

Five Hot Buttons Not to Push

By [Patricia Irwin Johnston](#)

The following article has been excerpted from the May 2001 book from Perspectives Press: *The Infertility and Adoption Publisher* ***Adoption Is a Family Affair! What Relatives and Friends Must Know*** Those reading it as a print out will find it on the internet at <http://www.perspectivespress.com/hotbuttons.html>

These are examples of amazingly insensitive comments heard recently by members of INCIID's Adoption Waiting Room Internet bulletin board. Names have been changed to protect both the guilty and the innocent. There are many people, who, before reading *Adoption Is a Family Affair!*, might not even have understood what was so bad about some of these comments, but you probably get it now. If you see yourself reflected or reported here, you may have some apologizing to do. If, on the other hand, you feel confident that you were never so insensitive, good for you! In that case, perhaps these examples will serve as an impetus for your helping to get the rest of your family circle better prepared for the addition adoption will bring to the family.

5. "What about the money?" (Didn't your mother teach you it was bad manners to talk about money, politics and religion?)

- "From my mother-in-law when we first told her that we were going to adopt, "You know, you can get a Mexican baby for \$250!" "
- Friends of mine adopted, and shortly after adopting the husband was telling a client about it and the client asked, "Oh, well how much did she cost you?" No this was not a blundering idiot like most, but a social worker!
- Q: "Why would you spend so much money on adoption after spending so much money on infertility treatment?"
A: "Well, didn't you just buy that nice \$35,000 SUV? This is our family we are talking about. Priceless!"
- My brother-in-law told his kids that we were "going to Korea to buy a baby!"
- Someone asked me if adopting babies from China was like a black market! I had to explain how they take good care of the babies and rigorously screen who they will allow to adopt and that the fee is used to keep the orphanages running and take care of all the kids, including those who won't be adopted. I sure don't ever want my kid getting the idea that she was bought on the black market.
- An acquaintance who heard about our plans asked us "How much will your child cost?" (ARGHHHHHHHHHH) No further comment with this one. On the other hand, yes, my husband and I have had this question numerous times! Some people who have inquired are very sincere, as they too, are weighing the decision to continue infertility treatment, live childfree, or move to adoption. That is very understandable, and I respect that question from them.

4. "Adoption connections aren't real connections anyway!" (Do you really want to say "You can do better than this"?)

- Are you sure you tried hard enough?" (to conceive)
- Q: "Does it bother you that they won't be of your own?"
A: "My favorite comment to this one is what I read from the INCIID Adoption Waiting Room bulletin board earlier this summer: 'I gave birth to them through my heart'.... that is the shorter version I use with this stupid question. It makes people think about how ignorant they were for asking in the first place."
- I mentioned to my sister-in-law that I wanted to name my future adopted son Truman, nickname Tru. She said "You can't call him Tru Kingsley, because he is not a true Kingsley. He will not be related....umm, I mean by blood". I was appalled and since then have refused to tell anyone the names I am considering for my future children.
- My husband adopted his first wife's daughter at the age of 9 months (she is now 22) and adopted my son at the age of 3 (he is now 10)...much to our surprise, I am now 30 weeks pregnant. On New Years Day we went to husband's mother's house. His sister (whom he has never really liked and hadn't seen in over a year) comes swooping in the door and hugs him and loudly exclaims, "I want to hug you before you get to become a real father." My husband said very angrily, "I've been a real father twice now, but thanks." He was so angry, and I was so angry, especially because both his son and his daughter heard her comment. I couldn't believe how stupid and totally insensitive and wrong her comment was.
- Q: "What's her mother's name?"
A: "My name is Lisa."
Q: "No, I mean her real mother's name."
A: "I'm her mother."
Q: "NO, I mean her real mother."
A: "What do you think I am? Polyester?"
And then, as if I must be some sort of an idiot, I said, "Ohhhh you mean her birthmother!"
Q: Then she said, "Well you knew what I meant all the time."
A: "No I didn't. I'm her real mother and I always will be. What do you think Sara will go through if she heard u say that I'm not her real mother and she is too young to understand?"
- From my brother who has a master's and a PhD in theology when my mom told him over the phone that we were going to adopt: "Why don't they just have their own kids?"

- “Too bad you have to adopt...your real kids would have been real cute.”
- Q: “What does her mom look like?”
A: “You tell me you are looking right at her!”
Q: The nerve of this woman She kept prying she said “Come on you know what I mean.”
A: I said “No ,I do not!”
- “She looks like she could be yours!”
- “Can they get her back?”
- “What are you going to do when he’s three or four and the birthparents want him back?”
- “Can you give him back if you find out he’s retarded or something?”
- An adult adoptee asked me, “If you and your husband get divorced, will you have to give him back?” I was so dumbfounded I didn’t respond how I really should have, which would have been to ask if her parents would have had to “give her back” if they had ever divorced.

3. “Adopted people are ‘flawed.’” (The Bad Seed myth, or is it Racism?)

- My reproductive endocrinologist said, “You might not want to adopt... you never know what you’re going to get.” As if you know with a biological baby!
- “Adopted kids are always so stupid!”
- I was talking to my sister, who by the way, is very well educated and is currently in a high-paying, high-profile job... working for an AA man. I was mentioning to her about our long wait for our child. She (once again) asked what my “criteria” was for our child... meaning, had we requested a newborn, toddler, what race..etc. I told her that all I asked for was that the child be under age 3. To which she said, with much surprise, “Even a black child?” “Yeeeeessss” I replied. “But you don’t know how to cook collard greens, or how to comb thier hair!!... and Desiree (the daughter born to us) will KNOW that s/he is not her real sibling!!” she says, totally serious. Funny thing is, (and I also told her this) that I am hispanic (Colombian), yet I have NEVER cooked a Colombian meal for my daughter!
- “I never knew Adopted Children could be so cute”
- An old friend of the family said “I think if someone is stupid enough to get pregnant and doesn’t want the baby, she should turn around, walk the other way, and never look back.” I thought that was so cruel. As if he is so superior that he never has made a mistake, and as if a birthmother could ever forget her child. This experience taught me not to tell many people about our open adoption. It’s really no one’s business.
- A co-worker of my husband said “I wouldn’t adopt, you will never get a perfect child.” I was stunned when he told me. She has a toddler who I am sure isn’t “perfect” and I think anyone who expects any child to be “perfect” is setting that child up for a life of misery!! My husband told her we were hoping not to have a perfect child, because it wasn’t going to have perfect parents. GO husband!!
- When I told my friend (a woman who was aghast that there was another girl in her play group with the same name as her daughter-she wanted hers to be the only one with that name) that if I had a boy, I’d name him Noah she exclaimed “Yikes! Why would you name him something so unusual, he’s going to stand out enough as it is. Why not name him something normal, like Larry?”
- Q: “Why don’t you just try to get a healthy caucasian baby?”
A: “HELLO!!!!!! We want a baby from another country. That is our choice.”
- Q: “Why on earth would you want to adopt a black baby. They are ugly, have kinky hair and are always boarder babies. No black baby is ever given up for adoption without drugs and alcohol. Could turn out to be a criminal, too.”
- Apparently, everyone born in Asia speaks an Asian language because it’s a genetic thing. People are forever asking me if our toddler son Cameron (who was born in Vietnam)can speak English. Just for fun, I told one person he was bi-lingual. After all, he was just a baby and saying only ma which happens to be Vietnamese for mother) and ba which is Vietnamese for grandmother.) I suppose he’s as bilingual as the next baby!
- Our Latina daughter was born in Alabama, but people are always asking me, “Do you think she will have an accent?”
- “Why not just adopt from Russia? At least they’d look like you?”
- A girlfriend who told me during my infertility treatment, “Why not just get a dog, it’s a lot easier” (probably should have ended the friendship right then) noted the other night that “It’s a good thing you are adopting an Asian kid, because he’ll be short like the two of you!” When I informed her that Koreans come in all different sizes like Americans she said, “Well we all know that Asians are generally shorter than Americans.”
- I am 6’ and my husband is 6’3” We have had two people tell us we shouldn’t be adopting from Guatemala because our daughter will be short. Who cares!!
- “Oh, no! You’re going to adopt a Mexican?”

2. “Didn’t you know that...” (Ignorance isn’t bliss in personal relationships)

- “Why don’t you just go and pick one out?” Gee, where’s the closest Babies-R-Us store?
- “Will you tell her she’s adopted?” Duh...our Chinese daughter and we won’t exactly look alike.
- We adopted our daughter from China in Dec. 1999. A few months ago we went out to dinner with my father- and mother-in-law. Our daughter was eating rice and getting it everywhere (she was 16 mos. Old.) My father-in-law said, “If she were home she would know how to use chopsticks by now.” I just gave him a weird look and said “She is home and what does chopsticks have to do with it?” I know he did not say it to be mean; he is just clueless. He loves his granddaughter to death.
- “If God intended for you to have children, you’d be pregnant by now.”
- We are African American, and we have been asked more than once: “What’s taking you so long. Aren’t there piles of AA babies that need homes? You must be doing something wrong!” I think that her comment does kind of reflect this notion that there are a lot of AA infants to be adopted — and this is in part supported by agencies and other adoption professionals. There isn’t a “surplus of AA babies out there. What is closer to reality is that there are a lot of older children of color in the foster care system, many of whom are adoptable.

- At Christmas my sister-in-law asked about the progress with the adoption, commenting that it is taking a long time. I told her our homestudy is being reviewed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and this time frame is about what the agency projected. She responded, “Well, if it doesn’t work out you can always go for artificial insemination.” Was she really paying that little attention during all the years we struggled with infertility????
- Q: “Do you get to name her?” She was still a baby, and had only the name the Chinese government assigned to her. Should I have answered “No, I have to call her Rover for the rest of her life”?
- “Well, you should know adoption is expensive”...Hmmm., well thanks for telling us that. Those hours researching adoption must have done us no good.
- “You mean you can still adopt within the United States?”

And, last, but not least, Sad-but-True variations on the NUMBER ONE INSENSITIVE COMMENT TO THOSE WHO ARE ADOPTING-”Now you’ll get pregnant! They always do.”

- Adopt and then you’ll get pregnant at last!” Does that mean the adoption won’t have any meaning then if a woman becomes pregnant?
- Everybody in my life knows that my significant other is a woman and that we want to be mommies. So, when I told my oldest sister that we were planning on adopting, she delivered the usual line about getting pregnant now that we’ve decided to adopt! So I told her no, we’ve stopped all treatment. We’re building our family through adoption. She insisted, “Oh no, you won’t need treatment. You’ll get pregnant now that you are going to adopt.” I finally just said, ‘Do you know how babies are made?’
- “Once you adopt you will soon become pregnant!” That is impossible since I had a complete hysterectomy. These people who say this to me, knowing I had the surgery, are down right mean. How cruel!
- My mother and my mother-in-law both really believe that once I adopt I’ll get pregnant. In fact, I hear this from everyone I tell that I am trying to adopt. Sheesh, pregnancy after adopting only happens in about 5% of the cases & who knows what their fertility problem was.
- My mother-in-law added the best comment to this one. “If you adopt and get pregnant I am not coming to Ontario to help you with babysitting!” My response is “THANK GOODNESS!”

But it’s not all bad. Marni checked in to report, “On the other side, I told one of my oldest/dearest friends (whose wife is thirty-two weeks along with their second baby) that I almost felt like I was pregnant. His comment? ‘Well, you are an expecting mother.’ Now, that’s what I call a great comment.”

You can redeem yourself and learn to be as sensitive as Marni’s friend! What’s more, you can help others “get it,” too. Keep reading...

If you found this excerpt from *Adoption Is a Family Affair!* provocative or enlightening you’ll love the book!
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[Pat Johnston](#), the publisher at Perspectives Press, Inc., is the author of several other books, including [Taking Charge of Infertility](#), [Understanding Infertility: Insights for Family and Friends](#), [Adopting after Infertility](#) and [Launching a Baby’s Adoption](#). She also edited the poetry anthology [Perspectives on a Grafted Tree](#).

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