



Talking about adoption

A calm way to explain stepparent adoption, hear your child's questions and keep the conversation open.

Start with your child's story. Use truthful words that fit their understanding. A legal change does not erase their history or require a particular feeling.

1 Choose a calm moment

Talk privately before an announcement or court day. Use names your child knows. A short conversation can be enough to begin.

2 Explain the legal change

"We are asking a judge to make [name] your parent under the law." Confirm what the proposed order would change for your family.

3 Invite their questions

Ask what they wonder about. Drawing or play may help a younger child. Listen without trying to produce an excited response.

4 Separate facts from guesses

Describe what you know about the other parent. Silence does not reveal someone's feelings. Say when you do not know an answer.

5 Leave room for feelings

A child can care about more than one person. They did not cause the adults' decisions. Avoid asking them to choose a "real" parent.

6 Return and follow through

Keep unanswered questions on your private worksheet. Confirm legal and practical details. Revisit the conversation as your child grows.

A voice at every age.

Listen whether or not your state requires formal child consent. Check the applicable law and court instructions; do not coach a child to sign or say something they do not mean.

Keep the useful guides nearby

[Explaining adoption to a child](#) · [Talking about the other parent's response](#)

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#) · [Children's Bureau: conversation guidance, pages 10–12](#)



YOUR PRIVATE CONVERSATION WORKSHEET

Hear. Clarify. Follow up.

Print for your own use. Separate your child's questions from the adults' assumptions, and plan what you will explain next.

OUR NEXT QUIET MOMENT TO TALK

WORDS / NAMES OUR CHILD USES

WHAT OUR CHILD ASKED OR TOLD US, IN THEIR WORDS

Before our next conversation

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Use facts we can confirm | ☐ Avoid guessing another parent's motives |
| ☐ Make room for mixed feelings | ☐ Keep adult disputes private |
| ☐ Check legal changes and child consent | ☐ Avoid promises about dates or contact |

Sort the unanswered questions

Question / topic	Known fact or what we need to confirm
What will change legally?	
What do we actually know about the other parent's response?	
What is our child worried about?	
Who can help us clarify a legal, school or support question?	

One thing we will follow up on:

Who will check, and when we will return to it:

If distress persists or daily life is affected, ask your child's pediatrician about support from someone with adoption experience. This worksheet does not assess mental health. Keep it with your private family records.