

Birth Parent Fantasies

In order to grapple with the idea of a birth parent, your grade-schooler may be concocting wild fantasies.

By Fran Eisenman

Over the years, 7-year-old Amy and her mom have had several “birth mother” talks. As a small child, Amy wondered aloud about what her birth mother looked like, whether she would come to visit, and how big her belly was when Amy was in it.

But now that Amy has school friends, she understands that not all children were adopted. This realization has led her to think more about her birth mother and, often, to miss the woman she never knew.

Demystifying Mom

Though adoptive parents sometimes feel threatened by talk of a birth parent, it’s important to keep the discussion open. Children who can talk to their parents about their thoughts, fantasies and feelings have a better chance of forming a realistic impression of their birth parents.

They can bounce their ideas and questions off a trusted adult and, in return, receive age-appropriate responses. But what about kids who do not or cannot talk to a parent about their birth families? What if they perceive sadness or anger whenever they bring up the subject? These kids will sometimes spin fantasies, without the reality check a grown-up can provide.

Adopted children will often grieve for their birth parents or for the lost opportunity to have known them. If left alone with their thoughts, they may fabricate a naïve and unrealistic perspective.

Uneducated in the legalities of adoption, they may hope for their birth parents’ return or fantasize about going to live with them in a home without chores, homework, or annoying younger siblings. Some children who are not sufficiently assured of their value or place in the family may fear being returned to the birth parent involuntarily, as punishment or out of indifference.

School-age children who are asked how often they think of their birth parents sometimes answer, “Every day,” “Whenever I am alone,” or “When I go to bed.” These responses demonstrate normal thought processes. Children in this age group are anxious to talk about their thoughts and to have help exploring their ideas.

The best help is from a parent who does not feel threatened by the mention of a birth parent, so be open to talking. As a backup, another close adult or a professional counselor well-versed in adoption issues can be a vital resource.

Speaking of Birth Parents

How do you broach the subject and encourage your child to keep talking?

- **Casually mention your child's birth parents** from time to time early in her life, preferably soon after she joins your family, regardless of her age. Smile. Your child will catch your emotional tone even if she doesn't understand all the words.
- **Let your child know that you will not be upset by birth parent talk.** Your child's interest in her birth parents is not a threat to you. Keep your tone neutral and your facial expression calm and welcoming. Practice your reaction in a mirror if you have initial discomfort.
- **Encourage your child to keep talking whenever he brings up the topic:** "What do you think?" "How does that make you feel?" "You sound sad (or angry)."
- **Accept your child's feelings as valid.** Don't try to talk her out of feeling sad or hurt. This will shut down the conversation and force your child to deal with her feelings alone. Accept the fact that there are some things parents can't fix — just be there.

Re-printed with permission from Adoptive Families magazine, Copyright ©2017. All rights reserved.

For more articles like this one, visit Adoptive Families online: <https://www.adoptivefamilies.com>