

Q&A with Dale and Raquel School

Fall brings shorter days, football, Halloween and school work. Some assignments can bring stress and tears to any child (and his/her parents!), but there are certain assignments that are particularly challenging for a child who joined their family by adoption.

Assignments such as timelines beginning at birth, requests for baby pictures, or autobiographies can require information that's not available to some children. Projects about genetics, studies of other countries, or family trees can highlight differences that a child might not be ready to bring attention to or to share with others.

Your reaction as a parent should depend on your child's age and their personality. Children in pre-school and early elementary school may enjoy having you visit the classroom to do an adoption presentation. Children in later elementary years may not want you to come into their classroom but may appreciate your help in talking to the teacher about the assignment. By middle school and high school, your job is to provide support to your child as they address the situation directly with their teacher.

Any interaction with the school should be in a respectful, cooperative manner. Try to understand the motivation behind an assignment and offer an alternative rather than demanding a project be dropped completely. For instance, a timeline may be assigned to illustrate how to chart historical events. Alternatives could be to start the timeline at some point in the past (not necessarily birth), let your child decide what types of significant events to include, or create a fictional character's timeline.

Regardless of the approach you take, support the way your child chooses to do an assignment. Also use these situations as opportunities for family discussions and teachable moments. With younger children, these assignments may stimulate questions or feelings they have about their adoption story. Acknowledge that you also wish you had pictures from when he or she was a baby or you wish you had been there when he or she was born. With older children, opportunities to discuss the difference between "mean" comments and ignorance may also present themselves.

For additional help with school assignments, visit www.adoptivefamilies.com/school