

The Answers Adopted Teens Seek

Written by Mark Gregston. www.heartlightministries.org/blogs/markgregston May 27, 2009

When an adopted child enters the adolescent years and their thinking transfers from concrete to abstract, they might begin asking that unanswerable question, “Why did my mother give me up?” At a time that most kids are trying to “find themselves” and form a concept and understanding of who they are and who they are not, the adoption card in their deck of options is one that is a mystery and a source of confusion for most (confusion is not a problem, **but how they display that confusion might** present a problem).

The hard part of all of this is that this transition of thinking happens around the 7th or 8th grade year when life is tough for any young teen. Having to deal with these pretty tough and deep issues at a time they’re having to transition into early adolescence would be a heavy overload for anyone. Thus the identity issues come to the surface.

What I have found through the years is that it is very easy to explain away the answer to the question with comments of “Your mother did what was right,” or, “She loved you enough to give you up,” or “Your mother wasn’t in a good place, and felt like you should be,” or, “Your mother wasn’t able to provide what she wanted you to have,” or, “Your mother was a mess, and didn’t want you to be.”

“Yeah, I know and understand, but she still gave me away, and left.”

Whatever the answer, and I don’t think any of the above are wrong, a parent must understand that there is a bigger question that looms with a child. I have heard many kids say to any or all of the above answers, “Yeah I know and understand...but she still gave me away, and left.” It is a lingering question of loss that I wonder, if it is ever answered for some. It is my experience that most adopted kids take about 10 to 15 years of abstract thinking to begin to process what this adoption thing is all about. This means that most don’t resolve the issue for themselves until they get into their mid-twenties.

If this is true, then parents, during those teen years, must be content to allow loss to be a part of their child’s life. In God’s timing, issues will be dealt with. Not all of them have to be resolved in a child’s teen years, no matter how much we want them to have all the answers. Additionally, at times, more trouble can be caused by the tendency to answer every question a child poses, than to simply give an answer of, “You know, I don’t know.” Oddly, helping your child learn through your example that you don’t know all the answers to life will give them license to be able to live with some unknowns in theirs.

Simply give an answer of, “You know, I don’t know.”

Adoption is riddled with acts of love by all involved. And once understood by the adopted child, they will understand the world of Scripture that uses the word “adoption” to describe the beautiful relationship between God and those that choose to be a part of His family...the One who desires to adopt us into His family. As pure and undefiled as this act is, the act of adoption can still have difficulties and struggles.

If you are an adoptive parent, your role is to continue to parent them with the same kind of love you’ve always held. Remember God’s example of nurturing, understanding, love, patience, kindness, goodness, forgiveness and grace. Don’t respond negatively because your feelings are hurt. Don’t say you’re giving up as their parent. And don’t try to “fix” the problem with giving the teenager more “things.” All of this only adds to an adopted teen’s mixed up sense of self and can lead to even more instability.

These kids need both time and stability to work through their issues. It is often a stage that they can work through and come out on the other side even more appreciative of their adoptive parents. In the meantime, they need their parents to remain steady and calm while they turn their world upside down in a quest to understand their history. And they may need professional help sorting it all out when the truth is finally made known.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mark Gregston is an author, speaker, national radio host, and the founder of Heartlight, a residential counseling opportunity for struggling adolescents.