



Birth parents thinking about searching

Some birth parents may approach their adoption agency with a view to enquiring about their son or daughter's well being and possibly receive non-identifying information. 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. For other birth parents their goal may be to trace and have a reunion meeting with their son or daughter.

The experience of a mother or a father who has placed a child for adoption is unique. The emotions involved in adoption, separation and reunion are often complex and sometimes confusing. Acknowledged or otherwise most birth parents experience feelings of loss and grief as a result of the decision to place their son or daughter for adoption. It is important for birth parents to move at their own pace and to prepare themselves for contact with their son or daughter in a way that suits them best. It is important that you have support and preparation for your search.

How each birth parent copes with the loss of a child through adoption is individual to her/him and this will have a bearing on whether or not to search. As a birth parent you may choose to prepare yourself by seeking professional support/counselling, by reading relevant material, by attending support group meetings and talking to other parents. In the Post Adoption Information Leaflet No 5 *'Issues and Feelings for all involved'* the many feelings and issues involved in the search process are discussed. It may be helpful to read this when you begin to think about searching for your son or daughter.

It is important for you to prepare yourself for the process of searching. As part of your preparation, it may be helpful to explore your own experience of adoption, loss and the impact it has had on your life. It is important to consider whether or not this is the right time to initiate a trace. The tracing process can be an emotional journey. It may also be helpful if you try to understand what it may have been like for your son or daughter to have grown up as an adopted person.

Some birth parents may hesitate or be reluctant to trace their child for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons might be:

- They may not want to disrupt their son or daughter and the adoptive family's lives.
- They may feel that they do not have the right to trace and make contact with their son or daughter. This view may be influenced by their experience at the time of placement.
- They may never have told anyone about the son or daughter they placed for adoption.
- They may be fearful of the possibility of being rejected by their son or daughter.

Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Birth parent(s) No. 3

- It may be too difficult for the birth parent to consider opening themselves up to the tracing process.
- It may be too painful for the birth parent to consider and reflect on their experience of placing their son or daughter for adoption. They may feel that they do not wish to stir up past emotions, feelings and experiences.
- The birth parent may be anxious about what he/she will discover during the course of the trace. Some birth parents say they fear their son or daughter may be angry with them for placing them for adoption. Others fear discovering their son or daughter has been unhappy in their adoptive home.

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

- What/who is motivating you to search?
- 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 son or daughter?

You may find it helpful to explore these questions with your social worker in the 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 by choice a slow process as time may be needed to consider the implications of each step taken. 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 search.

If you are a birth mother or birth father whose son or daughter is searching for you

If your son or daughter has contacted you, you may experience a variety of feelings which can range from excitement, anxiety, concern, to elation and curiosity. It is also likely that you will find yourself reliving painful memories of the time surrounding your decision to place your child for adoption and events over which you may have had little or no control. These feelings are all normal and to be expected. With support and the opportunity to talk about your experience it may be possible to reach a decision about the best response you can give at this time.

Many adopted people, irrespective of whether or not their adoption experience was positive, are curious about their family of origin. Sometimes adopted people only search for factual information such as their medical history.

Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Birth parent(s) No. 3

Others hope to meet and develop relationships with birth family members. 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.

Some birth parents may choose not to tell family members about the existence of their son or daughter placed for adoption. Some adopted people may have difficulty with this and may feel that this secrecy is a denial of who they are.

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