



Common phases in the search process

Having made the decision to search for your birth mother or birth father you may find that you experience many emotions during the search process. These experiences will not necessarily fall into any particular order and they can reoccur over time. The phases outlined below draw on the experiences of others. You may find some similarity with your own experience.

First Phase - Practical issues

Initially, most people find they are distant from the emotions involved in searching. At the beginning you may express your desire to search in terms of practical, concrete issues, such as a wish for information, or to pass on information. You may discover that your motivations become more complex as time passes.

During this first phase, some people may decide not to share their wish to search. They believe they will be able to deal with it quietly and they may prefer to tell people when they themselves feel ready.

Generally this phase does not last long and it changes the more involved one becomes in the search. You may find this period confusing as you gradually realise that the search is more of an emotional experience than you had anticipated.

It is important to understand that as you progress with the search your initial reasons for searching will remain, but many other complex emotions and issues will most likely become part of your journey.

You may need to explain to those close to you that this may happen, and that it is possible the search will take up a lot of your time and energy. This will, hopefully, prepare them for some of the emotions you may experience during the journey.

Second Phase - Intensity of feelings

During the second stage of your search you will often find that emotions become more intense. These feelings can sometimes manifest themselves as anger and frustration at the way the process unfolds, e.g. frustration that you are not legally entitled to certain information about yourself or anger at your lack of control over events. Feelings of loss and grief can also come to the surface. Some people feel guilty that they have a desire to search for information and/or contact, and wonder if they are being disloyal to their adoptive families.

The intensity of these feelings may make you feel uncomfortable and uncertain. If you have the opportunity to talk with someone else similarly engaged in the search process, you will discover that many people share your experience.

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Support will be important to help you to deal with the complexity of the emotions you may be experiencing.

Third Phase – Pre-occupation with the search

There may come a time during your search when the process of tracing becomes all consuming. You may have to accept that at times it is difficult for those close to you to respond to your needs completely. They may not fully understand the complexity of the issues from your perspective. They may express a desire that you keep things in perspective. You may have to accept that at times it is difficult for those close to you to respond and to support you as you may wish them to.

Fourth Phase – Time out

Following a period of determination to reach your goal, it can happen that you find yourself withdrawing somewhat, and you may decide to put the search on hold. You may simply need a rest from the emotional roller coaster you have been on. You may need more time to examine the feelings that have come to the surface, and most importantly, you may need more time to absorb new information. You may fear that you could discover something deeply distressing, or that your birth relative may not respond.

For some people this is the final phase, but for others, it is a temporary phase. It may last days, weeks, months or years. This withdrawal may also confuse those close to you. They may be surprised at your decision to halt a search that has been so important to you, and they may be surprised if you decide to resume the search again. Allow yourself the space to take time out when and if the need arises. It is important to remember that this is your search and you need to go at the pace that feels right for you.

Fifth Phase – Acceptance

This phase is arrived at when you accept whatever you have discovered. It can mean continuing with your search, or coming to terms with the fact that your initial hopes may be unrealistic. It may mean that there is an opportunity to meet your birth relative. Reaching a level of acceptance does not reduce the need for support. This is especially true if a reunion is going to take place, in which case you may be need support more than ever.

Everyone experiences the phases of search differently. It is impossible to clearly map any one person's journey, as each search deals with unique circumstances.