

# “Watch Your Language!”

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**Language is the tool** we use daily to communicate our ideas. Although we might not be aware of it, there is

also a subtext to the words we choose, reflecting our values in subtle ways, even when we aren't consciously trying to do so.

**Words have superpowers**, slowly informing and shaping our beliefs and imprinting our thought process. As humans, we then selectively remember information that serves to confirm these preconceived notions, further justifying our generalizations and affecting how we then communicate those beliefs to others.

*See how this cycle can start to take on a life of its own?*



**Mindfulness is a word we hear often**, and it has a valid application here as well. Adoption is an emotion-driven topic, and sometimes we fail to realize that word choice in certain contexts may convey negative messages. Whether you are speaking to your child, to your sister, or

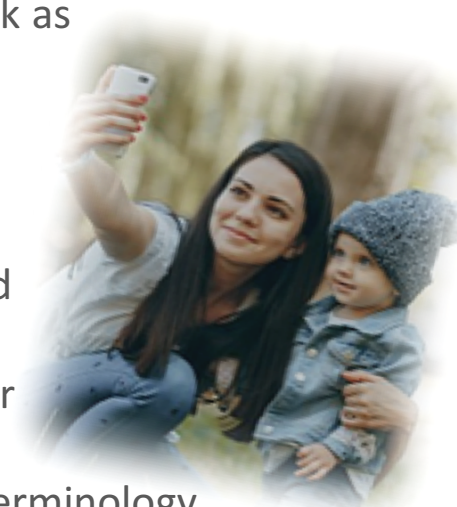
to the person sitting next to you in a waiting room, the words you choose can have lasting effects.

Here are some examples of ***Terms Commonly Used*** and the ***Positive Adoption Language*** to use instead.

Term Commonly Used	Positive Adoption Language
Put Up for Adoption Give Up for Adoption	Place a Baby for Adoption Make an Adoption Plan

***Put up:*** This term originated from the Orphan Train Movement of the mid 1800's, when homeless children from the cities were taken to the countryside and "put up" on stage for landowners to select. These children became the landowner's property and were taken home to work as field hands.

***Give up:*** People tend to use the phrase "give up" when referring to bad things or destructive habits. "He gave up drinking / gambling / smoking." For obvious reasons, we don't want to categorize a child by using this same terminology. Additionally, the subtle connotation of the term "give up" elicits the concept of an indiscriminate and careless action.



On the contrary, birthparents undergo an intense emotional experience to make this choice, take great care in selecting adoptive parents, and display remarkable strength in moving forward with their adoption plan.

Term Commonly Used	Positive Adoption Language
Real Parents Natural Parents	Birthparents Biological Parents

Using the words “real” or “natural” when describing a child’s birthparents implies that their adoptive parents are somehow “fake” or “unnatural.” The truth is that adoptive parents are “real” parents, just as the birthmother is “real” in her role as well. Using this reaffirming language with children is crucial to ensure they

feel confident that they are being raised in the family they are meant to be in. Alternatively, mixing up these terms can have confusing and detrimental consequences on the emotional development of adoptees.



Term Commonly Used	Positive Adoption Language
Adopted Child	My Child Adoptee



By using the adjective “adopted” when referring to a child, one implies that this person’s position within their family requires a qualification, and is subject to a classification. It sends the message that there is a different value placed on this child because he or she does not share a biological connection to their parent.

As much as possible, when referring to individuals, refrain from using the word adopted as an adjective. Try and use the word adoption as a verb that describes the way a family was formed (she was adopted), or as a noun when referring to a person. *“As an adoptee, Jon...”*

A person’s adoption is a part of who they are, but it shouldn’t be a stipulation. As individuals, we see ourselves as many things, all of which collectively inform our identity as a whole. “I am a dancer, an adoptee, a big sister, and an artist.”

***Changing old habits is hard.*** The words we use by default seem second nature, and omitting and replacing them takes effort. However, making these changes will have lasting effects on those around you. For a time, you might find yourself correcting your words mid-sentence, and that is okay.

Finally, also be aware of how your relatives are using adoption terminology, and help them to change their lexicon as well. Gentle reminders now will set an expectation to use positive adoption language with your child in the future. Remember, if you ever feel unsure of how to approach a difficult conversation with your child about their adoption, reach out to a licensed adoption counselor, we are here to help.

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