

Q&A with Dale and Raquel

Sharing Information With Your Kids

Sharing your child's difficult personal history with them can seem very challenging. Questions such as "how do I bring a difficult topic up?" or "how old should my child be before we discuss this?" or "how can I share something with my child that will cause him or her such pain?" are very typical. In fact, the first thing to remember is that virtually all families formed through adoption have some difficult information to share. Examples families may face include:

- Birth siblings remaining with the birth family
- Pregnancy as a result of a very brief relationship
- Multiple partners making the identity of the birth father unclear
- Criminal history
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Etc.

Your child's Life Book* is a way to introduce information such as birth siblings in a positive, non-threatening way during their infant and preschool years. Once this dialog about their past has begun, the Life Book can be a tool to use as a jumping off point to discuss more difficult information in their school age (6+) years.

When your child reaches the latency stage of development (age 6 – 11), it is the best stage developmentally to share some of the more difficult examples listed above. Children in this stage tend to have strong cognitive abilities, good language skills, a good understanding of family relationships and have reached the point where they are reality based instead of magic based in their thinking. It is a relatively problem free time for them to absorb information that is potentially painful, and it is best to give them this opportunity before the shaky ground of pre-adolescence and adolescence arrive.

Some children will ask many questions about their adoption which will lead naturally into their history. Some children do not ask many questions or questions may come in spurts. These differences are completely natural and normal, but if children do not ask questions, they still need to be given information that is part of their personal history. You can create "teachable moments" by using information seen on television, movies, or the newspaper or by using situations you observe in other families.

All of a child's personal history, no matter how difficult or troubling, needs to be shared with him or her. There are ways to use neutral language that minimizes the power and painful impact information can have on your child. To explain the idea of drug or alcohol abuse, language such as - "Your birth mother or birth father grew up in a family that didn't provide good role models, that didn't talk about difficult things, or that weren't supportive or helpful. She/he didn't feel good enough about him/herself and she/he didn't know how to make good choices" – can introduce the topic.

However, there may be information that is so potentially painful that sharing it needs to wait until after the turbulent adolescent years. History that includes rape, incest, violent criminal history or current incarceration would be examples of information that could be too difficult to absorb during the latency stage but needs to be shared later on.

If your child's history includes information that you are having difficulty sharing with him or her, please contact Dale or Raquel. They would be happy to provide you with specific guidance as to how to best do so. And as you continue to describe your child's history to him or her, remember what your sharing is nothing less than your child's story and all of it belongs to him or her.