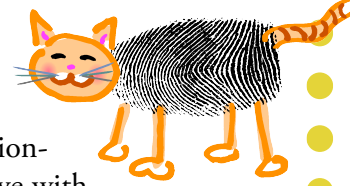


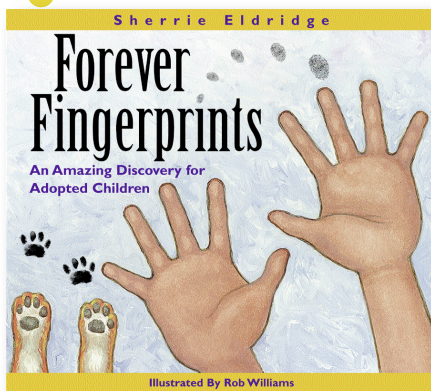
Talking Truthfully About Adoption

by Gregory Keck, PhD



One of the most important things in the world is truth. Truth allows for us to build relationships that we can rely on, that are predictable, that give us confidence, that allow us to love with our whole hearts, and to respect one another. Truth is fundamental in building trust. A trusting relationship allows parents to gradually help their children and adolescents to achieve the ultimate separation and autonomy they will need to be successful, productive adults.

Truth is what adults expect from their children. Then why is truth such a difficult subject for adoptive families? If parents expect truth from the child, then the child has every right to expect truth from his/her parents. And there should be no exceptions to this. Truth is truth and it could be ugly truth, beautiful truth, neutral truth—it doesn't matter. Truth, by itself, will enhance your connection to your child, and that should be the goal of every parent. Truth becomes the foundation for every other life task that occurs.



So how do you do this truthful talk about adoption? Here are some tips I offer parents to make the job easier and more effective:

1. Children respond to how we tell them information (not just what we tell them).

If you are trying to share information with your child about anything—birth family, your family, etc., do it casually. Children are perceptive and will pick up on your cues about how they “should” feel about this information, whether they are stated or not. If you, as a parent fear some truthful part of your child's adoption story then you won't deliver it comfortably. You may send a variety of feelings with the

truth, and the child will then experience confusion with your ultimate message. Most things can be delivered with little fanfare—this allows your child to decide how he feels about it.

2. The facts may not seem as serious to the child as it feels for the adult

Don't assume that the child will take what you are sharing as critically as you are taking it. After all, they have lived the stories already that we are putting words to. It's more likely they will want to get back to playing outside or to whatever they were doing. I have shared things with my kids that seemed horrible, and they looked at me with the “Oh” look. I felt relief both that I had told the truth and that they didn't seem to care as much as I did about it.

3. If the truth is always known, it is a part of the child's life—it's not new nor tragic nor wonderful – it simply IS

Things that have always been talked about are real for the child—it's not new. Please don't wait until the child is “old enough” to understand/accept what you are about to tell them. That causes distrust. They are now waiting for the next shoe to drop. If you tell them things they don't understand, tell them AGAIN later—they'll get it.

4. Sharing information does not have to be a big deal.

The truth does not have to represent “911 information”. It might be as casual as saying I heard that your birth mom had another baby. Or, on Mother's Day, I wonder if you have thought about your birth mom, I know I do. Opening a door is an invitation. If they accept, talk about it—if not go on with your day. Don't have a big sit down meeting for sharing. That creates too much anxiety and suggests that something is wrong. After you drop whatever ball you drop, what is the child supposed to do with it?



5. Birthparents are a part of who your child is.

Your child needs to know that they were born and from whom. They also need your help in making sense of the family connections that now exist, whether the adoption is open or closed. Expanding the circle of family creates understanding and connection that will benefit your child and show you respect who they are.

6. Follow your child's lead.

If your child doesn't respond to your invitation to talk about something, wait until another opportunity arises. You will have many chances! You will discover that this is an evolving understanding that will change over your child's life. Follow your child's lead so as not to overwhelm them. But do bring it up from time to time to make sure your child knows that it is a subject that is okay to talk about. Most of all, keep it light, keep it totally truthful, keep it fun when you can, and remember, the truth will not hurt the child-it will help them in their day- to- day life!

7. To tell or keep secrets.

If someone knows something about your child- the child will eventually find out. We parents tell our children: if you do something wrong, there may be a consequence, but if you lie about it, there will be a more serious problem. Remember this is true for parents as well. If you tell the truth early on to your child, you may feel bad. If you don't tell the truth, if you lie, by omission or commission, the result will be worse. Later.

Sherrie Eldridge's Forever Fingerprints delivers truth.

It tells how babies are made and how each one is carried by their birthmothers, whether they live together or not. It tells of the forever connections that an adopted child has to first family, no matter if the real time connections now are severed. It also delivers a powerful message to adoptive parents that is your job to give your child truth about their history and their connection to birthfamily – and by giving truth, you create trust and you bind your child more closely to you as a parent who will tell things straight. I hope your family will use Forever Fingerprints as a medium to talk about truth, and the feelings that truth brings out.

Gregory C. Keck, PhD, is the founder and director of the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio. Dr Keck specializes in working with adoptive families whose children experienced early trauma. He is also the co-author with Regina Kupecky, LSW of "Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow" (2002) and "Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special Needs Kids" (1995).

He is involved in training regarding attachment disorders, both nationally and internationally. Dr. Keck's website is www.abcofohio.net.

Forever Fingerprints, An Amazing Discovery for Adopted Children, written by Sherrie Eldridge, illustrated by Rob Williams. Find out more at www.emkpress.com.



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