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# Intermediary Services: Information for Birth Parents and Relatives separated by adoption

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**For further information**, please contact:

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## New legal framework

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 brings new rights for birth parents and relatives to request 'intermediary services'. With effect from December 2005:

- ◆ You can now seek assistance in tracing an adult you were separated from by adoption to find out if they wish to have contact with you.
- ◆ Subject to the consent of the adopted adult, you can seek support in sharing information, making contact and reunion with this person.

This change in legislation brings your rights to seek assistance more closely into line with those available to adopted adults. It creates a new framework for controlling access to information, enabling

- ◆ You as a birth relative to express informed consent about being approached by an adopted adult who is searching for you, and
- ◆ Adopted adults to register a formal veto if they do not want contact with birth relatives.

Some birth relatives do not feel confident about initiating contact, especially if many years have passed by. If you feel like this, you could still ask the agency that placed the child to put a letter from you on their file.

## Definition of birth relatives

Under the Act, birth relatives are 'any person who (but for his/her adoption) would be related by blood, including half blood and marriage' (Section 98.7 Adoption & Children Act 2002).

This definition allows natural parents and a wide range of birth relatives, including grandparents, full and half brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins the option to seek assistance.

Couples registered under the Civil Partnership Act 2004 will be recognised as birth relatives in the same way as those related by marriage.

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## Other sources of advice and support

**BAAF Adoption and Fostering** – Skyline House, 200 Union Street, London, SE1 0LX  
Website: [www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)

**Post Adoption Centre** – 5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London, NW5 2RZ  
Tel: 0207 284 0555 Website: [www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk](http://www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk)

**Natural Parents' Network** - 18 Bishops Way, Stradbroke, Suffolk, IP21 5JR. Website: [www.n-p-n.co.uk](http://www.n-p-n.co.uk)

**Norcap** - 112 Church Road, Wheatley, Oxfordshire, OX33 1LU.  
Tel: 01865 875000. Website: [www.norcap.org.uk](http://www.norcap.org.uk)

## 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)

'**The Adoption Reunion Survival Guide**' by Julie Jarell Bailey and Lynn N Giddens (New Harbinger Publications 2001)

'**Parting with a Child for Adoption**' by P Bouchier, L Lambert and J Triseliositis (BAAF 1991)

'**Love Child - A memoir of Adoption Reunion Loss and Love**' by Sue Elliot (Vermillion 2005)

'**Birth Fathers and their Adoption Experiences**' by G Clapton (Jessica Kingsley 2003)

'**Half a Million Women**' by D Howe, P Sawbridge and D Hinings (Post Adoption Centre 1998)

'**Within Me, Without Me**' by S Wells (Scarlett Press 1994)

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change of name).

- ◆ Any evidence you have of your relationship to the adopted person, eg original birth certificates.
- ◆ Information about the adoption agency that was involved in arranging the adoption and the date of the adoption, if known.

### Needing to search

In the past, adoption was a closed process. Birth relatives separated by adoption had no option to find out what had happened to their relatives. From the 1950s to the mid 1970s, young single mothers in particular faced intense social pressure to give up their children for adoption. The grief and trauma experienced by birth parents was not acknowledged. They were often left to deal with these feelings in isolation and without support. Many parents are still deeply affected by adoption. After a lifetime of distress, they continue to suffer the pain of not knowing whether their child is safe or well.

In recent years, adoption has become more 'open', recognising the benefits of contact for adopted children who, for whatever reason, cannot remain with their birth families. Nevertheless, some birth relatives did not benefit from contact arrangements and continue to be deeply affected by separation and loss.

It is important to recognise and respect that:

- ◆ Some adopted people may decide they do not want to have contact with birth relatives.
- ◆ Some birth relatives, especially birth mothers, may feel unable to have contact with an adopted adult.

Recent adoption research suggests that for those who have decided to search:

- ◆ Contact and reunion is a happy and satisfying experience for most birth parents and adopted adults.
  - ◆ In the vast majority of cases, contact and reunion has a long-lasting
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Intermediary services are:

Skilled professional support to:

- ◆ Prepare you for the emotional impact of searching
- ◆ Trace adopted people
- ◆ Check out whether they are willing to meet you or exchange information
- ◆ Help in the sensitive tasks of arranging a reunion meeting
- ◆ Assist you in dealing with possible rejection
- ◆ Support you in coming to terms with the joys and pitfalls of new relationships.

### Service providers

'Intermediary services' can only be provided by agencies working to strict regulations and guidance. The adoption agency that placed your child may provide these services, but is not obliged to do so. Alternatively, specialist adoption support agencies are registered to offer these services. Contact your Social Services Department or the adoption agency which arranged your adoption for more details on these services.

### Intermediary services at Adoption Matters

#### Northwest

Adoption Matters Northwest (previously known as Chester Diocesan Adoption Services—CDAS) has been an adoption agency for 50 years.

We offer intermediary services to birth parents who have a 'placement connection' to Adoption Matters Northwest—formerly CDAS.

We are required under the intermediary regulations to give priority to requests in relation to adoptions which took place prior to November 1975. This is in recognition of the fact that birth relatives separated

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from a child by adoption many years ago are older.

### What Adoption Matters Northwest provides

Our caring and experienced counsellors can offer the following support:

- ◆ Thinking through your options and the potential outcomes.
- ◆ Preparing you emotionally for the search and reunion process.
- ◆ Obtaining information from a range of sources including adoption agencies, The Registrar General's Office and the Courts.
- ◆ Using that information to trace and contact the adopted adult.
- ◆ Acting as an intermediary between you and your adopted relative and facilitating contact with them.
- ◆ Providing counselling support and advice to you and your adopted relative as required.
- ◆ Assistance preparing for reunion.
- ◆ Support to make post reunion adjustments in your life and family relationships.

### Discretion not to proceed

In providing intermediary services, we are required to have regard to the welfare of the adopted person, your welfare and that of any other person who may be identified or affected by your application.

We have a general discretion not to proceed or continue proceeding if we consider it inappropriate to do so. In the event of a decision not to proceed, you may apply for an independent review of the decision.

### Charges

The search and reunion process can be an intensive and costly process. Birth relatives may be asked to meet the cost of tracing which includes

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the purchase of birth, marriage and other certificates that are necessary to assist in the tracing.

These charges may also include the cost of the searcher's time, the Registrar General's administration fees and County Court fees to access files.

If a counselling/reunion service is provided, there are costs associated with this service. Details of these charges will be discussed with you by the counsellor.

For pensioners on low incomes and in cases of particular hardship, these charges may be waived. You are welcome to discuss individual circumstances in confidence with the counsellor.

### Deciding on your next step

We recognise that you may need to discuss your situation prior to making any firm decisions. You may wish to:

- ◆ Ring in for an initial discussion.
- ◆ Write to us providing your full name at the time of the child's birth, the birth date, place and birth name of your child and any information you may have about the birth and adoption.

### Making a formal request for an intermediary service

Should you decide to ask Adoption Matters Northwest to act on your behalf, you will need to make a written application requesting an intermediary service.

We need to meet with you to verify your identity and relationship to the adopted person.

You will be asked to provide:

- ◆ Documentary evidence of your identity (passport, driving licence, original birth certificate and certificates confirming subsequent