

FAQ Factsheet for Adopted Adults Searching for Birth Relatives



www.afteradoption.org.uk

0800 0 568 578

Legal Context

As an Adoption Support Agency, After Adoption is able to assist adult adopted people in searching for birth relatives. This service is provided as part of our regulated Intermediary Services under Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

If you want us to undertake a search on your behalf you will need to provide proof of your identity. Upon completion of the search, we can only share with you information which is in the public domain. It is After Adoption's policy only to undertake a search when this is part of an Intermediary Service, i.e. when contact with your birth relative will be made by one of our ASW's (Adoption Support Worker or Adoption Support Social Worker) or a worker from another approved agency or Local Authority, to whom we will provide the full information resulting from the search.

Prior to approaching your birth relative, the Intermediary Agency is required under the Regulations to contact the Appropriate Adoption Agency (AAA), i.e. the agency that holds your adoption records, to ask for their 'view' about whether an approach should be made. The Intermediary Agency also needs to consider the welfare of any party who may be affected by the approach.

Frequently Asked Questions

What information do I need to provide to enable you to undertake a search on my behalf?

As much as possible. If you have already accessed your adoption records please provide all known information relating to members of your birth family, including names and addresses, members of extended family, information relating to the circumstances of your adoption and date of Adoption Order and Court.

Sometimes information which seems inconsequential can prove to be of significance when undertaking the search. Accurate spelling and full names and dates of birth, where known, are important. We will also need you to provide a copy of your original birth certificate, showing your name prior to adoption.

What if I have not accessed my adoption records?

We would advise you to do so before proceeding. Begin the process by completing the form 'Access to birth records' available from the Direct Gov website or phone the General Register Office on 0300 123 1837 to request a form.

My adoption records cannot be found. What should I do?

Your worker may be able to help locate your records by approaching the Court which made your adoption order for the name of the adoption agency or alternatively using the 'Court Protocol'. Alternatively, it may be possible to trace your birth relative from the information on your birth certificate.

Do I need to register with the Adoption Contact Register (ACR) held by the General Register Office (GRO) in Southport regarding my interest in establishing contact with birth relatives?

Yes, this is advisable and before we can commence searching a check of the ACR must be made.

I have already undertaken some searching but have been unable to locate my birth relative. Do you need copies of the information obtained?

Yes please. It may prove useful to our researcher and save valuable time.

Is there a charge for the service and if so how much?

There is no charge for accessing your adoption records (under Schedule 2, Adoption and Children Act 2002).

This service may be provided by your Local Authority of residence, the agency through which your adoption was arranged or, in certain circumstances, by After Adoption. However, there may be a charge for the Search and Intermediary Service (under Section 98 Adoption and Children Act 2002). It depends on the area where you live and whether your Local Authority of residence funds After Adoption to provide this service. Call our Actionline (0800 0 568 578) to find out if costs are covered by your Local Authority and/or for a breakdown of current charges. Even if the service is funded by your Local Authority, we will ask you to bear the cost of any certificates we need to purchase as part of the searching process.

Are there any additional costs?

You may need to make an additional payment of up to £20 to GRO for an 'extract' from the ACR and for establishing the name of the court which made your Adoption Order. This would be discussed with you if needed.

What happens if a great deal of time has been spent on the search and my relative has not yet been located? Will I be liable for additional payments if the search is extended?

If this were necessary we would discuss the matter with you before incurring any further expenditure.

Who undertakes the search?

After Adoption has a team of committed and dedicated researchers, paid and voluntary, supervised by Service Managers. There are no qualification requirements; our researchers have an aptitude and interest in family history research. All staff are DBS checked. We do not employ private detectives or agencies who can access credit card ratings, for example.

What resources do you use?

Birth, Marriage and Death Indices and a variety of sources, such as LexisNexis, Find My Past, Ancestry.com etc.

Are you able to access information which is closed to me?

Most of the information we use is available to individuals, sometimes involving payment. However, by virtue of our status as an Voluntary Adoption Agency we are sometimes able to obtain certificates

which an individual could not. This relates to recent government concern about identity fraud. As a result, we are restricted in the information we are able to share with the applicant as the search results may be based on information which is not in the public domain.

What is the likely outcome of a search?

We are unable to guarantee that we will find your birth relative. There are many reasons why it may prove difficult to locate someone. For example, they may have a very common name or have married someone with a very common name. They may not have registered on the Electoral Register, or opted for their details to be withheld. They may be in jail, in the forces or living abroad. Sometimes searches are inconclusive. For example, from the information available to us we may only be able to say a person living at a certain address is probably the correct one, or the address may have been accurate a couple of years ago but is not necessarily up to date.

What if you cannot find my birth relative?

We will discuss with you the option of widening the search to look for other family members, such as a birth mother's brother. However, on occasions the search may result in our being unable to locate a relative.

How long will it take?

At the outset it is impossible to say. It depends on where the information leads us, for example a woman may change her name several times. Most searches take several months rather than weeks. In other cases, a likely address for the birth relative is located very quickly.

Will you keep me informed of progress?

Your Adoption Support Worker will endeavour to contact you (approximately monthly) to keep you abreast of progress, in general terms, bearing in mind we may not be able to share detailed information due to the restrictions mentioned above. If you have not heard from us for some time, please feel free to ring your worker for an update.

Are you able to search for people living abroad?

We have no specific resources to search for people living abroad but do what we can with information readily available to us e.g. social networking sites.

Will I be given a report?

You will be given a brief report of the outcome, bearing in mind we can only share information which is in the public domain or derived from such information.

What happens after you find an address for my relative?

When we believe we have located an address for your relative we will discuss with you whether you wish us to write to him/her and if so, when. Alternatively, we can provide the search results to another worker (e.g. Local Authority worker) to make this approach, if this is what has been agreed. If there is no response to our first letter we would send a second letter by Special Delivery. If there is still no response, we must assume that contact is not welcomed.

What if I decide to undertake my own search?

You may be able to undertake your own search starting from the information available on your birth certificate and in your adoption records, using births, marriages and deaths information and electoral registers etc. However, access to some information may be limited. We do ask that once our search has commenced, you put your own search 'on hold' until ours is concluded.

I would like you to undertake a search on my behalf.

What do I do next?

Send your request in writing to:

Actionline
After Adoption
Unit 5 Citygate
5 Blantyre Street
Manchester, M15 4JU

Or phone our ActionLine on: 0800 0 568 578.