

CHALLENGES of **ADOPTED CHILDREN**



What is expected?

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Challenges of Adopted Children

Introductory note

“Adoption means providing a family to children who cannot be raised in the families into which they were born i. e. in their families of origin” (Salvaterra, 2011, p. 15).

The integration of a child born in another family and at an older age can mean that the adoptive parents do not have full knowledge of their history and that they must get used to the idea that their child, born from strangers, belongs to them.

Although these and other challenges are illustrated in this small brochure and refers to situations that are more difficult for adoptive parents and children to manage, studies indicate that most adoptive parents are satisfied and have positive expectations about the effects that their children have on their family life.

In a study carried out with Portuguese adoptive families, we concluded that the adopted adolescents presented full integration into their adoptive family, good psychosocial adjustment and familial relationships characterized by security, trust and mutual affection between parents and children. Most parents said they were very satisfied or satisfied with their family life after adoption (Salvaterra, F., 2020).

These results suggest that, despite the challenges that may arise throughout the life cycle of an adoptive family, parents are very satisfied and happy for having adopted their children, valuing the family life they have built.

What is expected?

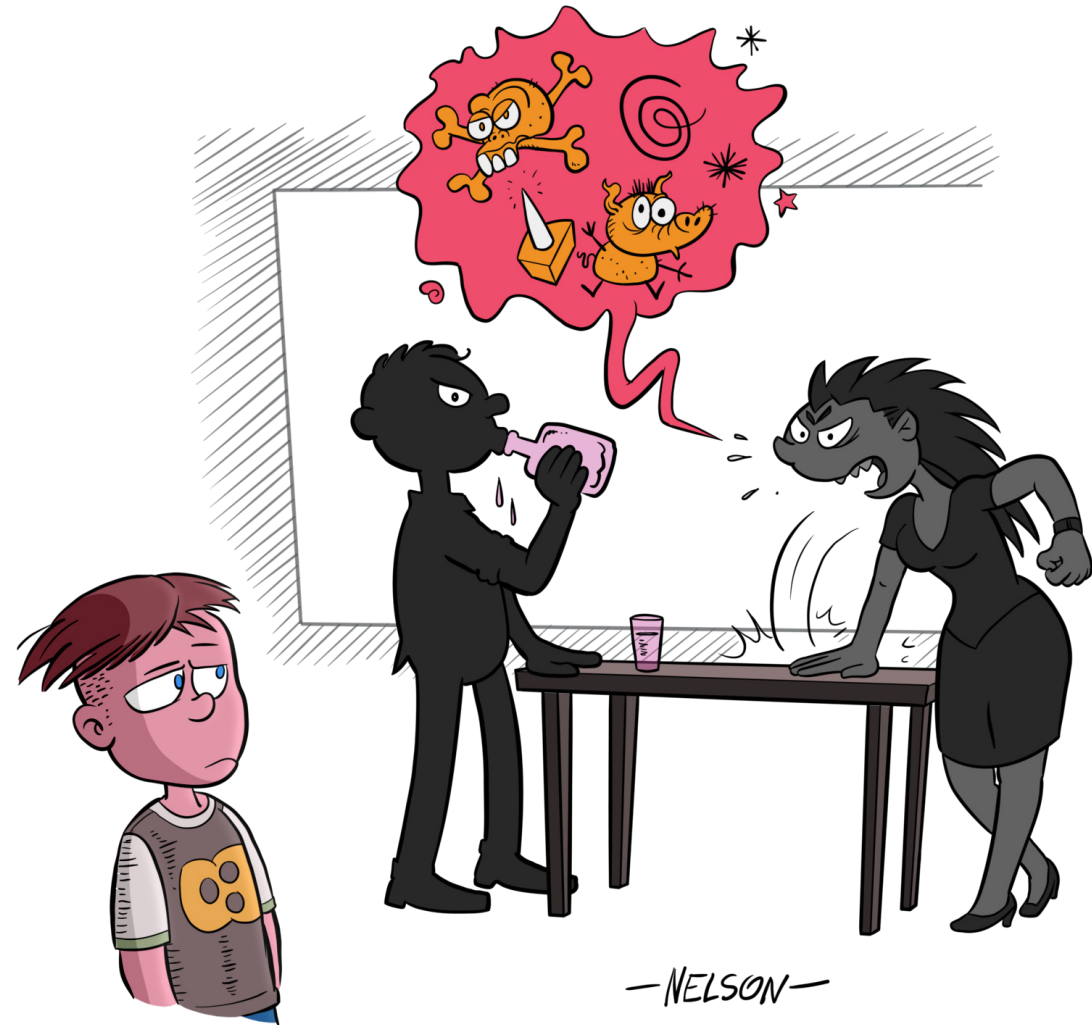


I was adopted! What I would like my adoptive family to know about me, so they understand and know how to deal with my behaviours and reactions so that I feel well integrated, is described in this booklet. If you have any questions, you can count on the team that accompanied my adoption process or you can always call the **SOS Família-Adoção (SOS Family-Adoption)** hotline with all your doubts and questions at: **+351 800 210 555** or mobile: **+351 924 134 760** (WhatsApp).

You can also send an email with your questions to:
sos.familia.adocao@iacrianca.pt

Why can I be different from other Kids?

Many children who are adopted, like me, may have been exposed to more challenging, difficult, or dangerous situations that can cause trauma, and that other children living with their biological families have not experienced. Examples of these situations are when birth parents neglected us, mistreated us (physically, psychologically, or emotionally), sexually abused us, or abandoned us. Other situations can also be exposure to domestic violence, substance use or mental disorders by our parents.



When we are exposed to these situations, we are constantly on alert and worried that our needs (e. g. food, sleep, affection...) won't be met. Therefore, our brains and bodies do not develop in the same way as in a child who is not exposed to such situations.

What makes me behave and

react differently from other kids?

When these situations take place, we start focusing on the danger around us, while trying to find a way to deal with the fear and uncertainty we feel in the environment around us. This fear and uncertainty affects our development due to the “toxic stress”, which results from the state of alert that we need to maintain due to the situations of mistreatment, neglect and abuse that we have been subjected to. This type of stress has negative implications for our development and for the way we interact with the environment and relate to others.



What reactions may I present when I'm in a new family?

Fear and constant alertness can lead me to exhibit some behaviours that are different from most children, which are called "survival reactions". These reactions make me feel safe and are mechanisms with which I've learned to protect myself. So, if I show any of these reactions when I'm with you, don't feel like I'm against you. I'm just trying to protect myself the best way I know. My reactions might be:



"Freeze".

I may seem very confused, anxious, aloof, distant, and even not able to respond to what is asked of me. I tend to be very attentive and seem to be looking for ways to escape and disappear. I feel ashamed. I'm afraid of failing and that you'll reject me if I do.



Be submissive

I can be sad and have a passive attitude. I don't like being the centre of attention, I want to be invisible and, as a result, I tend to avoid or withdraw from interactions with other people. I feel guilty, hopeless about the future and ready to give up.

Flee

I may run away from adults (e. g., hide under a table), be constantly restless, and be noisy. I have difficulty concentrating. I'm in a constant state of hypervigilance and I just want to find a safe place. I feel alone and I think I'm worthless.

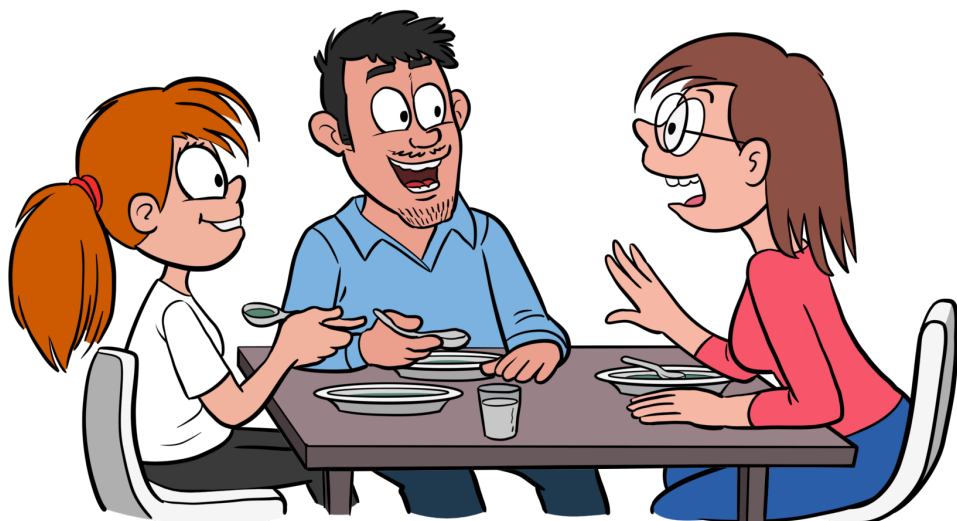
Fight

I need to control the situations around me and make them predictable to feel safe. I have difficulties following rules and I may lie or blame others for situations that happen or that I may have created. I feel that I have to "attack" to defend myself from danger that may arise (whether that danger is real or not).



— NELSON —

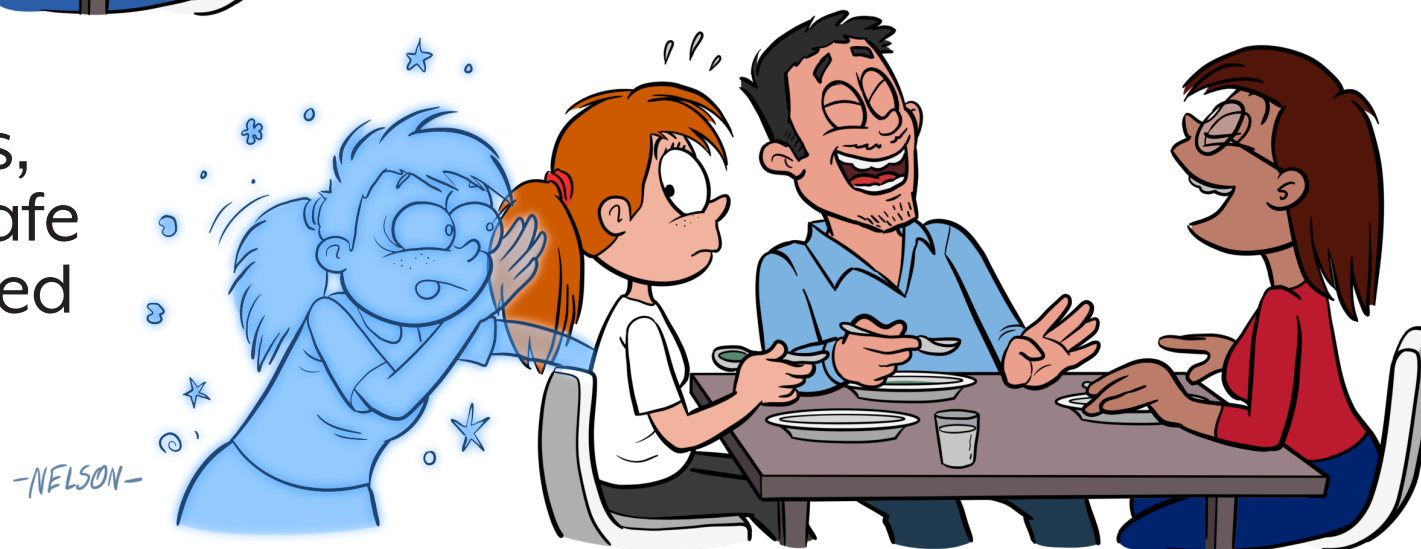
Why do I still have



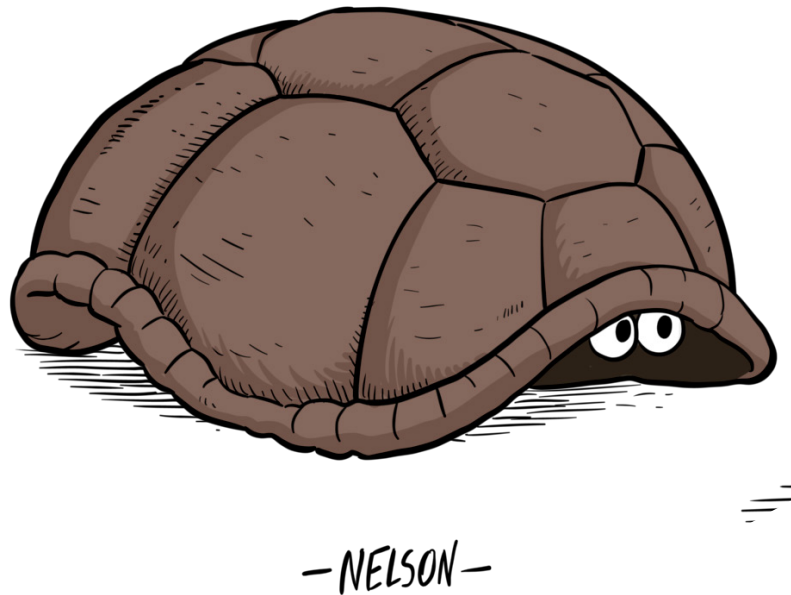
Even when I'm no longer in the environment that made me feel scared, my brain doesn't know about it. Thus, I may continue to have some of these reactions. This is because my brain registered this information and applied it to all situations and people around me. Unpredictability has always been a constant in my life, and I can still feel like I'm in danger and feel scared, even though I'm in a safe environment.

My previous relationships with adults may have been dysfunctional or abusive and therefore I may have learned that adults can hurt, abuse, ignore, reject, humiliate, and abandon us. My reactions are just ways to protect myself and avoid being hurt again.

these reactions,
even when I'm safe
and in a protected
environment?



What is important for you to remember when you adopt me?



It is important that you remember that these kinds of behaviour were mechanisms and strategies that I found to defend myself and that helped me feel safe. I may still not feel safe in your home and your presence and continue to act according

to the negative representations I have of other adults, projecting them onto you. This might make you feel like I misbehaved on purpose, but that's not true. These types of behaviour of mine are related to the traumatic experiences I had previously.



What should you take into consideration when I'm in my new family?

It is essential that you have access to information about my past, experiences I've had and dangerous or traumatic situations I've been exposed to. If you know what happened to me, it might be easier for you to help me

change my behaviour in the future. Having this information can also keep you from feeling inadequate or unable to manage my difficult behaviour and from feeling frustrated or wanting to give up.

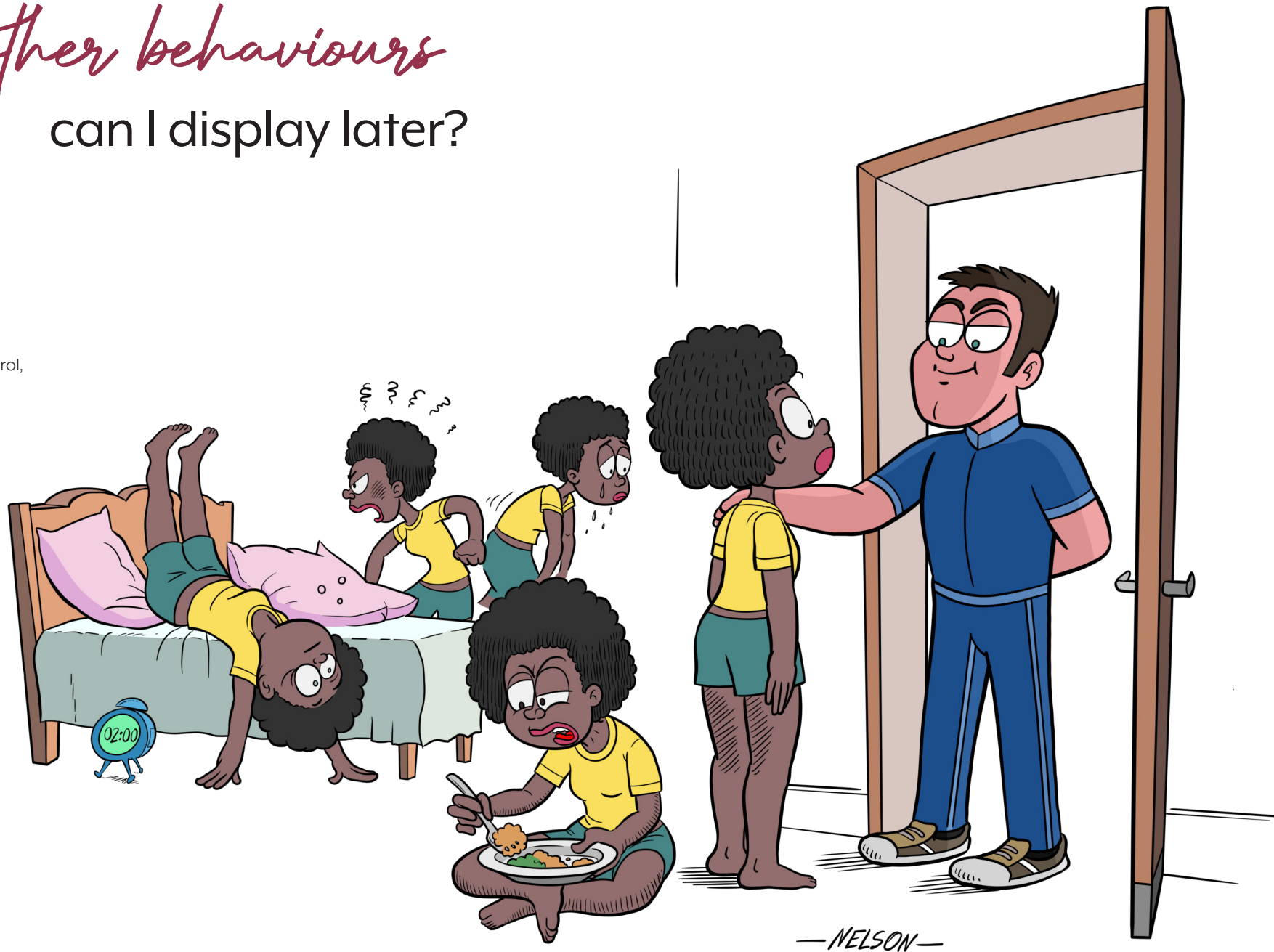


What other behaviours can I display later?

I might experience difficulty with:

- Sleeping,
- Eating,
- Concentrating,
- Keeping my emotions under control,
- Managing conflicts.

I need your help to develop and to readjust my behaviour now that I am in a safe environment. Most importantly, I need to feel loved.



What other difficulties and/or disorders may I present?



I may develop other more serious deficits and disorders, such as:

- Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder.
- Neurodevelopmental difficulties or disorders.
- Emotional dysregulation.
- Aggressiveness.
- Childhood depression.
- Anxiety.
- Isolation, distancing, and withdrawal from social interactions.
- Antisocial behaviour (e. g. not respecting rules, being violent, trying to manipulate others).
- Attachment disorders.

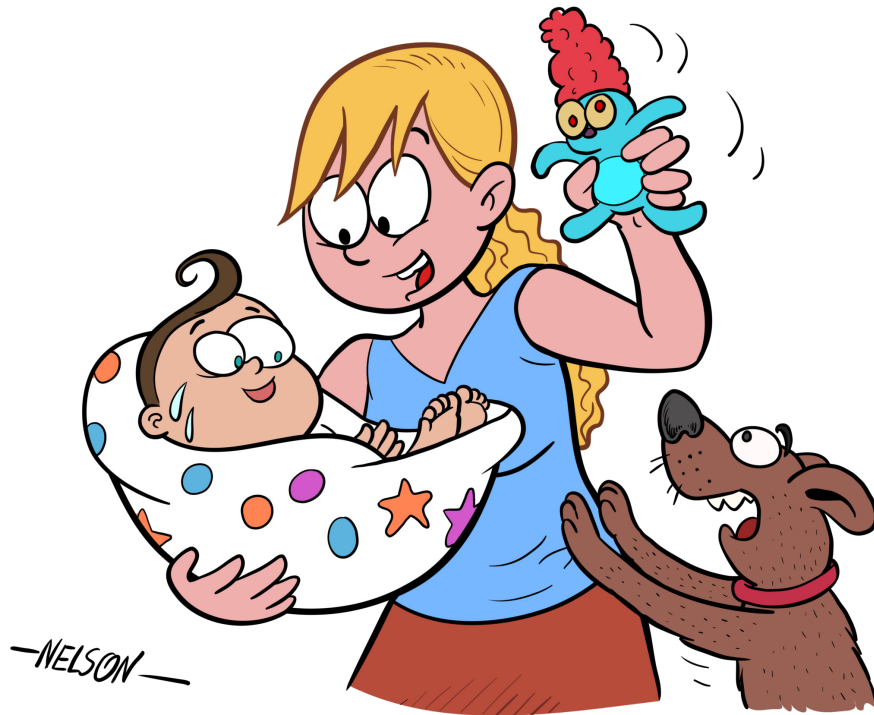
In these cases, other types of support, such as psychological, developmental or child psychiatry appointments, may be useful, if necessary. Don't be afraid to ask other people or professionals for help. It is important that I have all the support I need, and you are the first source of that support.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

Throughout my life, I may demonstrate some behaviour that you may find challenging and difficult to manage, due to my previous experiences. But I want you to know that these are common types of behaviour in children who have gone

through the same thing as me and that I will need more time and patience on your part to be able to change them. There are some strategies you can use to help me! So...

As a baby, I might...



Cry a lot (more than other babies).

That's why I need... more help to calm down. I may not have had consistent care and I learned that crying intensely is one of the ways I get attention and get my needs met. You can cuddle me, wrap me in a soft blanket, rock me and reduce external stimuli such as light and sounds to help me calm down. You can also speak calmly and reassuringly so I know I'm safe and can calm down. And, above all, give me love and affection!

Take a long time to fall asleep.

That's why I need... you to help me relax so I can fall asleep. I may be afraid of falling asleep, as this is a time when I feel most alone and/or vulnerable. You can use the same technique you use when I cry a lot, but it can also help if you rock me and let me fall asleep next to you. You can decrease the stimuli around me (e.g. bright light and loud sounds) so that I recognize when it's time to rest. And assure me you'll be there when I wake up!

Not want to eat.

That's why I need you to be patient and calm and respect my own rhythm. As I didn't have access to certain foods, I didn't learn to like their taste. I may not feel safe enough to eat, so you should stay calm and talk to me during meals, without being persistent and strict. It will help if you reduce the stimuli around me, such as television or objects that distract me from the meal.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As a toddler and pre-schooler (2-6 years-old), I might...



Throw intense tantrums

That's why I need... you to help me regulate my emotions. I may not know how to calm myself down and manage my emotions and I need your help to do so. You can, for example, hold my hand, hug me and comfort me, holding me, if I feel comfortable with your closeness and touch. You can rock and soothe me with instructions and a soft voice. You can verbalize what you think I am feeling ("are you angry about..." or "are you sad because..."). Remember that I may need my space and time to try to regulate myself and it is important that you avoid raising your voice or yelling at me, as I may get scared and lose my trust in you. Above all, I need your understanding!

Display self-soothing behaviours

That's why I need... you to help me learn how to properly calm down. I may have learned that behaviours such as rocking or bumping my head against objects or walls help me to calm down. It's important that you break this pattern, so I don't hurt myself. It may be necessary for you to physically contain me, hugging me and preventing me from hurting myself. Then you must comfort me physically and verbally, hugging and reassuring me. You can assure me that everything is fine and that you will stay with me until I feel better. It might be helpful if you show me other ways to comfort myself, like holding and hugging a toy or stuffed animal that I like or wrapping me in a blanket that you know I like.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As a toddler and pre-schooler (2-6 years-old), I might...

Overeat or hide my food

That's why I need you to teach me that I will always have food available. I may be afraid of not having my food when I want or need it, and therefore I may hide it, overeat, or say I don't feel full or satisfied after meals. You can help me change this behaviour by having a lunchbox of snacks, and other healthy foods always available. You can distract me when we finish meals, by playing with me or redirecting my attention to other activities.

Have difficulty falling asleep

That's why I need... you to help me get some rest and relax. I can be in a constant state of alert and not be able to sleep easily. It's important that you start by establishing a consistent sleep routine that helps me calm down which will teach me what happens before I go to sleep so that I know what I can expect at that time of day. You can also make sure I know that, at a certain time of the day, my room is only for sleeping, by keeping my toys in another room or a box. It might help if you limit my access to TV and electronic devices before I go to sleep. And be there for me when I wake up!

Not being able to fall asleep alone

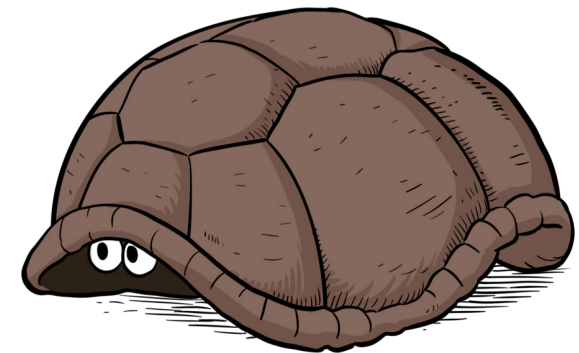
That's why I need you to teach me how to calm down and how to sleep on my own. I may be afraid of the dark, of the new house or of being abandoned. I need you to help me understand that everything is okay and that I'm safe. You can start by sitting next to me on the bed if I'm comfortable with that, or by giving me your hand. Then, gradually, you can move away, sitting in a chair next to me, then across the room, and finally out of the room. To help with this process, you can give me a teddy bear or a blanket that I like, so that I feel comforted and cosy. You can make bedtime a relaxing and calming activity by, for example, telling me a story, reading a story with me, or looking at a book together. Try to remember that this process is time-consuming, but it is important that you are consistent in doing it so that I learn how to sleep on my own. The important thing is that you make me feel safe!

Misbehave

That's why I need... you to help me regulate my behaviour. I may have difficulty dealing with frustration and controlling my impulses, which comes across as "misbehaving". To help me, you must use a calm but firm voice and tell me that I need to stop, while explaining why this behaviour is unacceptable. It's not enough to just tell me "Stop!", "Because it's bad" or "Because I say no". It is important that you tell me what the right behaviour is and that you be an example, so I know what is expected of me in that situation. In addition, it is essential that you avoid using a loud or harsh tone of voice, as this can scare me, which could have the opposite effect, making me behave even worse.

Reassure me that you love me, but that you will not tolerate these kind of behaviour and that you will help me change it by setting clear and consistent boundaries.

You should also consider that I can act like a younger child and have some reactions that are not appropriate for my age. As I adapt to the family, you can try to change that pattern, but you must respect my rhythm and adapt your behaviour to my evolution.



What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As a toddler and pre-schooler (2-6 years-old), I might...

Ask questions about whether I was in your belly

That's why I need... for you to start giving me simple, age-appropriate but truthful and honest information about my origin, so that I can gradually begin to know my story and the story of my adoption.

It is at this stage that I begin to actively question myself and be curious about my origin. I can start to question where I came from, when I became a part of our family and maybe even notice differences between my physical appearance and yours.

Therefore, it's important that you start telling me my story from an early age so that I understand my adoption in a natural way, without "taboos" and that I feel good saying that I'm adopted and talking about having adoptive and biological parents without embarrassment. You should share information about my adoption with me as soon as possible, so that I feel I "always knew" that I was adopted and that it's not a secret or something that I'm ashamed of. You should also reinforce that I was born in another family and not just that I was adopted, so that I have the notion that I was born, just like any other child

and that I didn't begin existing after the adoption. For example, if I ask you if I grew in your belly, you could say something like:

"No, you weren't in my belly. You were born from another mother, your biological mother. Your biological parents couldn't or weren't able to take care for you and so another family was found for you. We really wanted to have a child, and that's how we became your parents. That's called adoption. And we're so happy to be your parents!"

Despite asking questions, at this age I may still not fully understand what being adopted means, so you should remain attentive to my needs for more information and to clarify any doubts I may have. It's also important that you always convey openness, security, and tranquility when I show interest in talking about my adoption.



What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As an older child (7-10 years-old), I might...

Have difficulty dealing with my emotions

That's why I need... you to help me regulate the intensity of my emotions. I may not be able to regulate my emotions on my own. You can help me by teaching me how to use words to express what I'm feeling and how to tell others how I feel. If I fail to do so, I may feel even more frustrated. Pay attention to my signs of frustration as they begin to manifest. It helps me to understand how I can adequately express my emotions, using my body to calm myself down by doing, for example, deep breathing exercises. Also, you can show me other ways of expressing my anger or frustration, making drawings to show what I feel.

Feel confused and disoriented

That's why I need... you to help me feel safe and organized by making it clear what I can expect from you and the environment around me. I need stability and to know what to expect from other people or situations daily. You can help keep events or appointments organized through tables, graphs, reminders and by establishing predictable routines. I

may also need additional reminders and more specific, direct instructions for doing certain tasks. For example, when you ask me to do something, do it specifically: "Can you pack your backpack for school? Remember to put the pencil case, books, and notebooks for the subjects you will have tomorrow.", instead of just "can you go prepare your backpack?". Until my adoption, the future was unpredictable to me!

Be anxious, sad, or isolate myself

That's why I need... you to help me manage the emotions I'm feeling. I may begin to show signs of depression, anxiety, or even isolation, due to thoughts and memories of my past experiences. You need to encourage me to use my words to try to explain how I feel and why I feel the way I do. You can distract me by talking about things that make me feel better. If I'm anxious, talk to me to understand what makes me feel this way. Then you can teach me what I can do to feel better, such as doing relaxation and breathing exercises, doing an activity with me, or encouraging me to think about funny things.



Complain about physical pain

That's why I need... you to help me understand what's going on. I can complain of pain, even after I have been seen by a doctor and they have ruled out an injury or illness. It is important that you don't devalue what I feel and

that you consider that I may feel this way because of the previous trauma I went through. You can help ease these pains by helping me to calm down and by pampering me. You can use breathing exercises, massages, talk about how I feel or direct me to activities that you know I enjoy and that are comforting to me.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As an older child (7-10 years-old), I might...

Ask myself why my biological parents didn't keep me

That's why I need... you to explain and help me understand why my biological parents couldn't keep me, in an age-appropriate way, while avoiding attributing blame or talking negatively about them.

At this stage of my development, my problem-solving skills becomes more complex, which can lead me to question and wonder if my biological parents had other options besides adoption that would allow them to keep me. I might also wonder if they ever wanted me.

It's important that you explain my birth parents' circumstances to me in a simple, age-appropriate way that doesn't make me feel rejected or unwanted. You can say something like:

"Sometimes when people have a baby, they can't take care of him/her or any other child. It's never because of something wrong the child has done. You know babies need a lot of care, day and night, right? They need healthy food, a warm place to sleep, to be cared for when they're sick, and to be cuddled when they cry. Your biological parents knew they couldn't give you all these things, so they

resorted to adoption to find parents who could give you everything you needed to thrive.

Or, in other cases, the biological parents, being sick or not knowing how children should be treated, put you



in danger and social services had to protect you, finding you a family where you could grow up safely. And we were lucky enough to be able to meet you and have you as our child forever!"

Wondering if my biological parents regret giving me up for adoption or why they never came looking for me.

That's why I need... you to make me feel safe and to explain the situation to me, without making me feel rejected and abandoned.

At this age I can start to wonder if my biological parents think about me and if they feel unhappy or regret the decision they made. These doubts can make me feel confused, more anxious, and sadder.

You should reassure me that even if my parents are saddened by the decision they made, they know it was the best for me and are happy that I found a family like ours that takes good care of me.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

**As an older child
(7-10 years-old), I might...**



Ask myself whether I'm different from non-adopted children

That's why I need... you to reassure me that I'm just like any other child and that I just have a different family history.

Sometimes, I can feel different from other children and even think that, because I'm adopted, I don't have the same characteristics as others.

In this case, it's important you explain to me that, despite being adopted, I'm

just like any other child my age. Still, you should be honest and say that the story of how I came to my family is different when compared to other children's who weren't adopted. Adoption is just another way to start a family. You should also assure me that this doesn't change your feelings for me, that you love me just like a biological child and that adoption doesn't change my place within the family, school or in any other context.

Ask myself whether I'm different from my adoptive siblings (my adoptive parents' biological children) and whether you like them more than me

That's why I need... you to affirm and demonstrate that I'm as loved as my siblings.

At this point, I may think that my siblings, having been born from our mother, may be more important than me. You should

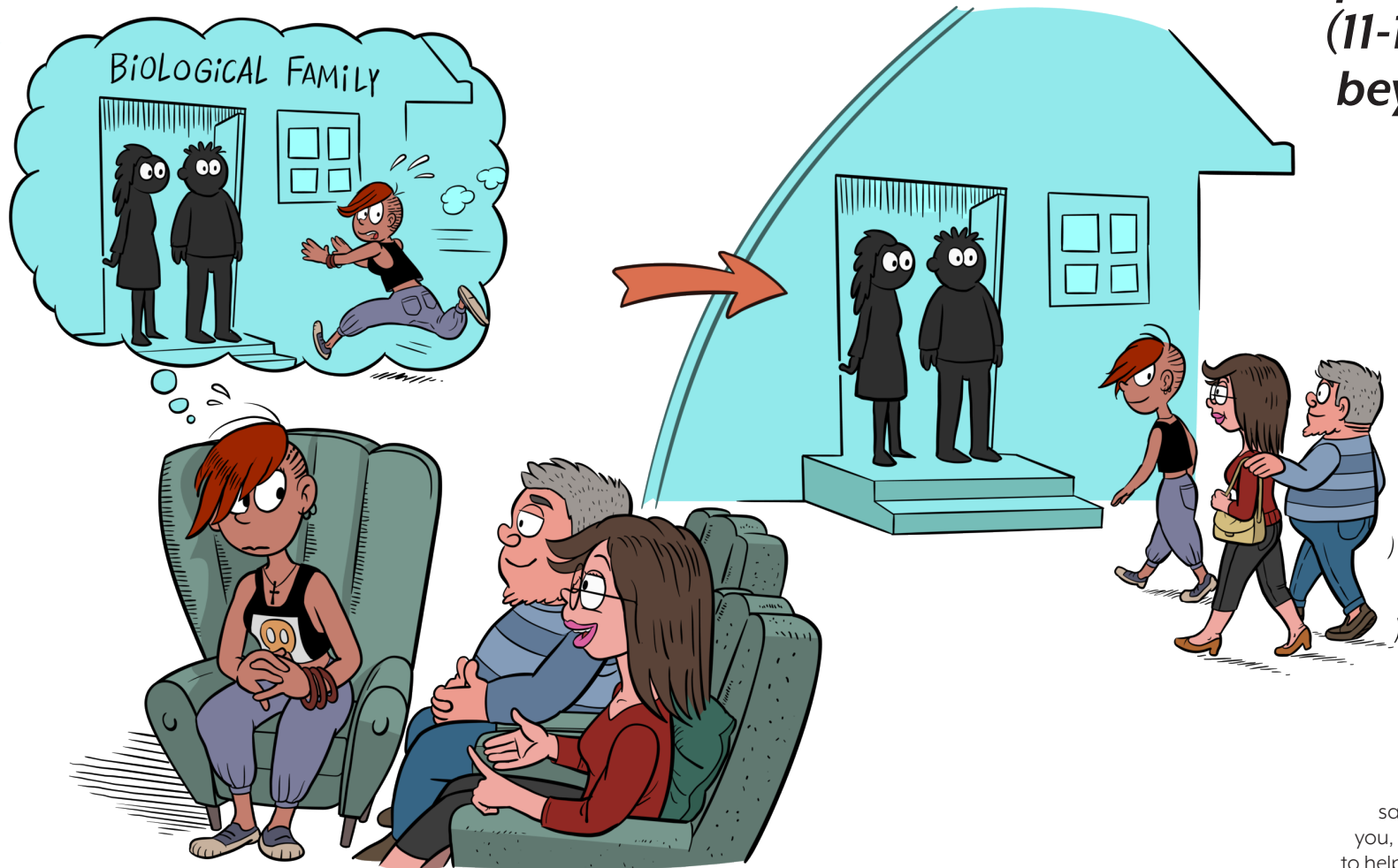
assure me that each of us holds a special place and that, in the absence of any one of us, the family wouldn't be the same.

Rivalry between siblings, which happens in all families, is normal, but you should make sure that our fights has nothing to do with the fact that I'm adopted.

If you already have children when I arrive, it's important you talk to them about me and the place I'll occupy in our family. If, on the other hand, my siblings are born after my adoption, you should explain to me that you'll continue to love me and that my role in the family will never change.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As a pre-teen and teenager (11-18 years-old and beyond), I might...



—NELSON—

Have difficulty dealing with the idea that I lost my parents and my biological family

That's why I need... you to help me understand this loss and integrate it into my identity, reinforcing that, despite having lost a family, I gained another.

At this age, my logical thinking develops which leads me to realize that although I gained this family through adoption, I also lost my biological family. This can be a difficult topic to manage and one that can lead to some emotional instability on my part.

So, it's important that you talk to me about the loss, and that you help me integrate it into my story, by explaining why it happened and giving me all the information, you have about my biological family, in way that is appropriate for my age and level of understanding. You can also help me to recognize my emotions, naming them and reinforcing that it's normal that some days I feel sad when I think about my biological family and that you, my adoptive parents and family, will be by my side to help me deal with these feelings when they arise.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As a pre-teen and teenager (11-18 years-old and beyond), I might...

Have disproportionate emotional reactions to situations

That's why I need... you to help me adjust the intensity of my emotions to situations. I may display more intense emotions that are not consistent with the situations I experience, potentially due to exposure to a prior trauma that I associate with the current situation and that has not been well managed and resolved. You can help me by talking to me about it, showing understanding of my frustration, and helping me to have a new perspective. You can also direct me to my five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) so that I can relax. You can suggest activities that are relaxing and that distract me, like listening to music, watching a movie, playing a board game with me, going for a walk, or having a snack that I like. My intense reactions are not necessarily directed at you. My anger and frustration are probably associated with negative past experiences. Try to keep calm and not take my attitudes and behaviour personally. Once I've calmed down, you can talk to me about signs

my body sends when my emotions are getting out of hand and how I can stay calm and control them again.

Have impulsive behaviours and reactions

That's why I need... you to help me think before I act. I may tend to be more impulsive than other teens and I may have difficulty associating my behaviours with real consequences. You can help me understand that all my behaviours and decisions have consequences for me and sometimes for others. For example, if in a moment of anger, I break or destroy any of my belongings, do not feel obligated to replace them (unless they are essential). It is important that I understand that my actions have consequences. You can also give me examples of impulsive choices with negative consequences that happened in situations around me. For example, you can use protagonists' decisions or behaviours in movies or series to exemplify why it's important to think

before you act. Then you can discuss with me other decisions and behaviours that characters or people might have adopted in those situations. I need you to reassure me that you like me even though you don't like my behaviour.

Use addictive substances

That's why I need... you to help me avoid or reduce the consumption of these substances. I may be more predisposed to consume alcohol and marijuana than most teenagers, for example, because I am more likely to miss school or because I am in a group of friends who also consume. You can help me by adopting a reward system, with activities or other incentives that are important to me and by valuing my appropriate attitudes and behaviours. You can use this system to encourage me to be more involved at school and to prevent me from spending so much time with friends whose behaviours are not the most appropriate. You could also consider finding a mentor (for example, a sports coach) to accompany me and encourage my involvement or collaborate with teachers so that I have

more monitoring when I am not at home.

Want to run away from home

That's why I need... you to help me understand that I don't need to run away from home to do things I want. You can help me by exploring why I feel the need to escape and by making activities that I enjoy or want to do more accessible, so that I feel more involved in the family environment. Another strategy is to propose a "behavioral contract," rewarding appropriate behaviours and valuing my skills. For example, asking for permission to go out, reporting often on where I am, going to school consistently and without skipping, doing my homework, and not running away from home.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As a pre-teen and teenager (11-18 years-old and beyond), I might...

To question my value, within the adoptive family, among peers and other people

That's why I need... you to clarify that being adopted doesn't devalue me as a person at all.

During my adolescence I may start to notice certain views associated with adoption as a "secondary" way of being a parent and I might think this was an option you only considered because you, my adoptive parents, were unable to have biological children. This belief can make me feel unappreciated and make me question how I'm perceived, for example, by my friends or people outside my family.

So, you should reassure me that I've always been a much-desired child, regardless of how I came to be part of our family. You should also reinforce that adoption is just as legitimate a form of building a family just as a biological pregnancy is.

Want to talk to you about my origins, but being afraid that you will be sad or angry with me.

That's why I need... you to encourage my curiosity and talk to me about my origins.

It's important that you keep in mind that there are a wide variety of reactions I may have during my adolescence regarding my adoption.

Sometimes I may show a lot of interest and curiosity about my origins or, on the contrary, I may not even want to talk about it.

It's also possible that I may be afraid to share some of my doubts and questions with you, for fear that you'll get angry with me or think that I don't value our family.

So, you should convey enough openness for me to feel comfortable exploring with you questions about my origin, cultural



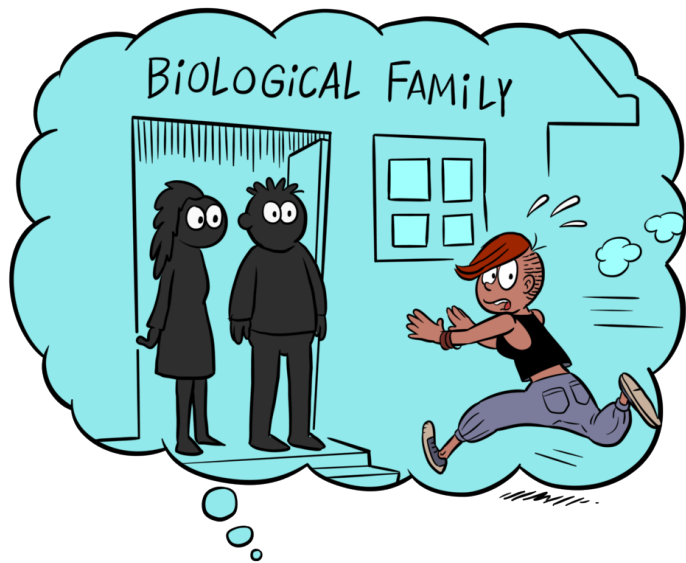
heritage, and background. You should also reassure me that any doubt or question I may want to ask is perfectly normal and that your role is to help me integrate and understand my story and that you'll never judge me for any questions I may have.

If you feel like we haven't discussed this topic in a long time and that I might be having a hard time starting the

conversation, you can do it with a small tip or statement that might open or spark my interest, such as "What do you think? What does your biological father look like? Did you inherit your hair/eyes (or another characteristic) from him?" If you feel like I don't want to talk about it, you should give me space and let me talk to you at my own pace.

What patterns of behaviors can I display throughout my life?

As a pre-teen and teenager (11-18 years-old and beyond), I might...



Wonder whether I should look for my biological parents.

That's why I need... you to support me in whatever decision I make.

This could be one of the most difficult phases we go through as a family. If,

on the one hand, I want to look for my biological family, on the other, I'm afraid you won't understand my decision. I may even have some anxiety about the possibility that my birth parents might not want to meet me.

So, you should make it clear that you understand my need to search for my

origin and roots and that you'll be by my side to support me in everything I need. You should also affirm and demonstrate that the search for my biological family in no way changes the place I occupy in our family and that it's natural to want to know about my history and origin.

However, you should be as honest and truthful as possible, helping me to manage my expectations regarding my biological parents. If you know they won't be interested in getting to know me better, you should try to explain it so that I don't feel rejected or discouraged, but so that I know what I can expect if I try to contact them now or in the future.

Have difficulty building my identity having two families, the one I was born into and the one I grew up with and figuring out with which one I most identify.

That's why I need... you to help me navigate this stage of my development and answer several questions that are essential for building my identity and self-concept, as well as my self-esteem.

During adolescence, I'll probably ask

myself many times, "Why was I put up for adoption?" "Who were my biological parents and what kind of people were they?" "Was I loved by my biological family?" and, finally, "Who am I?"

So, I need you to support me and be prepared to answer these questions honestly, so that I can positively integrate them into my identity.

It's important that you share all the information you have about my biological family, so that I feel I have some details that can guide me when I think about our similarities or differences.

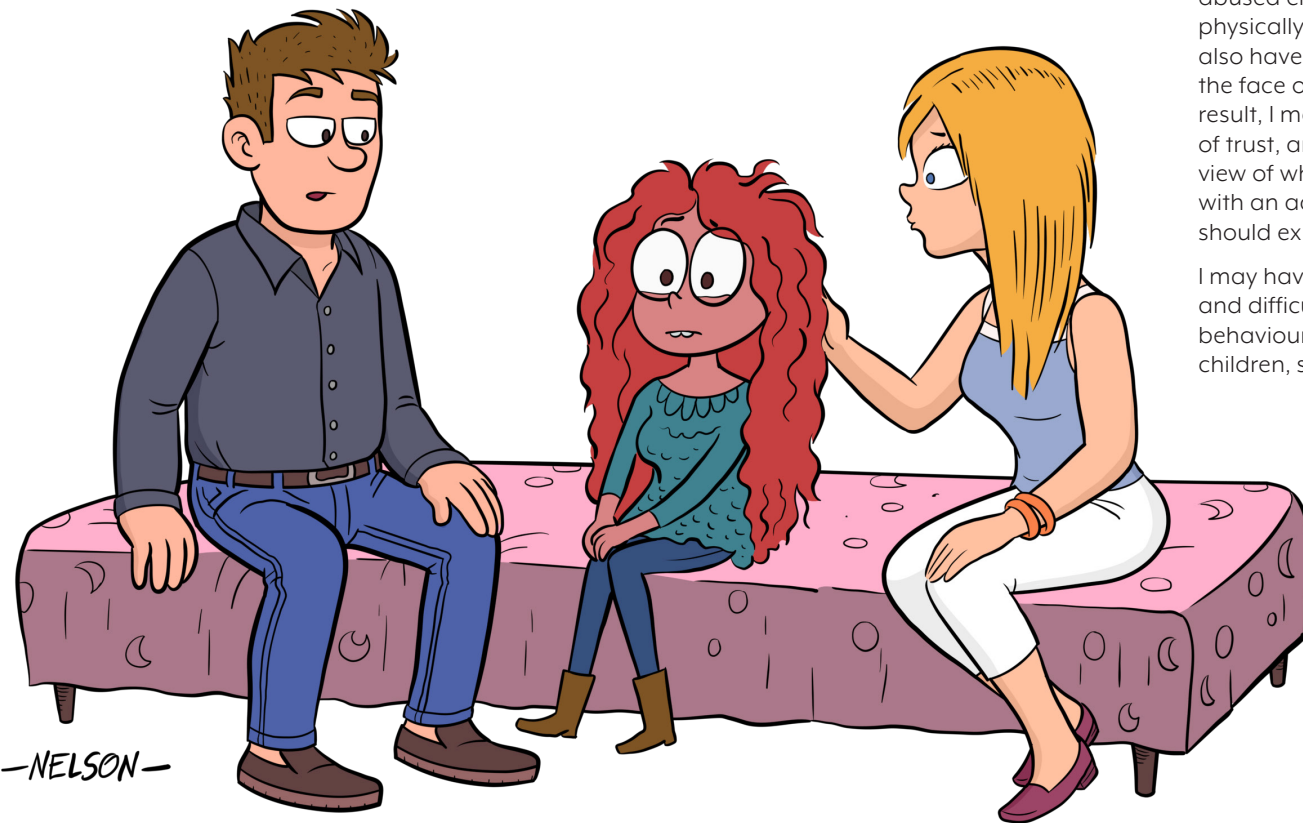
You can also help me by identifying characteristics you think we have in common or even the differences I have with you or other members of our family. This helps me understand that I have a lot in common with you, without, however, ignoring the differences that exist between us.

For example, you could say something like: "We're so similar, we're both fun, messy, we have the same sense of humour, we like the same movies, books, activities..." You can also point out our differences from a positive point of view, for example, "Sometimes I wish I were more like you... so calm, fun, active, talented..."

Other behaviours

I may manifest if:

I was a victim of sexual abuse...



If I have been a victim of sexual abuse, I may need you to help me and to be more patient and dedicate more time and availability to deal with my complex behaviours and needs.

It is important for you to remember that I may have been abused emotionally as well as physically and sexually. I may also have become vulnerable in the face of my abuser, and as a result, I may experience fear, lack of trust, and have a distorted view of what normal interactions with an adult are and what I should expect from them.

I may have more challenging and difficult-to-manage behaviours compared to other children, such as:

- Aggressive behaviours such as aggressive language, hitting, kicking, spitting, grabbing and throwing objects at other people.
- Destructive or avoidant behaviours, such as cutting things, destroying property, lying, wanting and/or trying to run away. I may have difficulty controlling myself, have incontinence or even suffer from enuresis (not controlling urine) and encopresis (not controlling the expulsion of stools).
- Sexualised, inappropriate or abusive behaviour, such as masturbating in public, compulsively masturbating (which can cause injury and wounds), exposing myself or undressing in front of others, touching, or playing with other children inappropriately, using sexualized language or making sexual advances towards adults.

These behaviours and characteristics can be more challenging and will require well-informed and sensitive responses, either from you or from other adults and professionals who contact me. You should inform yourself about how sexual abuse can influence my development, functioning and self-esteem, as well as about the situation of abuse I experienced. This information will help you to know

Other behaviours

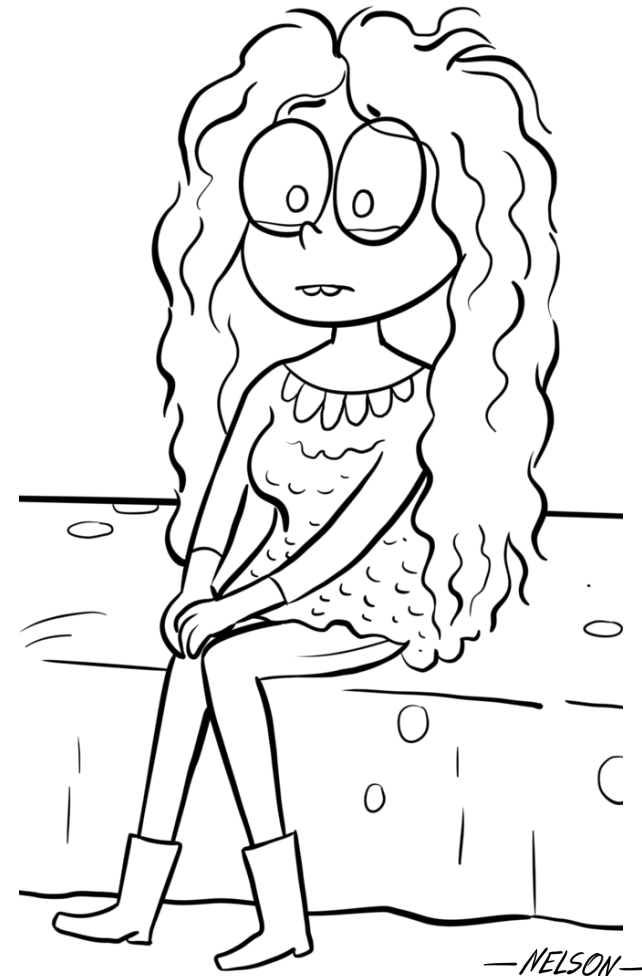
I may manifest if:

I was a victim of sexual abuse...

what implications it may have on the daily functioning of family life, such as bath time, bedtime and occasions for gifts or other important events.

You must reflect on and understand your own feelings and prejudices about sexual abuse so that you can have and model appropriate behaviours that help me deal with my own feelings. You can help me change my behaviour and understand what is normal, healthy and expected in my relationships with others and particularly with adults. It is important that you create an environment suited to my needs and use strategies to deal with my abuse-related behaviours, such as:

- Establish clear and firm “loving boundaries” – Establish boundaries regarding my personal space and that of others. You can make a schedule that determines the situations in which I should give space to other people and vice versa.
- Establish rules for behaviours of a sexual nature – Establish firm rules about what behaviours are acceptable or not. You can explain it, in a simple way, by doing an activity with me, that clarifies the acceptable behaviours. This activity consists of drawing a person or a body and identifying which parts can be touched only by me or by other people (and by whom), as well as which parts can be touched in public or in private.
- If my behaviours do not improve and they start to have negative effects on my daily functioning or that of the family, you should ask for help and seek psychotherapeutic support.



How to talk about adoption

Considering that disclosure and adoption conversations are central themes for the development of adopted children and youths, like me, here's a list of suggestions, strategies and tips for the adoption conversations to run as smoothly as possible:

The sooner the better

Sometimes adoptive parents may want to wait until they think we're ready to hear and understand our adoption story. But the truth is that information should be shared with us as soon as possible, so that we feel like we "always knew" that we were adopted. So, the sooner you tell us, the easier it'll be for us to deal with that information in the future.

Posture and tone are key factors

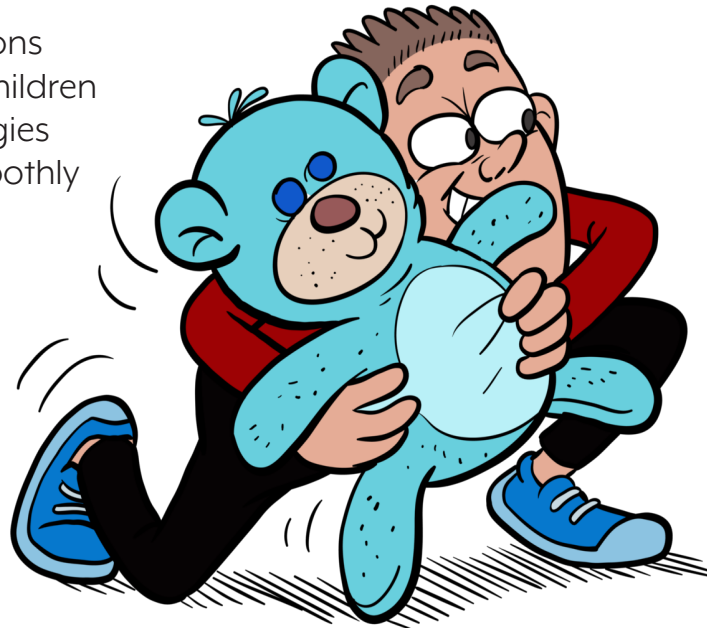
It's important to maintain a calm, positive tone of voice and a relaxed body posture. By doing so, you're letting us know that adoption is a comfortable and natural topic that you don't mind discussing. It makes us feel that you're happy and comfortable with the way we've become a family.

Play is your ally

Play, especially with younger children, is a great way to explore adoption and the feelings associated with it. You could try a scenario where two toys (e.g., dolls or animals) want to adopt another toy that needs parents. Just give a suggestion/ indication and leave the rest of the story to us.

If you're unsure, ask

Our questions may be simple or complicated and you should make sure you answer us with the information we are looking for. For example, if I ask you "where did I come from?" I may not be referring to where I was born, but maybe I'm looking for more information about my biological parents.



-NELSON-



Don't know everything? Admit it.

If you don't have much information about the circumstances of my adoption, be honest, but try to offer me more information, even if it's general. For example, if you don't know what prompted my birth parents to resort to adoption, you can say, "We're not sure if that's what happened in your case, but we know that many birth parents put their children up for adoption because... (they can't take care of them, they have other difficulties, etc.). Maybe that's what happened with your biological parents and what made them make that decision."

Take some time and space to think it over

If you just need a moment to think about the answer, you can repeat what I said to "gain" more time. If you feel you need more time to think about the answer, you can say something like, "That's a good question. Let me think about it for a while and we'll talk more about it over dinner," for example.

How to talk about adoption

Give full attention or not?

When we're younger, it's important to have your full attention during these conversations, so you should put yourself on our level and maintain eye contact. When we're older, we may feel more

comfortable sharing our issues while doing other things. During parallel activities, while you're driving or cooking, can be perfect moments to have these conversations.



—NELSON—

Always be ready to move on or change the subject

The toughest questions and sometimes the most intense conversations about adoption tend to take less than 10 minutes, even if they seem to take much longer at the time. So, if we indicate that we're ready to change the subject, take our cue and change the theme of the conversation.

Remember previous conversations

We may ask the same questions, in different ways, over the years, so if you remember important information or find it important to give information at a certain point, you can say "Remember when you asked me about [...]? I've been thinking about it, and I wanted to tell you that [...]".

Keep conversations age appropriate but never lie

It's important to reveal details about our history, gradually and as our understanding develops. But be careful with contradictions later. Always try to be truthful and honest, even if it's sometimes difficult to discuss parts of the process.

Give occasional tips

If we haven't talked about adoption in a while, you can try starting a conversation casually by making a comment like, "Sometimes I think about your birth parents, like on Mother's and Father's Day. What about you?" So, you convey to us that not only are you open to discussing the matter, but it's okay for us to think about our biological parents.

Quantity also matters

Having frequent conversations about adoption and other related topics is essential for it to become a common and natural topic of conversation in the familial context. And I'll give you a tip: If you don't remember the last time we talked about adoption, maybe it's time to revisit the subject.

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DATASHEET

TITLE

Challenges of Adopted Children: What is expected?

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EDITED IN 2023

ISBN 978-972-8003-80-7

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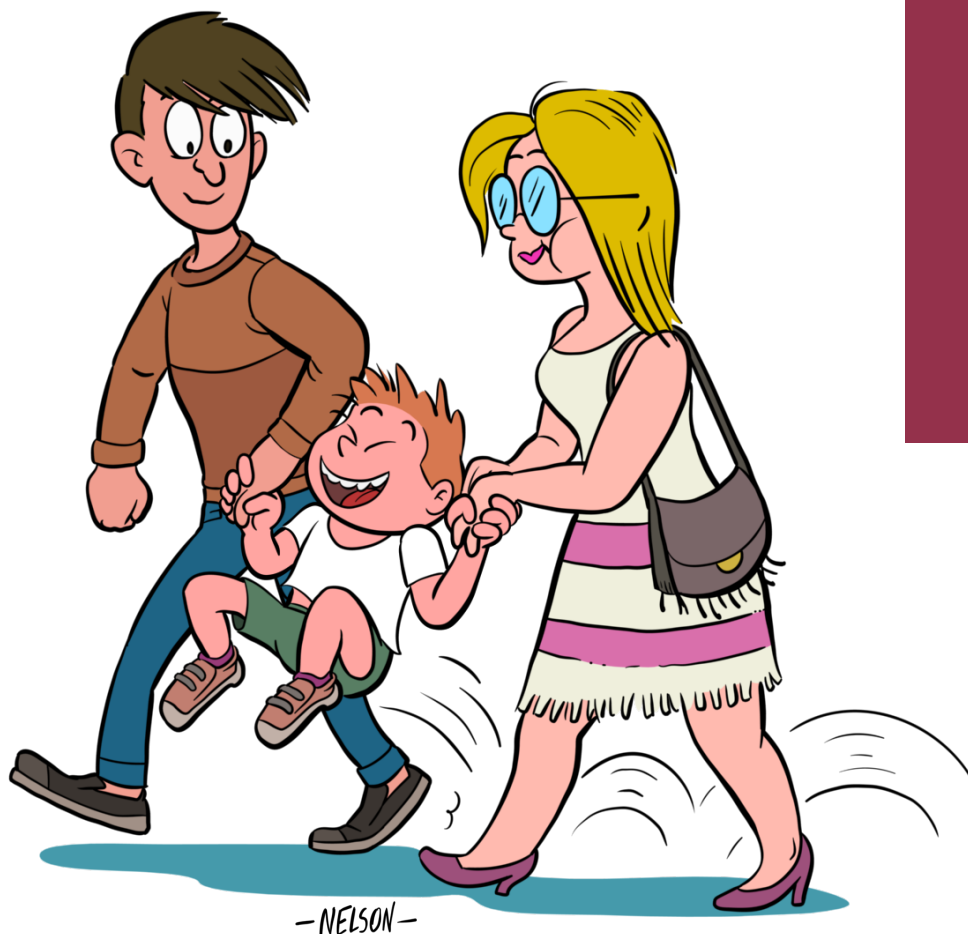
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Contemporary family presents an enormous diversity. The adoptive family is just one of several ways to form a family and, within adoptive families, there is still a great diversity, so we cannot speak of adoptive family, but of a plurality of adoptive families.

Adoptive families also evolve through a life cycle characterized by the variety of the family's own developmental tasks. Most of these tasks are like those experienced by non-adoptive families, however, some tasks are unique to this form of family life. At every stage of a family life, parents and children face adoption-related issues that can complicate the way each family member deals with and resolves the more universal tasks of family life.

This is why IAC has an help line - **Linha SOS Família-Adoção**, which aims to participate in the development and improvement of adoption, defending the best interests of the child, promoting their well-being, their family integration and enhancing their personal development, with a view to building a positive identity.

The actions of this help line aim to provide emotional support to families, adopted children and youth who need it, and specialized advice and independent consultancy to all professionals involved in a situation of adoption, especially to teachers, educators and assistants who are constant elements in children's daily lives.



If you need clarifications, request advice or support, you can contact **Linha SOS Família-Adoção** Adoção on Tuesdays (9 am-1 pm), and Thursdays (2 pm-5 pm), by telephone: +351 800 210 555 or mobile: +351 924 134 760 (WhatsApp).

You can also send an email with your questions to: sos.familia.adocao@iacrianca.pt

