



Possible outcomes of the search for your son or daughter

Many birth parents hoping to obtain information and or to meet their son or daughter placed for adoption have questions on the possible outcomes that may arise from their search. This information leaflet offers some information in this area. The order in which the list of possible outcomes of the search is presented below is not intended to indicate that any one outcome is more likely than another.

It is important to remember that the son or daughter you placed for adoption is no longer a baby. You may find it difficult to imagine your son or daughter as an adult. It may also be difficult to accept that your son or daughter has another family. Your son or daughter may need his/her adoptive family to be acknowledged and accepted by you. Being acknowledged has a tremendous healing capacity. This applies to both the adopted person and the birth parents.

In very exceptional circumstances, the adopted person may not be aware that he/she is adopted. In these circumstances it will be important to seek the support of the adoption agency which is undertaking the search.

It is possible that the name you gave your baby at birth was changed. You may have to prepare yourself to adjust to your son or daughter's identity in their adoptive family.

Contact between an adopted person and his or her birth mother or birth father can be a positive experience for each party and their extended families. It is essential for everyone to be sensitive to each other's needs and emotions in order to develop positive relationships.

Possible outcomes

Your son or daughter is found and wishes to have contact

Your son or daughter wishes to have contact with you. This is the positive outcome you had hoped for. Initially this contact may be by letter where correspondence is forwarded to each party through the adoption agency.

You and your son or daughter may be in correspondence for quite some time before sharing identifying information or considering 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 son or daughter and possibly develop the foundations of a relationship.

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

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Unable to locate your son or daughter

In a very small number of situations it may not be possible for the social worker to locate your son or daughter. There may be a number of reasons for this:

- The length of time that has elapsed since the adoption agency had contact with the adoptive family.
- Your son or daughter may have moved from the address on the adoption agency's records.
- Your son or daughter may have moved multiple times or may have emigrated.

Unable or unwilling to meet

Your son or daughter may be unable or unwilling to meet you at this time. There are many reasons this may be so and here are some of the more common reasons:

- The timing of an enquiry may not be appropriate, e.g. it might coincide with exams, marriage, birth, bereavement or illness.
- Your son or daughter may not at this stage have any curiosity about you or his/her birth family.
- Your son or daughter may not wish to upset or be seen to be disloyal to their adoptive families.
- The significance of the birth family may take on greater meaning when your son or daughter has a family of his/her own. He/she may prefer to engage in contact with you at a later stage.

If your son or daughter 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 son or daughter has made this decision? If the reasons behind a decision are known it can sometimes make it easier to accept that decision.
- Ask your social worker whether or not your son or daughter will receive a letter or photograph from you.
- Ask if your son or daughter would be willing to maintain indirect contact with you through the adoption agency.
- Could your son or daughter be asked to write a letter to let you know how they are?
- Is it possible to request non-identifying information from the adoption agency about your son or daughter and his/her the adoptive family?
- Is it possible to leave a letter or photo on the adoption agency's records in the event that your son or daughter should contact and ask for this information?
- Is it possible to meet with other birth parents for whom this has also been the outcome?

Some adopted people change their initial decision not to have contact, if they have the time to come to terms with the approach for contact. Also, their circumstances may change and allow them to reach a different decision. However, some adopted adults do not 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 son or daughter has died. This is not an outcome that any parent can prepare for and it will be a great shock and sadness to hear this news.

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Depending on the circumstances it may be possible for you to get some further information about your son or daughter. Discuss with your social worker if any of the following are possible:

- Is it possible to hear more about your son or daughter and his/ her life from someone who knew him/her well?
- Is it possible to meet adoptive family members?
- Is it possible to get some photographs of your son or daughter?
- Is it possible to visit your son's or daughter's grave?

All of the above and the timing of this request for information need to be handled with sensitivity as any approach to the adoptive family will re-open pain and grief following the bereavement.

Non-response

Your son or daughter may not respond to attempts by the social worker to make contact with him/her. It can be very difficult for you as a birth parent when there is no definite response as you can be left with even more unanswered questions.

Negative response

An adopted person may state that he/she does not want contact under any circumstances and he/she may ask that the adoption agency does not make contact again.

Considering your son or daughter's perspective may help you to understand why he/she 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 reunion meeting is voluntary. It is your son or daughter's decision whether or not he/she is in a position to establish contact, wishes to do so and the timing involved. This decision must be respected.

Adopted person unaware of his/her adoption status

A search may result in the discovery that your son or daughter was not aware that he/she was adopted. This may be a very stressful time for all involved and may require a lot of support from the adoption agency.

Research on outcomes

In general, research studies in this area have found that that the majority of people who search and have a reunion with a birth relative describe their experience as positive.