

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 1b

Information for parents who are thinking of searching for their adult sons and daughters in NSW

To search or not to search

Concerns about whether to search are common for parents whose child was adopted. Many parents express worries that their child may not know they are adopted, will not want to have contact with them or that they will disrupt their child's life in contacting them. Other parents talk about feeling that they don't have a right to search because they gave consent to their child's adoption or feel judged by society for wanting to search. Some parents have never told anyone about the birth of the child that was adopted. Everyone's experience of adoption is different as are motives for obtaining more information and tracing.

Many parents were told they would never be able to have contact with their child, and to forget that they had a child. These messages that may have been given long ago, have often had long lasting and serious consequences, and very often birth parents will have considered the possibility of tracing their child long before making any inquiries. This preoccupation is often not discussed for fear that it may arouse feelings of anxiety or judgement. At the Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC), we have been impressed by the sensitivity which parents show towards both their adopted child and their adoptive parents.

Searching is a step-by-step process which might be quite quick and in other instances, can be long and frustrating. It is important that you decide your own pace and allow yourself time to absorb new information and assimilate new feelings.

How do I find out about my adopted child?

1. Adoption Information Certificate

The first step is to obtain an Adoption Information Certificate from the NSW Communities and Justice. PARC can send you this application form or you can download them from:

<http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/parents,-carers-and-families/fostering,-guardianship-and-adoption/adoption/past-adoptions>

The Adoption Information Certificate is like a passport to further information and will also tell you if a Contact Veto or Advance Notice have been lodged (you can read more about the Contact Veto in Information Sheet 15 *Birth Parents Affected by a Contact Veto* and the Advance Notice in Information Sheet 13 *Advance Notice Information*).

When you apply for the Adoption Information Certificate you will receive:

- The Adoption Information Certificate and Memorandum of Adoption
- Social and medical information from departmental files
- Registration on the Reunion & Information Register if requested
- An Adoption Information Search Guide

2. *Additional Social and Medical Information*

The *Adoption Search Guide* also provides details of other sources that may hold records pertaining to your child; your Adoption Information Certificate will provide you with the eligibility to apply for this other information. The most likely source of information will be the adoption service provider who organised your child's adoption. The Department of NSW Department of Family and Community Services will tell you whether the adoption was organised by one of the private adoption service providers. It can often be helpful to acquire all of the social and medical information prior to searching and making contact with your adopted child. It may give you some information about your child's life after the adoption and the family in which he or she was placed. It may also provide you with some information that might assist you with your search.

3. *The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages*

Once you have received your Adoption Information Certificate you can apply for information from the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. You can apply for the result of a marriage search for your adopted child which is particularly important if you are searching for a daughter who may have changed her name after marriage. The registry will also search their records of deaths. If your child married you will receive a notice with the marriage details. If he or she has died the Registry will then send you the details of the death. If PARC has helped facilitate the BDM search, the Registry may notify PARC first, so that we can inform you over the phone.

Should you wish to do so, you can apply for your child's amended birth certificate although there is no legal necessity for this.

There is fee for searches conducted and certificates provided by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. You can contact the Registry at:

NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
Location: 35 Regent St, Chippendale NSW 2008

Post: GPO Box 30, Sydney 2001
General Enquiries: Tel: 13 77 88 (open 7am – 7pm, Mon-Fri)
Adoptions Section: Tel: 02 9035 6421; Fax: 9699 5334
Email: bdm-adeng@agd.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.bdm.nsw.gov.au

4. *Electoral Rolls*

Once you are sure of any change of name for your son or daughter, you can search for their current address by way of an Australia-wide Electoral Roll search. You can only conduct an Australia-wide search at one of the main Electoral offices. A list of these offices can be found on the Australian Electoral Commission's website:

http://www.aec.gov.au/About_Aec/Contact_the_AEC/

5. *State Libraries*

Australia-wide information can be researched at the Family History section of each state's State Library.

6. *Other options include*

Public Records: Telephone books or online
Internet Search engines

7. *The Reunion and Information Register*

Registering on the Reunion and Information Register means that if your adopted child also registers a wish for contact, you will be put in touch with each other by a mediator. Alternatively, messages left for you can be mailed on to you if you register a wish for information. The application for the Reunion and Information Register is included on the Adoption Information Certificate Application form.

How do I make contact?

Having located your adopted child and checked the information you have, you may then wish to make contact with her or him. It is at this point that parents often feel the need to discuss with an experienced counsellor the various ways of making contact and the pros and cons of each. You may wish to read Information Sheet 11 *Writing to an Adopted Person* to assist in your decision making.

Should I use an intermediary?

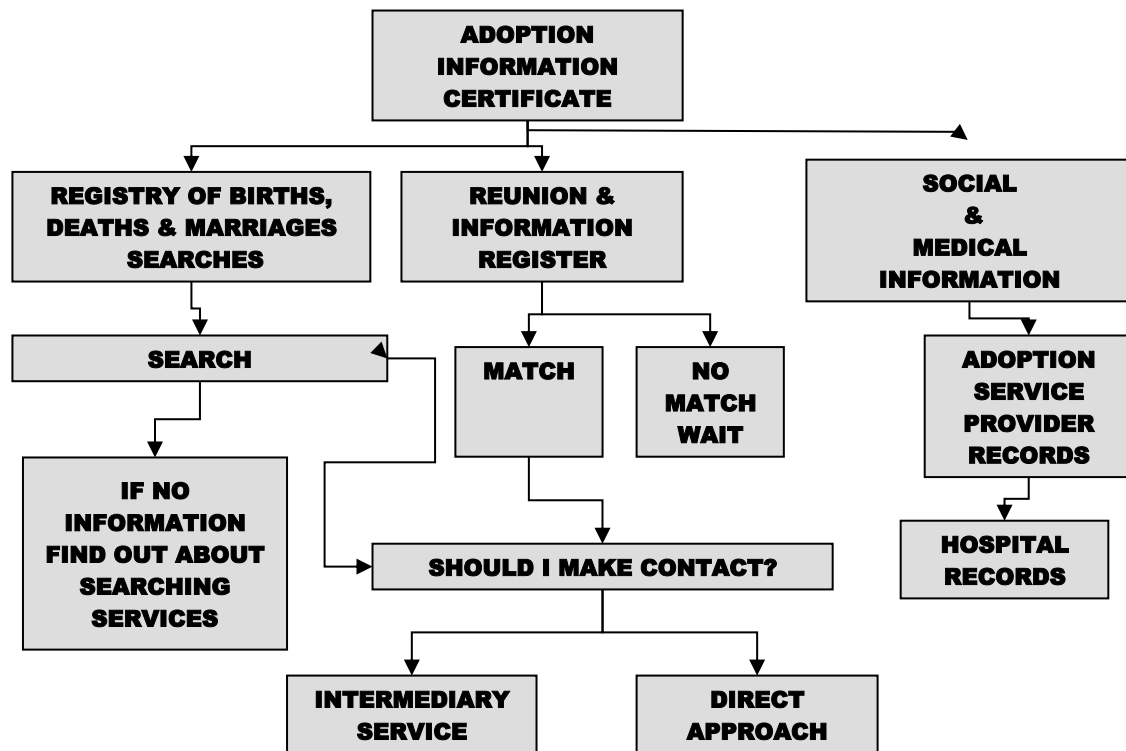
2019 © The Benevolent Society Post Adoption Services. This material may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes provided the author of the material is identified with the copyright notice.

The *Adoption Search Guide* provides a useful summary of the arguments for and against using an intermediary. PARC has an intermediary service which offers supportive counselling for both parties. Ask for further details of this if you are interested. You may, on the other hand, prefer to enlist the help of a trusted friend or relative, or of a support group. Whatever method of approach you choose it is important that you give yourself time to consider your own hopes and expectations and that you allow the person you are approaching time to consider their response. You may find Information Sheet 32 *Intermediary Service* helpful in deciding how to go about making contact. PARC undertook a piece of research in 2000 entitled *At Least Now I Know* about the experiences of people who have made contact. You can borrow this from the PARC library. A summary from the results of the research showed that those who contacted their birth relative indirectly either through an intermediary or by writing a letter were generally more successful in their reunion experience. It is usually a good idea to take things slowly and consider the situation from all the different points of view.

Getting help

The experience of some birth parents is that they have not been able to discuss their feelings with anyone for fear that they may be misunderstood or their motives misconstrued. The opportunity to hear other people's experiences, to discuss things individually with a counsellor or with other people who share a common interest can be very helpful and supportive. These are all services that PARC offers. PARC is not involved in searching, other than for people who are isolated or have a disability, but can give advice on steps to take and provide support at various stages along the way.

Below is a flow chart of the basic steps that need to be undertaken in searching for an adopted person. If your search is not straightforward and you cannot find your adopted child using the steps outlined in this Information Sheet, then you can talk to PARC about your specific situation to see whether any other services or support options can be recommended.



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

Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)
Mail: Locked Bag 6002, Hurstville BC NSW 1481
Phone: 02 9504 6788
Email: PARC@benevolent.org.au
Website: www.benevolent.org.au

Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ)
Location: Ground Floor, 189 Coronation Dr, Milton QLD 4064
Phone: 07 3170 4600
Email: PASQ@benevolent.org.au
Website: www.benevolent.org.au