



## Telling Your Child Difficult History

Rebecca Gallese, LCSW  
NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House

[www.njarch.org](http://www.njarch.org) / [www.kinkonnect.org](http://www.kinkonnect.org)



## NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House (NJ ARCH) [www.njarch.org](http://www.njarch.org)

**NJ ARCH: *The One-Stop Resource for those Touched by Adoption***; website includes over 1500 sortable pages of resource information on adoption and foster care. Free lending library, newsletter, training workshops, and more.

Launched 2003 and is A Program of Children's Aid and Family Services



## NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House (NJ ARCH) [www.njarch.org](http://www.njarch.org)

NJ ARCH Warm Line: 877-4ARCHNJ (877-427-2465)  
E-mail: [warmline@njarch.org](mailto:warmline@njarch.org)

Website includes:

- Numerous tristate resources
- Free Lending Library; books and articles
- Links to adoption and foster care related sites
- Handbooks and publications
- Upcoming events and conferences
- Training workshops for groups
- Information on the Adoptees Birthright Act
- NJ ARCH Newsletters: *Under the ARCH* (3 x per year)
- Virtual supports



## Resource Directory

- Adoption Agencies
- Specialty Camps
- Children's Crisis Intervention Services/ Mobile Response
- Family Support Organizations
- Family Success Centers
- Mental Health Professionals
- Support Groups (adoption/foster care)



## Free Lending Library and Article Library


- Over 3,000 books, articles and videos on adoption, foster care and kinship care in our free lending library

Includes:

- Professional
- General for families and individuals
- Children's Books
- Spanish books



## NJ ARCH Newsletter



- Published 3x per year
- E-mail or paper
- Book reviews
- Upcoming events
- Waiting children
- Articles
- Networking opportunities
- "Ask the Expert" (Always looking for professional articles!)

**Kinship Care Clearing House  
(KinKonnnect)  
[www.kinkonnnect.org](http://www.kinkonnnect.org)**

**KinKonnnect:** *An Information Center for Kinship Legal Guardianship and Kinship Care Families*; website includes over 600 sortable pages of information related to Kinship Care. [www.kinkonnnect.org](http://www.kinkonnnect.org)



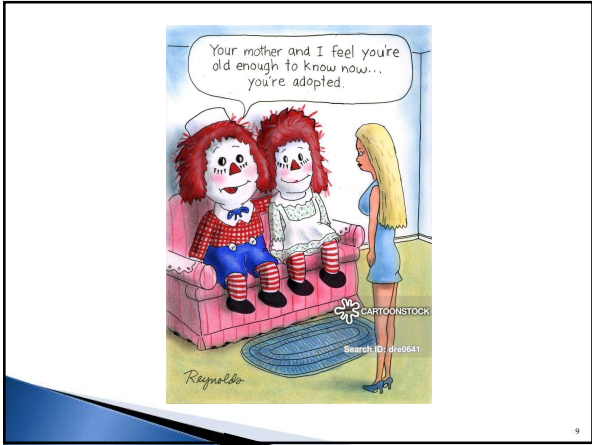


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## Telling Difficult History: Introduction

- ▶ Sharing painful information about a child's history or birth family can be challenging for adoptive parents
- ▶ This workshop will help give you information on how to competently and comfortably tell your children difficult information and ways to help them process it.

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## Why We Should Tell the Truth to our Children?

- ▶ Children benefit from knowing the truth about adoption.
- ▶ Recent research on "Late discovery adoptees" (LDAs) cites distress and lower life satisfaction as some of the effects of not knowing the true identity of the adults who raised them and the existence of unknown biological parents.

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## Why We Should Tell the Truth to our Children?

- ▶ According to the research, it's not that they were adopted that causes distress. Instead, LDAs experience emotional disruption because they were not told the truth about their identity.
- ▶ Therefore, sharing information, even though painful is important.

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## Steps in Telling

1. Determine the accuracy of information
2. Evaluate your own feelings about the information
3. Determine your child's readiness to process the information
4. Develop the appropriate vocabulary

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## Steps in Telling

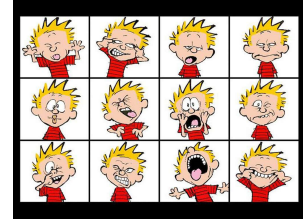
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## Steps in Telling

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## Steps in Telling

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## Steps in Telling

4. Develop the appropriate vocabulary



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## Positive Language

## Negative Language

Birth Parent  
 Biological Parent  
 Birth child  
 My child  
 Born to unmarried parents  
 Terminate Parental Rights  
 Make an adoption plan  
 To parent  
 Waiting child  
 Was adopted

Real Parent  
 Natural Parent  
 Own Child  
 Adopted child  
 Illegitimate  
 Give up  
 Take away  
 To keep  
 adoptable/available child  
 Is adopted

NI Adoption Resource Clearing House -  
 www.agnch.org/1-877-4ARCHNJ

## Roadblocks

- ▶ Avoiding pain for ourselves
- ▶ Protecting our kids from negative material
- ▶ Waiting for the "right" time



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## Special Issues

- ▶ Rape
- ▶ Incest
- ▶ Sexual Abuse
- ▶ Prostitution and Drugs

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## Tools for Telling

- ▶ Positive Adoption / Kinship Language
- ▶ Reframing
- ▶ Preventing internalization

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## Getting Ready

- ▶ Doing our own work
- ▶ Finish this sentence.....
- ▶ Understanding the danger of secrets
- ▶ Why telling earlier is better

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## When and How to Tell

- ▶ Age and cognitive functioning
- ▶ Best places to tell
- ▶ Validating feelings

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## Ways to Talk to Children about Adoption

Stage	Age	Task	Talking Tips
Infancy	0-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build Trust</li> <li>- Attach to caregiver</li> <li>- Explore their world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talk about adoption comfortably</li> <li>- Gather as much information (history) as possible</li> <li>- Model correct adoption language</li> <li>- Process own feelings about birth parents</li> <li>- Show pictures of birth parents</li> <li>- Identify names for birth parents (birth mom, tummy mommy)</li> </ul>
Preschool	4-7 yrs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gaining Independence</li> <li>- Concrete thinking</li> <li>- Magical thinking (they caused everything)</li> <li>- Self-absorbed (they are the center of the universe)</li> <li>- Seeking acceptance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tell birth and adoption story often – positively but realistically</li> <li>- Encourage questions</li> <li>- Keep answers simple and concrete</li> <li>- Reassure child he will not lose adoptive family</li> <li>- Acknowledge cultural differences vs. "color blind" approach</li> </ul>
School Age	8-12 yrs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abstract thinking increases</li> <li>- Understand concept of adoption and relinquishment (around 7 or 8 yrs. old)</li> <li>- Fairness</li> <li>- Differentness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acknowledge and validate grief</li> <li>- Initiate conversation often</li> <li>- Share more complex details about birth family and their history</li> <li>- Be prepared for divided loyalties</li> <li>- Prepare for triggers</li> <li>- Reinforce child could love both birth and adoptive families</li> </ul>
Adolescence	13-19 yrs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing Identity</li> <li>- Developing self-worth</li> <li>- Seeking sense of belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share whole history</li> <li>- Should know whole truth by age 12 (they may already know or may have been told by someone less supportive)</li> <li>- Give time to process after discussion</li> <li>- Reinforce child could love both birth and adoptive families</li> </ul>

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## Summary

- ▶ Sorting out one's own feelings
- ▶ Determining the child's ability to understand and process the information
- ▶ Reframing and using positive adoption language
- ▶ Adding to the story over time

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## Where to Get More Information

- ▶ Handouts
- ▶ Support Groups
- ▶ NJ ARCH Warm Line / Website
- ▶ Mental Health Professionals
- ▶ NJ ARCH Free Lending Library
- ▶ Articles / Publications

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## Contact us

[warmline@njarch.org](mailto:warmline@njarch.org)  
877-4-ARCHNJ  
(877-427-2465)

[warmline@kinkonnect.org](mailto:warmline@kinkonnect.org)  
877-KLG-LINE  
(877-554-5463)

Children's Aid and Family Services  
76 South Orange Avenue  
Suite 209  
South Orange, NJ 07079

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