

"I didn't know I was adopted until I was 10 years old"

A 21 year old adopted adult reflects on growing up adopted:

Curiosity about birth family

I was taken into care at 9 months old because of neglect and physical abuse. My Mum and Dad adopted me when I was about 2. To me, they are my "real" Mum and Dad. I feel happy, secure and loved in my family. That has not stopped me being curious about my birth family, or wanting to connect with them too.

I didn't know I was adopted until I was 10 years old. We had been doing a project at school about family trees and I realised that I didn't know much about mine. I went home and asked my parents to help. It was then that they "dropped the bombshell" and showed me my life story book. I felt very confused and very inquisitive. It made me feel empty and different to everybody else. I had a real mix of emotions about my birth mum. Sometimes angry, sometimes betrayed or rejected, or that I must have done something wrong to be put in care and adopted; there must be something bad about me? At other times I felt sorry for her and sad about her life and wondered if she felt guilty about what had happened.

Mum and Dad only told me I had a birth sister when I was 13. It was another big shock. It made me confused and left me wondering what else they hadn't told me, and if they were hiding anything else. I began to pull away from them emotionally and it affected me at school where I got into a lot of trouble and could not concentrate. It's difficult enough being a teenager, but with all my adoption stuff it made it impossible to concentrate.

I think my behaviour was to cover up my insecurities. I struggled to have close friends and felt like an outcast. When I told people about being adopted they seemed to think I had done something wrong to be put in care.

Being open and honest

My top tip for adoptive parents is to be open and honest from day one. Talk to your kids about being adopted and about their birth family. Make our adoption stories part of everyday family life at home. We need to know. Don't try to protect us from things you think might hurt us, just be there to help us whatever feelings we have and work it out with us. We won't love you any less.

Tracing your birth family

The Support After Adoption team can help with tracing your birth family. Since I reached 18, I have looked at my adoption files; which has really helped me to understand and put things into place more. I have decided to trace my birth mum. My parents are supporting me every step of the way and we are much closer because of the journey I am going on. I don't want to replace them, they will always be my mum and dad, I just need to put all the pieces of my jigsaw together.

Sam aged 21