



Adopted people thinking about searching

Everyone's experience of adoption is unique. For some adopted people curiosity about their origins may begin in childhood and continue into adulthood. For others it may be an interest that is sparked following a significant transitional event, for example: when moving away from home, getting married, the birth of a child, the death of a parent or moving into middle/late adulthood. This wish to have more information and/or to consider searching is, for some, a normal part of adoption. Some adopted people may not feel this curiosity or need to search and this too is quite normal.

An adopted person's wish to learn more about his/her birth family may be influenced by many factors which might include: his/her own personal experience of being placed for adoption, his/her own personal experience within their adoptive family, feelings of a sense of belonging to more than one family, questions about identity, age when told about being adopted, and a wish to have more understanding and insight into the reasons that he/she was placed for adoption. Often an adopted person will have considered the possibility of tracing a birth parent long before making any enquiries. He/she may have a variety of motivations for seeking information and tracing a birth parent. These motivations can shift and change over time.

Some adopted people may approach their adoption agency with a view to finding non-identifying background information and/or medical history about themselves and their birth family, but do not necessarily have a wish to trace or meet a birth parent. For others their goal may be to trace and have a reunion meeting with a birth parent. It is important to consider whether or not this is the right time to begin a search. The tracing process can be an emotional journey that can have a deep and long-lasting impact on the adopted person and the birth relatives involved.

Some adopted people may be hesitant or reluctant to trace a birth parent for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons might be:

- An adopted person may feel that tracing his/her birth parent is disloyal to his/her adoptive parents.
- An adopted person may feel that he/she does not have the right to trace and make contact with a birth parent. This view may be influenced by perceived societal and/or familial expectations.
- An adopted person may be fearful of the possibility of being rejected by a birth parent.
- It may be too difficult for the adopted person to consider opening himself/herself up to the tracing process.

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- It may be too painful for an adopted person to consider and reflect on his/her experience of being placed for adoption.
- An adopted person may feel that he/she does not wish to stir up past emotions, feelings and experiences.
- An adopted person may be anxious about what he/she will discover during the course of the trace.

In deciding if this is the right time to approach your adoption agency, with a view to tracing your birth parent, it is important to explore and reflect on the following:

- What/who is motivating you to make contact with your birth parent?
- Do you have realistic ideas and expectations of the possible outcomes?
- Are you prepared for the unexpected and not knowing what the search will reveal?
- What are your fantasies, hopes, fears and dreams about your birth parents/relatives?

You can also discuss these questions with your social worker in the adoption agency. Ultimately it is important that the decision to search is yours. This is a journey that can be enriching, fulfilling, painful, frustrating, enlightening and healing. It is important to consider whether or not you are ready for whatever the journey may reveal.

For many people the search is taken up and dropped several times before reaching any conclusion. The search needs to be seen as a step-by-step process. At times the search can be quite quick and at other times be long and frustrating. It is important that you decide your own pace and allow yourself time to absorb new information as it arises and to give yourself time to adjust to new feelings and experiences.

At all stages help and support from experienced professionals can be valuable in helping you deal with the emotional and practical challenges of the decision to search.

If you are an adopted person being sought or searched for by your birth mother or birth father

Usually it is the adopted person who undertakes a search for his/her birth family, however in some cases birth mothers, birth fathers, siblings and other birth relatives may initiate an enquiry. If you have been contacted in such circumstances you may experience a variety of feelings which can range from excitement, anxiety, concern, to elation and curiosity. You may be concerned about the impact that this contact may have on your adoptive parents and siblings and your relationships with them. These feelings are all normal and to be expected. With support and the opportunity to talk about your feelings it may be possible to reach a decision about the best response you can give at this time.

Birth mothers and birth fathers search for a number of reasons. Their motivations may include, enquiring about their son or daughter's well being and sharing factual information such as their medical history.

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Some adopted people and birth parents wish to keep their contact confidential. Adoption agencies can facilitate the exchange of letters and information, and arrange meetings between adopted people and birth parents in a discreet and confidential manner.

It is important for birth parents and adopted people to have respect for each other's privacy and individuality.