

Birthfathers in the Lifebook

When is the right time to add information about a birthfather to the lifebook? How do you present it when you don't have any information? Should you leave him out altogether?

The other day my son asked me a question which led to a conversation about his birthmother. Once that question was satisfactorily addressed, he asked another – this time about his birthfather. Not having as much information about him, I answered to the best of my knowledge and abilities. Because we were within hearing range of my daughter, the one that never seems to have an issue with interjecting comments into a dialogue not originally involving her, the conversation took a turn... “I don't have a birthfather”, she said.

“Of course you do”, I replied. “Everyone has a birthfather.”

“But he wasn't married to Lidia.”

“No, but he is still your birthfather. Although I hope it will be the case for you when you have children, it is not necessary to be married to make babies. He helped create you.” ...

I thought about the implications of my daughter's statements. Was she rejecting him because of his relative obscurity? After all, in comparison to the substantial amount of information on the birthmother, we knew extremely little about him – only a name. Was her naiveté masking a realization that to father a child meant simply that he had sex with her birthmother? Did she just want “to disagree”, to take an opposing stand, something she does frequently now in her adolescent quest for independence?

I devoted “space” to Maria's birthfather in her lifebook. I think all lifebooks should mention him. If information is unknown, I would simply state something like “It takes two people to make a baby. Those two people are your birthparents. They gave you life. We don't know very much about your birthmother and birthfather, but we can say that you look a little like them.” Discussing heredity, both of outward physical appearance and innate skills and talents, bridges the gap by providing what facts you can.

When is he included? From the beginning! As soon as the birthmother is introduced, so should the birthfather be. While a child may have an easier time relating to a birthmother (whether by seeing other pregnant women or through caregiver role identification or simply because there is more known identification about her to share) it would be a disservice to leave the birthfather out entirely.

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