

Let Kids Know They Are Adopted

- Meet Saras and her adopted daughter Varsha, two counselling psychologists who share their personal experiences with people
- Adoption need not be a secret that is dramatically revealed to the child at a certain age. It has to be dealt with honesty

• Archita Suryanarayanan

Saras and her daughter Varsha Swamy have many things in common, and one is a tattoo of a triangle overlapping with a heart — the universal adoption symbol. As full-time counselling psychologists, the mother-daughter duo focus on helping people understand that adoption is an equally natural way to bring a child into a family. They both share their personal experiences and professional knowledge in the area with prospective parents.

Adoption need not be something that you suddenly sit down at a table and announce to your child when you think he or she has reached a certain age, they say, and this isn't how they did it. "Right from her childhood, Varsha knew she had a *thoppai* (stomach) amma and an amma. She came to us when she was three-months-old, and I always told her stories about how adoption is natural," says Saras. Her now grown-up daughter shares her experiences with other parents and children to help them understand the issue better.

"I had known I was adopted for as long as I remember; there was no dramatic moment when I was told the news," says Varsha. Like any child, she was had questions about pregnancy, but always knew she had a different birth mother. "I used to be proud that I was adopted. When I was around eight, a girl asked me why was I so proud of the fact that someone abandoned me in a dustbin. I was shell-shocked as I had never thought of adoption that way, and went crying to my mother, who explained things to me," she recounts,



Saras and Varsha Swamy, symbolising their mother-daughter bond, inked themselves with a triangle overlapping with a heart which is the universal adoption symbol

adding that while adoption shouldn't be treated as a secret, there is no need to walk around with a label on your forehead.

Being an adopted child may come with its share of insecurities, but this is a part of growing up. "Girls may be more vulnerable to some of these, and they need to be dealt with honesty," says Saras.

"Everyone has insecurities, but adopted children start questioning themselves even more, especially while going through tough friendships and finding a partner for marriage. All problems that arise make you wonder whether it's because you're adopted. But the open atmosphere at home helped me through all of this," adds her daughter.

Nowadays, the 'search for roots' trend is also catching up in India, with children wanting to find their biological parents. "We left the option open to our daughter after she turned 18 to look for her parents, but presented both the positives and negatives of this. I didn't know what she felt about it until an adoption seminar where she told the audience her birth parents had moved on with their lives so she had moved on too," says an emotional Saras. Today, Varsha is happy with the only tangible thing of the past that her birth mother gave her — her name. Now a part of support groups and panel discussions about adoption, she turned her insecurity into strength and has also made it a part of her career. Adoption competency and counselling is still a niche field in India. It's very important for parents to handle adoption sensitively, they say. Since they have a beautiful mother-daughter relationship, the duo helps prospective parents take the decision. "This is our way of giving back to society," says Varsha.



Saras with her adopted daughter Varsha Swamy • Sunish P Surendran