



Navigating Birth Parent Relationships



**The
Forgotten
Initiative®**

Helping Your Child Process Their Feelings About Their Birth Parents

1. Initiate conversations; ask questions. Let them know it's okay to think about and miss their birth parents.
2. Show them empathy—even if what they are expressing is hurtful to you.
3. Celebrate their love for their birth parents. Encourage it. Don't make them choose between their love for you and their birth family.
4. Share your love and care for their birth parents. Even if you don't feel like loving, choose kindness. Do not speak with disrespect or anger about your child's birth parents. If you need to process these emotions, do so with trusted adults in your life—not your children.
5. Encourage them to draw a picture of their feelings or fears.
6. Help them write it out. Give them a journal for them to share their thoughts and questions.
7. Pursue healthy connections with people who cared for them before they were with you.
8. Learn about and honor their country, ethnicity, and culture.
9. Understand that grief can reveal itself in many different ways, not always through sadness. Be willing to sit with them in their pain. Don't try to brush it off, rationalize it away, or allow their sadness or anger to threaten your relationship with them.
10. Be honest in your answers. "I don't know" is better than making up a story.
11. Allow others to help your child process. This may be a sibling, friend, trusted adult, or counselor who understands and can help them navigate their feelings and emotions.

Suggestions from my 11 and 12 year olds (both adopted):

1. If you (child) have an opportunity to see your birth parents, bring a journal to write out your experience. It will help you process your feelings while there and after you return home.
2. Set out pictures of your birth family and your family in your room.
3. Parents, spend time alone with your child (eating out or hiking) where you can listen and talk through their questions, feelings, and concerns.

Caring For and Pursuing a Relationship With Your Child's Birth Parent

1. Seek to understand your child's birth parent. Everyone has a story.
2. Pray for them. Pray for their success. Pray for them to know Jesus and feel His love. Pray for your heart, too. Ask for God to give you His perspective.
3. Get a text app that provides a way to communicate and share pictures of your child without sharing your personal information before you are ready.
4. Send a journal to foster care visits with their child. Include a note about how their child is doing. Cheer them on. Encourage them to write back. Keep this practice going throughout the child's foster care stay.
5. Print out pictures to give at visits or send in the mail (through the agency or to their home if you know their address.)
6. Create a picture book through Shutterfly or a similar site to give at Christmas time as a yearly update and reminder that you care for them.
7. Model respect, love, and kindness in the way you speak to them and about them. Give your child the blessing of watching you care for their birth parents.
8. Write a letter to them expressing your care and thankfulness for them.
9. Treat them like family. Take them out to dinner. Text them on their birthday or other special days. Learn about them. Encourage them in their journey.
10. When the relationship is hard, remember who the real enemy is.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

Creating and Maintaining Healthy Boundaries With Birth Parents

1. Understand that your boundaries may need adjusted depending on your season in life.
 - Before jumping into a new relationship, assess your own health. How are you doing emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically? What do you have capacity to add? Choose options for interacting that are sustainable for your current season.
2. Before opening the door to a new relationship or a relationship after adoption, assess your child's emotional health.
 - Think through questions like: Does he feel bonded to us? Will seeing his birth parents create fears or questions about his place in our family. Does she want to see her birth parents? Is she asking for this consistently?
3. Determine if the birth parents are in a safe and healthy place in their life.
 - Meet with them first. Take them out to dinner or connect with them to find out how they are doing and if you feel confident that they will honor your boundaries and guidelines during a meeting.
4. Provide the opportunity for your child to meet (or see again after adoption) their birth parent.
 - Simple preparation and communication ahead of time with your children and their birth parents can ease everyone's concerns.
 - » Prepare them for the first moments. "You can call them by their first name. Feel free to give them a high five, fist bump, or even a hug if you're comfortable. You can also simply wave or smile."
 - » Work with your child to write down and bring questions they want to ask.
 - » Encourage your child to draw a picture or write a letter to share with their birth parent.
 - » Set up in advance a specific time for the meeting to start and end. Give your child the opportunity to be involved in this decision.
 - Be aware of how your child is responding during the time together.
 - » Listen and respond to their verbal and non-verbal cues. It is important to make sure your child continues to feel safe and secure.

5. After your time together has ended, continue initiating conversations with your child.
 - Laugh together about what was fun. Talk through what was interesting, hard, different or similar to what they expected.

NOTE: *If you have more than one child who has been adopted but doesn't have the same opportunities for relationship, this can create tension and struggle for them. Be aware of the impact this may have on your other children.*

6. Think through realistic expectations for your ongoing interactions.
 - Will you allow phone calls with birth mom or dad?
 - » What day of the week, time of day, or for how long will calls be allowed? Who can call who?
 - What about other visits? Where will they be held? Are visits at your home allowed?
 - What about birth siblings? Are you willing to babysit young ones (if requested)? Are you willing to provide opportunities for sibling interactions?
 - Answering "I don't know, yet" is okay too!
7. Walk with your child's birth parent through the hard times.
 - When you are asked to help in crisis, remember, it's not your job to try and be the hero. You can help and still maintain your personal boundaries.
 - » Stop and assess your emotional margin before saying, "Yes!"
 - » Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is say "no" and other times, "yes" is best.
 - » Listen to your people. Your spouse, close friends, and kids often know your limits better than you do. Listen to them. Ask their counsel. Trust their guidance.

Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors, there is safety.

Proverbs 11:14

- Give yourself grace. Understand you are not going to do this perfectly.

Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23



Be a catalyst for change in your community.

You have been given strengths, life experiences, and resources that you can use to help those who feel overwhelmed, misunderstood, or forgotten.

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