Information for adopted adults who are thinking of searching for their birth parents in NSW

To search or not to search

Everyone's experience of adoption is different as are motives for obtaining more information and tracing. Curiosity about origins may begin in childhood and, for some people, persists long into adulthood. Often adopted adults will have considered the possibility of tracing a birth parent long before making any inquiries. This preoccupation is often not discussed for fear that it may arouse feelings of anxiety or judgement. The decision not to intrude on birth parents or stir up feelings from the past is often expressed, as is the wish not to appear disloyal to adoptive parents. At the Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC), we have been impressed by the sensitivity which adopted people show towards both their birthparents and adoptive parents.

Often curiosity turns to action at particular times in adult life, for example, after leaving home, getting married, the birth of a child or the death of a parent. However, this may be short-lived and with many people the search is taken up and dropped several times before reaching any conclusion.

Searching needs to be seen as a step-by-step process which, for many people, can be quite quick and, for some, long and frustrating. It is important that you decide your own pace and allow yourself time to absorb new information and assimilate new feelings.

How do I find out about my birth parents?

1. The first step is to obtain a ***Supply Authority*** from Community Services (CS). PARC can send you this fact sheet and application form or you can download them from:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/adopt_supply_form.pdf

The Supply Authority is like a passport to further information and will also tell you if a Contact Veto or Advance Notice has been lodged (you can read more about the Contact Veto in Information Sheet 14 *Adoptees Affected by a Contact Veto* and the Advance Notice in Information Sheet 13 *Advance Notice Information*). There is a fee for the Supply Authority and the information about how to apply for the Supply Authority is included in the Fact Sheet which accompanies the application form.

When you apply for the Supply Authority you will receive:

- The Supply Authority and Memorandum of Adoption
- A Search Guide
- Registration on the Reunion & Information Register
- Social and medical information from departmental files

2. Additional Social and Medical Information

The *Adoption Search Guide* also gives details of other sources of information from which, having obtained your Supply Authority, you are entitled to apply for details of your background which may be on files. Sources of Information may be the hospital in which you were born or the adoption service provider who organised your adoption. Community Services will tell you whether your adoption was organised by one of the private adoption service providers. It can often be helpful to acquire all of your social and medical information prior to searching and making contact with your birth parents. It may give you some information about the reasons for your adoption and your birth parents' circumstances at the time of the adoption. It may also provide you with some information that might assist you with your search.

3. The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Once you have received your Supply Authority you can apply for information from the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. You can apply for the result of a marriage search for your birth mother and the registry will also search their records of deaths. If your birth mother married you will receive a notice with her marriage details. If she has died then the registry will contact PARC who will then telephone you to inform you of the death. The registry will then send you the details of the death.

Should you wish to do so, you can apply for your own original birth certificate although there is no legal necessity for this.

There is an additional fee for searches conducted by and certificates provided by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. You can contact the Registry at:

NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
35 Regent St, Chippendale NSW 2008
Postal Address:
GPO Box 30, Sydney 2001
General Enquiries: Tel: 1300 655 236
Adoptions Section: Tel: 02 9035 6421; Fax: 9699 5334
Email: bdm-adenq@agd.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.bdm.nsw.gov.au

4. Electoral Rolls

Once you are sure of any change of name for your birth mother, you can search for her current address by way of an Australia–wide Electoral Roll search. If you have your birth father's full name you can also search for him on the Electoral Rolls. You can only conduct an Australia-wide search at one of the main Electoral offices. The list of these offices can be found on the Australian Electoral Commission's website:
http://www.aec.gov.au/About_Aec/Contact_the_AEC/

You can also search Australia-wide information at the Family History section of each state's State Library.

5. **The Reunion and Information Register**

Registering on the Reunion and Information Register means that if one of your birth parents or some other member of your birth family also registers a wish for contact, you will be put in touch with each other by a mediator. Alternatively messages left for you can be mailed on to you if you register a wish for information. The application for the Reunion and Information Register is included on the Supply Authority Application form.

How do I make contact?

Having located your birth parent and checked the information you have, you may then wish to make contact with her or him. It is at this point that adopted people often feel the need to discuss with an experienced counsellor the various ways of making contact and the pros and cons of each. You may wish to read Information Sheet 10 *Writing to a Birth Mother* to assist in your decision making.

Some adopted people also feel concerned about the reaction of their adoptive parents who, quite understandably, can experience some strong conflicting emotions when their son or daughter decides to search for a birth parent, even if theoretically they can understand the need to do this. The kinds of feelings that adoptive parents describe include fear, anger, sorrow, jealousy, betrayal, guilt and a sense of failure; these emotions quite frequently coexist with feelings of sympathy, interest, relief and a sense of achievement. It may be helpful for your adoptive parents to read Information Sheet 2 *Information for Adoptive Parents whose Adult Sons or Daughters are Thinking of Searching for their Birth Parents.*

Should I use an intermediary?

The *Adoption Search Guide* provides a useful summary of the arguments for and against using an intermediary. PARC has an intermediary service which offers supportive counselling for both parties. Ask for further details of this if you are interested.

Whatever method of approach you choose it is important that you give yourself time to consider your own hopes and expectations and that you allow the person you are approaching time to consider their response.

You may find Information Sheet 32 *Intermediary Service* helpful in deciding how to go about making contact. PARC undertook a piece of research in 2000 entitled *At Least Now I Know* about the experiences of people who have made contact. You can borrow this from the PARC library or you can purchase it from our bookshop. A summary from the results of the research showed that those people who contacted their birth relative indirectly either through an intermediary or by writing a letter were generally more successful in their reunion experience. It is generally a good idea to take things slowly and consider the situation from all the different points of view.

Getting help

The experience of some adopted adults is that they have not been able to discuss their feelings with anyone for fear that they may be misunderstood or their motives misconstrued. The opportunity to hear other people's experiences, to discuss things individually with a counsellor or in a group with other people who share a common interest can be very helpful and supportive. These are all services that PARC offers. The centre is not involved in searching, other than for people who are isolated or have a disability, but can give advice on steps to take and provide support at various anxious stages along the way.

On the following page is a flow chart of the basic steps that need to be undertaken in searching for a birth relative. If your search is not straightforward and you cannot find your birth relatives using the steps outlined in this Information Sheet, then you can contact the Salvation Army Special Search Service who may be able to assist you further with your search. Their contact details are:

Salvation Army Special Search Service
PO Box A435, Sydney South NSW 1232
Tel: 02 9211 6491
Fax: 02 9211 2044
Email: SpecialSearchServiceNSW@aue.salvationarmy.org
Web: www.salvos.org.au

Frequently Asked Questions

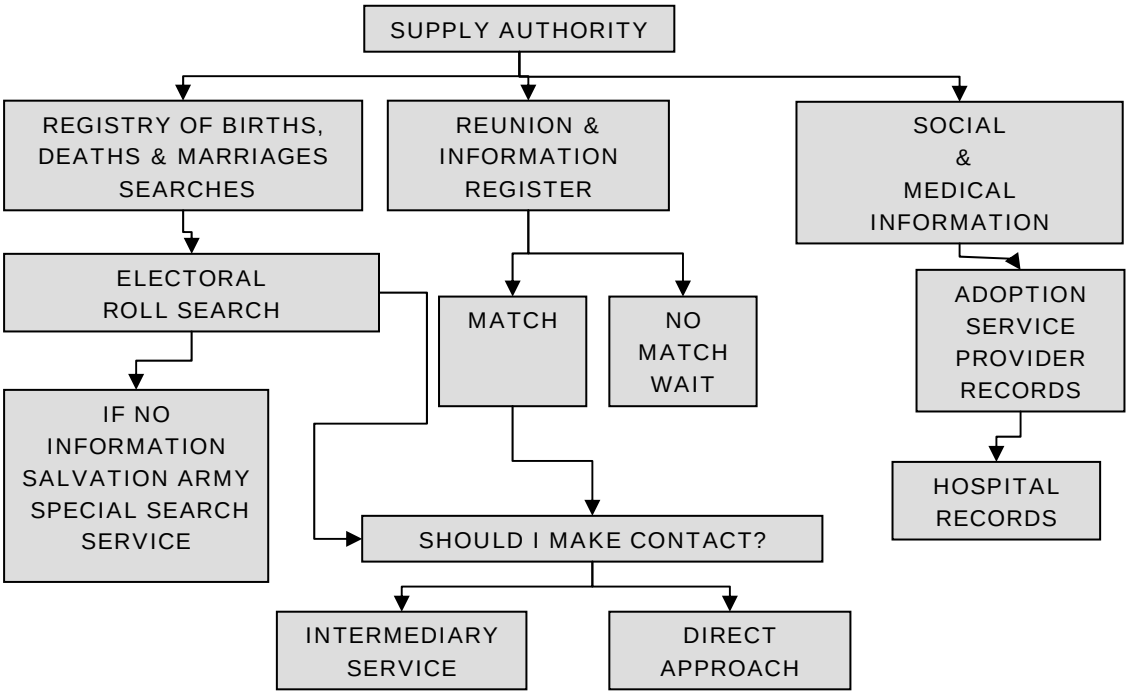
What about other adopted siblings?

If you have an adopted sibling who is over 18 when you apply for your adoption information you will receive their memorandum of adoption which will give you their adopted name. When you receive your social and medical information you will also receive social and medical information about any adopted siblings. For further information about adopted siblings read Information Sheet 18 *Siblings.*

Can I get my birth father's name?

If your birth father signed a consent then his name will also be included on your Supply Authority. More usually in the past birth fathers were not included in the adoption process. If their name is recorded on the adoption or hospital file but not the Supply Authority, the name cannot be released to you but can be released to an Information Source under the Adoption Act 2000. See Information Sheet 22 *Release of Information about Unacknowledged Birth Fathers* for further information. In many situations the birth father's full name is not recorded; in these cases usually the only person who can provide the birth father's name is the birth mother.

FLOW CHART



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

Post Adoption Resource Centre
Locked Bag 6002
Hurstville NSW 1481
T 02 9504 6788
F 02 9570 2699
E parc@bensoc.org.au
www.bensoc.org.au