



# Information for Birth Relatives

who are hoping to trace someone  
in their family who has been  
adopted



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**Information for Birth Relatives who are hoping to trace someone in their family who has been adopted**

The Adoption & Children Act 2002 has given birth family members the right to ask for an intermediary service. This is **not** a right to trace someone who has been adopted but means that you are able to ask a registered agency to try to do this on your behalf. If they are able to find the person they may then be able to approach them to see if they would like to have any contact with you.

Their new name and/or address will not be given to you without the permission of the adopted person.

This new approach is only in relation to adopted adults – it does not include children who have been adopted who are still under the age of 18 years.

A few adopted adults may have made a decision that they do not want to have any contact and for those adopted before 31.12.05 they can register a veto with the agency that arranged their adoption. If there is a veto in place then the agency that is trying to help you will not be allowed to contact them. Very few people have registered a veto at the moment but it is important that you know that this is a possibility. Adopted adults can change their minds and if they do then the agency will remove the veto.

**What is a registered agency?**

These are known as Adoption Support Agencies (ASA’s) and they have been registered in order to specially help birth relatives and adopted adults make contact with each other. Most of them were voluntary agencies involved in adoption work before this Act but have extended their remit to include this type of work. All local authorities can do this type of work too but many suggest you seek help from an ASA.

Any agency involved in this work has to be registered with OFSTED and has to comply with strict standards. All such agencies are regularly inspected to ensure they are meeting these standards. This is a legal requirement.

### How do I find an ASA?

Your local Social Services Adoption Support Adviser will be able to tell you about these agencies.

### How much will it cost?

There will be a fee but this will vary from agency to agency so make sure you ask about costs before you commit yourself.

### If you are searching

If you are the person who has decided to start to search for an adopted adult in your family then do get proper help and advice from an ASA. Often things get more difficult if you try to do this unsupported. Even if you think you have found the person it is usually wise to ask for someone to act as an intermediary and not make a contact directly yourself. If you do make a direct contact the adopted person could become more anxious and/or feel under pressure.

Also be prepared for the fact that this could take a long time, be patient.

If the agency is able to find the adopted person there may be a range of responses. They may not wish for contact with you. This will be very disappointing but please remember that this may not be the right time for them, it does not necessarily mean that they will never want any contact. People adapt to change and surprises at different speeds and they may need more time to think things over – remember you have probably been thinking about doing this for some time before actually starting – they may need time to catch up.

Anticipate a range of responses and be prepared for surprises, joy and disappointments.

Always be honest. It may well be that the adopted person has access to papers written at the time and however painful the situation it is always best to be honest.

We know that this search is very important to you but try not to let it take over your life. Such searches can affect your other relationships and those you are close to may feel shut out or neglected.

### If you have been traced by an adopted person

This can come as quite a shock. Many people who are traced have always secretly hoped for such an outcome but even in these circumstances there may be many issues to deal with. Close family members may be unaware of the adoption, such a contact will inevitably remind you of the feelings you had at the time the child was placed for adoption, you may have other children, you may be reminded of the child's other parent and your relationship or this just may not be a good time for you.

You may not have ever wished to be traced and may even be angry that you have been found.

Whatever the circumstances it is important that you seek some support from someone who has experience in this area of work.

Anticipate a range of responses and be prepared for surprises, joy and disappointments.

Always be honest. It may well be that the adopted person has access to papers written at the time and however painful the situation it is always best to be honest.

### If you do not want any contact

Even if you do not wish to meet the adopted adult or have any on-going contact with them it would be very helpful to write a letter to them (sent via the intermediary) explaining why you do not want any contact and a little about yourself and current circumstances. Whoever is supporting you will help you with this if you need it. If you feel you can include a recent photo this can be very meaningful for the adopted adult who may never have seen a photo of you or indeed of anyone to whom they are genetically linked.

### If you do want contact

Make sure you go at your pace – this is often difficult as things can move along quite quickly but try to keep a sense of control and not let it take over your life.

It is usually helpful to get some support and someone to act as an intermediary. Even if you know that you would like to meet the adopted person it may be wise to keep the first meeting fairly neutral and have an intermediary present. If the intermediary arranges this meeting it means that you do not have to give over your personal information before you meet. You do not know how this meeting will go and you may dislike the person on sight – this is rare but can happen. To have a confidential first meeting places no pressure on anyone for the future – each can make a more informed decision after the meeting and if both parties wish to exchange addresses/telephone numbers etc after the event this is fine

## Booklist

### 1. Adoption Healing – A path to recovery by Joseph Soll & Karen

It will help anyone touched by adoption to understand the adopted person's experience. It is a good follow up to Nancy Newton Verrier's Primal Wound. This book relates primarily to adopted people placed as babies – though much of what it says also relates to older aged adoptions.

### 2. Adoption Reunions - A book for Adoptees, Birth Parents and Adoptive Families by Michelle McColm

The author, an adoptee shares what she went through before, during and after her own reunion with candour and helpful hints (even listing them at the end of each chapter). It is a very specific book, as well. It reads very much like a handbook (with specific organisations to join, specific agencies, etc.) for a reunion– from backstage through "You're on" through Post Reunion. It is also appealing for all three parts of the adoption, as she takes the time to discuss the issues that anyone any place on the triad may be concerned about, what they may be feeling, or how they may be acting. Overall it is an insightful book about the reunion process.

### 3. Adoption Reunion Handbook by Elizabeth Trunder, Julia Feast and David Howe

The book describes the experiences that people have had when tracing their birth parents, as well as offering practical advice on how to go about searching and what to expect emotionally. Each section has an advice box which summarises key points, notes issues to pay particular attention to, or offers draft letters that readers can adapt for their own needs. The appendix contains useful addresses and web links, and includes checklists for searching and for the reunion. Chapters include reunion with birth fathers and birth siblings, as well as with birth mothers, the relationship with the adoptive family and dealing with reunions that break down.

### 4. The Adoption Reunion Survival Guide – Preparing yourself for the search, reunion and beyond by Julie Jarrell Bailey & Lynn Neal Giddens

This book is written by two adoption specialists, one of whom is a reunited birth mother. It draws on the real-life experiences of others to help reader prepare for the emotional turbulence of the reunion experience, examine fantasies and emotions about it, and find a personal support system and to help through. It also discusses the legal issues surrounding adoption reunion and includes a list of resources to help readers with their search.

### 5. The Adoption Triangle Revisited - A Study of Adoption, Search and Reunion Experiences by John Triseliotis, Julia Feast and Fiona Kyle

This book presents the individual perspective of birth mothers, adopted people and adoptive parents on what the adoption search and reunion experience has meant to them, the study then examines the reactions of matched pairs of adopted people and their birth mothers and adoptive parents.

### 6. Birth Bond – Reunions between birth parents and adoptees: What happens after by Judith S Gediman and Linda P Brown

It describes such a range of reunions and issues that can be raised especially for birth mothers. However this book can help birthparents, adoptees, and adoptive parents to see the results of closed adoption.

### 7. Blue Eyed Son - A Story of Adoption by Nicky Campbell

Blue Eyed Son is Nicky Campbell's story of his search for and reunion with his natural parents. In this refreshingly candid book, he tells the story of his journey to find his parents, the dark secrets that have been revealed and the journey he has had to make since finding them.

### 8. Elephants Never Forget – Relationship between Birth Parents and Adoptees by Kay Coleman and Eileen Jenkins

Advice, information and support for those who are being reunited with the children they gave up for adoption.

### 9. Letter to Louise by Pauline Collins

In 1964, in a bare room in Waterloo, a young actress gave her baby for adoption. They were to be parted for more than 20 years. The actress was Pauline Collins and the baby was her daughter Louise. Reluctantly she got on with life, finally achieving success and personal happiness. But she never forgot Louise and their story had the ultimate happy ending, the day they were reunited 22 years later.

### 10. Preparing for Reunion – Experiences of Contact after Adoption by Julia Feast

Written by some of the experts in the field of adoption – those people who have been adopted, have had a child adopted, or have adopted a child themselves. It is primarily intended for people who are personally involved in the adoption circle.

### 11. The Primal Wound – Understanding the Adopted Child by Nancy Verrier

This book hypothesises about the separation of a child from their birth mother, and the implications this has for children placed in adoptive families. It will help adopters understand adoptees, and will help adopted people come to terms with aspects of their identity. Therefore it's well worth reading, as long as you keep a clear head and remember to look for evidence to support the hypothesis at all times.

### 12. Race, Ethnicity and Adoption by Derek Kirton

This text reviews the controversy surrounding the adoption of black or minority ethnic children, either transracially into white families or into matched 'same race' placements.

### 13. Searching Questions – Identity, Origins and Adoption by Julia Feast & Terry Philpot

Based on a unique research study about why some adopted people want to search and others do not, this workbook highlights the issues involved and provides a greater understanding of the complexities and feelings that may be encountered on the way.

### 14. Within Me, Without Me – Adoption, an Open and Shut Case? by Sue Wells

This book explores the impact on birth mothers of giving up a child for adoption. This book voices their moving and often harrowing stories.

### 15. Whose Child by Kasey Hamner.

An adoptee's healing journey from relinquishment through reunion and beyond.

## 16. Yesterday They Took My Baby by Ben Wicks

This volume gives voice to adoptees that set out to discover their missing families and the parents who gave children up for adoption. What they seek, what they find and how they respond to the meeting of dreams and reality are recorded in these stories. This book tells the stories of many different birth mothers and adoptees; it also deals with reactions of those who adopted children.

### Genetic Sexual Attraction

When children grow up with their parents, and brothers and sisters share their childhoods, it is natural for them to have a lot of physical contact, through hugs, kisses and cuddles, play fights, and holding hands, or sharing baths and beds.

They also learn as they go along about what is OK or not OK about the physical contact they have, for instance, after a certain age, brothers and sisters develop a sense of modesty and don't want to have baths together any more. It's all part of growing up. Eventually family members move away from one another and into other relationships outside of the family where it is OK to have that sort of physical closeness.

### Mothers, Fathers, Sons and Daughters

Mothers and young babies are so close that it is often hard to think of them as separate beings. They have a lot of skin contact and are often besotted with each other.

Where a baby has been adopted, this normal pattern of development of physical closeness between birthmother and baby is cut short.

Sometimes when a mother and son or daughter are reunited, they naturally have an urge to feel that close again. Similarly, a father and daughter can feel physically attracted.

Additionally, those involved in a reunion can feel an exhilaration of feelings, often described as a honeymoon period, or 'falling in love', which can feel overwhelming in intensity. This can lead to a desire for the relationship to become sexual.

### Brothers and Sisters

Reunion can be very confusing for brothers and sisters. Here there may be two adults similar in age, who look alike, may have similar mannerisms, likes and dislikes, who may be very surprised at how well they get on. There can be a chemistry between them, rather like that between new lovers. Because they haven't grown up together and learnt the natural taboos, they may find that they are sexually attracted to one another.

If a sexual relationship on reunion, between any party, is allowed to happen, there is a risk of losing the relationship again. Those involved may feel isolated, guilty, and face problems of secrecy in a relationship that will be viewed as taboo. There is the risk of pregnancy and genetic abnormality. It is very likely to disrupt other relationships that both people may have.

## What Helps?

- Talking through hopes and fears regarding the person you are going to meet, and who she/he may resemble
- Informative, sensitive and frank discussion with your adoption support worker about Genetic Sexual Attraction prior to a reunion
- Exchange of photos and letters, possibly a video, then speaking to the person on the phone before actually meeting, so that both parties are more prepared for similarities, etc
- When arranging a reunion, it helps to have close friends or family available to offer support, and ensure the reunion doesn't take place in isolation.
- If confused by overwhelming feelings, being able to talk openly and honestly with your adoption support worker, who will know this is a common feeling among birth relatives and adopted adults, or in a support group setting, where others may acknowledge similar feelings.
- Being told that such powerful feelings do abate in time, much as they lessen in other romantic relationships
- Being especially aware of characteristics of anger and violence in oneself, or sensing it in the other – these need to be worked through with a counsellor. Using sex to work through unresolved feelings of hurt and anger connected to adoption can be dangerous
- Having things explained in terms of the dynamics of adoption – i.e. attachment/separation in adoption has interrupted the normal attachment/separation process when a child has grown up in his family of origin.
- Having the understanding support of a sexual partner, aided by input from an experienced counsellor
- Reading literature on the subject of Genetic Sexual Attraction, and having the incest 'taboo' explained (why it is considered dangerous)
- Because physical contact such as hugs, touching and smelling may be hard to deal with, find alternative ways of showing affection, e.g. sharing 'safe' experiences
- Using appropriate names, e.g. 'My mother', 'My son', 'My sister', which describe the real relationship
- Reducing energy levels by doing something physical together such as gardening, walking, racket games, ideally with other family members or friends around too
- Thinking of relationships with other children/parents/siblings as reminders of normal behaviour
- Guidance to help gain a perspective on the situation (discussing with a priest, doctor, counsellor, psychiatrist)

## Adoption Contact Registers

### The National Adoption Contact Register (held by the Registrar General)

Implemented in May 1991, as part of the 1989 Children Act, this register formalises and puts on a statutory basis, a contact register to be held by the Registrar General.

**Birth relatives:** for a fee of £30.00(2016) birth relatives can register their interest in contact with an adopted person. They will need to supply (on a form) original birth details of the adopted person, a copy of their own birth certificate and marriage details. They can withdraw their registration on 28 days' notice.

**Adoptees:** for a fee of £15(2016), an adopted person can register their interest in contact with a birth relative; they will need to supply original birth certificate details and adoptive details. Registration may be withdrawn on 28 days' notice. You can also register for no contact.

If both parties are on the register, the adoptee will be given the name and address of the birth relative (or third party); the birth relative is informed only that contact has been made.

The General Register Office is intending to encourage enquirers to apply through intermediaries/third parties e.g. social work agencies

### **Enquirers can obtain further information and application forms from:**

The Adoption Contact Register

General Register Office

Smedley Hydro

Trafalgar Road

Southport

Merseyside

PR8 2HH

01704 569824

[www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

### The Adults Affected by Adoption, NORCAP Contact Register

Adults Affected by Adoption, NORCAP have established their own register that has been successful in linking people. Information about this is available direct from Adults Affected by Adoption, NORCAP. Membership of Adults Affected by Adoption, NORCAP and details of their services can be found from:

112 Church Road

Wheatley  
Oxfordshire  
OX33 1LU  
01865 8750000  
[www.norcap.org.uk](http://www.norcap.org.uk)

## Useful Addresses

### **ENGLAND & WALES**

The General Register Office  
Family Records centre  
1 Myddelton Street  
Islington  
London  
EC1R 1UW  
020 8392 5300

### **Adoption UK**

Manor Farm  
Appletree Road  
Chipping Warden  
Banbury  
Oxfordshire  
OX17 1LH  
0870 7700450

### **SCOTLAND**

The General Register Office  
New Register House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3YT  
0131 334 00380

### **Post Adoption Centre**

5 Torriano Mews  
Torriano Avenue

London  
NW5 2RZ  
020 7284 0555

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

General Register Office  
Oxford House  
49/55 Chichester Street  
Belfast  
BT1 4HL  
02890 252 000/021

**BAAF**

Skyline House  
200 Union Street  
London  
SE1 0LY  
020 7593 2000  
[www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)

**EIRE**

General Register Office  
8-11 Lombard Street East  
Dublin 2  
003531 671 1000/1863

**Probate Service**

(Wills, Divorce)  
First Avenue House  
42 –49 High Holborn  
London. WC1V 6NP  
020 7947 6000

**NORCAP**

(National Organisation for the  
Counselling of Adoptees & Parents)

112 Church Road

Wheatley

Oxfordshire

OX33 1LU

01865 875000

[www.norcap.org.uk](http://www.norcap.org.uk)

**The British Library**

Official Publications Library

96 Euston Road

London

NW1 2DE

020 7412 7536/7677

**Registrar General**

Adoptions Section

Smedley Hydro

Trafalgar Road

Southport

Merseyside

PR8 2HH

0151 471 4313

**Birthlink/Family Care**

21 Castle Street

Edinburgh

EH2 3DN

0131 225 6441

**International Social Services**

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Cranmer House

39 Brixton Road

London

SW9 6DD

020 7735 8941

