

Q&A with Dale and Raquel

Family Traits

It's a family gathering, possibly a reunion or a holiday. Maybe there are some group photos taken. And then... the talk turns to family resemblances. "Isn't it amazing how Johnny looks just like Uncle Steve did when he was little?" "Sarah certainly has the Smith family blue eyes!"

The remarks are innocent enough but if members of this family joined it by adoption, they can feel excluded. Your child may be standing in the photo with beautiful brown eyes instead of the trademark "Smith blue." The birth relative they resemble may literally be a world away. Education of family members can help them realize the impact their remarks can have over time. Typically, people make these comments without really thinking about them. Gentle discussions or suggestions can go a long way in reducing their frequency.

Younger children may not even understand the questions but for older children a private conversation with you afterwards can help them process what they've heard. Have a give and take dialogue. Ask your child how they feel when people bring up common family traits. Share how you feel. Perhaps it makes you think of their birth parents and the beautiful curly hair or long legs they might have had. If you have pictures of birth parents, look at those and search for similarities between your child and their birth families. Talk about traits you have in common. Perhaps you are both athletic or have the same quirky sense of humor.

One of the lasting gifts you can give your child is self-acceptance. Celebrating the ways in which we are all different but yet similar is a way to help them achieve it.