

# This is A Week to Celebrate The Joys of Adoption

by Susan Cox

**Thanksgiving** week is recognized and celebrated by families across the United States as National Adoption Week. It is a time of celebration for families that are born through adoption. It is a time to learn and understand some of the uniqueness of adoptive families.

For the most part, an adoptive family is like any other. They love, care for and support one another as they share in each other's lives. Every day, they share both the ordinary and the extraordinary experiences that make up the fabric of family life.

For most of us who are part of an adoptive family, adoption is not something we consciously think about daily. We become very used to our relationship with family members, and it seems rather ordinary. Most often, it is brought to our attention when someone outside of our extended family reminds us.

It is important to understand that a child who comes to her family through adoption is truly loved the same as a child who is part of the family by birth—not more or less, but the same.

Unless the child is from another country, it often is not apparent that a child is adopted. It is natural that people are curious and interested in knowing about how a family came together. However, the occasionally prying and uninvited questions from total strangers are not only an intrusion, but often create anxiety for adopted children and their families.

It is clear how misunderstood the concept of adoption is when you consider the questions that are asked most often: "Who are your 'real' mom and dad?" "Why did your 'real' mom give you away?" "Do you get treated differently than your parents' 'real' kids?"

Adoptive parents also are asked to make explanations with questions such as, "Can't you have children of your own?"

For those families who adopt a child from another country, it is surprising how many times adults comment on the child's language. "How will the child learn to speak English?" "Will the baby know how to speak Korean?" "Will the baby have an accent?"

All children are affected by the environment around them. A child adopted from another culture as a baby will learn to speak as any other child, from parents, siblings and those who are a part of everyday life.

Most adoptive families do not mind sharing issues of adoption with extended families and friends. It is a normal part of the adopted child's history in the family and is talked about and enjoyed along with other family stories.

The reality for adopted children is that they have birth parents. For the most part, there is much more wondering about birth mothers than birth fathers. This is a subject that needs to be handled with sensitivity and care. When a child is told that her mother "gave her up for adoption," it is

less positive than being told, “Your birth mother chose adoption for you.” The individual circumstances that bring a birth mother to choose adoption for her child are deeply personal. To say she is “giving her child away” does not truly express the thought, caring and pain that went into her decision. The more positive tone of “choice” rather than “given away” helps the adoptee to see her birth parents with compassion.

When asked to explain who their “real” mom and dad are, adoptees should feel confident enough to say, “I live with my real mom and dad.” Sometimes, the person who asked the question isn’t satisfied with the answer and replies, “No, I mean, who are your ‘real’ mom and dad?” That’s when the adoptee should respond, “You mean my ‘birth’ parents. I’m adopted and these are my real parents now.”

Over the past few decades, adoption has certainly evolved. It is the right of every child to have a family, and for many children, they have found their family through adoption.

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