

Information on Genetic Attraction



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What is Genetic Attraction?

This is about feelings of attraction that may be experienced by adults when they reconnect with birth family members from whom they've been separated by adoption. An attraction so strong and so intense as to be interpreted as sexual desire. It's known in America as Genetic (Sexual) Attraction.

The Encyclopaedia of World Problems and Human Potential defines Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA) as:

"Nature: Experienced between mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, and between more distant relatives, but most common siblings of opposite sex who bear a close resemblance. It takes the form of an overpowering, almost electrical grip of emotion, associated with an inability to keep away from the other person and an almost primordial sense of having belonged together all their lives. The attraction gives rise to a sense of underlying shame and guilt, together with a feeling of rejection that may prevent effective communication because the emotions are too threatening to share with anyone. This may be compounded by any sexual relationship resulting from the attraction.

Incidence: Particularly noted in the case of adopted children who are subsequently reunited with the biological parent or sibling of the opposite sex, seemingly because the normal bonding mechanism has been disrupted."

It should be noted that genetic attraction can also occur between people of the same sex.

Why Does Genetic Attraction Occur?

Pastor Bill Bossert, Past President of the Oregon Adoptive Rights Association (OARA), writes that genetic attraction is a frequently noted response to reunion. Feelings include the need to touch, spend

time together, talk and share. Suggested reasons for the attraction include:

- **Similar Characteristics:** Similar genetic makeup can produce similarities in temperament, appearance, and other areas that are common in all birth families to a certain extent.
- **Self Love:** While we may not want to admit it, we generally tend to feel more comfortable with those whose characteristics are similar to our own.
- **Aromatic Identification:** It has been suggested that a subconscious memory of the smell of one's own family maybe recognised and, if so, would cause an actual physical reaction.

When the desire to consummate the relationship enters the equation, genetic attraction becomes Genetic Sexual Attraction.

Almost invariably, the outcome of sexual relations between reunited relatives is that any subsequent lasting relationships, platonic or otherwise, is doomed. That awareness has led New York psychotherapist Joe Soll to adopt the term 'genetic attraction', believing the word 'sexual' is in many cases inaccurate and also responsible for the underlying shame and fear that make the condition so distressing. He has noticed that the 'romance' that develops, especially when mothers meet their adult children, mirrors the sensuous bonding between a new mother and her baby.

"These people regress to a very early stage of development. The relationship is sensual, but we don't call it 'romance' or being 'in love' when it's breast feeding, cradling and stroking, or when it's a mother and baby gazing into one another's eyes. There's an urge for intimacy, which they were previously denied."

Fear of Discovery, Fear of Separation

Acknowledging the existence of such feelings raises the spectre of incest, and when these feelings become so intense that they threaten to cross the line over into the realm of physical and deep emotional involvement, many break off the relationship completely, or limit its scope rather than try to talk about it, says Bossert. Others, according to Canadian Adoption Therapist Dianne Mathes, can be overcome by the fear of another separation that they too keep silent but, instead of pulling away, may view a sexual relationship as the only way to keep the connection alive.

Confront It

Genetic Attraction is a recognised 'syndrome' as it can be rationally explained and understood. As with any issue, this needs to be met head-on despite its sensitive nature. It is a natural human desire to be with our own, and it's not at all unusual to react with excessive emotion when experiencing reunion. If you find yourself "falling in love" or sexually attracted to a new-found birth family member, here's what the experts say:

- Strong feelings of attraction are not 'abnormal'.
- There's nothing wrong with you.
- Recognise the initial excitement for what it is: the first rush and thrill of reunion, and the birth of love for family.
- Remember that relationships take time to develop and that goes for long-separated birth family members as well. Time will serve to settle the relationship in its proper context. Meanwhile put boundaries in place such as only seeing your relative in the presence of another person and at planned intervals.
- Talk to others who have experienced reunion.
- Find a support group whose leader is comfortable talking about the subject.
- Seek counselling from an experienced adoption support worker.

Further Information

If you wish to talk to anyone about the information outlined in this leaflet then you can call our ActionLine on 0800 0 568 578. You can also visit www.afteradoption.org.uk.