



Planning and approaching a reunion

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Other sources of advice and support

Norcap, 112 Church Road, Wheatley, Oxfordshire, OX33 1LU
Tel: 01865 875000 Fax: 01865 875686 Website:
www.norcap.org.uk

BAAF Adoption and Fostering – Skyline House, 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

Natural Parents' Network - 18 Bishops Way, Stradbroke, Suffolk,
IP21 5JR. Website: www.n-p-n.co.uk

Useful publications

'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)

'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)

Either party in a reunion can feel a range of emotions at any time. It is important to consider the feelings of both yourself and the other person which is sometimes too difficult to deal with in a meeting. It may well be easier to communicate in future by letter, especially if the reunion is so difficult and it is felt you could never relate to them.

Again, talk to your post adoption counsellor.

The reunion process

The reunion process has often been described as an emotional roller coaster. It can raise a number of intense feelings from the past and the euphoria of finding each other can be replaced by feelings of sadness and loss. It is usual for people who are reunited to want to spend time together, to talk and share their feelings.

However, for some the strong emotions that people can experience may stimulate sexual feelings. It does help to be aware of this. This feeling can be destructive and damage not only the new relationship, but any existing relationship. If people feel this, they will be urged to seek help.

The process offers the opportunity for adopted adults to know about the circumstances that led to their adoption and to have updated information about their family of origin, and for birth relatives to know about what happened to the family member parted from them by adoption.

Whatever the outcome and degree of contact, the majority of people feel more able to move on with their lives and feel a sense of well-being.

This leaflet has been written to help answer some of the issues and questions raised by adopted people and their birth relatives approaching a reunion.

The person searching

The person who is searching may well be more prepared and ready for a reunion than the person who is found.

If a post adoption counsellor has been part of the process, the person searching will have had the opportunity of discussing the information and the results of the search with them.

The person who is found

The person found will need time to consider their thoughts and feelings about what it means to them. To receive a letter unexpectedly can turn their world upside down; others may have a sense of joy and relief or indeed a combination of the two.

Some feelings may emerge that raise issues from the past of great sadness. There may be a high level of anxiety as family members may be unaware of their past experiences.

Adoptive families

Adoptive families can often feel left out of the reunion process. They may have a fear of losing the child they have parented and loved. Adopted people feel they do not wish to jeopardise their relationship and often feel unable to discuss their feelings and plans with their adoptive parents. However, reassuring their adoptive parents, including being open and honest, can assist adopted people to feel more at ease with the reunion.

Decision to accept contact

Once a decision has been taken to accept contact, the Intermediary* (see below) will suggest that they exchange letters in the first instance as this allows time to find out more about each other.

Think carefully about the best way of making contact. Think about how you would want to be contacted if the situation was reversed.

Adoption Matters Northwest is willing to provide a letterbox exchange service in the early days of the information exchange until both parties feel comfortable about providing their address.

Some people also feel e-mail and mobile telephone calls are a good way of communicating in the early stages, if they find ongoing letter writing a daunting prospect.

Having established contact, the next stage is all about feeling comfortable with the method chosen. Perhaps you could talk to close friends and family and get as much support as you can.

At some point it is likely that both parties will reach a stage where they feel they would like to meet. The Intermediary at Adoption Matters Northwest will be able to offer a venue for a private and supported first meeting. Some people, however, like to meet in a public place with the post adoption counsellor present during the meeting until such a time when the parties are happy to continue the meeting on their own. It is helpful sometimes to have a partner or friend with you at the first meeting.

There is no ideal venue that will suit everyone, so do discuss arrangements with your post adoption counsellor.

**The intermediary is usually a post adoption social worker experienced in counselling and supporting adopted people and their birth families who is employed by Adoption Matters Northwest.*

Outcome of the reunion

It is difficult to predict the outcome of a reunion or indeed how it will develop. Each situation is unique. It is a meeting of people separated for many years who are now strangers to each other, yet for many a deep bond has always remained.

Both adopted people and birth relatives can be amazed at the similarities between them, or they can be very different with apparently little in common.

The meeting

This meeting could be the first time of seeing somebody who they physically look like and sound like. The first meeting can raise complex emotions, people can feel exhaustion or distress. The feelings that are raised can remind people of the lost years. There also can be feelings of confusion, hurt or even disappointment.

Having met, the next step is to think and discuss what happens next. For many, this is planned and discussed at the first meeting. It is sensible not to rush into an intense relationship at this stage as drawing back from this can be hurtful for all parties and ultimately damaging to the relationship.

Whatever the decision may be, it is important to pause and reflect and discuss your feelings with people you can trust or your post adoption worker before moving forward.

It is important for all parties to understand how draining a first meeting can be.

Biological links are important, but they do not mean you will automatically share the same values and interests. You are likely to have different lifestyles. You may have felt you were meeting a person you did not know who was a total stranger.
