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Talking with Tweens & Teens About Adoption

Parenting tweens and teens is not for the faint of heart. This age group can be both intriguing and frustrating in equal measure. One particular skill that many parents need to develop is balancing how to let them gradually take the reins while still making yourself available for advice. Talking with tweens and teens about adoption is especially challenging because often they want to be in charge of the discussion... as they should be. But as parents we also need to remain available to keep talking with them. Here are some tips to make this easier.

Tips for Talking with Tweens & Teens About Adoption

1. Even if your child does not bring up the topic of adoption or birth parents, periodically throw out a conversation starter and let them decide whether to catch it and talk or ignore it and let it drop.
2. Children are often more open when they are not facing their parents. Some of the best opportunities for discussing any emotionally-laden topic, such as adoption or birth parents, is in the car or while you are rubbing their back with the lights off at bedtime.
3. Look for opportunities in the media, movies, or television where the subject of adoption comes up naturally to use as conversation starters with your adolescent.
4. Let your child know that it is normal to wonder about birth parents and to wish for more information or contact. Through your action and your words let your child know that you are not threatened by their curiosity or desire for contact, and that you are available to talk at any time.
5. Play the “*Where Does This Come From?*” game* with your teens and tweens. Label three baskets: From Birth Family, From Our Family, From Myself. On separate pieces of paper write down traits, such as hair color, musical ability, being an ice-cream-aholic, lover of bad puns, extroversion/introversion, hating math, competitiveness, ADHD, intelligence, etc. Each person in the family draws a piece of paper out of the pile and has to place it in the basket that they think best describes where this trait came from. Disagreements and discussions are not only allowed, they are encouraged. This is a great way to open up thoughts about how we became the people we are. After you play, listen as a family to this [Creating a Family interview with the authors of fascinating research on how much of our specific traits come from our genes or our environment. \(Importance of Genetics in Determining Who We Are.\)](#)
6. Leave school at school. By the time your child is a teen, parental pressure to perform well at school is not effective. It is fine to point out the natural consequences for poor grades, and it is fair to expect them to go to school, but their grades are between them and the school. It is not worth damaging your relationship over.
7. Actively work on strengthening your relationship with your tween and teen by playing games and having fun. This [post from Creating a Family offers practical advice on how to play with your kids](#) and keep playing with them as they age.

As you seek to build a connection with your child in which he feels safe “catching” your conversation starters and talking with you about his thoughts and feelings, you might consider these [additional ideas from C.A.S.E. for talking with your tweens and teens about adoption.](#)

*Credit for “*Where Does This Come From?*” game goes to Sean Delehant, a therapist and program director with our partners at [C.A.S.E.](#) He was a guest on the [Creating a Family show on “How to Talk with Tweens and Teens about Adoption”](#) where many of these tips were originated.