



## Opening the Dialog

*Why adoptive parents must "Talk Adoption" to their children*

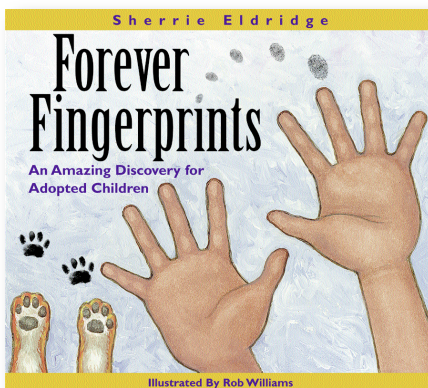
By Sheena Macrae, PhD

Love is required but not enough to cement the bonds of an adoptive family. Adopted children come to their new families with a past, and sometimes memories of it. In order to truly join their new families, these kids need to make sense of why they had to leave their birth family. Nobody is placed better to help an adopted child make sense of their past, and take pride in their roots than their adoptive family. Adoptive parents are parents plus. They deliver the love, they set the boundaries, they heal the hurts and they take on the sleepless nights (teens and babies!). But more, and right from the minute that their children arrive (as babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers, tweens and teens) they deal with how their child views their past. Why must they do this? Well simply because adopted kids have lived their past.

With the simplicity of a child who thinks all adults know everything, kids guess rightly or wrongly that adoptive parents can see right into their past. And if parents don't bring that history into the open, the children feel the past must be much too murky for their new parents to deal with... and they claim the responsibility for getting lost from birthparents. WRONG! So, adoptive parents must be proactive and open the dialogue for 'Talk Adoption' from even before a child necessarily understands what's being said. It's good practice for adoptive parents to start the talk right away. Often parents find opening the dialogue harder than their adopted kids find hearing it. Kids have lived their story, adoptive parents have to learn it and tell it together. Tough on parents!

Here at EMK Press, aka "The Toolbox Press," we offer tools to help parents help their children. So here goes on ways that parents can get open the dialogue and get 'Talk Adoption' underway... even if a child is very young, and yes they still work with older kids.

- **Telling stories.** This is paramount. If a child reacts well to simply-told, true life stories that are the child's actual history, then parents can go with that. If not, narratives about a fictional child whose story closely resembles that of the adopted child can be used. Sometimes a child will need more distance from a difficult start and the use of animals can be effective. See [www.emkpress.com](http://www.emkpress.com) Parent Guides for work in this field.
- **Lifebooks and Lifestories.** Working WITH the child works wonders. Most kids love to star in their own book (however parents present it). There are many ways to create lifebooks and no two children's lifebook will be the same because of their experiences and how it makes them feel. Beth O'Malley (*Lifebooks: Creating a Treasure For the Adopted Child*)



## Forever Fingerprints

**An Amazing Discovery for Adopted Children**

By Sherrie Eldridge

Illustrated by Rob Williams

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32 pages, Hardcover/Library binding, \$17.95

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advocates truth, honesty and the facts as we know them. UK Lifebook guru Joy Rees suggests that parents start lifebooks with the adoptive family and work backwards, thus seaming the child first into the adoptive home. What works best? Follow the lead of your child.

- **Roots.** Adoptive parents must make their child feel good about their identity and personal gifts. Adoption expert Holly van Gulden suggests parents use a pebbling technique, small seemingly throwaway remarks positively linking the child to birthparents. Letting these thoughts ripple inside the child's consciousness, they may sink in right away or may spark questions at a later time. The message is that these topics are okay to think about, talk about and ask questions about.
- **Routes.** Opening the dialogue to 'Talk Adoption' isn't about wallowing in the past. It is there and designed to help a child cope with growing up. It's about the routes a child takes, real and emotional, in dealing with adoption and what that means to them. This understanding is a lifelong process and will be different for each adoptee. Offering our children the understanding to support them whatever their route is the best gift an adoptive parent can give their child.

Sherrie Eldridge's *Forever Fingerprints* does just that. Lucie finds a connection to her birthparents via her fingerprints, but OH, please note that when Lucie dreams, she has her birthparents AND her adoptive parents dancing with her in a circle. She has squared that circle. She's made a map, she will cope with ROUTES. That is the subtext of this wonderful book which has so many layers waiting for expansion by little kids, by much older children and by the adults that love them too. *Forever Fingerprints* is a key to opening the dialogue. Through words, illustration and deep meaning this book helps parents find a story that makes 'Talk Adoption' possible.

*Sheena Macrae, MA., PhD (Senior Editor) is the married fulltime mum to two children adopted from China. She serves on a local authority Adoption Panel in the UK, specifically offering knowledge of intercountry adoption, as a disabled adoptive mum, and an adoptive parent who has successfully appealed being rejected by Panel. Her family return yearly to China to enable the children to maintain vital links with their birthcountry. Her adoption work encompasses a spell as ICA Country Fact-Sheet Editor for a UK adoption support group. She has worked with Adoption UK in consultation responses to new adoption legislation. With close links with Surrey Intercountry Adoption Team; she has worked with them in their preparation programme for prospective inter-country adopters. She has been published on various aspects of parenting intercountry adopted children in various adoption journals and books in the UK, USA and Australia. She holds a current position as Senior Editor at EMK Press ([www.emkpress.com](http://www.emkpress.com)) a publisher of resources and books for adopted children and their parents and is the Topic Editor at EMK Press's Yahoo listserv "Adoption Parenting", producing a fortnightly 'magazine' on various topics. She is also Co-Editor of EMK Press's title "Adoption Parenting: Creating a Toolbox, Building Connections", July 2006. And the Co-Editor of the pending title for teens from EMK Press called "What My Parents Couldn't Tell Me." Her most important job is being the available mum to two kids who are the light of her life.*