

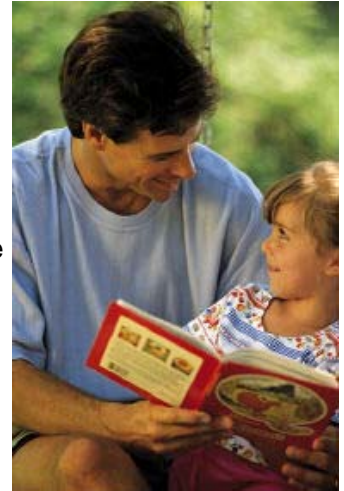
National Adoption Awareness Month

8 Ways to Celebrate

by Michele St. Martin

November is National Adoption Awareness month. According to the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), "The primary purpose of Adoption Month is to raise awareness about adoption, adoptive families and children who need adoptive homes. If done well, awareness-raising efforts represent adoptive families in a positive manner."

There are many ways to promote adoption. Some take little thought or planning, while others involve more, but it's often easier than you think. Don't let November pass by without doing something to acknowledge the importance of adoption in your life. The following are just a few ways that you can make a difference:



1. Introduce the subject of adoption to your child's school or daycare.

Bea Rothweiler, a mom from Minneapolis, Minn., will celebrate Adoption Awareness Month the same way she always does – by talking to her daughter's classmates about adoption and reading them one of their favorite storybooks. It's become a family tradition for Rothweiler to go to her daughter's school and share their story. "We read [A Mother for Choco](#) (Putnam, 1996) and share a LifeBook of our daughter's story of us becoming a family. We usually open the session up for questions," she says.

Other parents have donated books about adoption to school libraries, talked with their children's teachers to make sure that class projects are adoption-friendly, talked with their children's classes about their child's country of origin and helped provide the teacher with adoption-friendly resources.

2. Seek media attention.

Some parents have written letters to the editor of their local newspapers on adoption-related topics or asked the newspaper to run adoption-related stories during November. Other parents have contacted television stations or radio stations. By law, broadcast media must devote time and resources to various sorts of public service announcements. Plan ahead on this one – contact the station's public affairs department, and maybe next November you'll see an adoption-friendly public service announcement on your local television station.

3. Spread the word.

The adoption agency that Karen Lott's family used makes a yearly tradition of sending out a different adoption-related pin each year. "They enclose a note that says, 'Help [us] celebrate National Adoption Month. We hope that you will wear the enclosed pin to help increase the awareness of adoption. Don't forget: If the questions get too difficult for you to answer, please feel free to hand out our business card,'" she says. Other parents have worn buttons with pictures of their children or volunteered to speak about adoption at their workplace, church or other community venue.

4. Contact libraries and bookstores.

Libraries and bookstores often produce story hours for young children, so why not ask that they feature adoption stories during November? Often libraries and bookstores are eager to help spread the word.



Kathy Morowiak from San Francisco, Calif., remembers her first November as an adoptive mother well. "We lived in a small town, and the local library did not have a lot of resources," she says. "Together, with some other adoptive families, I approached them and asked that they feature adoption at one of the regular story hours in November. We purchased several copies of favorite storybooks about adoption and donated them. We helped spread the word to families about the adoption story hour. Nine years later, that library is still featuring the adoption story hour, and they have incorporated other activities to celebrate adoption during the month of November."

5. Remember those who helped with your adoption.

Michelle Maack Friedrichs of Mankato, Minn. celebrated her first year as an adoptive mother in October of this year. In remembrance of their first year as a family, Michelle Maack Friedrichs of Mankato, Minn., and her husband sent a photo album of their daughter Zoe's first year with them and a financial contribution to the orphanage that was Zoe's home prior to her adoption. "We are not doing anything special for National Adoption Month, but we do have some special 'gotcha day' activities that coincide with the same month," says Maack Friedrichs.

Other parents have sent a card to the social worker who performed their home study or the adoption agency that helped with the adoption. In an open adoption, they have sent a special gift to their child's birthparents. Still others have set aside extra time to volunteer for an adoption-related charity.

Jonathan Norburg of Minneapolis, Minn., plans to offer to help redesign the Web site of the small agency that facilitated his daughter's adoption. "It's something they need and something I can do for them," he says.

6. Involve your faith community.

Diane Vanderpool of Frankfort, Ill., started thinking of the families in her church who were formed through adoption and a special idea came to her. "I have asked our pastor to do a special blessing for the adoptive families in our parish at some time during the month," she says. "I thought it was a perfect time to thank God for bringing these children into our lives."

7. Start a LifeBook for your child or update your child's LifeBook.

A LifeBook tells the story of a child's life through their eyes. Adult adoptees say that LifeBooks help give them a sense of identity through having their own story. According to Beth O'Malley, from Winthrop, Mass., author of the definitive [LifeBooks: Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child](#) (Adoption-Works, 2000), "A LifeBook is a record of a foster/adoptee's life that uses words, photos, graphics, the child's artwork and memorabilia. A LifeBook includes information about the child's birth parents and reason for leaving them. It always starts at the child's birth. A LifeBook is more than a life story. It is a unique opportunity for parents to honor every minute of their children's lives."

8. Incorporate adoption as part of your everyday home life.

Many parents tell their child her adoption story on a regular basis. Others include birthparents as part of those they pray for or talk about. In our house, when we say goodnight, we add in the orphanage our daughter lived in and the children who still live there. Reading age-appropriate adoption stories is another way parents choose to make adoption a natural part of their family life. Speaking from my own experience as the mother of a very young child, I find reading stories is an easy way to tell her how wonderful adoption is.

One of our family's favorite books is [Little Miss Spider](#) (Scholastic, 1999) by David Kirk. This vividly illustrated story tells the tale of a baby spider who searches for a mother who looks just like her, but finally realizes that a beetle named Betty, who looks nothing like the spider yet loves her dearly, is her "real" mother. In the last few lines of the book, Little Miss Spider tells Beetle Betty that she has learned that the best way to identify your mother is to find the creature "who loves you the best."



Whether you read a special bedtime story, start an adoption story hour or lead a media campaign, be sure to celebrate adoption in November. You – and your child – will be glad you did.