

## **Post Adoption Information Sheet No 6**

### **Are you wondering how to respond to contact from a relative?**

You are party to an adoption; perhaps an adopted person, a parent, an adoptive parent or a sibling. You now know that a relative would like contact and this may or may not be appealing to you. Perhaps contact is something you never gave much consideration to. Perhaps it is something very precious and you are frightened it may “go wrong”. Perhaps it seems likely to complicate your life in ways you don’t feel prepared for.

On the other hand, you may have a desire to know something about your relative. What is your mother like and why did she place you for adoption? Did your child have a happy childhood and what is his/her life like now? What is your sibling like? Why does your relative want contact now?

The decision about whether or not to have contact is often not a simple one to make, but there are some things you can do that will help at this time.

#### **Face your feelings about contact**

If your relative who wishes to make contact seems very keen, you may feel uncomfortable that such a momentous issue appears so “easy” for them. You may wonder what their expectations will be, and if they will intrude in your life. While you may want to know “the truth” about your adoption experience, you may be anxious that there will be information you would prefer not to know.

For example:

Adopted people sometimes fear that they may have been conceived by rape or incest or that their father abandoned their mother or that their mother abandoned them.

They may fear that contact with their family will cause them to “lose” the self they know and understand and create feelings of confusion or loss of control.

Parents may fear that they will learn that their child had a difficult life. They may fear the adopted person will resent them or not be prepared to listen to their explanations. They may find the thought of future contact causes them to remember the shame, guilt and pain of the adoption. They may fear that others in their present life will reject them if they know of the adoption.

Adoptive parents may fear they will lose their child to relatives, or at least lose the specialness of their parent-child relationship. They may want to protect their child from unpleasant information. They may fear intrusion in their child's and their own lives. They may find themselves faced with many feelings from the past about their own infertility and the adoption. If they adopted children believing that contact could never occur, they may feel angry, cheated and unprepared for the present circumstances.

Siblings or half siblings may feel concerned about how their "new" sibling will fit into the family and the impact they will have on their parents.

There may be other people in your life that you feel need to be "protected" from your relative, people such as your parents, children and spouse.

If you would like contact, you may feel guilty at entertaining this thought, when you feel others around you would not want the contact.

This may make it hard to talk with those people who usually support you through difficult times. You might feel isolated. You probably don't know anyone else who's been through this situation, so it's hardly surprising you would feel that way.

### **Gather information you need**

You are at a stage in your decision-making when you need to gather information – about your options, other people and their expectations.

You may already know a little about your relative and why they are seeking contact. It may help you to see some photos and know who else in the person's family is seeking contact with you, what your relative hopes contact with you will be like, and how they feel about the adoption.

Your own desire for information and understanding about the adoption and your relative will now have to be balanced against any desire you have not to have contact. You may also have some understanding of your relative's needs and feel you would like to put that person's mind at rest too.

An intermediary could assist you to gather information from your relatives if you do not wish to have direct contact at this time.

If you have not already done so, you may like to do some reading about adoption reunions or about adoption generally. The Benevolent Society's post adoption services' have copies of 'Further down the track' and 'Meetings', both of which are collections of personal experiences of search and reunion, available through their libraries. You may also find it helpful to come along to information and discussion meetings hosted by our services'.

## Find out what contact is really like

A “reunion” is about information, understanding, knowing “the truth” and acknowledgment. Where a willingness to share exists, even a little, it’s hard not to achieve some measure of success.

If you have exchanged some information with your relative, you can already claim to have been successful. It’s not fair for you, or your relative, to perceive a desire by either of you not to pursue the contact further, as a failure.

## Consider how you’d like the contact to look

Every reunion is unique. Some people have letter or phone contact only, some have a lot of initial contact that peters out, some have birthday and Christmas contact, and some become firm friends over time. Some reunions happen in days, others in months. Some are short lived, others become lifetime relationships. A “successful reunion” is one in which both parties have their questions answered and feel comfortable with the level of contact that is established.

In parent – adopted person reunions, it is rare for people to establish a “parent-child” type of relationship and few people seem to seek that. For both parties to feel comfortable, compromises will be made, but no-one should be forced into contact they do not want. It is common for one person to wish for more contact but to accept the level of contact that is comfortable for the other person.

You may find it reassuring to know that most people report a feeling of satisfaction following their reunion, even if the reunion did not go as they had hoped. For many people, “not knowing” produces many fears, fantasies and feelings of emptiness. People who “just want to know the truth” invariably feel some sense of satisfaction when they finally do know, even if part of the truth is painful.

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

### Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)

**Location:** Locked Bag 6002,  
Hurstville BC NSW 1481

**Phone:** 02 9504 6788

**Email:** [PARC@benevolent.org.au](mailto:PARC@benevolent.org.au)

**Website:** [www.benevolent.org.au](http://www.benevolent.org.au)

### Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ)

**Location:** Ground Floor, 189 Coronation Dr,  
Milton QLD 4064

**Phone:** 07 3170 4600

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