

# THE POLARIS-AWAY

## Talking 'Adoption' with Nonadopted Kids

Depending on their age and developmental level, biological and nonadopted kids can struggle with the concept of adoption as it's different from their own context. But destigmatizing adoption is important and validating. Developmental milestones, coping mechanisms, and life experiences of adopted children are different. But, adopted kids and families are bigger than the "adoption" part of their story. Adopted kids are kids. Adoptive families are families. And this is a great opportunity to talk about the idea that love—not always DNA—is what makes a family..

### Rules for Nonadopted kids:

1. Model that adoption is a thing to be celebrated.
2. Use the right kind of language, and teach kids to do the same.
3. Avoid the comparison trap. Each kid is different. Each parent is different too.

### DOs:

- Talk about different kinds of family structures. "Sometimes kids live with their biological parents while other times, they can live with an aunt, or a single dad, or adoptive parents. Isn't it great how families come in all shapes and sizes?"
- Talk about transracial adoptions. "Isn't it wonderful that families don't have to look like each other to love each other?"
- Teach kids to focus on similarities instead of differences. "You both love the same [book, show, food]? That's so great! What else do you have in common?"
- Use dolls, toys, and stuffed animals to play and illustrate adoption.

### DON'Ts:

- Don't make a child's family status the thing to focus on: "Be nice to her. She's adopted/in foster care."
- Don't differentiate between siblings composed of nonadopted and adopted children: "She has one real brother and one foster brother."
- Don't ask or assume about the history of the child or about their biological family. If adoptive families choose to protect the child's history, respect that.
- Avoid terms or phrases that send a negative message:
  - "His **real** mom **gave him away.**"
  - "Her parents **rescued** her from [foster care, country name, etc.]"
  - "He's an **orphan.** That's why he acts like that."

