



### **Helpful Information if your son/daughter has made the decision to search**

If your son/daughter has made the decision to search for information about his/her birth family members you may be experiencing a wide range of emotions, for example:

- You may discover that how you thought you would respond to this situation is in fact quite different to how you now feel
- You may be concerned that your son/daughter will be disappointed or hurt by the outcome of the search
- You may be anxious about what a positive outcome will mean for you and for your relationship with your son/daughter
- You may not understand your son/daughter's reasons for wanting contact with birth family members
- You may be worried about the impact of this experience on you and on your family as a whole, and on your relationship with your son/daughter
- You may be excited about the prospect of contact with your son/daughter's birth family and you may be very encouraging of the search
- You may find it difficult to know how to balance showing interest and respecting your son/daughters privacy

You may find it difficult to tell your son or daughter how you feel. You may be anxious that your thoughts and feelings will influence his/her decision regarding pursuing a search for and contact with birth family members.

It may be that individual members within your family react differently to hearing that your son/daughter wishes to search for and have contact with his/her birth family. At each stage in the process the social worker in the adoption agency may be available to you and to your family to talk through the mixed emotions that may be arising and to offer support and information on the process and on this journey that you and your family are experiencing.

It is important to remember that the tracing process can be an emotional journey that can have a deep and long-lasting impact on you, your son/daughter, your family and your son/daughter's birth mother, birth father and birth relatives.

### **Issues and feelings that may arise**

A number of emotional experiences, which are common to adopted people, adoptive families and birth families, have been identified. These emotions are unique to each person involved. Exploring these emotions and knowing and understanding the different emotions that others may have can assist each person to gain a deeper insight into the impact and effects of the tracing process. How you, as an adoptive parent, may experience some of these core emotional experiences is outlined below.

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### **Loss**

Everyone involved in adoption will have experienced loss to some degree. As an adoptive parent you may have experienced the loss of never having a child born to you. The overwhelming sense of happiness experienced by adoptive parents at the time of an adoption can push any feelings of loss into the background.

You may find it difficult to talk about your own sense of loss. Some of these emotions may re-emerge for you when your son/daughter begins to search.

### **Grief**

A number of stages of grief have been identified. These include; shock and denial, guilt, anger, sadness and resolution. Disenfranchised grief is a term which describes grief that is not acknowledged by society. When loss is hidden it is more difficult for people to grieve for that loss. Adopted people, adoptive parents and birth parents can experience disenfranchised grief.

If you have experienced infertility you may feel that your grief has not been acknowledged or spoken about, and you may feel that you have not been allowed to grieve. This may also be the case if you have experienced complications in pregnancy. You may not have had an opportunity to work through your thoughts and feelings associated with your experience of infertility. It may be important to seek support for yourself if these feelings re-emerge for you at this time.

### **Rejection**

When your son/daughter expresses a wish to seek information about his/her biological roots, birth family and identity it may have a deep and resonating impact on you and you may experience your son/daughter's need for information as rejection.

### **Guilt and Shame**

When people blame themselves with regard to a loss, they can experience guilt. Feelings of shame and guilt can be experienced by adopted people, adoptive parents and birth parents.

You may feel guilty for having had the opportunity to raise your son/daughter and for his/her birth parents' lost opportunity of not seeing your son/daughter growing up.

### **Identity**

'Who am I?' is often a question which motivates adopted people to search. It is a question that arises for everyone connected with adoption.

You may question your own role and identity as a parent, particularly if your son/daughter decides to search. You may feel uncertain about what part you can play in your son/daughter's search and contact with his/her birth parent(s).

As new information becomes available and new relationships develop during the search and reunion journey, new questions concerning identity may emerge.

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### **Control**

Feelings regarding control or lack of control may be triggered during the course of the search. All those involved in adoption may have experienced a lack of control over this significant aspect of their lives. The loss of control may have a long term effect because it can bring about a sense of insecurity.

### **The search**

Your son/daughter may experience many emotions during the search process. At the beginning your son/daughter may express a desire to search in terms of practical, concrete issues, such as a wish for information or to pass on information. He/she may discover that his/her motivations become more complex as time passes.

Your son/daughter may at times be preoccupied with the search. His/her emotions may become more intense. Feelings of loss and grief can also come to the surface. Your son/daughter may feel guilty about his/her search and wonder if he/she is being disloyal to you and other family members.

It is possible that the search process will take up a lot of your son/daughter's time and energy, and complex emotions and issues may arise. It may be difficult for you to understand the complexity of the issues from your son/daughter's perspective.

This may be a difficult time for you. You may be faced with your own complex reactions and emotions to the search, while at the same time attempting to support your son/daughter and make sense of his/her responses.

There may come a time during the search when the process of tracing appears to have become all consuming for your son/daughter. It is important that you continue to offer your support and invite your son/daughter to talk openly about his/her thoughts and feelings.

Your son or daughter may withdraw from the process and decide to put the search on hold. For some adopted people this is the final phase, while for others it is temporary phase. You may be surprised at your son or daughter's decision to halt a search that has been so important to him/her and perhaps again surprised if he/she decides to resume the search.

The outcome of the search may be one that your son/daughter had hoped for and there may be an opportunity for your son/daughter to correspond with and or meet his/her birth mother, birth father or other birth relatives. Alternatively, he/she may be left feeling disappointed, hurt and or rejected. Your son/daughter may need to come to terms with the fact that his/her initial hopes and expectations may have been unrealistic.

### **Possible outcomes of the search**

- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father is found and wishes to have contact. She/he may also wish to have contact with you
- Your son/daughter's birth parents may have married each other and they may have had other children
- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father may married other people and may have had other children

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- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father may have placed another child(ren) for adoption
- Your son/daughter may have full or half siblings
- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father's family may not be aware of him/her
- It may not be possible to locate your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father
- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father may not be open to contact
- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father may be deceased
- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father may not respond to attempts to make contact with her/him
- Your son/daughter's birth mother and or birth father may indicate that she/he does not want any contact and she/he may ask that the adoption agency does not make contact again

### **Impact of the search**

It can be difficult to predict what impact a search will have on you, your son/daughter and your family. The search may raise difficult and painful questions for you and for your son/daughter. You may hear information that was not shared with you when your son/daughter was placed with you and it may be difficult to understand why this information was withheld by your son/daughter's birth mother and or by the adoption agency.

You may be uncertain about your own thoughts regarding your son/daughter's search and the search may raise complex emotions for you. You may wish to protect your son/daughter from getting hurt and from the possibility of being rejected by his/her birth relatives. You may feel understanding of, angry at and or frustrated by a birth mother, birth father or birth relative's non-response or negative response. At the same time you may be anxious about how a positive response will impact on your relationship with your son/daughter.

It may be of benefit to you and your son or daughter to talk openly and listen to each other's hopes and anxieties.

### **Support**

It is important for adoptive parents to feel supported throughout this process. You may decide to seek support from friends and family who are aware of the situation. You may find that your son/daughter wants to support and help you to understand his/her needs and wishes in relation to finding information about his/her birth family and initiating contact with birth family members. Talking with your social worker and reading relevant information may also be of support to you. You may wish to have contact with other adoptive parents and this may be something that you could discuss with your social worker. Listening to the experiences of other adoptive parents, adopted people and birth parents may help you to understand and make sense of your feelings and emotions at this time.

It is also important for adoptive parents to be supportive during this process. Knowing that you support his/her wish to search may be very important to your son/daughter. Your son/daughter may feel a strong sense of loyalty to you and he/she may be very anxious about your response to the search. Having this insight and understanding may help you to identify the difficulties and challenges that your son or daughter might be experiencing. Finding the right balance

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between showing enthusiasm, giving encouragement and reassuring your son or daughter is not always easy.

The search process, contact and reunion may bring happiness or sadness, great joy or disappointment. It is an end of sorts, but it is also a beginning. It is the beginning of a journey, which is largely unknown. The social worker is there to offer advice and assistance to everyone involved in the adoption process. He/she may be able to reassure you that the emotions and issues you and your son/daughter are facing are in fact quite common and normal reactions to this process.

### **Further leaflets**

You may have many more questions that have not been addressed in these two leaflets. You may wonder about the possible outcomes of your son/daughter's search. You may be unsure about what happens after your son/daughter's birth mother, birth father or birth relative has been contacted. You may have questions about how contact develops, the pace of the contact, and how a reunion is planned and structured. If these questions arise for you we suggest that you consider reading some or all of the following leaflets:

- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 1 – General information about adoption in Ireland and the first steps in finding out more about an adoption
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 2 – Searching for information about your birth family
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 3 – Adopted people thinking about searching
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 4 – Common phases in the search process
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 5 – Issues and feelings for all involved
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 6 – Possible outcomes of the search for your birth mother
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 7 – Possible outcomes of the search for your birth father
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 8 – Beginning the contact with your birth mother or birth father
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 9 – Preparing for a meeting with your birth mother or birth father
- Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Adopted people No. 10 – Post reunion issues for everyone involved