



General information about adoption in Ireland and the first steps in finding out more about an adoption

Adoption in Ireland

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The nature and effect of an Irish Adoption Order is that the child becomes the child of the adopters as if born to them within marriage. This means the child has the same family name and the same legal rights as if he/she had been born into the adoptive family. Adoption in Ireland is regulated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland which is an independent quasi judicial statutory body appointed by Government. (See Adoption Authority website for details on all of the Adoption Acts governing adoption in Ireland and for the Authority's current functions and services: www.aai.gov.ie).

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is responsible for:

- The issuing of Adoption Orders
- The operation of the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) which enables adopted people and birth family members to register their wishes regarding contact with each other.
- The registration and supervision of the Accredited Bodies. Some of these were previously known as Registered Adoption Societies.
- The regulation of domestic and intercountry adoption practices.
- The maintenance of the Irish and Intercountry Adoption Registers which records the birth names and adopted names of children who have been adopted.
- Issuing Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability to prospective adoptive parents.

Enquires about any aspect of adoption can be directed to the Adoption Authority: www.aai.gov.ie

Historical Context

Since 1952 almost 40,000 Adoption Orders have been granted in the State. Between the years 1951 to 1973, nearly 4,000 children were placed for adoption outside Ireland. The majority of these children were adopted by Irish-American families in the United States. Many Irish birth mothers also placed children for adoption in the United Kingdom.

Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Birth parent(s) No. 1

There are many reasons why children were placed for adoption in the past. These included:

- The social stigma attached to being a single parent and also the stigma attached to children born outside of marriage. This was particularly true until the end of the 1970's.
- Lack of financial support to single parents and their children. The first social welfare payment to single parents was made in 1973.
- The wish of single parents to have their children reared in a two parent family.

The spirit of the 1952 Adoption Act was based on a closed system of adoption. It was not envisaged that a birth parent or an adopted person would ever seek to have contact with each other again. Confidentiality surrounding adoption of children was of paramount concern. The majority of children were placed through registered adoption agencies or the local Health Boards (now Health Service Executive). Children were also placed in adoptive families in the following ways:

- Family Adoptions: Where a child was placed with a known family member, for example with the birth parent's sister, or aunt or with grandparents.
- Third Party Arrangements: Where a child was placed with a family by a third party, for example a doctor, solicitor, nurse or members of the clergy.
- Privately: Some children were placed privately in an adoptive family known to the birth mother, birth father or other birth family members.
- Informal arrangements: There is evidence that some babies were registered in their 'adoptive' family name as if they had been born into that family. No legal adoption order was made in those cases.

Trends in adoption placements

A major reduction in the numbers of Irish children being placed for adoption began in the late 1970's. By 1990 only 8% of children born outside marriage to Irish mothers were placed for adoption. Since the introduction of the Adoption Act 1991, the adoption of children from abroad by Irish residents has become the most common way for adoptive families to be formed. Between 1991 and 2008 over 5,000 children were adopted internationally (Adoption Board Annual Report 2008). An upward trend in international adoptions continued in the following years. However with the ratification of The Hague Convention in 2010 the number of countries from which Irish prospective adopters can adopt has decreased and it remains to be seen what trends will emerge in the future.

Adoption Services

All Health Service Executive areas provide an adoption service. See HSE Website for more details: www.hse.ie. Accredited Bodies registered by the Adoption Authority also provide a range of adoption services. See The Adoption Authority's website for all Accredited Bodies registered under the Adoption Act 2010 www.aai.gov.ie

Registration of a child's birth

Every birth in Ireland is entered in the Register of Births and a Birth Certificate can be issued from this Register. When a child is adopted into a new family an Adoption Order is granted, and the child's details are then registered in the Adopted Children's Register.

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A new Adoption Certificate, which has exactly the same legal function and standing as a birth certificate is issued for the child who has been adopted. This Adoption Certificate records the registration of the child's new identity/name and the certificate includes the names of the adoptive parents as the legal parents of the child. The certificate is a copy of the entry in the Register of Adopted Children.

Amended Baptismal Certificates

Once an Adoption Order is made, the adoptive parents' information is added to the original baptismal record. An amended baptismal certificate is issued for each adopted child in the parish area in which they reside. The original baptismal certificate is usually kept in the Diocesan office of the parish in which the child was born.

Access to Birth Certificates

Adopted people do not have an absolute right to obtain access to their birth certificates. However, adopted people can apply to the Adoption Authority of Ireland and request access to their birth certificate under Section 86 of the Adoption Act 2010. This section enables the Adoption Authority or a Court to direct that the adopted person be given access to the original entry of his or her birth in the records maintained by the Registrar General of Births.

All written enquiries can be sent to: Adoption Authority of Ireland, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Tel Ph: 01 2309300 and Freephone 1800 309 300. Email: info@aai.gov.ie Website : www.aai.gov.ie. The Adoption Authority applies certain criteria in relation to the release of birth certificates, one of which is that the birth mother is consulted as to her wishes in relation to the release of the birth certificate to the adopted person. Decisions by the Authority are made on a case by case basis and further information is available from the Authority.

First steps in finding information about an adoption

You can make a direct enquiry to the agency involved in you son/daughter's adoption. If you do not know the name of the agency this information will be available to you from: The Adoption Authority of Ireland, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Tel: 01-2309300 and Freephone 1800 309 300. Email: info@aai.gov.ie.

A letter or an email to the Adoption Authority or to the agency should include the following information:

- Your full name and any previous name.
- Your son/daughter's date and place of birth.
- Your current address and contact details including phone number.
- Some form of photo identification, for example; a copy of your passport or driver's licence.

You should also state what information you would like to obtain. The Adoption Authority and adoption agencies welcome enquiries, all of which are treated confidentially.

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National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR)

It is also advisable to consider placing your name on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register which is operated by The Adoption Authority. The NACPR was established in 2005 by the Adoption Board. The NACPR facilitates contact between an adopted person and a birth mother, a birth father, a sibling or other birth relatives. Participation is voluntary and contact through the NACPR will only be initiated where both an adopted person and a birth relative register and wish to have contact.

The NACPR allows you to choose whatever level of contact you wish to have. It also includes an option to have no contact with other parties to the adoption if this is your wish. Those who register on the NACPR can indicate their preference about the level of contact and this ranges from:

1. Willing to meet
2. Contact via telephone
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4. Exchange of letters/information
5. No contact but willing to share medical information
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The NACPR is confidential and once a match is made through the Register the adopted person and the birth family member will be informed by the Adoption Authority. For further information contact the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

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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.

Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Birth parent(s) No. 2

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?'

Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Birth parent(s) No. 2

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.



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.



Common phases in the search process

Having made the decision to search for your son or daughter you may find that you experience many emotions during the search process. These experiences will not necessarily fall into any particular order and they can reoccur over time. The phases outlined below draw on the experiences of others. You may find some similarity with your own experience.

First Phase - Practical issues

Initially, most people find they are distant from the emotions involved in searching. At the beginning you may express your desire to search in terms of practical, concrete issues, such as a wish for information, or to pass on information. You may discover that your motivations become more complex as time passes.

During this first phase, some people may decide not to share their wish to search. They believe they will be able to deal with it quietly and they may prefer to tell people when they themselves feel ready.

Generally this phase does not last long and it changes the more involved one becomes in the search. You may find this period confusing as you gradually realise that the search is more of an emotional experience than you had anticipated.

It is important to understand that as you progress with the search your initial reasons for searching will remain, but many other complex emotions and issues will most likely become part of your journey.

You may need to explain to those close to you that this may happen, and that it is possible the search will take up a lot of your time and energy. This will, hopefully, prepare them for some of the emotions you may experience during the journey.

Second Phase - Intensity of feelings

During the second stage of your search you will often find that emotions become more intense. These feelings can sometimes manifest themselves as anger and frustration at the way the process unfolds for example, frustration that you are not legally entitled to certain information about your son or daughter.

Feelings of loss and grief can also come to the surface. The intensity of such feelings may make you feel uncomfortable and uncertain. If you have the opportunity to talk with someone else similarly engaged in the search process, you will discover that many people share your experience. Support will be important to help you to deal with the complexity of the emotions you may be experiencing.

Post Adoption Information Leaflet: Birth parent(s) No. 4

Third Phase - Pre-occupation the search

There may come a time during your search when the process of tracing becomes all consuming. You may have to accept that at times it is difficult for those close to you to respond to your needs completely. They may not fully understand the complexity of the issues from your perspective. They may express a desire that you keep things in perspective. You may have to accept that at times it is difficult for those close to you to respond and to support you as you may wish them to.

Fourth Phase – Time out

Following a period of determination to reach your goal you may find yourself withdrawing from the search. You may decide to put the search on hold. You may simply need a rest from the emotional roller coaster you have been on. You may need more time to examine the feelings that have come to the surface and more time to absorb new information. You may fear that you could discover something deeply distressing, or that your son or daughter may not respond.

For some people this is the final phase, but for others, it is temporary. It may last days, weeks, months or years. This withdrawal may also confuse those close to you. They may be surprised at your decision to halt a search that has been so important to you, and they may be surprised if you decide to resume the search again. Allow yourself the space to take time out when and if the need arises. It is important to remember that this is your search and you need to go at the pace that feels right for you.

Fifth Phase – Acceptance

This phase is arrived at when you accept whatever you have discovered. It can mean continuing with your search, or coming to terms with the fact that your initial hopes may be unrealistic. It may mean that there is an opportunity to meet your son or daughter. Reaching a level of acceptance does not reduce the need for support. This is especially true if a reunion is going to take place, in which case you may be in need of support more than ever.

Everyone experiences the phases of search differently. It is impossible to clearly map any one person's journey, as each search deals with unique circumstances.



Issues and feelings for all involved

A number of core emotional experiences which are common to adopted people, birth families and adoptive families have been identified. How an adopted person, a birth parent and an adoptive parent may experience some of these core emotional experiences is outlined below. All of the emotions described are unique to each person. 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 adoption and search process.

Loss

Within adoption the experience of loss needs to be considered. Everyone involved in adoption will have experienced loss to some degree. As a result of gaining a new family through adoption a child loses contact and the opportunity to grow up with the birth family. The birth family loses the opportunity to raise the child and is usually not involved in the child's life. The adoptive parents may have experienced the loss of never having a child born to them.

Traditionally, secrecy was a part of the adoption process. It was believed that secrecy offered the best protection to everyone involved in adoption. This emphasis on secrecy has made it difficult for people to express sadness with regard to their feelings of loss. During the search there are times when one may feel incredibly sad despite the fact there is great happiness attached to potential or actual contact. It will be important to talk about these feelings of loss and sadness with others who can understand either because of their own personal experiences, or because of their professional training and experience.

Grief

When loss is hidden, as it most often is for members of the birth family in adoption, it is more difficult for people to grieve that loss. In the normal course of grieving there are a number of identified stages of grief: shock and denial, guilt, anger, sadness and resolution. When a loss is not acknowledged, for example in the placing a child for adoption, birth parents can experience what is termed 'disenfranchised grief'. This can add an extra 'layer' to one's grief as society may perceive that the person has no right to grieve.

Birth parents who have kept their child's placement a secret may have been unable to grieve for a long time. They may not remember information about the adoption and talk about 'keeping a lid on their pain'. It can be very painful for a birth parent to revisit these blocked or repressed memories.

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Adopted people may have difficulty grieving, they are not encouraged to mourn a loss which is often not recognised as a loss. Some adopted people do not feel that they have experienced grief around their adoption.

For adoptive parents the overwhelming joy and happiness at the time of the adoption pushes any feelings of loss into the background. They often describe finding it difficult to talk about their own sense of loss.

This need to grieve can sometimes be overwhelming. It is important to be able to seek support from those close to you and/or your social worker with whom you feel comfortable.

Rejection

Some adopted people may struggle with feelings of rejection as a result of their adoption.

Birth parents may feel they have been judged not to be good enough to parent a child. They often fear that people close to them will reject them if they confide that they have previously placed a child for adoption. They may also fear that the child they placed for adoption will reject them or be hostile towards them.

When an adopted person expresses a wish to seek information about his/her birth family and identity it can have a deep and resonating impact for an adoptive parent. Adoptive parents may feel a sense of being rejected by their son or daughter. This can be a concern for adopted people who are considering tracing a birth parent.

Guilt and shame

When people blame themselves with regard to a loss, they can experience guilt. Adopted people may feel shame at being different and may feel guilty about their need to search. Birth parents may feel guilt and shame about placing their child for adoption. Adoptive parents sometimes express guilt for the loss experienced by birth parents.

Identity

'Who am I?' is often a question which motivates adopted people to search, but it also influences everyone connected with the adoption. Adoptive parents can also question their identity as parents because they do not have a biological tie with their child. Birth parents lose their identity as the parent who raises the child. For example they find it difficult to respond when asked how many children they have. For many years they may have had to, at least in public, deny the existence of their children relinquished for adoption.

Adopted people lose their birth family identity through adoption and take on a new identity with their adoptive families. Most people take for granted the availability of information such as who they look like or other related family traits. This information contributes to the development of a sense of self and it is not available to adopted people.

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Uncertainty about one's identity can lead to feeling of low self esteem. As new information becomes available and new relationships evolve during the search and reunion journey, new questions concerning identity may also emerge.

Intimacy

People who have experienced confusion about their identity may have difficulty getting close to others. Since they have experienced significant losses in their lives they may have difficulty becoming intimate with others because they fear they may experience another loss. A fear of intimacy can lead to a lack of trust in relationships or at times difficulties in giving an on-going commitment to others.

Control

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

Birth parents may feel victimised and powerless about the decision to place their child for adoption. Adoptive parents may not feel fully entitled to be parents to their adopted children because they are not the biological parents. Adopted people may also experience these feelings as they had no control over the decision to place them for adoption.

Control is an important issue within the traditional adoption system and it can be perceived that control lies with another party, e.g. with the social worker in the agency, with the birth mother or the adopted person in relation to the scheduling of any meetings, and with the adoptive family in relation to acceptance of the need to have a relationship with the birth family.

Some of the issues outlined above may seem familiar to you, others may not. However, it is likely that some of them may emerge or re-emerge during your search journey. Experiencing such issues may be very emotional and may cause pain and grief to come to the surface. This is why it is important to seek support during your journey. This support can come from many sources, your family, a trusted friend, or a social worker or other experienced health professional.



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.



Beginning the contact with your son or daughter

Once you have met with a social worker in the adoption agency and the decision to search has been made, the process of contacting your son or daughter can begin. The adoption agency will attempt to locate your son or daughter and make contact with him/her. If he/she is willing to have contact, the adoption agency will encourage both of you to correspond by letter and this exchange of letters can be facilitated by the adoption agency.

Advice on writing letters

Most adoption agencies encourage those who are searching to begin contact with a letter as it is a positive way of engaging with the person you are searching for. Prior to meeting, corresponding provides a unique opportunity to gain information and start to build a relationship which can make the initial meeting easier and more comfortable. Email, telephone and text communication although faster, usually demand an immediate response. Writing letters allows you to take time and reflect on the process and make informed decisions on how you wish to pace the contact.

If your preferred form of correspondence is by email the adoption agency can help with this by agreeing to forward your emails to your son or daughter. The adoption agency can leave out your email address until you are ready for direct contact.

Most adoption agencies suggest that the person who began the search write the first letter. This is because the person searching will most likely have had more time to think about and consider the issues involved in contact and may be more prepared for writing. The first letter provides you with an opportunity to share some information and to introduce yourself.

Most adoption agencies suggest that letters are exchanged through them without disclosing identifying details until such time as you are ready for direct contact.

Suggestions for writing letters

Getting started is the hardest part. It is often not possible to sit down and immediately write a perfect letter. Some people write several drafts. The suggestions outlined below may be of help to you in writing to your son or daughter.

- Try to be warm, friendly and reassuring. Assure your son or daughter that you will respect their wishes about contact and that you understand that circumstances may limit his/her ability to respond quickly, or at great length.
- It's more personal if you write your letter by hand. It is best to sign the letter using your first name. If you type your letter handwrite your name.
- Keep a copy of your letter.
- Don't worry too much about correct spelling, grammar or phraseology.

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- Give some background information e.g. upbringing, family situation, education, employment etc.
- Don't attempt to try and cover everything about your life in your first letter. Use this as an opportunity to ask some questions and to invite questions also.
- Say what you might like in terms of the contact. For example it might be that you want to share medical information or to start regular correspondence and hope to meet in the future etc. You may wish to say that you would like to receive a response to your letter.
- Acknowledge that your son or daughter has existing relationships with their adoptive family.
- Short letters are probably better in the beginning as too much information may be overwhelming in the early stages of correspondence.
- If you wish to enclose a photograph with your letter it may be better to discuss this with your social worker first.
- Always re-read the final letter as if you were the person receiving it. Try to see it through your son or daughter's eyes and try to imagine how he/she might react.

Discuss sharing any difficult information with your social worker prior to including it in a letter. If there are things that you want to address but believe that a letter may not be the appropriate forum to deal with them, then talk to your social worker about them. You can always discuss the content of your first letter with your social worker if you would like some further advice. Remember, letters are an important part of getting to know each other so it should sound like you.

Waiting for a response to your letter can be an anxious time. It is important to remember that some people need more time than others to respond. If you do not receive a response to your first letter it is advisable to give your son or daughter some time to respond before making a second approach. Your son or daughter may not have expected to be searched for and may need time to consider how to best to respond.

Writing letters may come easier to some more than others. Some people question how many letters they should write or how long should they correspond for, before moving on to the next stage. This is decided by the individuals themselves. Throughout this process your social worker will maintain contact with you and your son or daughter to provide ongoing support and guidance as the contact develops and possibly moves towards a meeting.



Preparing for a meeting with your son or daughter

It is recommended that you avail of the support and assistance of your adoption agency if you are planning to meet with your son or daughter. A reunion meeting is a complex emotional process. Part of the social worker's role is to offer support to all those involved and to mediate and facilitate contact.

Studies have shown that a reunion can be a very positive experience even when it does not lead to an ongoing relationship. Generally those who meet consider that there are more advantages than disadvantages to meeting. Those who have met gain more knowledge about the other person and often experience a sense of healing as a result.

There are many issues that you should consider prior to your meeting. It may be one of the most significant events in your life and in the lives of those around you. It is therefore important to prepare for the initial meeting by considering the following:

- Why do you want to meet?
- What are your expectations of meeting your son or daughter?
- How might the reunion affect the people you care about?
- Do you have someone you trust with whom you can discuss your hopes and expectations of this meeting?
- Are you prepared to be mindful of your son's or daughter's feelings which may or may not be different than what you expected?
- Are you prepared to receive information which you may find difficult to accept? How might you handle this information?
- Have you thought about how you will accept your son's or daughter's feelings, choices, lifestyles, if they are different from yours?
- What are your supports to help you cope if you are disappointed with the outcome of the reunion?
- How might it be if your son or daughter wants a closer relationship than you anticipated or are ready for?
- You may have to prepare yourself to talk with your son or daughter about the circumstances of their adoption. They may want to know why they were placed for adoption, discussing this may bring up painful memories for you. It is important to consider who can best offer you support during this time.
- If you are a birth mother, it is also likely your son or daughter will want to know about his/her birth father. It will be helpful to have talked with your social worker about what information you are able to share with your son or daughter at this time.
- How might it be if your son's or daughters' adoption experience was not what you had hoped for?

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Further questions to reflect on

- How will you feel if your son or daughter has not told anybody about his/her search for you or your search for him/her, and may not be ready or willing to do so?
- Have you considered that your son or daughter may wish to move at a different pace from you in terms of the contact?
- How would you feel if you learn that there are health issues in regards to your son or daughter for example mental health concerns, physical disabilities and or genetic conditions?
- How would you feel if you were told difficult or sensitive information about your son's or daughter's life?
- How would you feel if you learn that there is a history of alcohol or drug addiction?
- How would you feel if you learned that your son or daughter had engaged in criminal behaviour?
- Are you aware of the issue of genetic sexual attraction?

The following steps can be useful before a first meeting:

- It is generally advised that first names only are used in letters during the early stages and that identifying details are not given. It is easier to share identifying information when both of you are happy and comfortable with the developing relationship. During this time of exchange of information and letter writing, take the opportunity to discuss with your social worker what identifying information you are comfortable sharing so as to ensure that your confidentiality is protected in case at some stage you decide that you do not wish to continue to have contact.
- Exchange of information can include a résumé of life events. This can be useful in bringing each person up-to-date on the other's life, and past and present circumstances. It and can be helpful to have such information before a first meeting.
- Exchanging letters, photographs, tapes, dvd's/video before a first meeting. Photographs or dvd's are a way of getting to know the person you are meeting. Not everyone will be comfortable with sharing photographs. Letters may give an opportunity to ask/answer some questions and to build up some information. Remember though, not everyone finds writing easy so you will need to take this into account both for yourself and for your son or daughter.

Planning for a first meeting

The plan and structure of the meeting should be discussed with your social worker and agreed by all concerned.

Who attends?

The initial meeting should be between you and your son or daughter. It is important that an opportunity is created for the people directly concerned to meet each other first and to have time together before the complexities of other relationships are introduced.

How long should the meeting last?

This is hard to decide, but generally about 2 hours is a good rule of thumb. Because the first meeting is an emotional event for everyone, it is important that you have enough time but also that it is not overwhelming. If your meeting is being facilitated by a social worker, he/she will offer to check in with you during the meeting, and you can decide if you feel this would be helpful.

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What else will help?

It will be important also to think about the following:

- Discuss where the meeting will take place. Your social worker will consult both of you and a decision will be reached regarding the location of the meeting.
- It will be important that the time you meet is arranged so that one person will plan to arrive earlier than the other person. Be sure you set it up so that you do not meet in the reception area of a building.
- Discuss with your social worker prior to the meeting what information you are happy to share, or not yet ready to share with your son or daughter.
- Decide if you would like to have the social worker with you to make initial introductions.
- Some people like to bring a small gift, but this is not essential. Discuss this with your social worker to see what might be best in your particular situation.
- Everyone will be nervous. Be yourself, use first names and try to relax.
- Consider bringing along some photographs. These can help to start and keep conversations going as you relate stories from the photographs.
- You may wish to bring a camera to your first meeting. It is a good idea to discuss this with your social worker so that you can find out if your son or daughter is okay to have photographs taken.
- Be aware of both your own and your son or daughter's need for privacy and be prepared for the fact that there may be some difficult or private issues which will not be discussed at the first meeting.
- It is important that the first meeting ends in a planned way. The ending of the meeting, especially if you are not sure what will happen next, can be very difficult and emotional for everyone involved.
- The first meeting can bring up emotions and feelings that you may not have expected or been prepared for. It is important to give yourself time to reflect on this first meeting. It is not advisable to rush into making plans for further meetings at this stage. Take some time out to decide if and how you would like to proceed with contact.
- At the end of the meeting it is a good idea for you both to contact the social worker to organise the next meeting if that is what you have agreed. Alternatively if you have agreed to share your phone numbers you can arrange further meetings directly with your son or daughter.
- Arrange some support for yourself. It is not advised to return directly to work or to college after the reunion. Many meetings can be emotionally exhausting for everyone involved. Take time out either by yourself or with a friend or family member.

The first meeting may be different from what you had expected. You may need some support and a chance to reflect on the experience and your feelings afterwards. Sometimes it can be disappointing for one or both parties, particularly where one or the other has expectations of a warm relationship that is not shared by the other person. Your social worker will provide support for you and may be able to put you in touch with others who have had experiences similar to your own.

The support of your social worker will continue to be available to you for as long as you wish after the reunion so you should feel at ease asking for this help if you need it.



Post reunion issues for everyone involved

Many people who have had a reunion with a member of their birth family find that some questions and concerns still remain. This leaflet seeks to offer assistance in this area.

Are reunions generally successful?

This question is often posed by people to help them make a decision whether or not to proceed to a first meeting. Adoption research has shown that a majority of people involved in a reunion are glad they took the decision to have a first meeting, but that not all of those continue to meet or have a relationship with their birth family member. The following is an outline of some of the stages and issues that can arise in post-reunion relationships. These stages are only a guide and do not necessarily happen in sequence. Indeed, they may, or may not be evident in your life after a reunion.

First stage – getting to know you

Some reunions may happen as a once-off meeting. This may be because the adopted person or birth relative may only wish to have one meeting or because the relationship between them does not develop beyond an initial meeting. Each reunion is a unique experience for the individuals involved. The reunion process you are entering is uncharted territory. As a result it is wise to consider how much identifying information you are ready to share at this early stage for example your telephone number and address. It is easier to provide further information as a relationship develops rather than regret having shared information too early. It is important to respect an individual's decision to share or not to share identifying information.

The first stage is sometimes described as the honeymoon stage in which those involved try to get to know each other and spend time with each other. This period can be very intense and can lead to feelings of exclusion for others in your family.

Some issues that may need to be discussed at this stage in the relationship include:

- What to call each other.
- When and how to introduce each other to friends/acquaintances.
- How often to meet and have contact. This may be determined by distance and location but can lead to difficulties if one person has very different expectations to the other, or if one person does not respect the wishes of the other.
- Agreeing the frequency, time and date of contact arrangements. For example, checking with each other whether it is best to text first and then call. It may be important to arrange a specific time to call that suits you both.

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Apart from practical issues you may also need to;

- Try to develop an awareness of and sensitivity to each other's lives and the commitments each of you have to partners and family members.
- Consider sharing information regarding conception, the birth and the decision to place your child for adoption. This information may include details about the birth father and his family.

It is important to remember that sharing this information may be very painful for a birth mother. It may be difficult and emotional for an adopted person to hear this information as well. If you are not ready to share this information at this time it is important that your wishes will be respected.

Genetic Sexual Attraction

During this stage, a small number of people describe a feeling of being attracted to their birth relative which can include a sexual attraction to a father, mother, son, daughter or sibling. A reunion may be the first time that the adopted person has had an opportunity to meet someone who is genetically linked to them. Some people feel attracted to a birth family member without any sexual component being present. Where there is a sexual component it is generally described as genetic sexual attraction. These feelings can be very powerful and may threaten to overwhelm those involved. If these feelings do arise for you it is really important that you talk about them with your social worker. Your social worker is likely to have experience of working through similar issues with other people and will be able to offer you advice and support.

Second Stage - pulling back

This is described as a 'time out' stage in which one person feels less closely involved than he/she appeared to be in the first stage. It can be very hurtful for the other person and it may increase fears of being rejected and or abandoned. It may also bring feelings of loss and grief. This stage can also include a need to look at the new relationship and to see how it is working for all involved. The relationship may then either settle down into a mutually agreeable level of contact, or, in some instances, it may end completely.

Issues which may need to be resolved during this period are:

- If it is to be successful, the new relationship needs to take into account the lifestyle and commitments of the other person.
- If you and or your son or daughter have not told significant family members about each other it will pose challenges for your relationship.
- Once the initial intense period has passed, other considerations come into play such as sharing or not sharing common interests, lifestyles, values and goals. Where two people are very different, it may be more difficult to get to know each other well and to enjoy each other's company.
- Where the birth mother and the birth father have not stayed in touch and now have contact, they may need to negotiate a relationship that does not threaten their present relationships. It is important to recognise the emotions and challenges involved in this process.

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- One of the possible realisations for everyone at this stage is that no reunion can replace the years that have passed since the adoption. This can lead to feelings of sadness and anger for some or all concerned and these feelings can re-emerge at any time. It is important to acknowledge these feelings and accept them, as otherwise they may interfere with the new relationship in a negative way.
- At this time challenges around identity and the role played in each other's lives can emerge for everyone involved.

Third stage - maintaining the link

This is described as the solidifying stage. Issues continue to be resolved and to be reworked. The relationship is moving more steadily and along more solid lines. New issues can arise, for example invitations to weddings and christenings. Interpersonal and interfamily conflicts develop, as they do in all families. Where conflicts remain unresolved, one or other person may decide to terminate the relationship completely. This is less likely to happen where both people establish good communication, are flexible and have similar expectations of each other. Over time the new relationship may need to be negotiated and renegotiated as individual needs, wishes and expectations change.

Post reunion support

After the reunion meeting is over, you are embarking on another journey and as with the experience you have just been through, one which is largely uncharted. However, other people have travelled this path and social workers in adoption have considerable experience of the issues surrounding the post-reunion period. Talk to your social worker at any time if you feel you need support with any of these issues and he/she will be glad to assist.



Mothers who have placed more than one child for adoption

If you have placed more than one child for adoption, you are one of many women in Ireland who have done so. This leaflet may be of help to you but should be read alongside the other leaflets for birth parents. See details at the end of this leaflet.

Impact on you as a birth mother

Many birth mothers have great difficulty in talking about the experience of placing their child for adoption and for those that have placed more than one child it can be even more difficult to talk about this. Mothers have spoken about their feelings of shame and about their fear of being criticised and judged by others. This affects their ability to talk or confide in anybody.

In the course of writing this leaflet we asked some mothers in this situation about what their thoughts and feelings were and one mother stated that she felt *'terrified even to mention more than one baby...'* Therefore the *'secret continues and is overwhelming'*. Another mother encouragingly said that *'there are other women in your situation and you will meet them in time and see how they cope and move on'*.

Difficulties remembering the adoptions

It is a common for some women to find it difficult to remember detailed information about the adoptions of their children. Sometimes the mixture of emotions can feel overwhelming and there can be confusion regarding certain facts, for example each child's date of birth and the adoption agencies involved.

Seeking further information

If you decide to seek further information about the adoptions of your children you can contact the adoption agencies involved if they are known to you. Alternatively you can contact the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) who will provide you with any information they can about their adoptions and the name of the placing agencies. You can register your wishes for contact or no contact with the AAI's National Adoption Contact Preference Register. See information at the end of this leaflet.

Birth Fathers

There are many different situations regarding birth fathers. They may not be the same for each of your children. They may or may not have been told about their children. Depending on the particular circumstances, they might or might not have been involved in the adoption process. The nature of the relationship between you and each birth father will have varied. There may have been love, abuse, abandonment or any number of aspects to the relationships and which still affect you today. Whatever the circumstances, adoption agencies will offer you help and you can discuss matters in confidence with them. They are very aware of the very many different situations, past and present, faced by birth mothers in relation to the fathers of the children. They have the experience and expertise to assist you in relation to your children and their birth

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fathers today. You will be offered help and guidance about agency procedures should your child or children request contact with their birth fathers and in relation to your own wishes regarding contact or no-contact with their birth fathers.

When you contact the adoption agency

Consider the questions you would like to ask, write them down, send them to the adoption agency and/or bring them with you to your appointment. It is important to bring any information you already have with you. You may wish to have a support person to assist you through this process.

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 adult child or children. Discuss any queries you may have with the social worker.
- Ask about the agency's policy and practice in relation to information and tracing.
- 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?
 - Is counselling offered to everyone involved in the search process?

How siblings may learn about each other

You may not have considered that your children would ever search for you or each other. In all cases where siblings seek contact with each other the adoption agencies involved will first make efforts to contact and consult you as a birth mother.

Your children can learn about each other in a number of different ways:

- They may be told by their adoptive parents.
- They may be informed by the adoption agency when they make an enquiry.
- A sibling may undertake their own search through social media, internet or public records and may discover information.
- If siblings register on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register they will be matched with each other. They will be informed of the match and efforts will be made to contact you and you will be offered the opportunity of becoming involved.

Impact on an adopted person

You may be concerned about how your children will react to learning that they have other siblings placed for adoption. For some adopted people learning that their birth mother has placed other children for adoption may come as a shock or surprise. It may trigger a mixture of emotions. Some adopted people may find it difficult to understand why their birth mother made an adoption decision on more than one occasion or why they were not placed in the same adoptive family. At the same time an adopted person may be curious and pleased to learn more about his/her siblings. Adoption agencies can offer support to siblings to help them understand the issues involved in these situations.

Support

The adoption agency will offer you counselling and support. You can choose to have contact with one agency which liaises on your behalf with the other agencies involved, or you can contact each agency that placed your children for adoption.

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It can be helpful to talk to someone else who is in a similar situation to yourself. The adoption agency may be able to arrange this for you either on a one-to-one basis, or refer you to a support group.

Possible outcomes of contact

A birth mother's relationship will differ with each child she placed for adoption as with any parent and child. Relationships will also be influenced by who began the search and the circumstances of how the contact was made.

When there is a possibility of contact with more than one of your adult children at the same time, it will inevitably be practically and emotionally demanding for you and for everyone involved. Ideally it is best to take time to get to know one at a time.

The relationship between siblings will vary. Sibling relationships like all relationships require patience and attention and respect for each other's needs. Support will be offered to all involved.

Further Information

- We recommend you look at the other leaflets for birth parents which are available from <http://councilofirishadoptionagencies.com> or from your adoption agency
- Also see: Child and Family Agency Adoption Services: <http://www.tusla.ie/services/alternative-care/adoption-services/>
- Adoption Authority Website: <http://www.aai.gov.ie/> for an application form for the National Adoption Contact Preference Register and the booklet called 'Your Questions Answered' on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register.

Note:

- With thanks to the colleagues in other adoption agencies and the birth mothers in the Barnardos' groups for providing their views on this Leaflet.