

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 14a

Adopted people affected by a Contact Statement in QLD

For adopted people who intend to make contact with their parent, discovering that an objection to contact 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 sense of grief.

If you grew up knowing that you were placed for adoption by your parents, discovering the Contact Statement 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 objection to contact 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 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 realised that contact with your 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 objection to contact 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, some young adopted people express concern that they may marry a member of their own family. If your father's name was not on your original birth certificate, you may struggle with the thought 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 parents. As 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 Statement.

You, as the seeker, may 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

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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 parents and what may be the difficulties of your mother or father's current family situations.

Some mothers signed adoption consent forms under intense pressure from their families and/or the father. In addition, past social norms existed that were very unsupportive of unwed mothers. Many mothers were told they would have no right to information about you and that there would be no possibility of contact with you in the future. Adoption often took place within a context of secrecy, hiding the birth of the child from family and friends.

Your mother might have coped with the pain by trying to get on with her life, imagining you had been placed in a loving home. The common belief for many years was that women who placed children for adoption 'should put the experience behind them' and many mothers have been strongly affected by this belief.

She may have kept your birth a secret, and may have experienced shame and guilt for years. These feelings might now prevent her from telling anyone about your birth. She may be concerned that you have anger toward her. Low self-esteem associated with shame and guilt, leads some mothers to believe that their child would never want to meet them. She may desperately want to see you, but fear her immediate family may reject her if she confides in them.

The circumstances surrounding your conception and birth might be extremely painful for her to remember, and she might feel that you are better off not knowing the truth. Meeting you could make her losses seem more real to her, and she may not feel emotionally strong enough to cope with any more pain. Fears of this sort may paralyse a mother and prevent her from accepting contact. By meeting a long separated child, she will be forced to acknowledge many painful emotions and she may feel that she has suffered enough by letting you go. Some mothers translate their depression and pain into anger against a society which made them place a child for adoption; against their parents or the father who didn't help them; or even occasionally, against the adopted person.

She still may be grieving for the baby who was placed for adoption and may find it impossible to think of you as an adult. She may believe that even a meeting with you will not be able to make up for the years apart, and may even intensify her grief for the years of your childhood which have been lost to her.

Her strong sense of responsibility and obligation towards your adoptive parents may inhibit her from making an approach to you. She may be scared to discover that you were raised in an unhappy or abusive home - after all, it was perhaps her fantasy of the 'perfect couple' that allowed her to place you for adoption in the first place.

She may feel always 'second best'; a failure as a woman and a mother, as she feels society's condemnation for 'giving up her child'. You may have been placed for adoption in a climate

of secrecy when 'illegitimacy' was regarded as shameful and adoption was not openly discussed as it is today.

Any one of these factors or a combination of many may have influenced your mother's decision to object to contact with you. It may help you to accept that decision if you have been left an explanatory message on the Contact Statement she lodged. However, leaving a message is very much a matter of individual choice and some mothers choose, for a variety of reasons, to leave no message. One reason may be that knowing nothing of the adopted person who will receive the message, they may be anxious that it will be misinterpreted - seen as being either too unsympathetic or as offering unfounded hopes. For people unused to writing letters, the effort of putting their thoughts down on paper, of finding the appropriate words in such a delicate situation, may well seem beyond them.

These are just some thoughts to help you start to understand and make some sense of this situation; to plan for a future which may not include contact with your mother.

If part of your reason for wishing to connect with your birth family is to ascertain family medical history, you can contact Adoption Services, in the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women who may be able to approach your mother, or a relative (despite the contact statement) to try and gain information of this nature, to pass onto you. Adoptions Services contact number is: (07) 3097 5100 or free call on 1800 647 983 (Queensland only). If, on the other hand, you were hoping for information about your family background and biological relatives, there are a number of ways in which you can conduct family history research. You may wish to enlist the help of your local genealogical society, State Library, or family history sites such as Ancestry.com.

You may feel the need to discuss this further in order to digest this information and the feelings arising for you. Here at Post Adoption Support Queensland, 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 inform you of upcoming groups where you might meet others who are also struggling with their response to a parent's objection to contact.

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

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