

## Siblings of an adoption that took place in QLD

Many adopted people enter their search for their birth mother with a strong hope that they will find siblings or half siblings, either on her side or on their birth father's side. Some are either delighted or shocked to discover that their birth parents married each other after their birth and that they have full siblings. This is only one situation where contact between siblings can occur. The following 'scenarios' are also common:

- A sibling born before or after the adopted person may also have been adopted.
- A sibling, born before or after the adopted person and parented by the birth mother, may be told by the mother or another family member of the adopted person and may seek him or her out. Similarly, other children born to the birth father may also wish to seek out their adopted sibling.
- Occasionally the adopted person discovers a number of siblings or half siblings, some of whom were fostered, some stayed with the birth parents, some were adopted or brought up by other family members. Older siblings may have strong memories of younger ones.

What legal rights do siblings both adopted and non-adopted have which would enable them to have contact with their other siblings?

### Rights of adopted people

#### 1. Information about other adopted siblings born to my birth mother.

Strong feelings may be aroused for those adopted people who discover that they were one of several children placed for adoption by the same birth mother. There may be a temptation to judge your birth mother harshly prior to finding out what her situation was at the time.

To discover you have adopted siblings can feel very overwhelming, particularly if you had imagined meeting only your birth mother. Your birth mother may not be willing to meet all of the children who were placed for adoption or may only wish to develop a relationship with one of you. This can lead to feelings of anger, loss and confusion.

If your adoption took place in Queensland, you are entitled under the *QLD Adoption Act of 2009* to:

- an adopted sibling's date of birth
- their name immediately after the person's adoption, and
- with the person's consent, the person's last known name and address.

This information can be obtained by writing to Adoption Services Queensland (ASQ), Department of Communities, Child Safety (see address below). Talk to your counsellor at The Benevolent Society about information on siblings in other states.

## **2. My rights to contact my siblings**

My birth mother is deceased - do I have the right to contact my siblings?

My birth mother has refused contact but has not stated in a contact statement that she doesn't want her children to have contact - do I have the right to contact my siblings?

My birth mother has met me but refused to tell her other children about me - do I have the right to contact them?

The answer to these 3 questions is the same - you would not be breaking any law in making such contact/s if you succeed in locating your siblings, however we urge you to use careful judgement about making contact in these situations.

We are happy to discuss these issues with you. In each of the above 'scenarios' there may be both good or difficult outcomes.

Where the mother has died, siblings may welcome the adopted person and say that the knowledge of the adoption has helped them understand their mother better.

Other adopted people have been hurtfully rejected by those siblings who refuse to believe that their mother could have placed a child for adoption and feel the memory of their mother has somehow been 'contaminated' by this new knowledge.

In making contact with children of a birth mother refusing contact or refusing to tell her children, you run the risk of jeopardising any chance of a future good relationship with her - that is a risk some adopted people decide to take with a wide range of outcomes.

### **3. My birth mother has stated that she does not want contact in a contact statement. Does this also apply to her children?**

Usually yes. Enquire with ASQ regarding your birth mother's wishes expressed in her contact statement. If your birth mother has stated she does not want contact with any member of her family then you are legally obligated to respect that wish.

## **What rights do non-adopted siblings have?**

### **1. My mother is deceased. I want to trace the child who was adopted. Can I do this?**

Yes, under the *QLD Adoption Act 2009* you can apply to the relevant state department (see below) for information about your adopted sibling, provided the adopted person is over 18.

Information about adopted siblings can be provided if written consent is given by the adopted person. Information that can be provided includes:

1. the adopted person's date of birth;
2. the adopted person's last known name and address;
3. a prescribed document.

If an adopted person has died, an adult relative of the person may give the consent for the release of information; or if an adopted person does not have capacity to consent, a guardian or adult relative of the person may give the consent.

Please contact ASQ for more information about how to request information about your adopted sibling(s).

## **2. My mother is still alive and wants me to help her find the adopted person - how do I do that?**

Contact ASQ to apply for information about the person.

For many birth mothers, stressful though it can be, direct involvement in the search process can contribute to healing her grief in a way that the sudden appearance of the 'long lost child' may not.

## **3. My mother is still alive and refuses to speak about the adopted child let alone look for him or her, but I want to - how do I do this?**

If your mother has lodged a contact statement with ASQ indicating that she does not want contact for herself or any member of her family, then legally you are not able to access information about your sibling. If your birth mother has not lodged a contact statement limiting contact and the adoption took place before 1 June 1991, then you can apply for information about your adopted sibling. This information will be supplied to you **if** the adopted person gives consent.

If you know the birth father of the adopted child and he is willing to help you, it is possible that he could have his name added to the Original Birth Certificate. He would then be entitled to the same information as your mother. If the father was married to your mother at the time of the adoption it is likely that his name is already on the adopted person's Original Birth Certificate and he would have the same rights as the birth mother.

In 'exceptional circumstances' information is sometimes released with special permission. These exceptional circumstances are usually a medically urgent need (e.g. for a bone marrow donor) but other circumstances may be considered, e.g. you were fostered and have no contact with your birth mother or do not know her whereabouts. You may need to produce documentary evidence to support any claim of exceptional circumstances, e.g. a doctor's letter. Please discuss these matters with a counsellor at The Benevolent Society if you have questions about your own circumstances.

### **Mailbox service**

ASQ also operates the Mailbox Service which allows you to write to your birth relatives and for this correspondence to be facilitated by ASQ. If one of your relatives has previously contacted ASQ or contacts ASQ in the future they will be able to receive your letter. The same works in reverse if you have a birth relative who would like to contact you.

### **How do sibling reunions work out?**

In 'Birth Bond' by Gediman, (when discussing post-reunion experiences of 300 birthmothers), the author wrote 'the absence of a shared upbringing does not preclude the possibility of strong, even instantaneous kindred feelings'. Our experience is that sibling reunions can be as complex as other reunion relationships. There may be complete disinterest and hostility (e.g. the birth mother's eldest child may feel deprived of their position or may exhibit sibling jealousy and resentment, particularly if one sibling has had a better life and more opportunities than the other.) Lifestyle, education, religion, interests and occupations can be so different that siblings have no common ground for a relationship.

Alternatively, warm and happy long-term relationships can grow, e.g. two siblings discover they have much in common and they develop a close relationship.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, opposite sex siblings may be very strongly drawn to each other. The intensity and need for contact may strain existing relationships. The strength of the attraction can be of a sexual nature and without the taboos which are built in when siblings have been brought up together. It can require determination, clear thinking and care for any pre-existing significant relationships to avert the damaging affects of this kind of attraction. If you would like to talk to one of our counsellors or do some reading on this and other relationship issues that may affect sibling reunions, give us a call.

Wherever your relationship travels, you will experience many 'ups and downs' - as in most relationships. Most siblings advise 'take your time, don't rush, you've got the rest of your life' and 'I give the other person space when they need it.'

Lasting relationships can best occur when each sibling has been able to put themselves in the shoes of the other; so if you are adopted, you may benefit by finding out about birth families, the grief of the birthparent and how that impacts on the other children.

If you're not adopted, learn about the feelings of adopted people, their fear of rejection and struggle to establish an identity. You can do this by reading (our library of books, tapes and videos as well as books for sale), and by meeting other birth parents and adopted people (phone us for the nearest adoption support group to you, or information on where we are planning to hold discussion days). If you'd like telephone contact with another person in your situation, phone us and talk to a counsellor who will be able to put you in touch with someone (first names only).

**NB:** The above information refers to adoptions that took place in QLD and the search process there. Every state of Australia has different adoption laws. For other states, phone us and we will give you the relevant contact numbers.

*Chapter 10 'About Siblings' pp 185-201 in 'Birth Bond' by JS Gediman and LP Brown published New Horizon Press New Jersey 1991.*

*Chapter 18 'Siblings' pp 162-167 in 'Lost and Found': by BJ Lifton pub. Harper and Row , New York 1979*

*'Did I dream that?' 'One woman's self discovery and Genetic Sexual Attraction' by Rose Blanchard in 'Adoption Therapist' 1996 (copies available from PARC)*

*Sibling Reunions , a letter to those who been contacted by Randolph W Severson. Pub House of Tomorrow adoption Texas 1992*

### **Useful contacts**

The following contacts will be useful to you if you decide to search for a sibling who is affected by adoption in Queensland:

Adoption Services Queensland  
Department of Communities, Child Safety  
GPO Box 806  
Brisbane, QLD 4001  
Phone: 1800 647 983 or 07 3224 7415  
Website: [www.childsafety.qld.gov.au/adoption](http://www.childsafety.qld.gov.au/adoption)  
Email: [asq@communities.qld.gov.au](mailto:asq@communities.qld.gov.au)

QLD Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages  
110 George Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
Australian callers 1300 366 430; International callers + 61 7 3247 5811

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

Post Adoption Support Queensland  
PO Box 5347  
West End QLD 4101  
T 07 3170 4600 or 1300 914 819  
F 07 3255 2953  
E [pasq@bensoc.org.au](mailto:pasq@bensoc.org.au)  
[www.bensoc.org.au](http://www.bensoc.org.au)