

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 34

Parents Considering A Reunion

Preparing for a Reunion

The decision to search for the now adult child you placed for adoption is a momentous one and requires adequate preparation. It is important to be clear what your reasons are for searching and to consider what the implications of a reunion might be to you, your family and to the adoptee. The search for an adoptee may be quick or may take years to locate the person or before they are ready to respond to you, and what might happen once you have found your child is an unknown. Hence, it is 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.

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

If your family are not aware of the adopted child, you may want to give some thought about when to tell them. They too will be impacted and may require some time to come to terms with it and to adjust to the idea. If you have not told anyone that you had long ago placed a child for adoption, this may come as a surprise. It may be worth talking to other birthparents to learn how they initiated the discussion. Talking to your immediate family members about your desire to search is important for you and them and for your relationship with them. You may all be much better prepared to cope with whatever results from the search if you have their support. It may be an enormous relief to share this secret that you have held for so many years.

Once you have made the decision to search for the adoptee, 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 the adoptee with support.

Once you have set the search process into motion, the adoptee 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. Adoptees often do reciprocate the desire for a reunion but some may not wish to make contact or may take time before they are ready to make contact. Some adoptees may not have been told that they were adopted and this contact might come as a shock to them. Whatever fantasies you may have about your adult child may be completely different in reality and your child may not at all be the sort of person you expected. Your child is also likely to have questions about you and their birth and adoption, which may be hard for you to answer. It is a good idea to think through the sorts of questions they might have and how you would answer them.

Once you have located your son or daughter, you may experience a whole range of feelings and you may need some time before you take steps to make contact. It is important 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 son or daughter, this has allowed you time to prepare for contact, but for them, such 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 are 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 son or daughter will also likely to be experiencing their anxieties about meeting you.

Your son or daughter may not agree to a meeting, in which case there is little you can do except hope that they may one day have a change of heart. You may wish to periodically send them cards and letters to remind them that you care for them and hope to one day make contact with them. 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, guilt, 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. Some birth parents report that meeting their son or daughter brings up painful memories from the time of their birth. It is important to take things slowly, to be patient and to be kind to each other and to yourself.

References:

- Anderson, Carole J (1987). Thoughts for Birthparents Newly Considering Search. Iowa: Concerned United Birthparents Inc.
Ormerod, Thea. Preparing for Contact. *Branching out: newsletter of the Post Adoption Resource Centre*(Vol 7 No 3, pp 9-10)
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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