

Adopted Children Learn What They Live

Years ago my adoptive mother proudly hung a famous poem in our home titled "Children Learn What They Live," by Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D., a person who was keenly aware of the benefits of positive youth development. It remained there for years. Now that I'm post 50 and discovered at age 48 that I'd been adopted, I've wondered about that poem, wondered "positive youth development for who?" We need to remember that it means positive for the adoptee and from their perspective since they are the ones who are going to be living their lives.

This is my twist on that poem, my hope and dream for what a truly positive message for adoptees might look like –

ADOPTED CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

If adopted children live with parents who are called their "real" parents, they learn that they came from "unreal" parents and that they're rooted in something unreal, untrue, and unworthy of acknowledgement.

If adopted children live with labels like "chosen" or "lucky," they learn that they were first unchosen and unlucky.

If adopted children live love defined by "your first mother loved you so much that they gave you up for adoption," they learn that real love means being given away and to fear being given away every time they are told how much they are loved.

If adopted children live as "the answer to their parent's prayers," they learn that their sole purpose in life is to make others happy or risk a second abandonment if they don't.

If adopted children live "Forever Family," they learn that they're like an adopted puppy or kitten, something to be acquired.

If adopted children live that finding first family is wrong, they learn that their deep need to know about their origins is wrong as well, and despair, sometimes waiting until it's too late to find their truths.

If adopted children live with secret adoptions and no access to their original birth certificates, health histories, and heritages, they learn that they are not valued for who they were and question if they're as worthless as the paper their amended birth certificates are printed on.

If adopted children live that adoption is only a blessing, they learn that their feelings of loss are invalid, and there must be something wrong with them for feeling that way.

If adopted children live that their trauma is real and their sadness over it is normal, they learn that their feelings are important and appropriate too.

If adopted children live with the opportunity to grieve, they learn they can survive and even thrive after loss.

If adopted children live with validated feelings, they learn that others genuinely care and value them.

If adopted children live with knowledge of their original identities, they can live authentically as themselves and not have to pretend to be someone else to be loved.

If adopted children live within an honest familial and societal system, they learn that they are more than a baby to be acquired and trust that they are valued just as they are.

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