

You're Not My Real Mother!

by Jean MacLeod

“You’re not my REAL mother!”

Children who use “you’re not my real mother” as a weapon in anger, do it because it is the most hurtful (and obvious) thing they can think of saying. It is an especially surprising and upsetting statement if the child’s birthmother hasn’t been regularly discussed at home, as the adoptive mother can feel blindsided by her child’s rejection.

It helps to put the statement into perspective, and to use “you’re not my real mother” as a teaching moment. What is it the child needs when he uses the ‘ultimate weapon’ on his adoptive mother? He needs and wants his worst fear refuted: he wants to know that no matter what he says, his mom *will not abandon him*. He wants his mother to be in control of the situation and of the angry feelings being hurled around.

My own daughter went through a stormy phase as she learned to deal with the big feelings she carried that had to do with her adoption. I refused to get into a lose-lose conversation with my daughter about who was her “real mom”, and I refused to argue. I chose to point out what kind of mom I was, without denigrating the unknown birthmother:

“I’m the mom who makes GOOD CHOICES for you. I’m the mom who keeps you safe. I’m the mom who takes care of you the way a little child should be taken care of. I feed you and bathe you and sing to you. I’m the mom WHO WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU. I’m the mom who loves you, and I will love you forever!”

It is difficult for our children (and for us) to face what their birthmothers were unable to do for them, but our children also need to hear what kind of moms WE are, and we shouldn’t have to get lost in the healing process. An angry moment and a hurtful comment can actually work to reinforce your permanent place in your child’s life; how you handle your child’s angry feelings can open a door to discussion of deeper issues.

And for those exasperating “you’re not my *real* mother” moments where you are simply being tested by an intractable child in a nasty mood, there is always the unarguable:

“But I’m the one you’re stuck with!”

