ADOPTED CHILDREN:
HOW TEACHERS CAN HELP!

ADOPTION: GIVE A CHILD A CHANCE
A Coalition of Adoption Advocates Serving Louisiana Children With Special Needs
ADOPTED CHILDREN
How Teachers Can Help
ADOPTED CHILDREN: HOW TEACHERS CAN HELP!
DEVELOPED BY
THE LOUISIANA ADOPTION ADVISORY BOARD, INC (LAAB)

MISSION STATEMENT: The mission of the Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board, Inc. is to bring the various members of the adoption community together to listen to differing perspectives, seek common understanding, and promote joint solutions that pertain to special needs adoption.

The Board hopes that this brochure will be useful in the classroom for all children with special families, not only those who are formed by adoption. Additional copies may be obtained by contacting Mr. Robert Kerns, Chair, at (504) 835-4284.

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TELEPHONE NUMBERS FOR OTHER ADOPTION RESOURCES:

Adoption Subsidy Information .......................... 504-342-2844
Bureau of Licensing - DSS .......................... 504-922-0015
Child Protection (State Office Referral) ............. 504-342-6832
Post Adoption Services (OCS State Office) ........ 504-342-4086
Office For Citizens with Developmental Disability .. 504-925-1910
Mental Health Advocacy and Information ............. 504-428-5432

Sponsor: The Louisiana Department of Social Services

ADOPTION IS A SOCIAL AND LEGAL PROCESS IN WHICH A PERSON, USUALLY A CHILD, BECOMES THE LEGAL CHILD OF A PARENT OR PARENTS OTHER THAN THE PARENTS TO WHOM HE WAS BORN.

BACKGROUND OF THE ADOPTED CHILD IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Children are adopted in Louisiana either by a family member such as a grand- parent or step parent, or by an unrelated family. They are adopted as infants or older children.

An adoption plan is made for children for a variety of reasons. Some of them are:

- Inability of the birth parents to adequately provide or care for a child due to:
  - A plan made by the birth parents before the child’s birth as they cannot parent the child. This may be due to:
    - parents’ future plans
    - educational goals
    - financial needs
    - family problems

- Other parents have this decision made for them, often by the court due to:
  - Mental illness of parent
  - Incapacitating physical illness or handicapping condition of the parent
  - Mental retardation of the parent
  - Substance abuse
  - Incompetency of the birth parent with an accompanying lack of social, emotional, financial support
  - Abandonment by parent
  - Incarceration of the parent
  - Death of the Birth Parents

A legal termination of parental rights must be accomplished prior to the adoptive placement. A voluntary termination is called a “surrender.” An involuntary termination is termed a “Certification For Adoption.”

As you can see, some children who are adopted have losses to work through. Some children who were born to one family and are now growing up with another family may not develop a sense of family connectedness, while others have few if any problems.
HOW TO SUPPORT THE CHILD AND FAMILY

TEACHERS CAN HELP BY:
Respecting all confidences. Once told, information concerning the child's background CANNOT BE TAKEN BACK.

Remember that you will need to have proper authorization to release information concerning the adopted child.

• Children need to be taught not to answer questions about their background and to be able to do it without saying "It's none of your business."

TEACHERS CAN HELP BY:
Intervening and referring the questioner to the adoptive parents, if you overhear a child being questioned, especially by an adult. The teacher can coach the child to say, when asked about his background, that his mother told him "this is family business and my mother says you are to ask her that question". The child may also be asked by other children if he misses his real family - it is all right if he admits to this. Children are usually satisfied with a yes or no answer.

TEACHERS CAN HELP BY:
Considering - when a problem in the classroom arises:

• Is he grieving for or fantasizing about his birth parents?
• Is it related to adoption?
• Is it a generic developmental delay?
• Is it a learning disability?
• Is it a school system problem?
• Is it a social effect caused by teasing or unkind remarks because of adoption?

Remember - adoption is not the reason for all problems. Some "problems" are a normal part of the developmental process.

TEACHERS CAN HELP BY:
Talking with your classroom about the world being a diverse global community where people have many differences and similarities. There will be a variety of families represented in your classroom:

Traditional families
Adoptive parents
Foster Parents
Single Parent
Divorced Parent
Divorced Parents with joint custody
Grandparents
Kinship parents - aunts, uncles, etc.
Transracial parents

There are different types of families
People who live together and care about each other are a family
Sometimes members of a family do not live together but they still care about each other

THE FAMILY TREE

The family tree on this page is suggested for the adopted child. Both the birth family and the adoptive family is depicted.

• The birth parents and the cultural or racial heritage is written across the roots of the tree.
• The child's name is written on the trunk of the tree.
• On the major limbs write:
  • The name of the adoptive parents
  • The name of the adoptive grandparents
  • The names of the siblings

The birth family - the roots of the child's tree, provide the origins - the beginning of the child's existence.

The leaves and upper branches bring continued growth and life.

If we destroy the roots, the tree dies. If we destroy the foliage or the upper branches the tree also dies.

(This information was taken with permission from an article written by Linda Babb, Ours Magazine, September/October, 1990)

Simone Weil: "To be rooted is probably the most important and least recognized need of the human soul".

Note: This tree can be used for all the types of families listed on page 4.
USING POSITIVE ADOPTION LANGUAGE

Positive adoption language conveys maximum dignity and respect to the decisions made by birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees. Using positive adoption language eliminates the idea that adoption is a negative choice; it allows us to say that adoption is another way to build a family.

SAY: Parent, Mother, Father, Child - to describe members of the adopted family

AVOID: Adopted Child, Adoptive Parent, Own Child: "ADOPTED" or "OWN" implies that adoptive relationships are not as permanent as genetic relationships.

SAY: Birth Parent, Birth Father, Birth Mother

AVOID: Real Parent, Real Mother, Real Father, Real Family, Natural Parent: "REAL" parent implies that adoptive relationships are artificial or tentative.

SAY: Made an Adoption Plan: Acknowledges the birth parents were responsible and in control of their decision.

AVOID: Put up or gave up her child up for Adoption: Gives the appearance that the birth parents unwillingly placed their child for adoption.

SAY: Decided to parent her child

AVOID: Decided to keep her child

SAY: International Child

AVOID: Foreign Child: "Foreign" has negative connotations

SAY: Child with Special Needs

AVOID: Handicapped Child

SAY: Was Adopted: Refers to the way the child joined the family

AVOID: Is Adopted: Describes the child

SELF ESTEEM BUILDING ACTIVITIES FOR THE ADOPTED CHILD

- Have a national Adoption Month activity in November. Ask the adopted child in your classroom if they would like to be in charge. Suggest and help them with the project: A book display, presentation, poster about famous people who were adopted (Moses, Superman, President Clinton).

- Regularly include books and discussions that have adoptive families in them.

- Allow the adopted child flexibility if a science project requires tracing ancestry - for instance they may trace hemophilia in royal families.

- Talk about adoption. Invite a parent, family, or the child to give a presentation. An international child may welcome presenting information about the culture of their country of origin. To do this you need to:
  - Obtain permission from the child and the parents
  - Ensure the child and parents feel comfortable responding to questions about adoption.

CONTACT THE CHILD'S PARENTS

IF: The child is being teased or the child lets you know that he has problems at home. The child may not let his parents know. The Department of Social Services may provide individual or family therapy in order to assist the adopted child and family. Suggest the family call the post adoption services telephone number on page 2 of this pamphlet for referral information.

IF: You have a positive report for them - The child completed all of his work or did well on an assignment. Take the time to brag about any positive attribute. The parents and the child need positive reinforcement.

IF: You are aware of an upcoming school activity, event, or project, that could be a challenge or potentially embarrassing for the child. "Lead time" for planning will be appreciated by the family. For instance, this would be appropriate if baby pictures were needed for a child who was placed after infancy.

IF: The child appears depressed or listless. This child may need outside intervention through the post adoption services referenced above and available in each region of the state. You may want to give his family a copy of this pamphlet.

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