

# CHERISH

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## **“How to Talk to Your Child about Adoption” Notes from Oct. 21, 2004 Meeting**

**Teri Wunderman, Ph.D.**  
(305-595-6633 ext. 5)

At the Cherish Adoptive Families of Miami monthly meeting in October 2004, psychologist Teri Wunderman discussed how to talk to your child about adoption, key messages to be conveyed, and how 'Lifebooks' can be useful aids. Here are highlights from her talk:

- Kids want the truth.
- Lay a foundation of openness and acceptance within your family.
- Be truthful with your child from day one. This builds trust and makes things a lot easier later on.
- Start talking about adoption early. Use the word 'adoption' early on.
- Instead of talking about 'when you were born,' talk about 'when we got you.'
- The 'matter of factness' about adoption is key. Adoption is a simple fact of life. It isn't mysterious or weird.
- Keep it simple: "You were in another lady's tummy." "We went to get you."
- Our society is behind in accepting adoption as a natural way to build a family. Celebrities having 'adopted' children are constantly described in the media that way. Adoptive families today are pioneers paving the way for greater acceptance of adoption in our next generations.
- There are basically two ways to have a baby – in Mommy's tummy or you can adopt.
- Family trees can be awkward to do in school. Be open to helping your child do an adoption tree and/or a biological tree. Give them the choice.
- Your child's privacy is the priority. Respect their wishes not to say they are adopted unless they want to. This helps build loyalty and trust.
- You don't owe anyone an explanation, especially total strangers, teachers, relatives. You can be there to educate them and help with their acceptance of your child. You can help them understand your child's needs when appropriate.
- Change the subject or use humor to get around an awkward moment. Be light about things. Remember if someone else is uncomfortable with your adoption, it's their problem. You're fine with it. For example: "How did she get that blond hair when you're so dark?" – Don't feel obliged to explain. Instead, compliment the quality in your child – "Isn't she gorgeous? I love my daughter's hair."
- Be careful not to glorify your child's birthmother or birthfather. Don't encourage elaborate fantasies about them or other birth relatives. Be matter-of-fact and

- always speak of them with loving and gratitude. Without your child's birthparents, your child wouldn't be yours and they wouldn't be who they are.
- We all have birthparents. Some of us are raised by them. It's just that some of us are raised by others – including adoptive mothers, grandmothers, stepmothers, aunts, older siblings, adoptive fathers, stepfathers, etc.
  - Be aware that questions from kids about adoption may come up at any time, depending on their developmental level and whatever might have triggered their curiosity at the moment, i.e.: a movie, a discussion in school, their own noticing of their body's changes, etc. These questions often pop up unexpectedly, like when you're driving in the car! Do your best and forgive yourself if you feel awkward or caught off guard. You can always come back to your child later with something like, "You know, I've been thinking about what you asked me in the car today, and I have something else to say..."
  - Let them know they can always ask you for more information and that you are always available to talk more.
  - Let them know honestly when you simply don't have information to answer their question. For example, "No, I don't know where your birthmother is right now."
  - Don't give more information than your child asks for. But do answer their questions fully and honestly. When they want to know more, they will ask you.
  - Your adopted child's birth siblings are birth relatives. If your child has them, it's good to know they are there, but they are not part of your "family" per se. In most cases, they are more like a distant cousin with whom you have little or no contact. Don't glorify them as long lost relatives. They simply are birth family members.
  - Lifebooks are albums or scrapbooks that tell the story of your child's adoption. You make them yourself, and they usually include photos, papers, announcements, etc. from before the adoption through some time after placement. Lifebooks can be useful in honoring the way you built your family and in helping keep things open in the family about the adoption process.
  - Raising children is a beautiful process of learning and discovery, for us as well as our children. Be kind to yourself as you discover ways to be a better and better parent and your children discover more and more who they are.

**\*\*Bonus Points to Remember\*\***

- Love your child unconditionally.
- Remind them that they are your children, that you are their parent, and that is the truth forever. And the love you share is what matters more than anything.
- Hug and kiss them a lot.

For more information on Cherish Adoptive Families of Miami, please visit [www.geocities.com/adoptionsmiami](http://www.geocities.com/adoptionsmiami) or contact Cherish President Jeanne A. Becker at 305-444-2181.