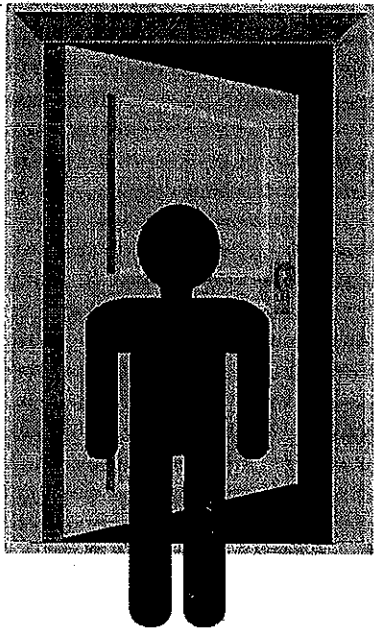


A Child's Understanding of Adoption

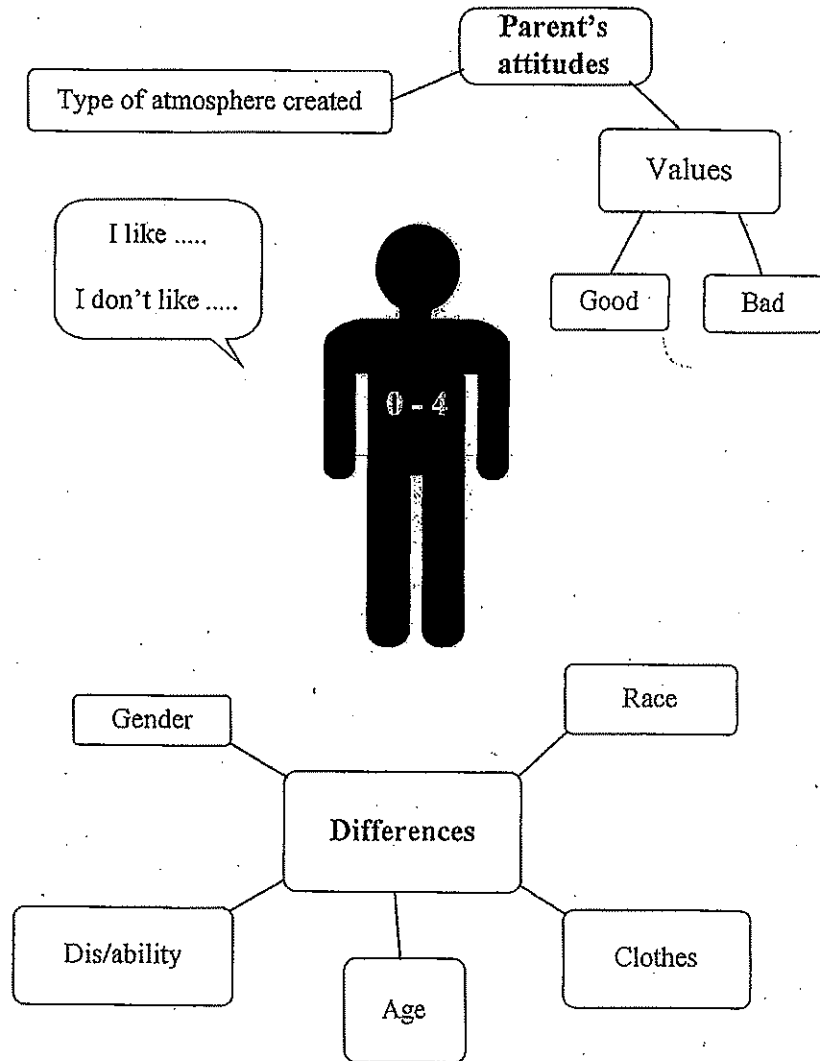
Based On Work by David Brodzinsky



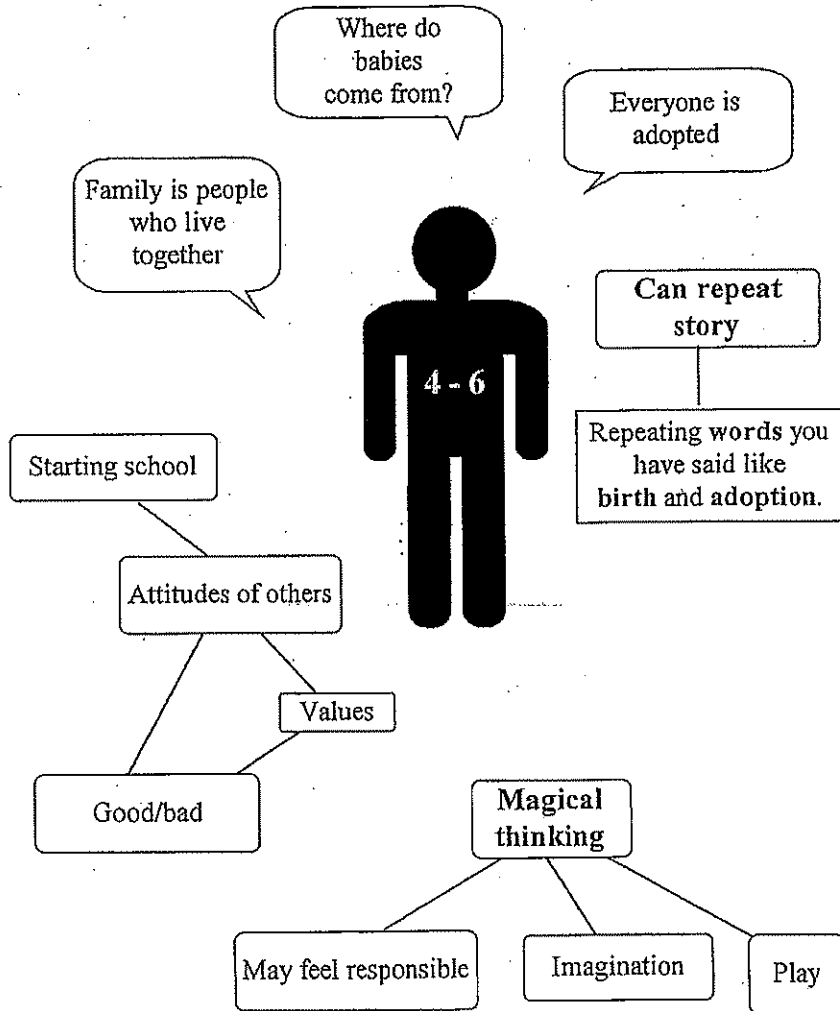
**Support
After
Adoption**

(Nottinghamshire Post-Adoption Service)

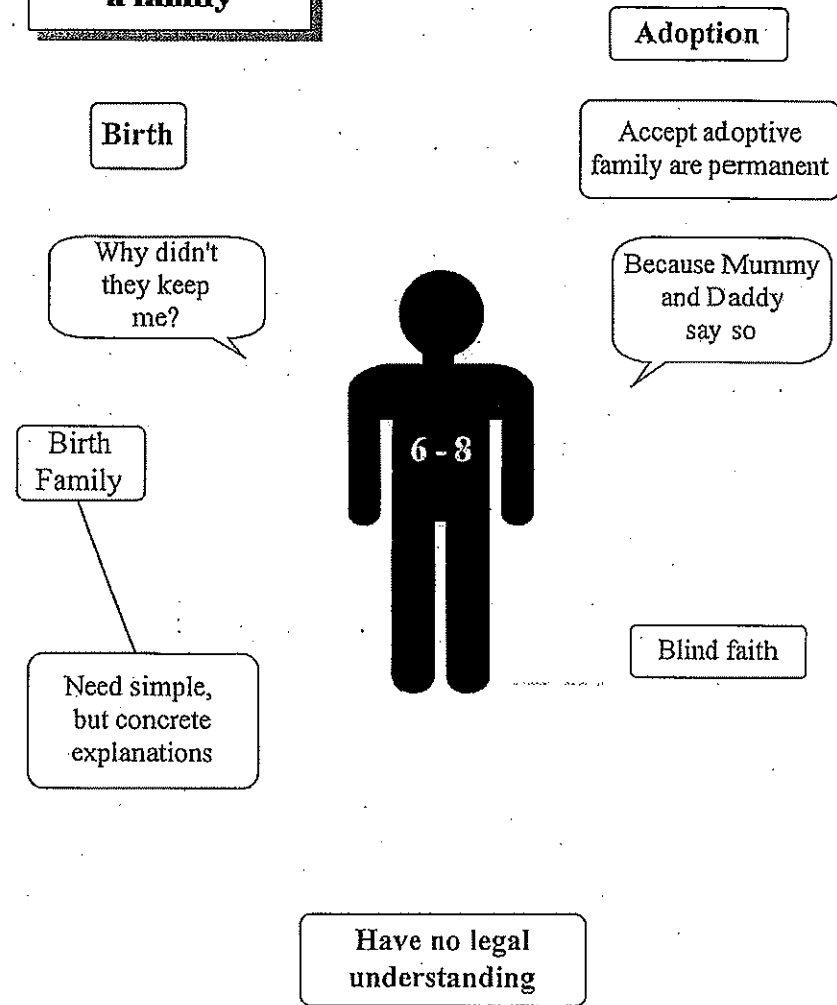
**Very young children
have no understanding
of adoption**



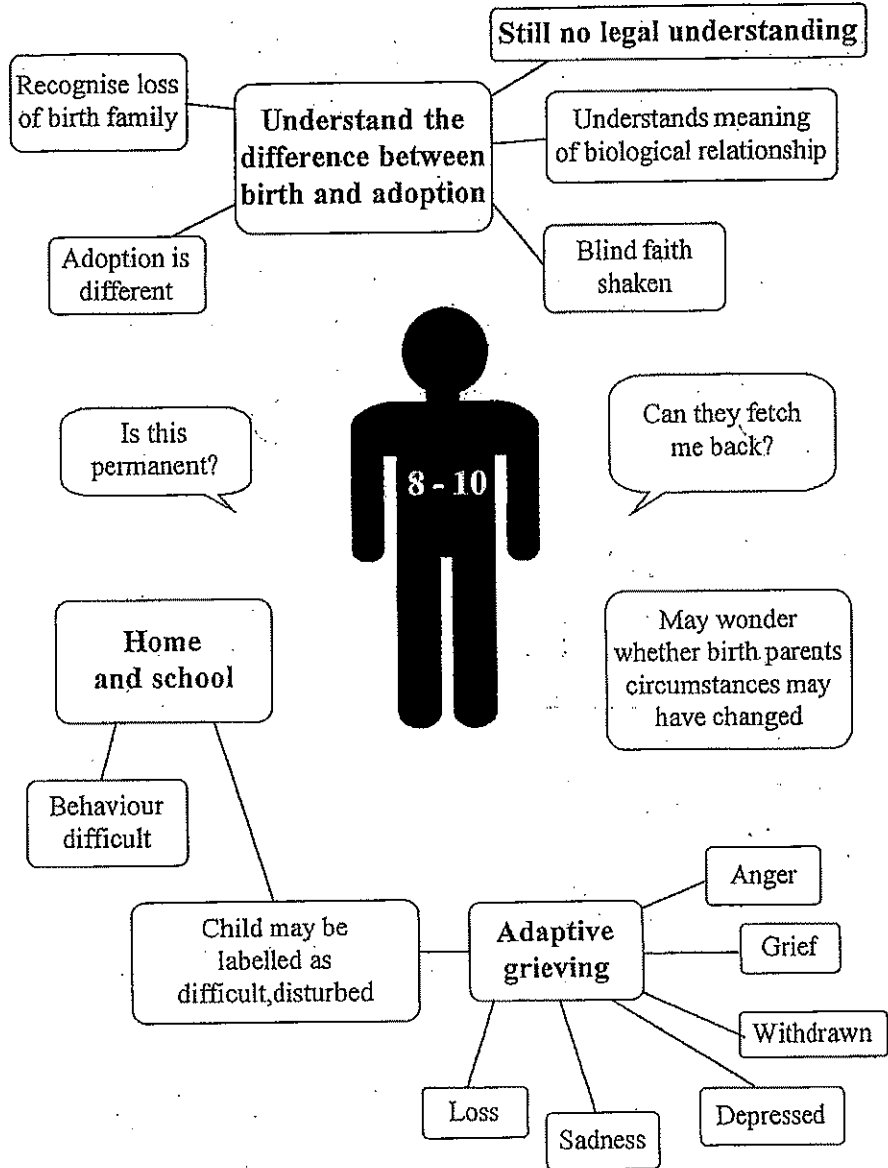
Still no understanding of the difference between birth and adoption



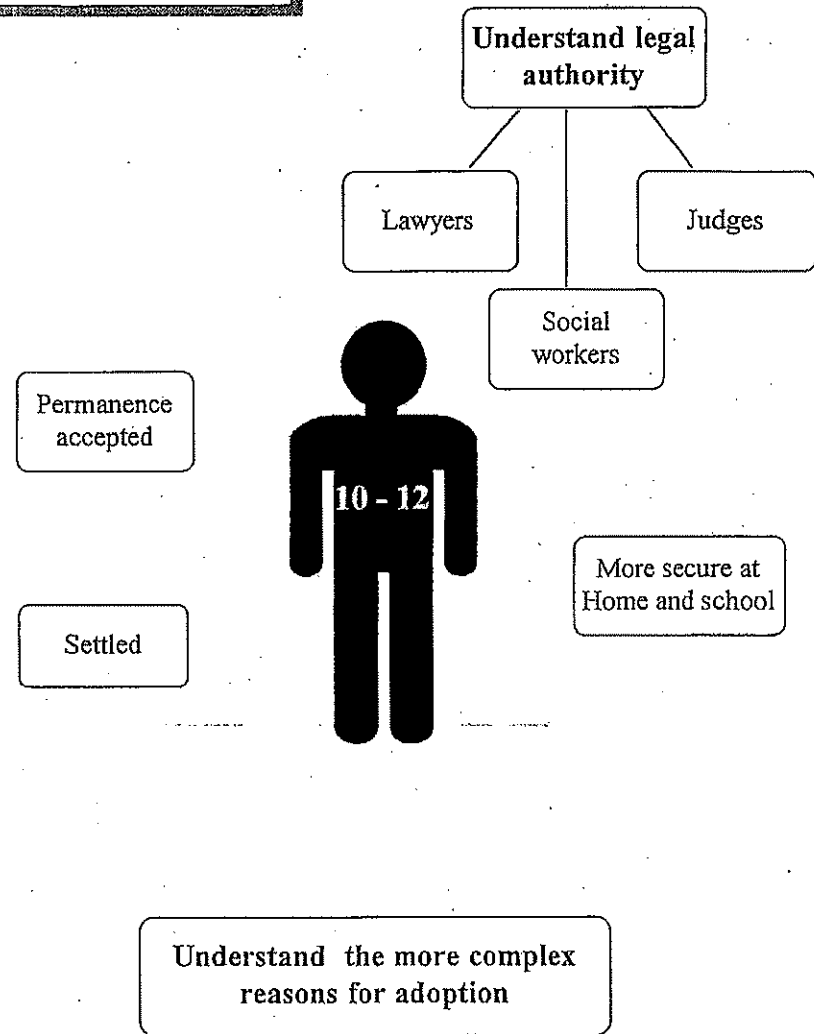
Understand there are different ways into a family



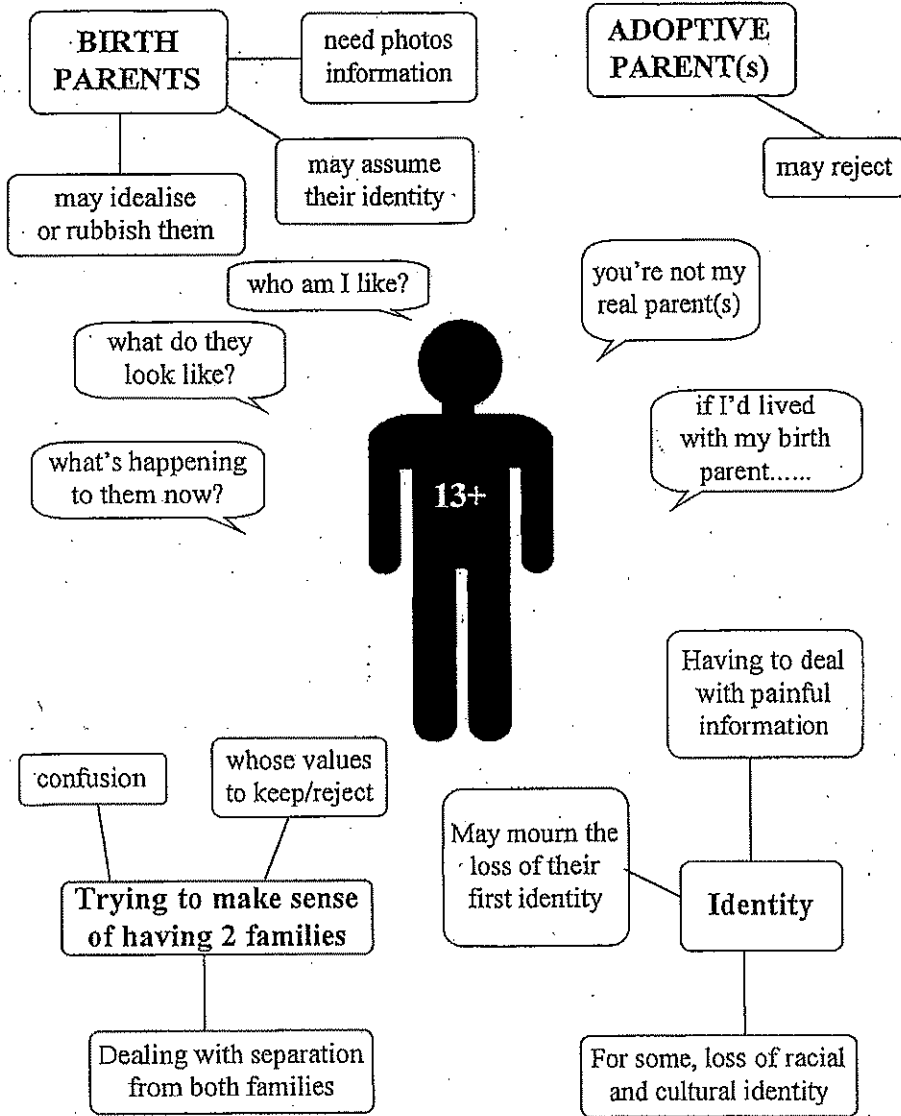
Adoption is different - Adaptive Grieving



Child now has more legal understanding



Identity - Who am I?



BAAF THOMAS CORRY

Talking to children about their past

Sometimes there are things that happened in the past to children that they need to know about, so that in time they can understand why they behave in certain ways. For example, the fact that their parents used to argue a lot could mean that the child gets really upset if there is an argument. The child may not know why, and so thinks that there is something wrong with them, and then they may get even more disturbed. If the child was told that they used to have to listen to lots of really awful arguments between their parents, then they might understand why they don't like arguments more than other people. They would see that they were normal, and there was nothing seriously wrong with them, because it had been talked through with them.

There are other things that need to be told to a child so that he or she can come to terms with whatever problems have held him or her back. One thing that is often kept back from an adopted child is why he or she was adopted and anything about the child's life before he or she was adopted. Sometimes, even the fact of adoption itself is kept secret.

I am going to give you some examples of children who were adopted fairly young, and how the family talked about the adoption. Nina, Ernesto (a friend of the

Ernesto came to us at nine weeks old. He grew up being told about his country of origin and the fact that we had chosen him and wanted to love and care for him. He has been more concerned and confused of late, having reached the age of seven and having the ability to think more about his origins. In Ernesto's case he practises avoidance and so it was necessary to talk to him more than once. He would prefer to ignore the fact that he is adopted and doesn't particularly want to discuss the fact that he is Salvadorian. He just wants to be like any other English child in this country. Despite a friend, who adopted a child while living in Hong Kong, having loaned him some very helpful books on adoption, Ernesto has avoided reading them. He is aware that there has been a civil war in his country of origin and wanted to know if his birth mother is still alive. I told him that we have been unable to trace either his mother or father and all letters have been returned. However, we do have his parents' identity card numbers and I have promised him that when he is older and if he wishes to do so, we will travel to El Salvador in an effort to locate his natural parents.

Nina's mum, who is also my mum, wrote this:

Even when Nina was very young we began to talk to her about her past. When she was 13

months old she began to behave quite badly and have long periods of defiance and crying. It seemed to me the right time to talk to her about her past.

Because she was so young I did this through photographs. We put photos taken during the three months she had been with us in an album for her and added ones of us all in her foster home and some of her foster family. She was pleased with 'our' photos, but for several days would not look at those of her foster family. Gradually she showed interest and we would talk about them. Every few months she would need to get the album out and reassure herself that her foster family were real.

When she was two, we decided to put a photo of her birth mother in the front of the album, on the same page as one of me with our younger son as a baby. At first she ignored it, but in time came to talk about the fact that this was Nina as a baby. Then on Mothering Sunday when she was two and a half, she got the album out, opened it and asked who the lady was with her as a baby. I told her 'it is your mummy'. Our other daughter and son saw a whole range of emotions flash across her face. During the day we talked to her about the different 'mums' in her life. Gradually again she accepted the photo, and also had photos of her adopted sister's birth parents in the album.