



Possible outcomes of the search for your birth father

Many adopted people who initially search for their birth mother may then wish to make contact with their birth father. It is important that you know that in order for your birth father to be contacted his identity will need to be confirmed by your birth mother. If your birth mother is unable or unwilling to provide information about your birth father it may be extremely difficult to proceed with the search.

Your birth father may not have any knowledge of what happened to your or your birth mother. Your birth mother's circumstances at the time may have been complex and communication may not have been possible between your birth parents.

Many adopted people who begin a search for their birth father wonder what the outcome may be. This leaflet offers some information and help in this area. The order in which the list of possible outcomes is presented is not intended to indicate that any one outcome is more likely than another.

Possible outcomes

Your birth father is found and wishes to have contact

Your birth father wishes to have contact with you. This is the outcome that you may have hoped for. Initially this contact may be by letter where correspondence is forwarded to each party through the adoption agency.

You and your birth father may be in correspondence for quite some time before you agree to share identifying information and consider the idea of meeting. Corresponding by letter gives you time to process the fact that you are in contact and come to terms with the many emotions involved. It also allows you to get to know your birth father and possibly develop the foundation of a relationship.

A reunion may be a once-off meeting between an adopted person and a birth father or it may lead to a short-term or indeed a long-term relationship.

There are a number of issues to bear in mind which may have an impact on how the contact or relationship develops. These may include:

- Your birth parents may have married each other. This is not uncommon and for some it can be a very welcome outcome while for others it can be difficult. Some birth parents may decide that they cannot tell their other children while others may need time to consider how best to tell their other children who may not be aware of you. These siblings may need time to adjust to having another brother or sister.

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- On occasions when birth parents have married they may not wish to have contact this can be a very difficult outcome.
- This may be the first time that your birth father has learned about your existence and in view of this it may take him some time to respond to the request for contact.
- Your birth father's partner and family may not know of your birth. In the past, births outside of marriage were often concealed because of a fear of the social stigma that was experienced by mothers and fathers of children born in these circumstances.
- Your birth father may have difficulty in telling you about his relationship with your birth mother and the decision to place you for adoption. The reasons for this may be that:
 - Your birth father's experience of placing you for adoption could have had a long-lasting traumatic impact on him. When contact is established difficult and painful memories may resurface for him and as a result he may not be willing to have contact or to share information.
 - Your birth parents may have had a very short or difficult relationship.
 - Your birth father may not have been aware of the pregnancy at the time.
 - Your birth father may not have been involved in the decision making process regarding your adoption.
 - Circumstances may have forced your parents to end their relationship.
 - Your birth father may not have given support to your birth mother at the time of the pregnancy and he may find this difficult now that you want to meet him and know what happened.
 - Your birth father may be a close family relative.
 - The pregnancy may have been as a result of a non-consensual sexual relationship.
 - Your birth may have been as a result of an extra marital relationship.

Unable to locate your birth father

It may not be possible for the social worker to contact your birth father. There may be a number of reasons for this:

- There may be very little identifying information on the record regarding your birth father.
- The length of time that has elapsed since the adoption agency had contact with your birth father.
- Your birth father may have moved from the address on the adoption agency's records.
- Your birth father may have moved multiple times or may have emigrated.
- Incorrect identifying information may have been given at the time of the adoption.
- Your birth mother may not be able or willing to confirm the identity of your birth father.

Unable or unwilling to meet

A birth father may be unable or unwilling to meet you at this time. There are many reasons why this may be and some of the more common reasons are outlined below:

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- Your birth father may not have been aware that he is your birth father. He may never have been informed about the pregnancy and he may not accept that he is your birth father. DNA testing may be the only means of resolving this issue.
- Your birth father may not have told anyone else about your birth and may fear the reaction of his partner and/or his family.
- Your birth father may not wish to inform his family about the request for contact and may not be in a position to travel to a meeting without their knowledge, for example, because of age or disability.
- Your birth father may be fearful of your attitude towards him and his part in the decision to place you for adoption.
- Your birth father may feel that he has a lot to lose by engaging in contact with you.

If your birth father is unable or unwilling to meet you, you may wish to discuss some or all of the following with your social worker:

- Is it possible to know why your birth father has made this decision? If the reasons behind a decision are known it can sometimes make it easier to accept that decision.
- Is it possible to ask if your birth father would be willing to receive or exchange a letter or photograph?
- Is it possible that your birth father would be willing to maintain indirect contact with you through the adoption agency?
- Is it possible to ask if your birth father would write you a letter explaining his decision not to have contact? Is he open to giving some family background and medical information?
- Is it possible to leave a letter or photo on the adoption agency's records in the event that your birth father should contact and ask for this information?
- Is it possible to meet with other adopted people for whom this has also been the outcome?

Some birth fathers change their initial decision not to have contact, if they have the time to come to terms with an approach for contact. Also, their circumstances may change and allow them to reach a different decision. However, some birth fathers may never change their initial decision not to meet and this can be very difficult to accept. Counselling may be helpful if this is the outcome of your search.

Death

The adoption agency may discover that your birth father has died. This is not an outcome that many people are prepared for and some can experience great shock and sadness upon hearing this news.

Depending on the circumstances, it may be possible for you to get some further information about your birth father and/or other members of your birth family. Discuss with your social worker if any of the following are possible:

- Is it possible to hear more about your birth father and his life from someone who knew him well?
- Is it possible to meet any family members?

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- Is it possible to get some photographs of your birth father?
- Is it possible to visit your birth father's grave?

All of the above and the timing of these requests for information need to be handled with sensitivity as any approach to family members may re-open their pain and grief following the bereavement.

Non-response

Your birth father may not respond to attempts by the social worker to make contact with him. In some cases a birth father may deny that he is the person being traced. When there is no definite response you can be left with even more unanswered questions.

Negative response

A birth father may state that he does not want contact under any circumstances and he may ask that the adoption agency does not make contact again.

It can be very difficult for you to learn that your birth father is not open to or unable to have contact. Considering his perspective and the experiences that he may have had in the past may help you to understand why he has made the decision not to have contact. Having this insight may help to ease the hurt that can be felt when contact is refused. Contact, whether by letter or meeting is voluntary. It is your birth father's decision whether or not he is in a position to establish contact, wishes to do so and the timing involved. This decision must be respected.

Research on outcomes

Some research studies suggest that 30-40% of adopted people search at some time in their lives. Adopted people do not always search hoping for a relationship or a reunion with their birth relatives. What an adopted person wants in searching may vary over the course of his/her life.

It is not always the adopted person who searches, birth relatives also search as well. This is evident from the number of birth relatives who have signed on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register established by the Adoption Board, now known as the Adoption Authority of Ireland (see: www.aai.gov.ie). In general research studies in this area have found that the majority of people who search and have a reunion with a birth relative describe their experience as positive.