

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 29

Using social media to search for family members post adoption

Social media is a useful method of communication and a transforming tool in all aspects of adoption and post adoption connection. Social media helps family members stay connected and helps adopted people fill in the gaps.

Social media creates the potential for all adoptions to be open which puts a huge strain on the secrecy of the past closed adoption era.

Searching using social media

The internet is a valuable tool in helping people search for family members. Social media may provide you with links to other family members and confirm the names of, and connections with, more distant relatives. Using social media can also go terribly wrong and ruin potential relationships. Family members may have no knowledge of the adoption and revealing this secret to more distant relatives could compromise any chance of developing a relationship with your mother/ father/ child.

We find the following tips a helpful guide:

- Be aware of the lack of privacy when searching online.
- Confirm that the person named on your documents **IS** the person you have found.
- Consider a conservative approach like a letter or private message to initiate contact.
- Prepare what you wish to know – you may only have one chance.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes – how would it feel to be approached on a public page?
- Ask yourself “would I say this in a crowded room full of strangers”? If the answer is no, then using a social media site is not the best approach.
- Be mindful that you do not have access to other people's privacy settings on social media nor knowledge of their interpersonal relationships.
- Know that this will have come “out of the blue” for the person you are contacting while you have been preparing for this moment.
- Be aware that people are uncomfortable at feeling “stalked” on social media.
- Consider taking the information you have found on line to locate the sought person to an Intermediary Service such as PARC or PASQ.

Staying in touch using social media

Connecting socially on networking sites exposes each party to the daily happenings of the other person's life. This may be positive, but it can be overwhelming or difficult to learn so much about the other person. You may learn things you didn't want to know or you may reveal more about your life than you wish to share. It takes time to build relationships and develop trust.

We suggest you:

- Move at the pace of the slowest party while getting to know each other.
- Set boundaries from the beginning to help form a stronger and healthier long-term relationship.
- Evaluate whether it will be healthy to accept a friend request or send a friend request. Do not feel that you must accept.
- Suggest other ways to stay connected such as email, phone calls and Messenger.
- Consider what you post on line, especially if it relates to the adoption.

Communication via social networking is forever and it can be difficult to make the decision to "unfriend". Take time to build your relationship before exchanging "friend" requests.

What are the best sites to use for searching?

There are so many social media platforms and online forms of connection. The most common ones offering a wide range of options are Facebook and the DNA sites.

Facebook is useful because people generally use their own name as their profile. It also tends to contain a lot of personal information and connections which may or may not be visible depending on privacy settings.

DNA sites also use people's names and show family connections in a more formalised way. They provide no information on relationships, personalities and family dynamics so use them to reach out to people with caution.

What does PARC & PASQ recommend?

- Apply for your adoption information and any official documentation you are eligible for. In NSW, apply to Adoption Information Unit Family and Community Services (DCJ), In Qld, apply to Adoption and Permanent Care Services.

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- Ensure your information is up to date as state governments have gradually offered more information and more original documents since the opening up of the adoption records in the early 1990s.
- Use these records and current BDM searches (e.g. Marriage and Death) to ensure you have an accurate and full name for the person you are looking for.
- Carry out an Electoral Roll Search to see if you can locate the person.
- Searching online for that name may give you a fuller a picture of that person's current situation. Before reaching out to them, consider if you think they are in a place where they could respond positively to an outreach.

Consider contacting PARC or PASQ to discuss your situation. We are happy to provide information, support and / or an Intermediary Service.

Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)

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Hurstville BC NSW 1481
Phone: 02 9504 6788
Email: PARC@benevolent.org.au
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Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ)

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