

HANDOUTS FOR MODULE 2:

DEVELOPMENTAL UNDERSTANDING OF ADOPTION EXPERIENCE

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SUGGESTED ADOPTION BOOKS BY AGE GROUP

7 years and under:

- ☐ *A Mother for Choco* by Keko Kasza
- ☐ *I Love You Like Crazycakes* by Rose A. Lewis
- ☐ *How Are You Peeling?* by Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers
- ☐ *Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story* by Lori Rosove
- ☐ *Zachary's New Home* by Geraldine M. Blomquist and Paul B. Blomquist
- ☐ *We're Different, We're the Same* by Bobbi Jane Kates
- ☐ *ABC, Adoption and Me* by Gayle Seift
- ☐ *I Wished For You: An Adoption Story* by Marianne Richmond
- ☐ *My Family is Forever* by Nancy Carlson
- ☐ *Murphy's Three Homes: A Story for Children in Foster Care* by Jan Levinson Gilman

7–10 years old:

- ☐ *The Whole Me* by Ellen K. Baron
- ☐ *Maybe Days* by Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Kahn Wright
- ☐ *Families are Different* by Nina Pellegrini
- ☐ *I Feel Different* by Kathy Stinson
- ☐ *Finding the Right Spot, When Kids Can't Live With Their Parents* by Janice Levy
- ☐ *The Little Green Goose* by Adele Sansone
- ☐ *Owen and Mzee* by Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Dr. Paula Kahumbu
- ☐ *Double Dip Feelings* by Barbara S. Cain

- ☐ *Forever Fingerprints* by Sherrie Eldridge
- ☐ *The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Catherine Paterson
- ☐ *Families Change: A Book for Children Experiencing Termination of Parental Rights* by Julie Nelson

12–14 years old:

- ☐ *The Missing Piece* by Shel Silverstein
- ☐ *The Missing Piece Meets O* by Shel Silverstein
- ☐ *How it Feels to be Adopted* by Jill Krementz
- ☐ *We Adopted You Benjamin Koo* by Linda Walvoord Girard
- ☐ *Mulberry Bird* by Anne Brodzinsky
- ☐ *W.I.S.E. UP! Powerbook* by Marilyn Schoettle
- ☐ *Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens* by Debbie Riley

ADOPTION STORY

[illegible]

CHILD'S PLACEMENT HISTORY TIMELINE

Write on the line(s) below your child's placement history—everywhere child lived up to now

Birth	1 yr.	2 yr.	3 yr.	4 yr.	5 yr.
6 yr.	7 yr.	8 yr.	9 yr.	10 yr.	11 yr.
12 yr.	13 yr.	14 yr.	15 yr.	16 yr.	17 yr.

SAMPLE SCRIPTS FOR DISCUSSING DIFFICULT HISTORY WITH CHILDREN

The following scripts are meant to be conversation starters. They should be tailored to the specifics of each child's situation. Each should be preceded by asking the child what they know about the topic and what questions they have. For further information, please refer to *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past* by Betsy Keefer Smalley and Jayne E. Schooler (2nd ed., 2015).

Substance Abuse:

Your mom (and/or dad) couldn't take care of you because s/he has/had a problem with drugs (alcohol). Do you know what drugs/alcohol are? They are chemicals that change the way someone thinks and acts and can make them do things they wouldn't otherwise do that may be unsafe for children. These are not the kinds of medicines or chemicals that a doctor gives you and carefully oversees as someone takes it, but taking medicines or drugs that do not come from a doctor. Many times when you start using them, it's really hard to stop—if this happens, the person is addicted to the drugs or alcohol and then they can't take care of themselves or their children even though they may love them. It's not that they are bad, but they have the illness of addiction. It's not like a cold or the flu, but comes from the drugs or alcohol. There is nothing you (the child) did that caused your parents to abuse drugs or alcohol and there's nothing you could have done to make them stop.

Mental Illness:

Your mom (and/or dad) couldn't take care of you because she has/had mental illness. Mental illness is a brain disorder that changes the way someone thinks and acts. When it's really bad, it makes it hard for people to take care of themselves or their children even though they may love them very much. Mental illness can make someone do things that they usually wouldn't do and that may be unsafe for children. It's not that they are a bad person, but they have an illness. It's not like a cold or the flu, but comes from a chemical problem in the brain. There is nothing you (the child) did that caused your parent(s) to be mentally ill and there's nothing you could have done to make them better.

Criminality and Jail:

Your mom (and/or dad) has/had to spend some time in jail or prison because s/he made a mistake that broke the law. Even though your mom or dad made a really bad decision that sent them to jail, it doesn't mean they didn't care about you. There is nothing you (the child) did that caused your parents to make those mistakes.

Prostitution:

(Because this is such a common reason why women with substance abuse problems are in jail, we are covering it separately. In general, for children under the age of 12 who may not understand prostitution, we suggest using the more general criminality description above. For children over 12 or those asking about prostitution, use the following script). Sometimes parents who have problems with drugs need money to buy more drugs because they are addicted and need the drugs to feel OK. If they don't have any other way to get money, sometimes they have sex with people to get the money and that's called prostitution. It doesn't mean that she is a bad person but addiction to drugs sometimes makes people do things they wouldn't normally do.

Child Abuse:

Your mom (and/or dad) couldn't take care of you in a way that kept you safe. They sometimes lost control and hurt you. This is called child abuse and it is not OK for grown-ups to hurt kids. Child abuse is never the child's fault because it's a parent's job to control their feelings and never hurt their children. Sometimes people lose control and hurt their children because of their problems with drugs/alcohol or mental illness.

Neglect:

Your mom (and/or dad) couldn't take care of you in a way that kept you safe. Sometimes people who have problems with drugs/alcohol or mental illness can't take care of themselves or meet their children's needs like feeding them, giving baths, taking them to the doctor, and not leaving them home alone. This is called neglect. It is never the child's fault that their parents didn't take care of them. It doesn't mean that they didn't love and care about you.

Domestic Violence:

Your mom (and/or dad) couldn't take care of you in a way that kept you safe. They sometimes lost control and hurt each other (OR: your dad sometimes lost control and hit/kicked/pushed your mom). This is called domestic violence and it is not OK for grown-ups to hit each other. Domestic violence is never the child's fault because it's a parent's job to control their feelings and never hit or hurt anyone. When a parent hits another parent, it is scary for the child who sees this, and is not safe.

Unknown Father:

We don't have any information about your birth father. We wish that we did have that information. It is frustrating not to be able to know something about him. (If you think the child might share a trait with them: e.g. you are such a good runner, that may be something you got from your dad; you have beautiful brown eyes and your mom's eyes are blue, you must have gotten your beautiful brown eyes from your birth dad).

CHILDREN’S QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION AT DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

0–4 years of age

Child:

- Does not yet understand the meaning of “being born”
- Does not yet realize the difference between themselves and nonadopted children
- Unable to fully grasp what it means to be adopted

Parent:

- Wonderful opportunity to “practice” telling the child’s story
- Practice positive adoption language
- Introduce the subject of how babies are born

Questions in the minds of children:

- Tell me my story again.
- Are you adopted?
- Did I grow in your tummy, mommy?

5–6 years of age

Child:

- Child asks a lot of “why” questions to the basic adoption story
- Loves to hear their adoption story but has little understanding of the concepts
- Comfortable saying that they are adopted
- Racial awareness emerges

Parent:

- Answer questions concretely and honestly
- Keep it simple—recognize your child’s cognitive capacity
- Be calm and reassuring
- Model “talking is good for everyone”

Questions in the minds of children:

- Where do babies come from?
- Whose tummy was I in?
- Why was I not in your tummy?
- Why is my skin darker than yours?
- Why is my hair curly and yours is not?
- Where is my birth mom?
- Can we go see her?

7–12 years of age

Child:

- Child understands basic concept of adoption
- Realizes the loss of the birth parent/family
- Feelings of loss and grief may surface
- Carries mixed feelings about adoption: happy, sad, confused
- Recognizes that everyone is not adopted like them
- Curious about birth families, may fantasize about them
- Growing sense of feeling different

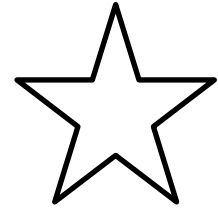
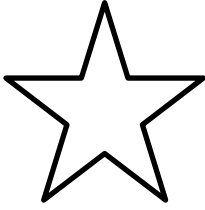
Parent:

- Recognize that child is reflecting and understanding their story on a deeper level
- Adoption story becomes “real”
- Keep communication open—be prepared to answer more difficult, probing questions
- Look for opportunities to bring up issues surrounding adoption, i.e., I think about your birth mom/birth dad on your birthday, do you?
- Remain calm when responding to comments or questions—recognize when you are uncomfortable.
- Validate your child’s feelings—be careful not to undermine communication by telling them not to feel...sad, angry, and/or confused.
- Support discussions of memories from the past.

Questions in the minds of children:

- Why was I adopted?
- Why didn’t they want me or keep me?
- Where are they?
- Do I have any brothers/sisters or where are they? (if they have been separated from siblings).
- Why couldn’t you have kids?
- Does she think about me?
- What did they look like?
- Why can’t I see them?
- Did I do something wrong?
- Where is my foster family? Why did they not want me?
- Why did they do drugs and hurt me?
- Why are they in jail?

MY ADOPTION STORY: A LIFEBOOK



MY LIFE BOOK
_____'s
ADOPTION STORY



ABOUT ME

My name is

_____!

I am _____ years old.

I am in _____ grade in school.

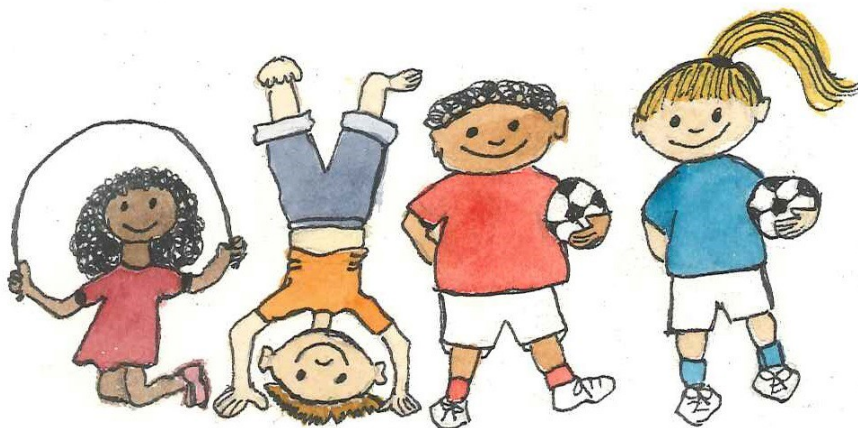
My favorite subject in school is _____.

During playtime, I like to _____.

My favorite color is _____.

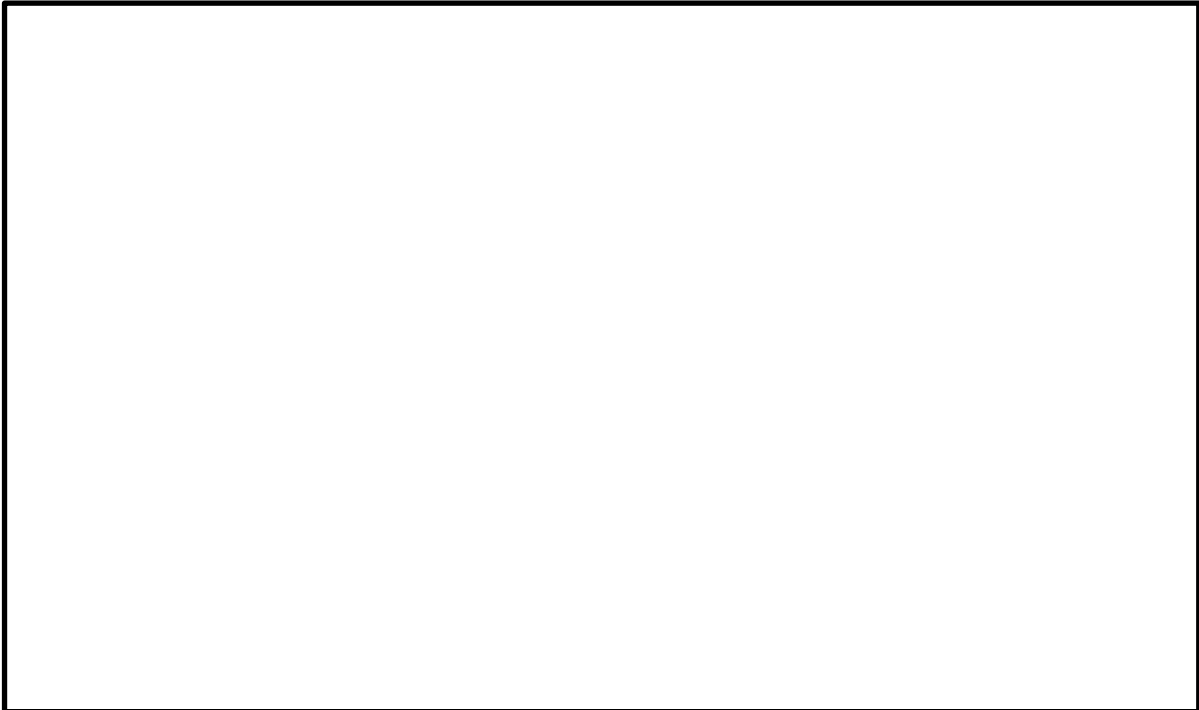
My favorite animal is _____.

I am very good at _____.



My Forever Family

This is a picture of the first time I met my
forever family.



FIRST, I felt...

THEN, we did...

AFTER, I felt...



What is a Forever Family?

My forever family is a family that has chosen to adopt me. I will always be a part of this family. Adoptive families come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. This is the kind of forever family that I have...

___ Two-parent family

___ Single-parent family

___ Grandparent(s)

___ Aunts or Uncles

___ Older Sibling(s)

___ Foster family

___ Parents of a different ethnicity/race than mine

___ Other:

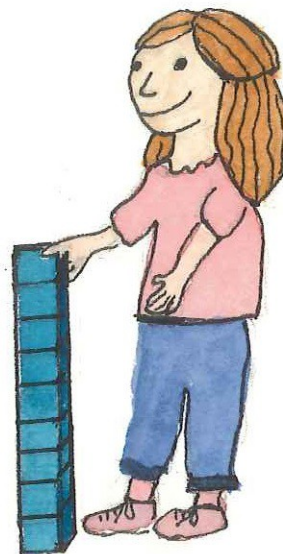


My Forever Family's name is: _____.

When I think about my Forever Family, I feel



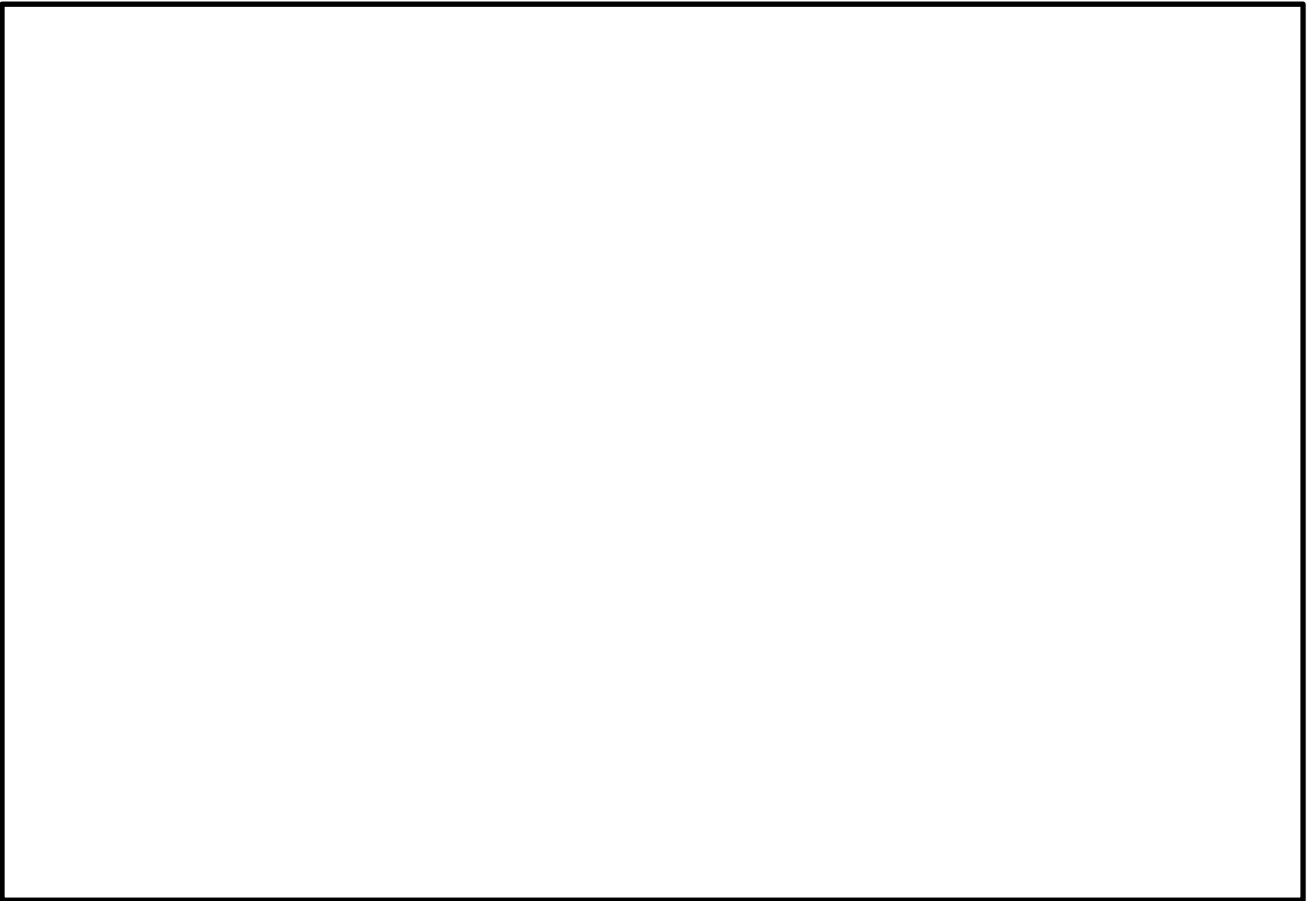
My Forever Family likes the way I:

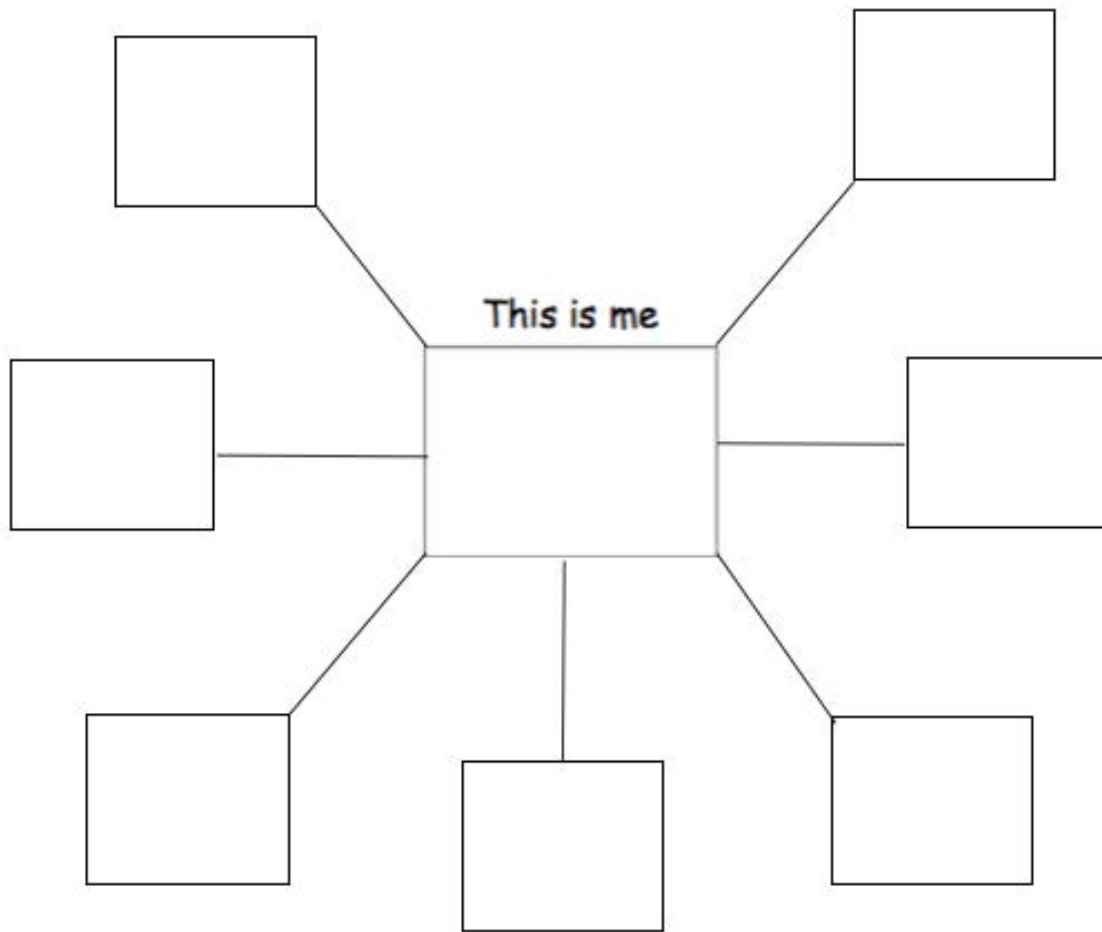


My Forever Family likes to:



My Forever Family Picture





Include your parents, brothers, sisters,
grandparents, pets, and anyone else that is a
part of your family!

If you need to add more lines, **DRAW THEM
IN!**

My Foster Family



This is what I remember best about my Foster Family:

My Foster Family Picture

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a child to draw a picture of their foster family.

My Foster Family

My Foster Family's name:

_____.

I moved to my Foster Family's home when I
was _____ years old.

I moved there because

I lived there for _____
weeks/months/years.

I left my Foster Family because

My Foster Family

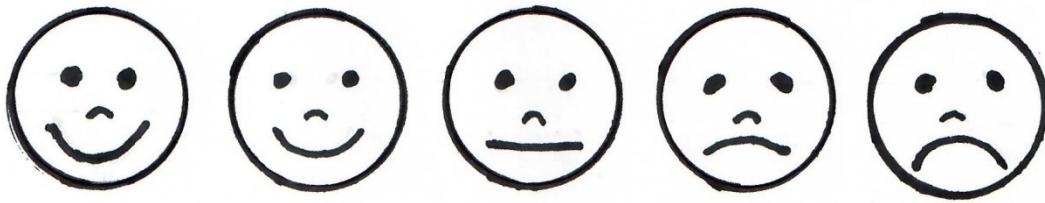
Some foster families have many people living with them, like a mom, a dad, other kids, grandmas, and grandpas, but other foster families are smaller.

Here's a list of people I met while living with my Foster Family:

- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____

My Foster Family

When I think about my Foster Family, I feel



What I liked best about living with my Foster
Family was:

What I liked least about living with my Foster
Family was:

My Second Foster Family



This is what I remember
best about my second
foster family:

My Foster Family Picture



My Foster Family's name:

_____.

I moved to my Foster Family's home when I
was _____ years old.

I moved there because

I lived there for _____
weeks/months/years.

I left my Foster Family because

My 2nd Foster Family

Some foster families have many people living with them, like a mom, a dad, other kids, grandmas, and grandpas, but other foster families are smaller.

Here's a list of people I met while living with my Foster Family:

- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____

My 2nd Foster Family

When I think about my Foster Family, I feel



What I liked best about living with my Foster Family was:

What I liked least about living with my Foster Family was:

My Other Foster Family



This is what I remember best about my other foster family:

My Foster Family Picture

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a drawing or picture of the foster family.

My Other Foster Family

My Other Foster Family's name:

_____.

I moved to my Foster Family's home when I
was _____ years old.

I moved there because

I lived there for _____
weeks/months/years.

I left my Foster Family because

My Other Foster Family

Some foster families have many people living with them, like a mom, a dad, other kids, grandmas, and grandpas, but other foster families are smaller.

Here's a list of people I met while living with my Foster Family:

- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____

My Other Foster Family

When I think about my Foster Family, I feel



What I liked best about living with my Foster Family was:

What I liked least about living with my Foster Family was:

My Orphanage

The Country I was born in was

Draw a picture of your Birth country flag in the box below:



Show where you were born on the map below.



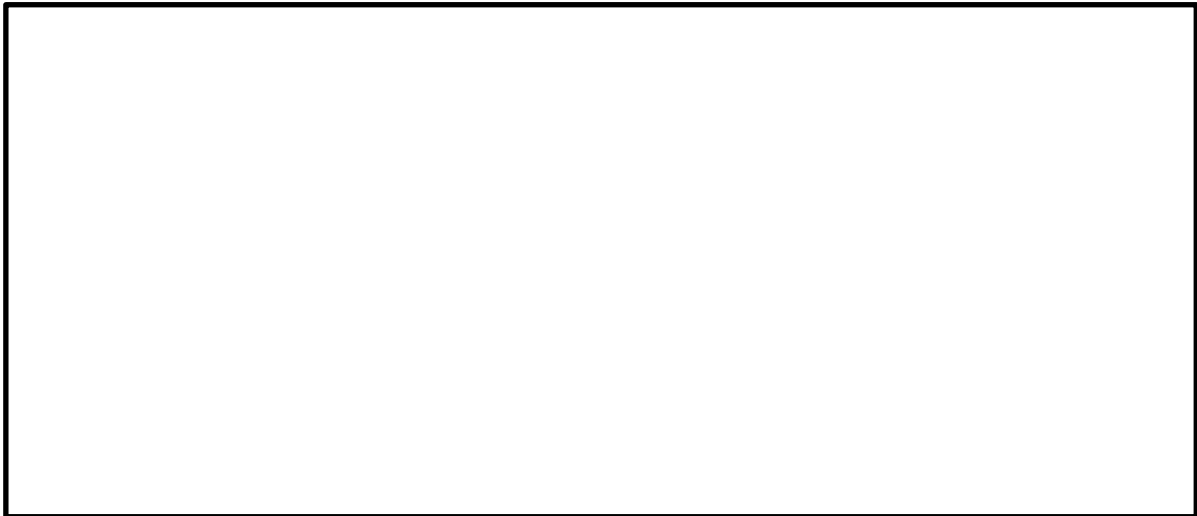
The name of the orphanage was

I went to the orphanage when I was _____
years old (or I went when I was born _____).

I moved there because _____

I lived there for _____ months/years.

Draw a picture of your memory of what the
orphanage looked like :



Draw a picture or write names of the people who took care of you in the orphanage:



Some of my friends that I remember living with in the orphanage are:

★ _____

★ _____

★ _____

★ _____

★ _____

★ _____

★ _____



When I think about living in the orphanage, I feel:



What I liked most the orphanage:

What I liked least the orphanage:

I came to America when I was _____ years old.

Draw a picture of when you arrived. Who was with you? _____

How did you feel? _____

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a drawing.

My Birth Mother



Some kids know nothing about their birth mom, but others know a lot. Here's what I know about my birth mother.

My birth mother's name is _____.

When I was born, she was _____ years old.

This is my Birth Mother (or what I think she looks like)

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a child to draw a picture of their birth mother or write a description.

My Birth Mother

This is what I know about my
Birth Mother:













These are the questions I have about my
Birth Mother:





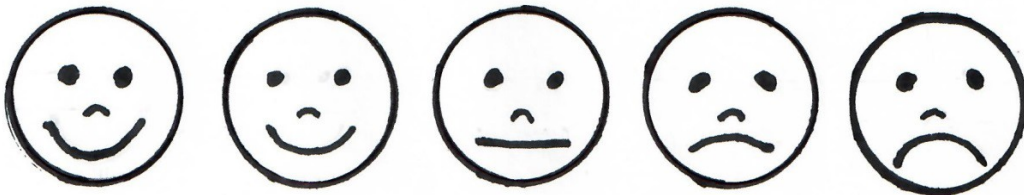




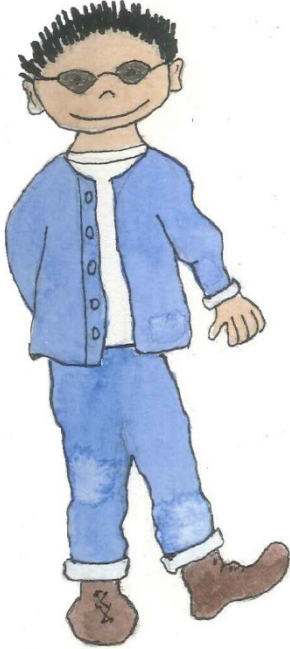
My Birth Mother

I don't live with my Birth Mother because

When I think about my Birth Mother now, I
feel



My Birth Father



Some kids know nothing about their birth dad, but others know a lot. Here's what I know about my birth father.

My birth father's name is

_____.

When I was born, he was _____ years old.

This is my Birth Father (or what I think he looks like)

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a drawing or description of the birth father.

My Birth Father

This is what I know about my Birth Father:











These are the questions I have about my Birth Father:





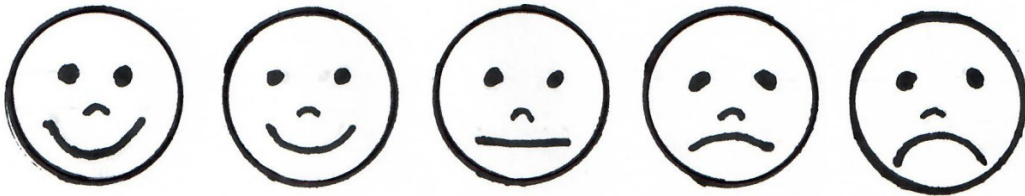




My Birth Father

I don't live with my Birth Father because

When I think about my Birth Father now, I
feel



My Birth Family

Some kids also have birth brothers or sisters or other special people they remember. The people I remember are:

brother(s)

sister(s)

grandma(s)

grandpa(s)

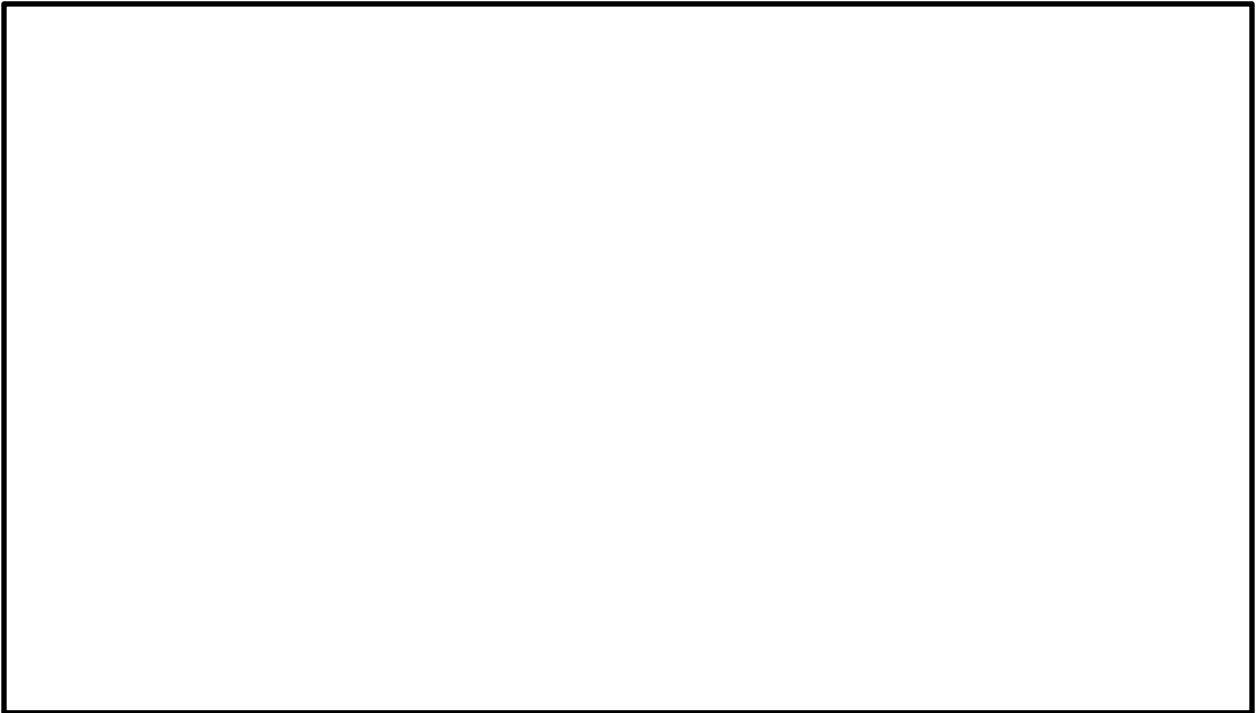
aunt(s)

uncle(s)

cousin(s)

special pet(s)

My Birth Family Picture



When I think about my Birth Family now, I
feel



QUESTIONS FOR MY PARENTS

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____
