



Access to files: Information for Adopted Adults

For further information, please contact:

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Obtaining birth record information

Once you have reached 18, you have the legal right to have a copy of your original birth certificate and access to your adoption records.

The first step...

Making the decision to start the process

Accessing your birth records is a highly emotional experience. It is important to choose a time when you have support around you.

Obtaining birth record information is a major decision: for some they have thought about the possibility of searching over the years, then something triggers the decision to take the next step; for others it is about waiting for the right time for them to search.

The second step...

Obtaining a copy of your original birth certificate

You may already have your original birth certificate and if so, you can move to accessing your adoption records.

If you were adopted after 12 November 1975 and wish to obtain a copy of your original birth certificate, you can choose whether or not to see a counsellor. You can obtain your birth certificate from the Family Records Centre or alternatively you can apply online for a copy of your birth certificate. If you do not know your original name, you will need to apply to access your birth records through the General Register Office (GRO). You will need to request an application form to obtain your original birth certificate. On your application, you will need the adoption date, which is on the adoption certificate. The contact details for the Family Records Centre and the General Register Office (GRO) are provided in this leaflet.

If you do not have these details, contact the agency or social services department who arranged your adoption and this information may be available to you. Advice, support and counselling is also available to

Sources of help:

Your local Social Services Department's Post Adoption Support Services

The Adoption Agency involved in your adoption.

Talk Adoption – Tel: 0808 808 1234. Website: www.talkadoption.co.uk

For people under 26 who have an issue with adoption:

Norcap, 112 Church Road, Wheatley, Oxfordshire, OX33 1LU

Tel: 01865 875000 Fax: 01865 875686 Website: www.norcap.org.uk

General Register Office (GRO)—Adoptions Section, Smedley Hydro, Trafalgar Road, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2HH

Tel: 0151 471 4830 Website: www.statistics.gov.uk

BAAF Adoption and Fostering – Skyline Huse, 200 Union Street, London, SE1 0LX

Website: www.baaf.org.uk

Post Adoption Centre – 5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London, NW5 2RZ

Tel: 0207 284 0555 Website: www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk

The Family Records Centre—1 Myddelton Street, Islington, London, EC1R 1UW

Tel: 0845 603 7788

Useful publications

'**Searching Questions, Identity, Origins and Adoption**' by Julia Feast and Terry Philpot (BAAF 2003)

'**The Adoption Triangle Revisited: A Study of Adoption, Search and Reunion Experiences**' by John Triseliotis, Julia Feast and Fiona Kelly (BAAF 2005)

'**The Adoption Reunion Handbook**' by Liz Trinder, Julia Feast and David Howe (Wiley 2004)

you, should you wish to receive this service, from the adoption agency that arranged your adoption or your local social services. It is advisable to contact the adoption agency who arranged your adoption as there may be information held on your adoption file from birth relatives which has not been passed on to you.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduces new provisions for birth relatives. The Act provides birth relatives with the right to ask the adoption agency to provide an intermediary service to the adopted person informing them of the birth relative's interest and wish for contact. It is then up to the adopted person to decide how they wish to proceed, if at all.

If you were adopted before 12 November 1975, you are required by The Adoption Act 1976 to see a counsellor (a social worker experienced in adoption work). This could be the agency who arranged the adoption or through your local social services department—you will be able to choose which.

When you have contacted the General Register Office and returned the application form, they will send the following details to your chosen agency:

- ◆ A form for you to apply for a copy of your birth certificate
- ◆ Information about the Contact Register
- ◆ A Form CA6 to enable access to further information from the court where your adoption order was made and the agency which arranged your adoption, providing it was not a private adoption

When you meet a counsellor, you will be advised regarding:

- ◆ Your right to access your adoption file
 - ◆ How to obtain your original birth certificate
 - ◆ The Adoption Contact Register – the General Register Office holds this government register which was set up in 1991. Names registered remain there permanently unless a removal is requested. The cost currently is £15 for an adopted person to register and £30
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for a birth relative to register. It is left to the adopted person to make a contact when there is a match.

- ◆ The NORCAP Contact Register – this register is held by the voluntary organisation NORCAP. The cost of registration is included in the cost of the first year's membership.

If you wish to access your file

Before 1984, agencies were only required to keep records for 25 years. After 1984, agencies were required to keep records for 75 years. Generally older files contain less detail, therefore information is limited in some files.

In rare cases, the counsellor may refuse access to an original birth certificate and adoption file if it is thought to be severely detrimental to:

- ◆ the adopted person
- ◆ the birth family
- ◆ any significant others

The third step...

Tracing your birth family

Some adopted adults, having obtained the information on their file, decide that they wish to trace their birth parents and/or members of their birth family. This is not a decision that all adopted people make. The motivation to search relates to wanting more information about 'roots, reasons and relationships', as access to the adoption file may not provide sufficient information.

The fourth step...

How to go about a search

If you wish to trace your birth family, the counsellor will provide advice, support and information on how to do this.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 makes provision to assist you in your search or to undertake the search on your behalf. Further details of this will be available from your counsellor. These services may be offered by a different agency on behalf of the Social Services or the adoption agency that holds your records. Searching can be a complex and lengthy process. Assistance in your search may well be invaluable.

The Adoption & Children Act 2002 also provides birth relatives with the right to ask the adoption agency to provide an intermediary service so that the adopted person can be informed of the birth relative's interest and wish for contact. It is then up to the adopted person to decide whether they want to exchange information or to meet their birth relative or not.

If you decide to search, the questions you may have are:

- ◆ Where do you start?
- ◆ What needs to be done and how?

There are guides to searching and also modern technology such as the Internet to help you.

Your counsellor will advise how to obtain the information you require. Literature and addresses, which also may assist you, are provided below.

Making the contact

There are three ways of making contact:

- ◆ Adoption Contact Register
- ◆ Intermediary approach
- ◆ Direct approach which can be a delicate and anxious process. It may cause fear and distress as people need time to think about what is happening and may need support

Each method of approach should be carefully considered and discussed with your counsellor.
