

## ATMAJA: The Association of Adoptive Parents

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### Disclosure: A Necessity for Adoptive Parents

Dear Friends:

It is our pleasure to welcome you to this pre-adoption workshop and wish you all the best. As adoptive parents, and members of Atmaja, we are concerned about one important issue - which is how to tell the children that they are adopted. Through this page, we like to share our opinion and experience on this issue and also to explain some of the reasons behind our convictions.

We believe that it is absolutely necessary to disclose, primarily because the foundation of any beautiful relationship, such as the parent-child relationship, should be built on truth. Mutual trust, which is so important for this relationship to work, can be seriously violated when this truth comes to light, often through a third person. It is difficult to live in isolation and the truth is bound to come out. For a child to learn this personal information from an outsider can be quite traumatic. Our experience indicates that the child may, in such case, behave very aggressively, or withdraw into total seclusion; in either case, it becomes a difficult situation and it might take a long and painful time for the healing of this tension and returning to normalcy; the breach of trust may never be repaired.

The question is then how and when to tell. Talking about adoption with your adopted child is a slow process and this may start as soon as possible - ideally, when the child is two to three years old, and, preferably, before the child begins school - even though the child may not understand the full implications of the concept. Not only is it easier for the parents to start at that early age, it is easier for the child also to slowly get used to hearing about it and digest the idea as she matures and at her own pace. The story of her adoption and her life slowly unfolds to her as she is just beginning to understand reality. Also, in the process, the positive aspects of adoption is ingrained into her value system by the people she loves and trusts the most - her parents. The word 'adoption' should be used around the house frequently and non-hesitantly, through stories or examples, so that the child finds nothing unusual about it and sees it as synonymous to being loved and wanted. Our experience suggests that the adopted child often likes to hear about the specific details of the process of her own adoption and how you enjoy having her as your child.

How you say all this is more important than what you say. If the child senses tension and anxiety in your tone, she may not want to hear about it anymore. An appropriate thing will be to give the child a big hug and kiss, when you are happy with something she has done, and say, "We are so glad that we adopted you". It may be a good idea to

celebrate the Adoption Day as well, perhaps within the family.

A child cannot really begin to understand adoption until she learns that a baby comes from mothers tummy. As she keeps learning about both the process of birth and adoption (probably between the ages of three and six), she starts asking questions like If all babies come from mothers tummy, which mothers tummy did I come from?, etc.. It is important to give simple and truthful answers to questions that your child asks, no matter how difficult it is. The child must be helped to understand that the woman, whose tummy she was in, gave her birth and, then, for some unavoidable problems of her own, could not look after her and wanted her to have a happy home, and that you are her real mother now, and for ever, and that now she is part of your family. In this way, she will develop and maintain a sense of belonging to you as her parents. You should never make negative comments about her birth parents or suggest that they abandoned her easily. Some adopted children may suffer from a sense of insecurity if they feel that their birth parents did not love them enough.

One main objective of Atmaja is to provide a network, support group and forum for adoptive parents. We try to help each other, through discussions, with the various problems/issues as well as share the joy of parenting with others like us while we are bringing up our adopted children. This is both through formalised meetings and discussion sessions as well as informal get-together and events on various occasions. We urge and welcome you to join Atmaja and make your family a part of this sharing.