

Back to School!

Fall marks an exciting time of year with cooler temperatures (we hope!), vibrantly colored leaves, and the start of a new school year. Probably the most significant event in fall for your family is the beginning of a new school year.

All parents want their children to have a positive school experience. Children who join their families through adoption sometimes have unique issues at school. These issues vary from child to child and are influenced by their past history, social environment, and genetic makeup. How adoption is handled in school will affect your child's feelings about adoption. Therefore, for your child to have a positive and rewarding experience in school, teachers need to understand adoption.

Teachers need to be aware that as children reach the age of 7 or 8 years old they begin to understand what adoption really means – that they are not born to their parents like many children. Children may begin to think about their adoption and birth parents, especially about loss. Loss is a common theme for children of adoption, regardless of the age they entered their family. For some children, it takes a lot of energy to process this part of their life, making the child distracted, possibly out of sorts, and sometimes may cause academic and social difficulties.

A child adopted at an older age may have some added challenges at school. Children who did not receive early emotional nurturing or who had disruptions with their primary caregivers may demonstrate inappropriate behaviors in the classroom and with peers. Your child's teacher needs to know some of this background information to plan useful interventions together with you.

But how much information should you share with the school? Share only the relevant details that could impact your child's school performance and be cautious in how much detail you provide and to whom. Let the teacher know that your child's information should be treated with confidentiality, to be shared only with those professionals who absolutely need to know. Leave out graphic details: Your child's story belongs to you and your child. You, as the parent, are the keeper of that story until your child is old enough to share it with others. So before talking with your child's teacher, tell your child what you will say and why you are saying it.

Communication is the key to a successful school year, communication between parents and the school, parents and the teacher, child and the teacher. Open communication about adoption will only increase the awareness of school personnel to adoption issues and make school a positive experience for your child.

Written by Jennifer L. Klotz, who is the Assistant Director for the Center for Adoptive Families. The mission of the Center for Adoptive Families is to strengthen relationships created by adoption through counseling and educational programs that emphasize a wellness approach. For more information, please call CAF at 410-402-1121 or 301-422-5110.