



Siblings affected by adoption

Some adopted people may not have considered the possibility of having or finding siblings when they initiate a search for their birth mother or birth father. Others begin their search with the hope that their birth parents had more children.

During the course of your search for your birth mother or birth father you may discover that you have full or half siblings, your siblings may be older and or younger than you. They may have been:

- Raised by your birth mother and or birth father
- Raised by a family member
- Raised in a foster family
- Raised by adoptive parents

Learning that you have siblings can be both overwhelming and exciting. It may take some time for you and your adoptive family to adjust to the existence your siblings. Some of the information that follows may guide you in terms of how best to make contact with your sibling.

Tracing a sibling who was adopted

There are a number of issues that need to be considered in beginning a search for a sibling who was also placed for adoption. For example:

- Your birth mother/birth father's thoughts in relation to the search.
- Your sibling may have been placed for adoption through the same adoption agency as you or a different agency.
- Your sibling may not know that he/she is adopted and may be unaware of his/her birth family history.
- Your sibling may be very shocked to hear of the existence of a brother or sister also placed for adoption.
- Your sibling may have already established a relationship with your birth mother/birth father.

Tracing a sibling who was not adopted

Depending on your birth mother/birth father's response to contact with you, contact with your siblings, raised by your birth mother/birth father, may or may not be possible.

If your search reveals that your birth mother/birth father has died, you may wish to search for your siblings, who were raised by your birth mother/birth father. Your siblings may or may not be aware of you. Depending on the circumstances and how they have learned about you, family members may vary in their readiness or openness to contact. As every situation is different, each family member will respond differently.

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Searching for your siblings

It is recommended that adopted and non adopted people who are enquiring about their siblings should place their name on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) which is operated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland. If siblings are 'matched' on the NACPR all parties to the match will be informed by the Adoption Authority. If possible the birth mother is also informed of this match. See the Adoption Authority of Ireland website for further information: www.aai.gov.ie

Using social networking sites to trace

There has been an increase in the number of people using social networking sites to trace and make contact with siblings. Searching for someone in this way can be very tempting as it can allow access to large amounts of information about the person being sought. However, there is a lot to consider before using these sites as a method of tracing. For example:

- How would your sibling feel if he/she became aware that you had accessed information about him/her via one of these sites?
- These sites may hold personal information about your sibling that they may not be ready to share or wish to share with you.
- It may be overwhelming to see information about your sibling in this way.
- It may be important to consider how you would react if your personal information was accessed in this way.

We would highly recommend that your contact is facilitated through an adoption agency and that contact is not made via a social networking site. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) have compiled a useful guide in relation to social networking sites and tracing. This guide is available from:

<http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/socialnetworking/>

Possible outcomes

If you decide to trace your sibling there are a number of possible outcomes that you may need to consider:

- Your sibling may not have been aware of your existence and may need some time to come to terms with this information.
- Your sibling may not be open to contact.
- Your sibling may only be prepared to exchange basic information.
- Your sibling may be open to contact and the possibility of meeting.

As with any other birth relative, contact with a sibling is voluntary. It is an individual's decision as to whether or not he/she is in a position to establish contact and the timing involved. This decision must be respected.

Preparing for contact with your sibling who was adopted

There are a number of ways that you may learn about your sibling. You may be informed by your adoption agency that you have a sibling or you may be 'matched' with your sibling through the NACPR. If you have been told by your adoption agency that you have a sibling they will support you in relation to the ongoing contact and how best to proceed. If you and your sibling have been 'matched' through the NACPR you will be offered support by the Adoption Authority of Ireland and or referred to your adoption agency to assist and support your contact with your sibling.

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Preparing for contact with a sibling who was not adopted

You may learn that you have a sibling who was raised by your birth mother or birth father. Contact will depend on a birth parents willingness to share information about you with his or her other children. Your contact with your sibling or any other birth relative is voluntary. It is an individual's decision as to whether or not he/she is in a position to establish contact or maintain contact.

Advice on writing letters

Most adoption agencies encourage those who are searching to begin contact with a letter as it is a positive way of engaging with the person who has been located. Prior to meeting, correspondence provides a unique opportunity to share information. It can help to build a relationship which can make the initial meeting easier and more comfortable. Email, telephone and text communication, although faster, usually demand an immediate response. Writing letters allows you to take time and reflect on the process and make informed decisions on how you wish to pace the contact. It may be useful for you to read the Post Adoption Information Leaflet No 8 for Adopted People, **'Beginning the contact with your birth mother or birth father'** as the suggestions may be helpful in beginning contact with a sibling.

How do sibling reunions generally work out?

It may be useful for you to read the Post Adoption Information Leaflet No 9 for Adopted People, **'Preparing for a reunion meeting with your birth mother or birth father'** as the suggestions outlined apply equally to meeting a sibling.

Reunions between siblings tend to be less complicated than reunions between a birth mother or birth father and an adopted person. Research studies have found that sibling reunions often work out well and relationships between brothers and sisters tend to be long-term in duration but they can vary as much as other relationships. A shared common interest, similar lifestyles, or similar occupations can help to build an ongoing relationship.

Genetic Sexual Attraction

On rare occasions some siblings may experience feelings of attraction to each other. A reunion meeting can sometimes represent the first time that the adopted person has had an opportunity to meet someone who is genetically linked to them. Some people feel attracted to their birth family member without any sexual component being present. Where there is a sexual component in the attraction, it is generally described as Genetic Sexual Attraction. These feelings can be very powerful and may threaten to overwhelm those involved. If these feelings do arise for you it is really important that you talk about them with your social worker. Your social worker is likely to have experience of working through similar issues with other people and will be able to offer you advice and support.

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Developing the relationship

You may experience ups and downs in your relationship with your sibling. The advice for this relationship like many others, is to take your time, don't rush, and enjoy getting to know the other person. Try to develop an understanding of his/her life and give each other space when this is needed.

One of the tasks of any relationship is working out whether you like the other person and have something in common with them. Like any relationship it will require negotiation and recognition of the different needs that each person brings to the new relationship.

It can be important to try and gain an insight into your sibling's life and experiences. For example, if you are adopted, it may be useful to learn about the grief and loss that a birth parent can experience and how that can impact on his/her other children. If you're not adopted, learning about the feelings of adopted people can be helpful. You could learn more by talking to your social worker, by reading relevant information and by meeting birth parents and adopted people.

It will be useful to seek support during this time by talking with a social worker at the adoption agency, another professional or a trusted friend.