

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 14

Adopted people affected by a Contact Veto in NSW

For people who have been adopted intent on making contact with their birth parent, discovering that a Contact Veto has been lodged can come as a devastating blow. The initial reaction may be one of shock, disappointment, disbelief and anger, perhaps giving way to a long period characterised by a sense of ongoing grief.

If you grew up knowing that you were placed for adoption by your birth parents, discovering the Contact Veto may revive feelings of rejection and seem like a second even more painful rejection - a total abandonment. If you have only recently found out that you are adopted, you may be in a state of confusion, with a desperate need to know something of your origins.

Your long held or recently formed hopes, fantasies and dreams which revolved around a meeting may be instantly dissolved, and replaced by fears and self doubt. The veto may bring to the surface many difficult memories associated with the past, for example feelings of 'not belonging' and 'being different', which may have been part of your experience within your adoptive family. You may also feel that it is your right to know your background, medical history and genetic details. You may find it hard to deal with the painful feelings of loss which begin to emerge when you realise that contact with your birth family will not happen and that all the questions you have in your head will not be answered. The frustration of not being able to communicate or to explain yourself and your need may be difficult to bear.

There may be other reasons why the veto is hard to understand or accept. The need for contact may have arisen from the strong sense, experienced by some adopted people, of not being genetically connected to anyone, apart from their own children. Such a sense of "disconnectedness" may lead to fears or fantasies about real or imagined hereditary diseases, particularly mental illness. Similarly, many young adopted people express concern that they may marry a member of their own birth family. If your birth father's name was not on your original birth certificate, you will have to cope with the fact that you may never come any closer to finding out anything about him or his family. The blocking of access to half or full siblings may also be a source of great disappointment adding to your sense of loss.

In your anger and disappointment, it is understandable that you may have negative feelings towards your birth parents. Hard as it may be for you to do so at this stage, it is important for your own sake to consider some of the many reasons which may have led to the lodging of a Contact Veto.

Do remember that you are the seeker and that you have had years to think about and plan for a reunion. If, on the other hand, your desire for reunion has been forged in the heat of late discovery of adoption, then your preparation has been of another kind. In either case your own ideas and feelings about reunion are likely to be far removed from the expectations of your birth parents and what may be the difficulties of your mother or father’s current family situations.

There is a step you can take after you have had an Adoption Information Certificate for 6 months. The Adoption Act (2000) allows the Department of Communities and Justice to approach the vetoer to find out whether he or she wishes “to confirm, cancel or vary the veto”. This approach can be made only where the Department, “after relevant consultation, is of the opinion that circumstances exist that justify the approach in order to promote the welfare and best interest of either or both of the parties concerned.” Sometimes such an approach can lead to a change in the veto or even to the lifting of the veto.

These are just some thoughts to help you to understand and begin to make sense of what is now happening to you and to move forward, to plan for a future from which, in the foreseeable future, the hope of contact with your birth mother must be excluded. Many adopted people may feel the need to discuss this further. Here at the Post Adoption Resource Centre we would be very happy to hear from you, to have a discussion with you on the phone, to arrange an individual appointment or to perhaps provide a group where you might meet other people also struggling with their complex reactions to a veto.

Please phone us if you wish to talk further about any issues raised in this information sheet.

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