



Searching for information about your son or daughter

Introduction

You may be thinking about taking a first step in relation to searching for information about your son or daughter who was placed for adoption. All adoption agencies welcome enquires from birth mothers or birth fathers who wish to know more about their son or daughter placed for adoption.

If you are a birth father, your identity may have to be confirmed by the birth mother before a search will be undertaken for your son or daughter. This confirmation may need to be obtained from the birth mother, before any non-identifying information concerning your son or daughter can be shared with you. In a situation where the birth mother is deceased or unable to be contacted, the adoption agency will discuss with you how best to proceed in relation to your search.

Typically adoption agencies deal with enquires about a younger child by contacting the adoptive parents for information. Direct contact with the adopted person will take place when he/she is 18 years of age and over.

Accessing and using the information and tracing services of an adoption agency

If you decide that your next step is to seek further information about your son or daughter's adoption you should contact the agency involved or the Adoption Authority of Ireland, if the name of the agency is not known to you. Consider the questions you would like to ask, write them down, send them to the adoption agency and/or bring them with you when an appointment has been received. It may be important to bring any information you already have.

At the first appointment

- Ask whether it is possible to confirm or update any information you have.
- Explain what you would like now: for example, any background information, whether or not it is possible to search for your son or daughter.
- Discuss with the social worker any queries you may have.
- Ask about the agency's policy and practice in relation to information and search.
- Ask about the agency's waiting list. Consider putting your name on the waiting list even if you are uncertain about your wish to proceed as you can always withdraw or defer your enquiry.
- Ask some or all of the following questions with regard to the search process:
 - How is a search usually carried out?
 - What is the average time involved in the searching process?
 - Is counselling offered to everyone involved in the search process?

What can the adoption agency offer?

Background Information

Most adoption agencies will provide non-identifying information regarding your son or daughter, dating back to the time of the original placement. Unless the adoptive family kept in touch with the agency over the years, it is unlikely that the information relating to your son or daughter will be up-to-date. The adoption agency cannot provide a birth parent with identifying information, including the adopted person's name or address. This is because the Adoption Authority of Ireland and the adoption agencies must follow the legal requirements to uphold rights to privacy.

It is possible to obtain copies of the official consent to adoption which was signed by you at the time of the adoption. It is also possible for you to ask your social worker to assist you in obtaining the following:

- Your son or daughter's birth certificate.
- Copies of any documentation signed by you.
- Copies of your correspondence to the agency.
- Medical information relating to you at the time of the birth.

You may wish to leave your contact details with the adoption agency in the event your son or daughter makes his/her own enquiry at a later date. The adoption agency will keep this information on record and notify you accordingly.

Counselling

In relation to adoption issues counselling provides time and space for you to:

- Explore issues that are important to you
- Explore the possible effects of the search process on you and others close to you
- Explore the best time to actively pursue the search
- Explore the possible outcomes

During this time you will obtain information about the search process and you may also wish to receive non-identifying information.

Ideally, a professional relationship based on mutual trust will be developed between the social worker and the birth parent or other birth relative making an enquiry.

Help with the search

Your social worker will offer you support and advice in relation to your search. He/she will attempt to locate and approach your son or daughter and thereby obtain his/her wishes about being in contact.

Using social networking sites

There has been a growth in the number of people using social networking sites to make contact with an adopted person or birth relative. Finding someone in this way is very exciting, but because of the speed in making contact with a birth relative in this way it can be overwhelming for all involved. It is also possible that that person you contact in this way may not prove to be your son or daughter.

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It is really important in terms of your future relationship with a birth relative to consider using an adoption agency to make contact. A very useful resource and 'top ten tips' to consider when thinking about using a social networking site to search or to make contact with a birth relative, has been compiled by BAAF and these are available from this link:

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

Who should I tell?

As a birth mother who has placed a child for adoption you may feel alone and isolated. As a birth father you may have similar feelings. It may be helpful to speak with someone else who has had a similar experience and your social worker may be able to arrange this for you.

Remember this is your search and you should be the one who sets the pace and makes the decisions about when and how to search. Be selective about the people in whom you confide. Not everyone close to you will understand your need to search, your feelings about it and the emotional reactions you will have as the process goes forward. It may be beneficial to have the support of close family and friends. In the end you will be the best judge of who to tell. The following information may help you to decide.

Parents and or siblings

Deciding to talk to your parents or siblings about your intention to search may depend on the nature of your relationship at the time of your child's placement and now. You may feel that your parents were in some way responsible for the decision to place your child for adoption. There may be many unresolved issues about this between you and your parents or other relatives. It is possible that parents and or siblings may not have been aware of the pregnancy and subsequent adoption.

Partners

If you are in a relationship and have confided in your partner, it is likely that he/she will want to support you. However, although initially supportive, a partner can sometimes find it difficult to understand the significance of your search. He/she may also view your search as a potential threat to your present relationship and may resent the time and energy it absorbs. He/she may raise objections to your decision to search in order to protect you from potential pain and rejection.

It may be the case that you have not confided in your partner and fear that to do so now could jeopardise your relationship. Whilst initially your partner may be shocked and hurt that you had not previously confided in him/her it is important that you discuss why you were not able to do so in the past and that you now welcome support. Partners and families are usually understanding and supportive, and at any stage in the process the social worker in the adoption agency will be available to meet with them to discuss the issues which are pertinent to them in the search process.

Children

If you have children, the prospect of telling them that you placed a child for adoption may be difficult as you may worry about how they will react. You might wonder for example: 'Will they judge my past actions?'

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Timing and preparation are important and here you can enlist the help of your social worker. For younger children, there are some good story books available explaining the concept of adoption which you may find useful. See list of books on <http://councilofirishadoptionagencies.com>

Whether or not to tell your children and when, how and what to tell them is something you should discuss with your partner, as it will effect the family as a whole. Remember, when you decide to tell your children, particularly young children, it is important not to burden them with the need to keep secrets. If you have adult children, it may be important to inform them of your plan to search in order to prepare them for what you may find, and also to give them an opportunity to support you. You can discuss all of these issues with your social worker.

Friends

While close friends can offer valuable support throughout your journey, it can be painful to discover that a close friend is unable to offer support, or cannot grasp the significance of your search. To some friends, the phases of your search can resemble chapters in a novel and they may be intensely interested. If your search is progressing slowly, they may induce feelings of frustration in you by constantly questioning how things are progressing and expressing opinions on the pace or progress. Some friends are happy to support your pace irrespective of how slow or quickly your search is progressing.

You will quickly sense when and with whom you can express your true feelings. Although it is likely that you may be disappointed at the reaction of some close friends, there may be others who can offer appropriate support and assistance.

Other Adopted People/Birthparents

You may already know someone who has experience of the adoption process and it may be useful to talk with him/her. It does not have to be someone whose experience of adoption is similar to your own. Adopted people and birth parents can provide you with genuine and meaningful support. The aim of the search/reunion for an adopted person and birth parent may be the same and the fears that each experience may be similar. Motives may be different but complementary and so it may be good to talk to others and hear different opinions and experiences.