the cost; that information is widely available. If you feel the need to discuss the financial strain, consider if you need to manage stress or are seeking attention and validation. If someone in the community asks in front of your child, you can tell them it was manageable (you did do it!), and if they would like detailed information they can contact you separately and hand them a business card. Better yet, hand them the card for your adoption agency who can best answer such questions as the world of adoption is constantly changing. Supports, please, do not ask such questions in front of children - even within a one block radius because their hearing is amazing. If you are truly seeking information because you are also interested in adoption, you can ask for contact information for the adoption agency and seek out updated, accurate information and resources.