

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 35

Adopted people considering a reunion

Preparing for a Reunion

The decision to search for a parent often takes courage and requires adequate preparation. It is important to be clear what your reasons are for searching and how that may impact your parent. The search may be quick or may take years to locate the other person. It may also take some time before they are ready to respond to you, and what might happen once you have found them is an unknown. It is therefore important to prepare yourself by understanding what could happen, by learning of others' experiences and how they have coped and by ensuring you have adequate support around you to deal with the journey ahead.

Once you have made the decision to search for your parent, you have the option of doing this on your own or using an intermediary. Both come with their particular advantages and disadvantages but often an intermediary can act as an emotional buffer and provide you and your parent with support.

It is important to consider what your reasons are for contact. Once you have searched you cannot reverse the process. Or if you are only wanting a one-off meeting there is risk of causing further distress to your parent who has had to deal with the separation from you and the associated issues that this brings. If your parent wants ongoing contact, a one-time reunion could be very hurtful.

Once you have set the search process into motion, your parent may be found very quickly or it may even take years before they respond to you. It is important to have thought through beforehand the various likely scenarios. Parents often do reciprocate the desire for a reunion but some may not wish to make contact or may require time before they are ready to make contact. Whatever fantasies you might have about your parent may be completely different in reality and your parent may not be the sort of person you expected.

Once you have located your parent, you may experience a whole range of feelings and you may need some time before you take steps to make contact. Be aware also, that your parent may not have told anyone about your adoption and may be fearful of their secret being exposed and so it is important to proceed respectfully and discretely. During this period of uncertainty, it is a good idea to have support along the way. Some support options include support groups, counselling services, post-adoption services, and your intermediary, should you have one.

Managing the Relationship

It is important to remember that while you have been going through the various steps to find your parent, this has allowed you time to prepare for contact, but for them, the contact will come out of the blue. Be aware that they may be at a stage in their life where contact with you might be too overwhelming or an added pressure. Taking things slowly and allowing time to adjust after each step is essential. It is good to go at the pace of the more cautious party and to remember that building a relationship with anyone requires time, commitment and effort. It may be a case of one step forward and two steps back as you both negotiate a relationship that is mutually acceptable. You may even find that although you 'love' each other, you may actually not 'like' one another. A reunion is a very intense experience and any fantasies that you may have had will be replaced by reality. Just as you may be anxious of being accepted and living up to expectations, your parent will also likely be experiencing anxieties about meeting you.

Your parent, for various reasons, may not agree to a reunion. They may feel too old to cope with a sudden upheaval in their lives or may be fearful of stirring up long buried feelings which they have spent their whole lives suppressing. Whatever the reason, there is little you can do except hope that they may one day have a change of heart. Again, it is important to make sure that you have support around you.

As your relationship unfolds, you may experience a roller coaster of feelings - a mixture of positive and life-affirming feelings mixed in with emotions such as confusion, anger, disappointment and grief as you negotiate the relationship terrain with another adult with their own psychological makeup, history, set of values and expectations. And for both of you, these feelings are likely to arise from the present situation as well as unresolved issues from the past. It is important to take things slowly, to be patient and to be kind and respectful to each other and to yourself.

References:

Anderson, Carole J (1987). Thoughts to Consider for Newly Searching Adoptees. Iowa: Concerned United Birthparents Inc.

Trinder, L., Feast, J., Howe, D. (2004) The Adoption Reunion Handbook. Chichester: Wiley

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

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