
THEM BEFORE US



Curriculum

The Christian
Ethic for
Children's
Rights

Leader Guide

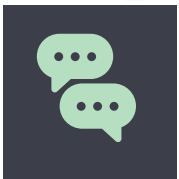
WHAT IS THE THEM BEFORE US CURRICULUM?

When Katy and Stacy wrote *Them Before Us: Why The World Needs a Global Children's Rights Movement*, they knew they needed to make a case for children's rights using the foundation of natural law because political and religious arguments have failed in the battles for marriage and family in the post-Christian West.

This resource is different. This resource uses the foundation of everything Them Before Us believes and draws out the underlying Christian ethic on marriage and family. We hope that Christians all over the globe will integrate God's story with the fight for the rights of children.



HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM



As the leader, you will often see a “leader note” with answers to the questions from the sections to help folks recall what was taught in the video or extra Bible verses for context to the teaching.

THEIR VOICES



Here you will read the true stories of the children who have been impacted by divorce, mother or father loss, and third party reproduction.



Look for the sticky note for additional information from research with citations to the references in the back of your book.

- **Q&A with Katy:** Starting on page 18, you'll find the questions and Katy's answers from every video session.
- **Appendix:** You'll find more resources, like our charts, studies, and references.
- **TBU University:** This leader guide is designed to be used along with the video curriculum you'll find under your account at Learn.ThemBeforeUs.Com. Participants will use a different guide.
- The ***Them Before Us* book** is not required for use of this curriculum but would be a great additional resource, especially for leaders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SESSION 1

Children's Rights 1

SESSION 2

Biology Matters 3

SESSION 3

Marriage Matters & Divorce 6

SESSION 4

Modern Families 9

SESSION 5

Reproductive Technologies 11

SESSION 6

Surrogacy & Adoption 15

SESSION 7

Katy Unplugged - Q&A 17

SESSION QUESTIONS

..... 18

APPENDIX

..... I

REFERENCES

..... IV

SESSION 1 | CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

- Which major social issue facing society would you solve if you could? Why?
- What connection do you see between what Katy shares about a child's right to his or her mother and father and that social issue?
- What are natural rights? Why are they an important foundation for the conversation on children's rights?
- What are the "three rules" that determine if something is a natural right?
- Use these three rules to evaluate something that our culture currently/frequently describes as a right and see if it passes the test.



Leader note: "Natural rights" are something all humans have, regardless of their differences in religion or politics. These rights are based on natural law—that is, the moral code for how all humans across society and cultures must live. The three things that determine if something is a natural right are: A natural right exists pre-government, no one has to provide a natural right, and a natural right is distributed equally (i.e., it does not vary in degree or amount). Romans 1 says that the law of God is written on our hearts. We find this by looking at our biological design and observing the natural world.

- Before today, have you heard the phrase "children's rights"? How should Christians go about redeeming and restoring the concept of children's rights that has become distorted, broken, or lost in a fallen world?
- What does it mean for children to have a right to their mother and father? How is that right violated today?
- What are the four specific demographics that God has a special heart for, especially in the Old Testament?



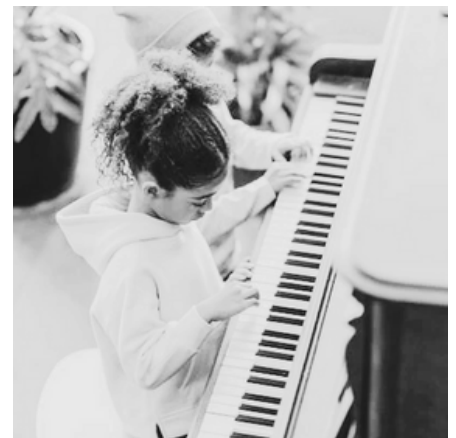
Leader note: The poor, the sojourner, the widow, and the fatherless are four demographics God states His heart for. The Bible doesn't reference "the motherless" because it's so foreign to humankind. Going forward, when you hear "protect the fatherless," it should go without saying that motherless children also need defending. Unlike in past times when children lost a mother or father to tragedies like war or childbirth, now children also experience mother and father loss because of cultural, legal, and technological violations of their rights.

Isaiah 59:14 says “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.” This verse insists that we advocate for justice specifically “in the public square.”

- *What does that look like when it comes to the fatherless & motherless ?*

Psalms 82:2-3 says “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.”

- *Who are the weak and fatherless in our communities?*
- *What can we do to give them justice, instead of showing partiality in ways that hurt them?*



Leader note: Some Christians think, or are told, that they should stay out of the “culture wars” and shouldn’t be involved in politics. But Isaiah connects the lack of justice with the lack of truth in the public square. A crucial step in addressing the violation of children’s rights in our society is being willing to speak the truth about what those rights are, how they’re being violated, and how adults can protect children.

THEIR VOICES:

Michael R: *“Without the connection to both biological parents, the process for a child to grow and mature is significantly hampered. Both scientific research and thousands of anecdotal experiences like mine make this abundantly clear. ..The greatest act of love a person could give their child (or prospective child) is the family involving both the mother and father as constant presences in their life as prescribed by God and attested to by nature. The most loving thing to do is to put Them Before Us.”*

Louise: *“I feel that as a donor conceived adult I have lived on the other side of this social and biological experimentation, and that what I have to report is more than mere opinion, but confirmation that the ancient landmarks, fatherhood, family, identity, are not unenlightened social constructs, but solid realities.”*

SESSION 2 | BIOLOGY MATTERS

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

- *What are some of the physiological effects that father absence has on children?*

3 Things Children Get when Their Right to Mom & Dad is Protected

1. Safety and Love

Biological parents are, according to the data, the most connected to, invested in, and protective of their children.

- *How do the reality of children's needs in the home reflect God's commands around sex and marriage?*

A CLOSER LOOK

Unrelated adults are statistically less connected to and less protective of kids than their own biological parents. Princeton researchers found that stepmothers provide stepchildren with less healthcare, lower quality education, and spend fewer dollars on food when compared to biological mothers.⁴ The starkest difference is seen in child safety. Researchers Martin Wilson and Margo Daly found that children are 120 times more likely to die from a beating at the hand of a step-father or a mother's boyfriend.⁵ Children's risk of experiencing all forms of abuse is highest in homes with a single parent and their partner.⁶

- *How should we think about the folks who are exceptions to this rule, the great step-parents and adoptive parents? Do they disprove the importance of biological connection?*

A CLOSER LOOK
Research has found that children's telomeres—the protective end caps on chromosomes—are significantly shortened in children who have lost their fathers.¹ Telomeres typically shorten with age. Early shortening is associated with high levels of stress. Girls without a dad enter puberty on average one year earlier than their peers,² which is associated with a number of health risks, including type 2 diabetes, heart problems, and breast cancer.³



Leader note: When we see non-biological parents making a deep investment in the lives of their children, we see adults putting children first.

Non-biological parents are capable of doing hard things on behalf of children and we celebrate adopted and step-parents who sacrifice to love their children. This doesn't mean that the ideal for children changes from their biological mom & dad married and in their home.

2. Biological Identity

- *Why do you think the “who am I” question can be answered from the “whose am I” question? Have you seen this in your own life or the lives of those you know?*

A CLOSER LOOK

Research shows that adopted adolescents who have contact with their biological families fare better than those who do not.

They are more satisfied with their adoptions,⁷ have higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, feel greater trust toward their parents, experience fewer feelings of alienation, and have better family functioning overall.

Nearly two-thirds of children with donor parents say that their donor is half of who they are.⁹

- *Are the great works in literature and film more likely to have a search for non-biologically related adults (mom’s boyfriend or a step parent) or biological mom or dad? Why do you suppose there’s a difference in the prevalence of one story over the other?*
- *Why is open adoption so much more common now and what need do we see emphasized (and as much as possible, met) in open adoption as opposed to closed adoption?*
- *What identity struggles do donor-conceived children experience? How are they similar to or different from the experiences of adoptees?*

3. Perfect Gender Balance in the Home

- *What are some situations or organizations where you’ve observed men and women complementing one another?*
- *Where are some areas in scripture where we see that God values and intentionally designed the differences between the sexes as a good thing?*

A CLOSER LOOK

Mothers and fathers contribute to children’s development in unique and essential ways. The way that a father speaks to and reads to a child is different from the way that a mother does, with fathers pushing children to grow in their language development skills while others often speak at a child’s level. Research has found that paternal reading at 24 and 36 months significantly predicted children’s language and cognitive skills at age 36 months as well as their book knowledge at preK.¹⁰



Leader note: God describes different callings and roles for men and women: Men and women are created differently from one another in Genesis for the sake of fulfilling the call to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:18-24); man is the head of his wife and his wife is the glory of her husband (1 Corinthians 11:4-7); men and women are each called to specific roles in the church and home (Ephesians 5:22-33, Titus 2:2-8, 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Timothy 3:1-13); cross-dressing is prohibited because God wants us to reflect and glorify him in our maleness and femaleness (Deuteronomy 22:5).

- What are ways you see mothers and fathers interacting differently with their kids?
- From a child's perspective, why does being both "mothered" and "fathered" matter? Can you think of examples from your own life?
- Does someone who doesn't feel like they fit the typical gender stereotypes mean that the differences between men and women don't matter?

A CLOSER LOOK

Mothers play an essential role in children's emotional development, including their ability to self-regulate. Columbia University neuroscientist Nim Tottenham has explained how babies are unable to regulate their central nervous system for the first several months of their lives. Instead, they rely on their mothers to bring down their stress levels and enable them to be soothed.¹²



Leader note: Men and women talk to their kids differently.

- Moms help children develop fine motor skills, dads help children develop gross motor skills.
- Mothers and fathers read to children differently.
- Mothers and fathers play with kids differently.

A mother's love and a father's love are different on both a biological and social level. In fact, sociologists argue that there's no such thing as "parenting," but only mothering and fathering.¹¹ Kids need both. The fact that there are "in general" statements that don't ring true for everyone doesn't mean that the differences between men and women are insignificant or that mothering and fathering are the same.

THEIR VOICES:

Alicia: "[When the DNA results came back] I discovered that my paternal grandmother wasn't my biological grandmother. Thus, my dad wasn't my biological father. So, in the process of trying to help my mother and try to heal my family tree, I opened a larger wound. I suddenly did not know who I was anymore. I had never been able to be close to my mother's side because of the dysfunction and fatherlessness in that side of the family...and then I had just discovered that the only family I did know and have connection with was not biologically connected to me at all."

Sarah: "I needed a father, as do most other girls growing up in single parent homes. I ended up being the statistic: high school drop-out, teenage runaway, homeless youth, a victim of sexual abuse by a step-parent, and pregnant at 17. Regardless of my mother's preferences, my rights were violated the second she wrote in a false name on my birth certificate — a legal document which belonged to me. Children aren't property. They aren't ours to do what we please with. I will never recover what's been lost, and neither will the millions of American children who suffer under the delusion that we only need a mom to make everything alright."

SESSION 3 | MARRIAGE MATTERS & DIVORCE

Mark 10:2-9.2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

- What do the five major religions (Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism) agree on?
- What are the three staples of a child's social-emotional diet?
- What is the only arrangement that gives children all three?



Leader note: The major religions agree that marriage is between male & female, that marriage connects a child to the man & woman that created him or her, and that marriage is a matter of justice for children.

The three staples of a child's socio-emotional diet are mother's love, father's love and stability. Lifelong marriage with mom and dad is the ideal arrangement that gives a child all three.

The Two Major Departures from Lifelong Marriage

1. Cohabitation

Katy says there are more children whose rights are being threatened by cohabitation than by gay marriage, reproductive technology, or novel "modern family" arrangements.

- What do you think of this? What are the specific ways that cohabitation threatens children's rights?

A CLOSER LOOK

Research shows that the question isn't whether unrelated adults pose an increased risk to kids, but *how much* risk they pose. In a survey of household composition and risk of fatal child maltreatment, the authors found, "...young children who reside in households with an unrelated adult are at nearly 50-fold risk of suffering a fatal inflicted injury, compared with children residing with two biological parents. The majority of perpetrators were male members of the decedent child's household."¹⁴



Leader note: Have the group search "mother's boyfriend" online. Read some results aloud. Were you surprised by the headlines?

Cohabiting couples are much more likely to break up than married couples. Their relationships typically last about 18 months.¹³

2. No-fault divorce

Katy describes no-fault divorce as the “original redefinition of marriage.”

- *What do you think of this? What does divorce cost kids?*
- *How are children impacted by the instability of having more than one household?*



Leader note: Divorce costs kids in the following ways:

- Trauma: divorce is a traumatic event in a child’s life.
- Physical: children of divorce are more likely to have physical health problems when they grow up.
- Emotional: loss of stability leading to a personality split.
- Relational: children with divorced parents are more likely to divorce as adults.

The instability of having separate households often causes a child to adopt separate personas.

- *Scripture makes provision to end marriages in certain cases, what are they?*
- *Do the majority of marriages today end for biblical or historically recognized reasons?*



A CLOSER LOOK

Research shows that children of divorce suffer physically, emotionally, and relationally as a result of their parents’ choices. Step-children suffer more adverse family experiences (AFE’s),¹⁵ putting them statistically at higher risk of poverty, having mentally ill caregivers, witnessing neighborhood violence, exposure to drug or alcohol addiction, and having an incarcerated parent. As adults, step-children are more likely to suffer poor health outcomes, to abuse illicit drugs, and have a higher risk of suicide.¹⁶ Across the board, adults with divorce in their backgrounds experience diminished outcomes in all aspects of their personal and professional lives,¹⁷ and have an increased risk of experiencing depression and bipolar disorder.¹⁸



Leader note: Two explicitly Biblical reasons for divorce are infidelity (Matt 5:31-32) and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:10-16).

While the Bible does not explicitly mention divorce in cases of abuse, it is clear that abuse is a complete perversion of God’s design for marriage (Eph 5:22-33). Additionally, God says that he gave the sword to the state in order to punish evildoers (Rom 13:1-5). One of the ways we see that being carried out is in the case of the state’s role in protecting victims from abusers, including through legal separation.

70% of divorces end *low-conflict* marriages —marriages that would not have fit the criteria for “at-fault” divorce and are only enabled through no-fault divorce laws. The majority of marriages today do not end for the sake of child protection or because of abuse or infidelity. They end because adults refuse to do hard things. Additionally, no-fault divorce often favors the spouse who wants the marriage the least.

Malachi 2:15 says, “Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.”

A CLOSER LOOK

Scholar Elizabeth Marquardt surveyed 1,500 young adults ages eighteen to thirty-five. Half came from divorced homes and half came from intact homes. Marquardt writes that close to half [of children] said that after the divorce they felt like a different person with each of their parents—something only a quarter of children from intact families said. Half said their divorced parents’ versions of truth were different, compared to just a fifth of those with married parents. More than twice as many children of divorce as children of intact families said that after the divorce, they were asked to keep important secrets—and many more felt the need to do so, even when their parents did not ask them to.¹⁹

- What does this passage tell us about God’s design for marriage?
- How does this shape the way we think about the importance of doing hard things on behalf of children within Christian marriages?
- How can we help the culture around us view divorce rightly and promote healthy marriages in our communities?



Leader note: God is seeking godly offspring. Marriage and children are directly connected, and we see that in the ways that children are affected by broken marriages.

God doesn’t hate people who are divorced. He hates what divorce does to kids, and to adults as well.

THEIR VOICES:

Christie: “[My father’s] new wife did not want kids in general and did not want us in particular. In truth, we were both a lot of work by then, me mostly because I had very very bad asthma, and my sister because she was acting out. What also became clear is that she did not want us to be close to our father...we were the interlopers in their private, very adult relationship.”²¹

Allison: “My mom remarried a couple of years after my bio dad left. The man she married is still my stepfather to this day, forty years later. He took on four kids that were not his own and tried the best he knew how to raise us. Unfortunately, he was often verbally abusive, ill-tempered and reactionary...my mom was put in the position of protecting us almost daily from his verbal diatribes. My stepfather and my mother ended up having three children together as well and I saw my stepfather turn into a loving, adoring biological father. He was a different, changed man...toward his own children.”²²

Leighaine: “I’ve only been in one adult relationship, mainly because I’m terrified of the hurt that rips the threads of your life apart—your home, your friends, your finances, your day-to-day life. Divorce will end your life as you know it. The biggest thing I learned from my parents’ divorce is no matter how much you love the other person, if they choose to leave you, there isn’t anything you can do to change their mind.”²³

SESSION 4 | MODERN FAMILIES

Read Genesis 2:18-24. Eve is described as a helper “fit” for Adam—they were alike but different. Obviously, the differences between men and women matter for bearing children. They also matter for raising children, as discussed in Session 2. Homosexuality is condemned in both the Old and New Testament because it violates God’s design for human sexuality (see Romans 1:21-27). Violations of God’s design for marriage and family will always hurt the children involved.

A CLOSER LOOK

The two studies frequently cited to claim that children with same-sex parents fare no different than children raised by their married mother and father are Reczek’s, “Family Structure and Child Health; Does the Sex Composition of Parents Matter?” and Wainright, Russell, and Patterson’s study on adolescents with same-sex parents.

These two studies had the following methodological flaws:

- Misidentification of sample sets (both studies included misidentified heterosexual couples).
- Inaccurate control groups (Reczek’s study controlled for “biological parentage” rather than identifying it as a variable).
- Rejecting standard measures for emotional outcomes (Reczek’s study rejected the standard CDC measure of emotional difficulties).

Once these errors were resolved, research found that child depressive symptoms rise from 50% to 88% when comparing unmarried to married same-sex parents. Depressive symptoms for children with opposite-sex married parents are lower than average (47.2%), rise to 56% with unmarried opposite-sex parents, and rise further to 87.8% with married same-sex parents.²⁴

- What has happened as a result of the United States and a handful of other countries redefining marriage?
- When sociologists are **not** talking about same-sex parenting, they overwhelmingly agree on what three things?
- Based on previous discussions, what impact do these three factors have on children? Should we be skeptical of claims that children with same-sex parents fare “no different” than kids raised by their mother or father?



Leader note: When a country redefines marriage, the redefinition of “parenthood” always follows. Children will always be the victims as adults try to get legal recognition and cultural approval for their ever-shifting desires.

Sociologists agree that

- Biology matters in the parent-child relationship.
- Mothers and fathers offer distinct and complimentary benefits to children.
- When a child loses a relationship with their mother or father, it impacts their bodies, future relationships, and their emotional health.

The claim that there’s “no difference” cannot be true. Children with same-sex parents are always missing at least one biological parent, always raised without either a mother’s love or a father’s love, and always lose an in-home connection with either their mom or dad. We know that any one of these things carries consequences for children, so we can be confident that all three together are certainly harmful.

A CLOSER LOOK

Father-loss has a devastating impact on individuals, and also on society. In fact, it has been remarked that “prisons are holding tanks for fatherless men.” Consider these statistics:

- 90% of homeless and runaway youths are fatherless. Homelessness and the life of a runaway are common gateways
- to sex trafficking.
- 70% to 85% of prison inmates
- grew up without a father.
- 63% of teenagers who commit suicide
- have absent fathers.
- 71% of pregnant teenagers come from fatherless homes.
- 71% of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.²⁵

- The data seems to show that children with **married same-sex parents** fare worse than children with **cohabiting** same-sex parents, why? How does the cementing of the same-sex relationship uniquely affect children?
- What distinct loss do children raised by same-sex parents experience?
- What does a child lose when adults choose polygamy or polyamory?
- What do you think of the statement, “modern family is code for child loss?”

- What about polygamy in the Bible? How should Christians think about this?



Leader note: A child raised in a home by same-sex adults loses one or both biological parents, and will experience mother hunger or father hunger due to the absence of gender balance in the home.

A child loses safety and stability when adults choose poly-relationships.

Poly-relationships in the Bible are not portrayed as something worth emulating. Every polygamous family we see in Scripture has jealousy, instability, confusion, and infighting. It’s not how God instituted marriage in the Garden and we never see it go well for the children involved—nor for the adults, for that matter. That’s exactly what we see in modern polygamy, as well.

A CLOSER LOOK

Far from simply having more adults who can love and care for them, polygamy ensures that unrelated adults share living spaces with kids. Polyamorous homes see higher rates of abuse and neglect,²⁹ alongside competition and jealousy between adults and children.

THEIR VOICES:

James: “I grew up in a household with my father, mother, and another woman. I hated seeing my dad kiss another woman in front of me. It would anger me to see my own dad with someone else who was not my mom. I never told anyone how I felt. In my late teenage years I began dating two girls at the same time, of course without their knowledge. In the end I hurt both girls. It wasn’t until my early twenties that I began questioning my intentions, desires, and actions when it came to dating. I wish I only had my mother and father with me in my childhood.”³⁰

SESSION 5 | REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Read Psalm 139. In this passage, we see God's tender care for us from our earliest moments. From a scientific standpoint, we know that life begins at the moment of conception. In light of this, we should understand that God's heart for the preborn applies to embryos created in labs. They also bear His image and deserve to be cherished and protected as image-bearers.

Infertility is one of the greatest heartaches that an adult can face in life, but sadly, the modern response to the heartache of infertility is often to encourage IVF and third-party reproduction. This technology is facilitating the creation of motherless and fatherless children.

IVF & Third Party Reproduction Often Violate a Child's Right to Life

- *There are a number of ways that IVF and third-party reproduction violate children's right to life. What are they?*

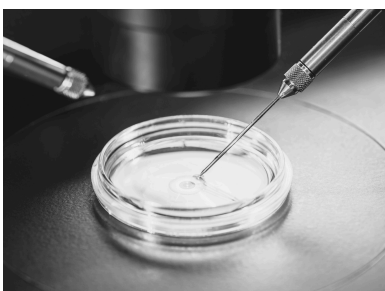
We don't often think of IVF as a human rights crisis, but it is estimated that there are over 1.5 million embryos in cryogenic freezers in the U.S.,³¹ and that number grows every year. Further, 25-40% have been functionally abandoned: their parents have stopped paying the storage fees or are unable/unwilling to be contacted.³²

- *Does this change the way you think about IVF?*



Leader Note:

- Children at the earliest stage of development are frozen and abandoned.
- Many embryos don't survive the thaw.
- Fertility doctors routinely employ "selective reduction," that is, abortion.
- Many embryos, pre-born children, are "donated" to science (i.e., experimented on and then killed and discarded).



IVF & Third Party Production Often Violate a Child's Right to Mother and Father

A CLOSER LOOK

Pro-lifers should look very carefully at IVF—by the numbers, the fertility industry results in the loss of as many or more embryonic lives than the abortion industry.³³ Only about 7% of lab-created babies will be born alive.³⁴ IVF clinics routinely use genetic screening to weed out “less desirable” embryos³⁵ or to engage in sex selection,³⁶ allowing couples to discard babies of the “wrong” sex. Life begins at conception, which means the lives of babies conceived via IVF deserve protection—protection from destruction, abandonment, frozen storage, and scientific experimentation.

- How does third-party reproduction violate children's rights to their mother and father?
- What do you find when you search “sperm donor catalog” or “egg donor catalog”? Is it accurate to say that some of these technologies are treating children as a customizable product?



Leader Note: Third party reproduction violates children's rights by:

- Creating a marketplace of gametes.
- Causing children lose to access to their biological identities, including medical history, knowledge of half-siblings and other relatives, and the loss of a parent who is still alive but has been “paid off” to stay out of their life.

Third-party conception recognizes the parents' desire for a biological connection with their child, but it ignores the child's right for biological connection with their missing parent.

- What's wrong with the idea of “donating” embryos?



Leader talking point:

For the first time since the Civil War, we have a class of people who are considered property. Embryos are humans. We donate property, not people.

A CLOSER LOOK

“Donor” is often a misleading term when it comes to third-party reproduction. Typically, the way it works is the rich buy and the poor sell—egg donation targets young women with the promise of quick, easy cash (and the added bonus of helping a couple “build” a family). Egg donors are paid \$5-10,000 per cycle.⁴² Sperm donors can make \$780 per month.⁴³

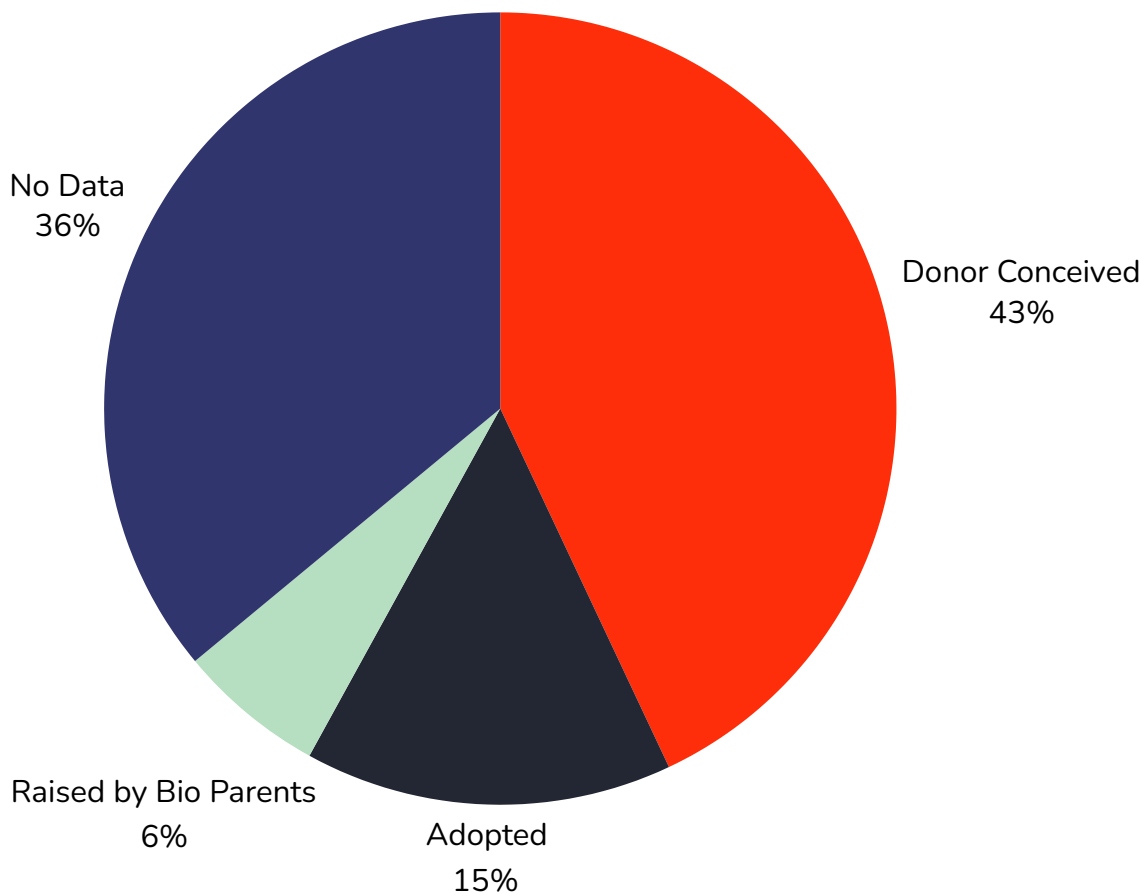
What Do Donor Conceived Children Have to Say?

The “My Daddy’s Name Is Donor” study shows the overwhelmingly negative result of what third-party reproduction has done to the children. (see appendix for more graphs)

37

“I feel confused about who is a member of my family and who is not.”

Forty-three percent of donor offspring, compared to 15 percent of adopted persons and six percent of those raised by their biological parents agree, “I feel confused about who is a member of my family and who is not.”



- *What does a compassionate response to infertility that does not sacrifice the rights of children look like?*



Katy draws a parallel between caring for women and families experiencing unplanned pregnancy and women and families experiencing infertility.

- *How does she describe this parallel? Is this an apt comparison?*
- *Why should Christians be at the forefront of rejecting the commodification of children at the hands of the fertility industry? How can we do that?*



Leader talking point: Read Psalm 113:9, Isaiah 56:3-5, and Psalm 147:3. In these passages we see God's compassionate heart toward those who are struggling with infertility and grief. The brokenness of the fall touches every aspect of life, including fertility, and with that brokenness come longings that may never find earthly fulfillment. Yet our unfulfilled longing, regardless of how strong, doesn't justify violating someone else's rights, needs, and longings. Instead, we are called to cling to the God who holds our tears (Psalm 56:8) and promises that our weeping will be turned to joy (Psalm 126:5-6). When we walk alongside someone experiencing this grief, we weep with them and point them to the promises of God.

THEIR VOICES:

Stephanie: *"Just a couple of months into this new reality, I began to grapple with the ethics of 'donor' conception. Was it right to father children and sign away all parental rights for \$40? Was it right to create a person who would be intentionally cut off from their biological family? Do the intended parent's desire for a child justify the upheaval of the child's life? Is it possible that the incredible desire to have a baby could cloud judgment to the point that one cannot think about how their actions could negatively affect the very person they desire to have? ...Children are a gift from God to a married couple to raise and to provide for. Life doesn't always work out that way, but to skew and warp that concept on purpose is to create chaos...calling my conception unethical in no way devalues the fact that I am glad to be alive...as for the idea that my parents 'wanted me so much,' that isn't quite accurate: my parents actually wanted a child that came from BOTH of them, hence the 14 years of trying. Using someone else's gametes wasn't part of the original plan, but that's what worked. I love the man who raised me. He will always be my dad. He provided for me, loved me, and sacrificed for me. Yet despite my sweet childhood, I am adamantly against 'donor' conception."*⁴¹

SESSION 6 | SURROGACY & ADOPTION

Surrogacy may include the mother-loss, father-loss, and commodification discussed in Session 5, but additionally, surrogacy requires the loss of a child's birth mother. Read Psalm 82:3. As Christians, we are called to defend the rights of the fatherless. Motherlessness is something of a historical anomaly—losing a father to war or dangerous working conditions was not uncommon, but it was unusual for a child to survive the loss of his or her mother at birth or in infancy. When we read passages in Scripture telling us to defend the cause of the fatherless, we should see that this is also a call to defend the cause of the motherless.

- Prior to this video, what had you heard about surrogacy? (i.e., “It’s just like adoption,” feminist objections around the exploitation of women, that it’s a way to support infertile couples, etc.)
- How does a children’s rights perspective change the conversation around this topic?

A CLOSER LOOK

Mother-child bonding begins in utero. By the time a baby is born, she knows her mother’s voice⁴⁴ and smell⁴⁵ and has been responding to her emotions.⁴⁶ Studies show that maternal separation, a feature of surrogacy, is a major physiological stressor for the infant and even brief maternal deprivation can permanently alter the structure of the infant’s brain.⁴⁸

- What does Katy point out happens in the process of surrogacy?
- With “splicing” “mother” into three separate people, what do a “genetic mother”, “birth mother,” and “social mother” all offer to a child?
- What is the “primal wound” that adoptees and children of surrogacy experience? How does this affect them?



Leader talking point: Surrogacy inflicts mother-loss. It splices what should be one woman into three pieces and claims they’re interchangeable to children. It is always the intentional severing of a child’s relationship to their *birth mother* (losing biological identity), often their *genetic mother* (primal wound, being separated from the only human you know at birth), and sometimes a *social mother* (daily feminine/mothering love children are made for).

- Who is the client in an adoption? Who is the client in a surrogacy arrangement?

Katy lists four reasons that adoption and surrogacy are polar opposites from a children’s rights perspective.

- *What are they?*
- *If “a just society cares for orphans, it does not create them,” how can this perspective re-frame the way we think about surrogacy and other forms of third-party reproduction?*
- *How would you respond to the argument that some forms of surrogacy are altruistic and therefore acceptable? (i.e., when there’s no money changing hands and the child is genetically related to the commissioning parents)*

A CLOSER LOOK

The “primal wound” is a term coined by Nancy Verrier in her book of the same title to describe the unique grief and loss that adopted children experience. Also known as adoption trauma or relinquishment trauma, this can manifest as depression, feelings of abandonment and loss, and emotional problems throughout their lives.⁴⁹ It can hinder their attachment, bonding, psychological health, self-esteem,⁵⁰ and future relationships.⁵¹



Leader talking point: In adoption, the child is the client and his or her needs should be prioritized above adults seeking out a child. In surrogacy, the adults are the clients and the child is the product.

The four differences between adoption and surrogacy are: adoption is an institution centered around the well-being of children but Big Fertility is a marketplace centered around the desires of adults; adults who adopt are seeking to mend the child’s wound but the adults who create children via third-party reproduction inflict the child’s wound; in adoption, the adults support the child but in third-party reproduction, the child supports the adults; and adoption is sometimes necessary but third-party reproduction is *never* necessary.

Even if surrogacy is “altruistic,” a child of surrogacy who is genetically related to his or her commissioning parents still loses the only person he or she has ever known immediately upon birth. The baby doesn’t know that these are his genetic parents – to him, they are strangers.

THEIR VOICES:

Jessica: “When you know that a huge part of the reason that you came into the world is due solely to a paycheck, and that after being paid you are disposable, given away and never thought of again, it impacts how you view yourself. As a product of surrogacy, when I express this viewpoint to others, I am told, ‘Look how much your parents wanted you, they planned and saved to have you. You should be grateful and thankful for them.’ But at the end of the day, the adults were looking out for themselves, and what they needed and wanted.”⁵⁴

SESSION 7 | KATY UNPLUGGED - Q&A

Note for leaders: This last session is an extended time of Q&A with Katy, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the series as a whole.

- *Of the topics we've covered so far, which did you find most interesting, surprising, or compelling?*
- *Katy talks about the importance of becoming an expert. What's one thing you're going to work on becoming an expert on after finishing this study?*
- *It can be intimidating to speak up or stand your ground when culture says you're wrong. What topic(s) do you feel more confident addressing after finishing this study?*

SESSION QUESTIONS

Session One | Q&A with Katy

- How would you encourage someone who feels convicted by this content?
- Why aren't there any Bible verses in your book, *Them Before Us*?
- Why are we scared to advocate for the rights of children?
- Is there a connection between pro-life and pro-family work?
- Why should all political parties love the framework of Them Before Us?

Session 3 | Q&A with Katy

- Can you share more about God's original design for marriage?
- How do kids feel when they see affection between their parents vs. stepparents?
- How does divorce impact adult children?
- Is there a good time for a single parent to remarry?
- How can a single parent create stability for their children?
- What should the posture of Christian leadership be for talking about or defending marriage?
- Is it bigotry to define marriage as only being between a man and a woman?
- What can churches do to support healthy marriages?
- What are the appropriate grounds for divorce?
- How has the rise of single motherhood impacted poverty and the Black family?
- Is there practical support for the biblical concept of male headship?
- How is marriage beneficial for men?

Session 2 | Q&A with Katy

- How have we as a society strayed so far from the truth?
- Can those in the LGBT+ community be good parents?

Session 4 | Q&A with Katy

- How do we balance compassion and truth with same-sex parents?
- What are the long-term effects of being raised by same-sex parents?
- How can we help children of same-sex parents who experience mother-hunger or father-hunger?
- How can we model for our children loving our LGBT neighbor and standing on truth?
- What about the parent that doesn't have someone in closer proximity who is in a same-sex relationship?
- How do both previous and future redefinitions of marriage threaten the well-being of children?
- How do I talk to my children about sex and other challenging cultural topics?
- How should the church be addressing these topics?
- Should the church get involved in conversations about sex, gender, and marriage?
- How can we remind those we're leading that God's design is good?
- Is there flexibility across time and cultures when it comes to sex and marriage?
- Do you see the American church struggling with this truth more than others?

Session 5 | Q&A with Katy

- Is there a way for ethical IVF and embryo adoption to be done that honors the child's rights?
- How much does IVF cost and what is the alternative?
- How does the fertility industry source their "materials?"
- When it comes to protecting children's rights, what regulations should Christians be advocating for?
- How do kids fare if they are created via reproductive technologies and raised by same-sex parents?
- When it comes to protecting a child's rights, what regulations should Christians be advocating for?
- Can you talk about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?
- How do we navigate "I have a right to a family..."
- Is there an ethical method to approaching infertility?

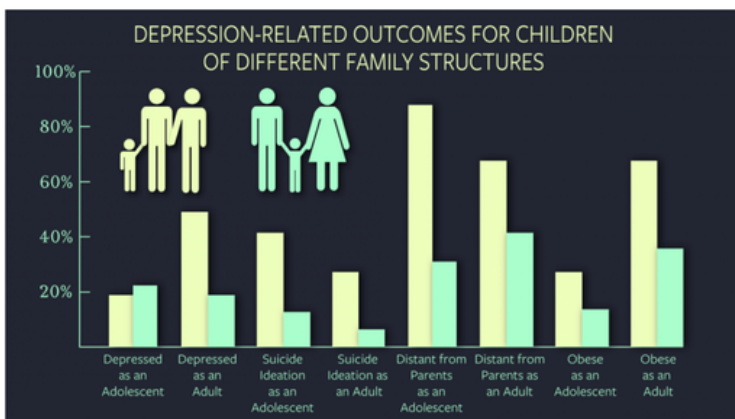
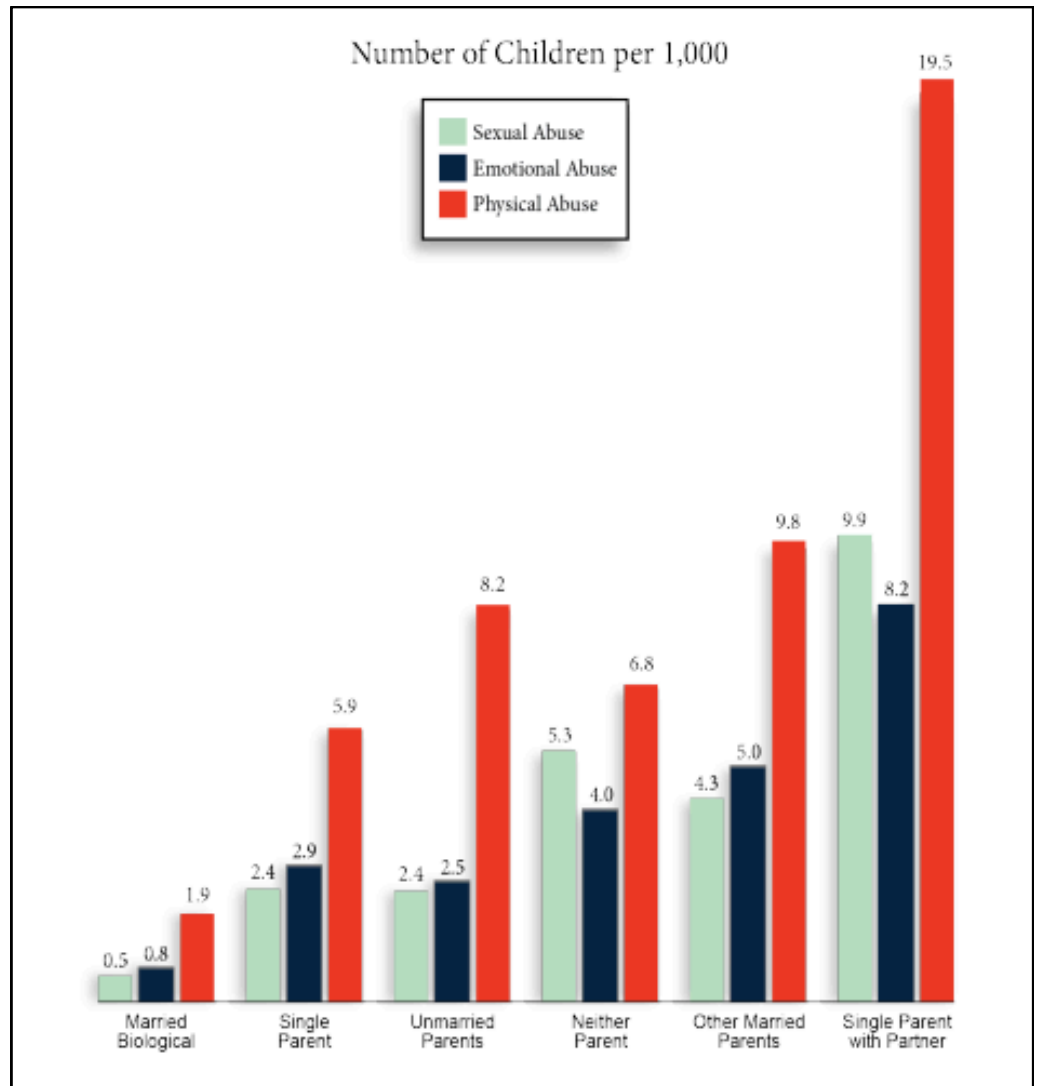
Session 6 | Q&A with Katy

- What advice do you have for families considering adoption?
- Adoption is expensive, does that make it baby-buying?
- Should parents with an unplanned pregnancy place their children for adoption?
- What's the best way to help foster kids?
- Is surrogacy wrong if it's a heterosexual couple using their own sperm and egg?
- Are children created through Big Fertility better off because they are "planned" and "wanted?"
- Do we foresee predators using surrogacy?
- Who should be allowed to adopt?
- In the event of a tragedy, should a child have a voice in who receives guardianship over them?
- How can the church affirm and support children in broken family situations?
- For the church to be effective advocates on behalf of children, what needs to change?
- How can I start defending children?

Session 7 | Q&A with Katy

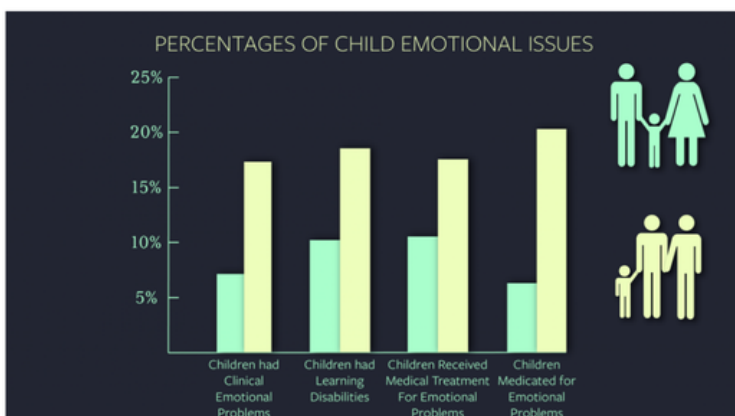
- Have you always been courageous speaking on this topic?
- How do you deal with confrontation and difficult conversations?
- We are considering adoption. What should we be thinking about?
- In an unplanned pregnancy, should the couple always get married?
- Most of the "research" says kids with same-sex parents are fine. How can I trust the research you cite?
- I'm struggling to reconcile my circumstances with this children's rights message. What should I do?
- As a church, what do we do when a couple divorces?
- How can a church strike a balance between grace and truth?
- Should Christians have a different posture in the personal versus the political?
- What is the hardest conversation you've personally had since starting Them Before Us?
- If you could have a do-over for one conversation, which would it be?
- Could you share some practical ways we can expose our children to truth and beauty?
- What can the church do to help parents inculcate a Christian worldview in their children?
- What's best: home school, private school, or public school?
- What if you have high schoolers and you haven't done any worldview training yet?
- If we are training them in worldview formation, what kinds of examples should we give our kids?
- How has your advocacy affected your family and children?

Them Before Us | p38



Session 4: Modern Families

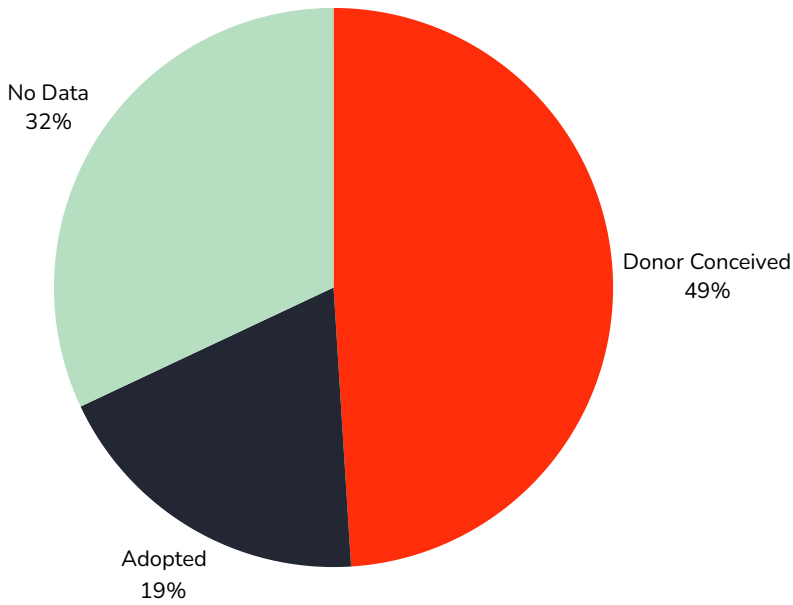
Them Before Us | p124



Session 4: Modern Families

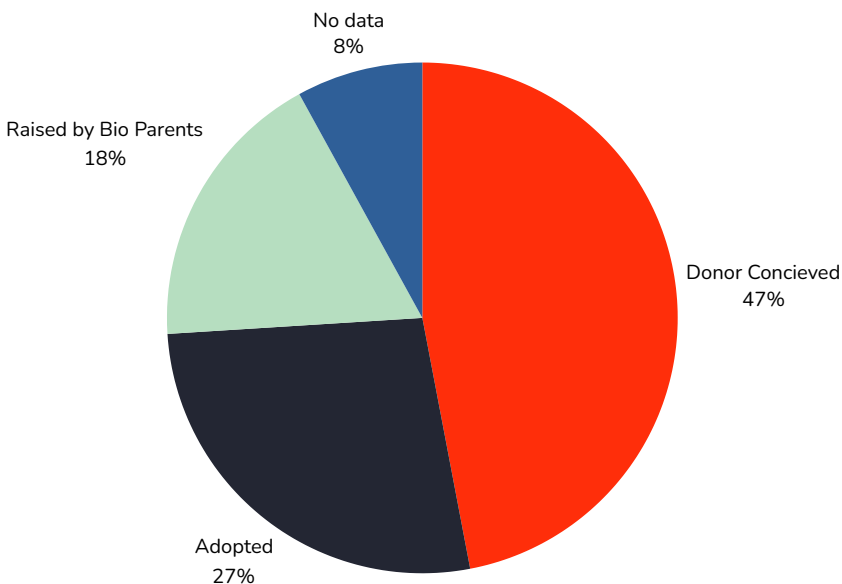
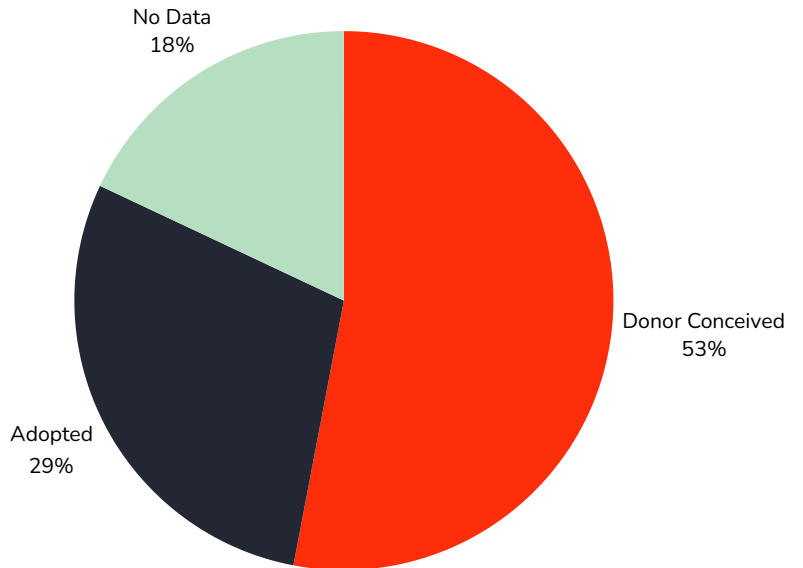
Them Before Us | p128-129

The landmark study, “My Daddy’s Name is Donor”³⁷ compared outcomes between donor-conceived children, adopted children, and those raised by their biological parents. The study found that:

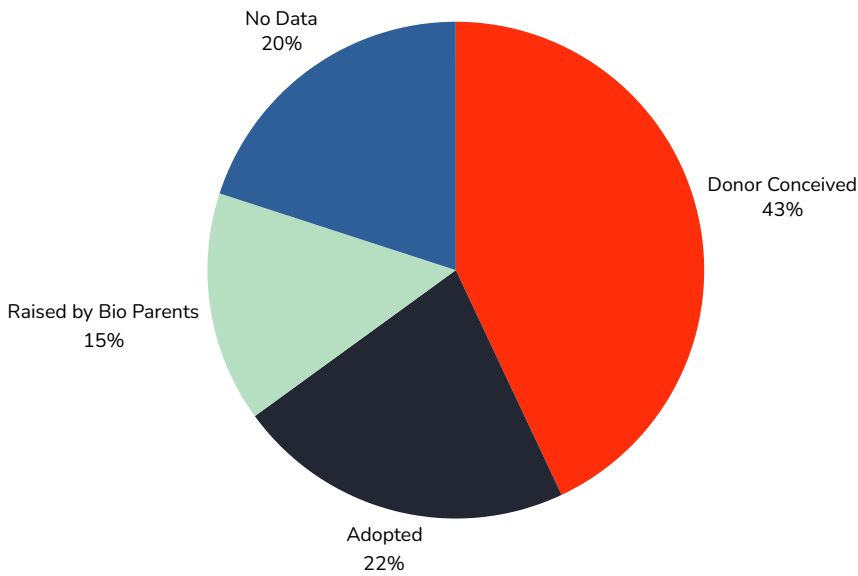


Nearly half of donor offspring (49%) compared to about one-fifth of adopted adults (19%) agree, “When I see friends with their biological fathers and mothers, it makes me feel sad.”

Similarly, more than half of donor offspring (53%, compared to 29% of the adopted adults) agree, “It hurts when I hear other people talk about their genealogical background.”

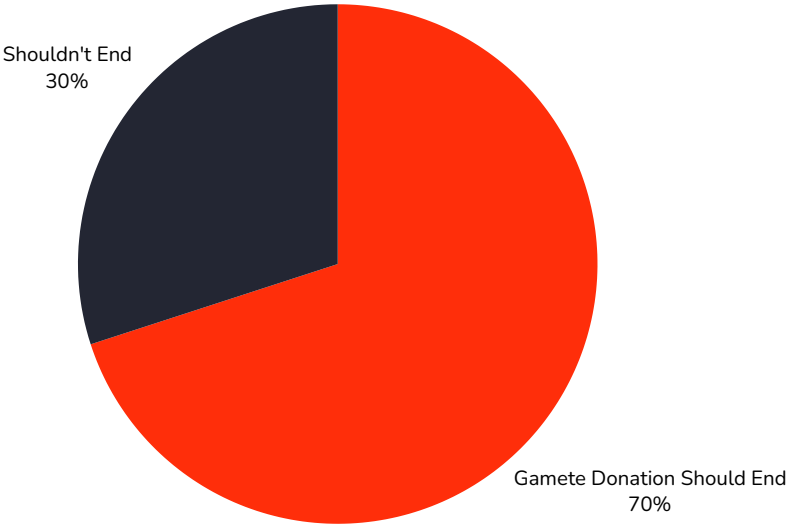
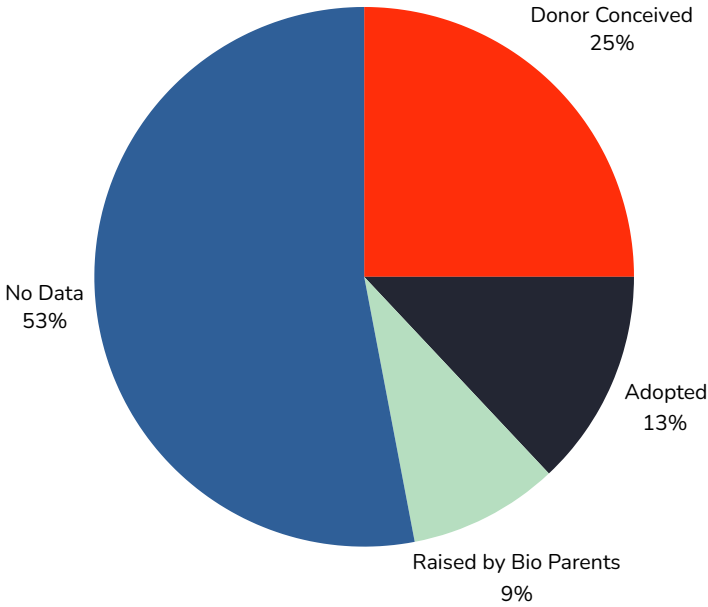


Almost half of donor offspring (47 percent) agree, “I worry that my mother might have lied to me about important matters when I was growing up.” This compares with 27 percent of those who were adopted and 18 percent raised by their biological parents.

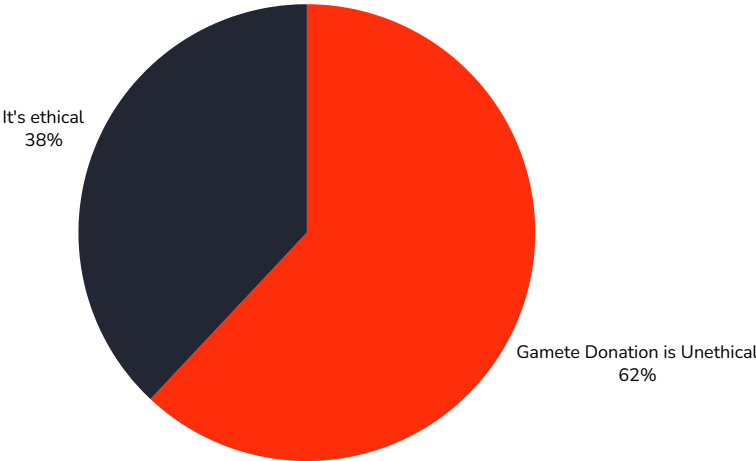


Similarly, 43 percent of donor offspring, compared to 22 percent and 15 percent, respectively, of those raised by adoptive or biological parents, agree that “I worry that my father might have lied to me about important matters when I was growing up.” Compared to those raised by biological parents, the donor offspring are more than four times as likely to agree strongly.

Many donor offspring agree that “I don’t feel that anyone really understands me.” Twenty-five percent agree strongly, compared to 13 percent of adopted and nine percent of those raised by biological parents.



Additionally, 70% of donor-conceived adults believe that society should end the practice of gamete donation and 62% said they found the practice to be unethical.³⁸



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