

## REASONS FOR SEARCHING

### Adopted People

Searching is often because of a natural curiosity to know about one's origins and to "put the pieces of the Jigsaw together".

Some adopted people may not have any desire to search once they have received their information. Others will want to continue the process in order to complete the journey they have started. Others will only start the search after a crisis in their lives such as illness or the death of an adoptive parent.

A search may be undertaken to:

- Gain information about medical conditions and family health problems
- Find out the reasons for their adoption
- Find out why they look like they do
- Know about family background, culture and ethnicity
- "Fill in the blanks" – they may feel that parts of them are missing and that they need these 'parts' in order to become a whole person
- Link the past with the present and future, so they can form a sense of continuity and belonging
- Help themselves feel clearer about being adopted
- Reconnect with their relatives from whom they were separated.

### Natural Parents

For many natural parents the adoption of their child was a difficult and/or traumatic experience, in the past, many women felt forced to give up their babies as single parents were not accepted or supported by society. Women in particular were encouraged to start a new life and forget about their child. Fathers often were ignored in the process or did not even know about the pregnancy.

The Victorian Adoption Act 1984 denied natural parents access to identifying information about their son or daughter, until in July 2013 an amendment to the Act was introduced allowing natural mothers and fathers access to identifying information about their son or daughter. Fears of rejection and memories of adoption processes at the time of can lead to some natural parents feeling unable to face the thought of making enquiries about their child. Further, many natural parents feel they have no right to make enquiries and to disturb the life of their child; this situation sometimes changes when natural parents hear of other positive stories or gain confidence from support groups.

Natural parents may search to:

- Find out if their adopted son or daughter is alive, well and happy
- Try and explain the reasons why their child was adopted
- Come to terms with grief due to the adoption of their son or daughter
- See the son or daughter who has now become an adult
- Try and make themselves "feel whole" again. It can be difficult for some people to reconcile the fact that their son or daughter is not with them but is 'somewhere out there'. Most natural parents never forget their child.

## Taking the Next Step

### Part 1

Once you have gone through the process of searching, you may then decide that you want to make contact.

Before deciding to make contact with your son/daughter or natural parents/siblings, it can be helpful to consider these questions.

- What are your reasons for wanting contact? (medical/family information only or a possible relationship)
- Who will support you in this process?
- Have you considered the other person's experience of the adoption process?
- What are the possible implications for your family and who from your family would you tell about your decision to make contact?
- What are your expectations or needs for having contact? Have you considered that these may change after contact has been made?
- Have you considered the possibility that the person you are searching for may not want contact? How will you deal with this?
- Are you able to be sensitive to the other person's feelings, and to try to understand and respect their wishes?
- Are you willing to give the other person as much time as they need to decide about contact with you and how do you feel about proceeding at a rate the person sought is comfortable with? Bearing in mind that this could be at a slower pace than you desire.
- How do you feel about ongoing contact and how will you deal with the likely differences in need for contact?

## **Making Contact**

### **Part 2**

Some useful suggestions when thinking about making contact.

It is important to consider and maintain the privacy of the person you are seeking and respect the confidential nature of your outreach for both yourself and your natural relative/s.

It also helpful to be aware that many natural mothers (and or fathers) have spent years trying to manage the emotional impact of their son or daughter's adoption and the associated feelings of grief and loss that this can bring. Similarly, an adopted person may have spent years trying to understand their adoption experience and as is sometimes the case, may not know they are adopted.

With this in mind, do not just turn up at someone's door. For many people involved in adoption this is one of their greatest concerns and it is possible that an approach made this way could jeopardise future chances of a relationship developing.

As the person who is doing the searching, you may have been thinking about making contact for quite some time, whereas the person you are searching for has not had this time to prepare themselves.

It is therefore suggested that the initial contact be made via a brief letter which does not disclose the nature of your relationship and is written in a warm and inviting manner. This allows the person you are contacting time to work through any emotions that have arisen as a result of your outreach and to consider a response. Once contact has been established, it is considerate to move forward at the pace of the found person as they often need time to absorb the information received and process their emotions before they are ready to proceed with a response or further communication.

Another suggestion or alternative to outreaching on your own is to seek the assistance of an intermediary service for the initial outreach. This method not only is an opportunity for you to access support, it is also an opportunity for the found person to access support and talk about their experience of adoption in a safe and supportive environment.

This step of a search can be quite daunting and challenging; we encourage you to talk about this step with your family or a friend you feel you can trust. Alternatively, you can make an appointment with a VANISH support worker.

## MAKING REUNIONS WORK

The following suggestions to help make your reunion, if you have one, work as well as it can for you have been taken from the *Adoption Search and Reunion Handbook*<sup>1</sup>

- Set out on this journey when you are ready. You will know when it is the right time
- All reunions are unique. Find a balance and pace that suits you and your reunion
- Work out what you want from, or can give to, the reunion. Be realistic about what you can offer each other and the place in each other's lives.
- You and your relatives are likely to have to deal with some strong emotions. It will take time, patience and probably compromise to sort them all out. Try to work out *why* people feel or behave the way they do (including you!). Be kind to yourself and others if behaviour is not always perfect
- If you can, try to let your adoptive family know about the search and reunion process
- Keep communicating with all the people involved. If you feel hurt, excluded, angry or swamped then say so, but gently.
- You'll need a lot of support from people who might share your excitements and disappointments, act as sounding boards, and from time to time suggest a different view on things.
- Be prepared to adjust your expectations as time goes on. The chances are that the reunion will have good times as well as bad like all relationships. Nor are you likely to sail through all challenges in a state of perfect tolerance, compromise and understanding! Get what you can from the search and reunion process. Hang onto the good bits and, when you are ready, discard the bad.
- Above all, the reunion is about you coming to terms with your past, present and future in whatever way you can.

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<sup>1</sup> Liz Trinder, Julia Feast & David Howe, *The Adoption Reunion Handbook* John Wiley & Sons Ltd England 2004