What is cleft lip? What is cleft palate?
A cleft lip is an opening in the lip. A cleft palate is an opening in the roof of the mouth. Clefts happen because of incomplete development of the lip or palate while the baby is forming before birth.

Babies’ lips and palates develop during the first three months of pregnancy. Normally, the left and right parts of the lip come together, or "fuse," creating a normal lip. The two vertical lines on the normal upper lip are created when the left and right parts fuse. In a similar way, the left and right parts of the palate come together to create a normal palate. A front-to-back line along the roof of the mouth can usually be seen where the "fusion" occurred.

Will our baby have trouble learning to talk?
If the cleft affects only the lip, speech problems are unlikely. However, many children with cleft palate need the help of a speech pathologist, and some many need an additional operation to improve speech. The most common problem these children experience is an overly nasal tone to their speech.

Why didn't our baby's mouth fully develop?
We don't know the answer to this question, but you can be assured it was usually not because you did something wrong. It was not your fault.

Scientists have learned that there are many possible causes for clefts. Research is under way to discover more about these causes. Sometimes clefts occur in combination with other problems which are associated with a syndrome. Meeting with a special doctor known as a geneticist can help you understand about the possible causes of clefts.

How many babies are born with clefts?
Clefts are among the most common problems found in newborn babies. Annually in the U.S., over 6,800 newborns (or about one in 600 babies) are born with a cleft.

How can we pay for the treatment our baby will need?
Health insurance will pay for all or part of the necessary care. Additional financial assistance should be available from an agency in your state that is supported by your tax dollars. Your family physician can direct you to the proper agency.

How do other parents feel when their child is born with a cleft?
It is natural for parents to be upset at this time. Feelings of concern, anxiety and grief are not unusual. Your family physician and the hospital staff members will help you to tell relatives and friends about your baby.

How can we tell our relatives and friends about the baby's cleft?
Most parents feel that telling others is a little difficult. If the people closest to you can visit while the mother and baby are still in the hospital, it may be easier. You should try to tell the story directly and as honestly as you can. You may want to share your factsheet with your family members and close friends. It is important, even though you may feel uncomfortable, to tell relatives and friends very early.

I have read the term “hare lip.” What does it mean?
The word “hare” refers to the rabbit, which has a natural indentation in the center of its lip. This term is rarely used by professionals because it is an insensitive and inaccurate term. “Cleft lip” is the correct description of the condition.

Please contact ACPA Family Services for further information or for a referral to a cleft palate/craniofacial team.