



The picture of childbirth today is very different to that at the beginning of the twentieth century. Until recently the subject of adoption was surrounded by secrecy and taboos. In 1900 just four per cent of live births in England and Wales were outside marriage and there was an enormous stigma attached to having a child outside wedlock. The social and moral codes of the time meant that it was very difficult to bring up a child outside of marriage and up to a million children were adopted in Britain in the twentieth century. In 1968 the number of children adopted in England and Wales peaked at 27,000.

The human stories behind adoption are often ones of loss, guilt, identity, family feuds, lifelong hurt, reunion and redemption. These stories are significant to Britain's social history as one in every four families has direct experience of adoption in recent generations. Yet such is the secrecy surrounding adoption, many thousands are still unaware of their true identity or of their birth parents. It is only recently with the changes in law and society's moral codes (41.1 per cent of children were born to parents who were not married in 2003) that the subject of adoption can be explored, as Testimony Films did in the making of *Love Child* for ITV1.

This factsheet provides information and advice on tracing relatives separated by adoption. It also has information on finding more about family history and sources of further help.

Love Child

Tracing birth parents

Adopted people living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland can obtain a certified copy of original birth entry when they reach 18 (16 in Scotland).

- Contact the appropriate General Register Office (see General Register Offices) requesting an application form.
- People who were adopted before 12 November 1975 in England and Wales (18 December 1987 in Northern Ireland) are legally required to see an adoptions counsellor before being given this information.
- People who were adopted after these dates and people in Scotland do not need to see a counsellor before they can get a copy of their birth certificate but can ask to do so if they think it will help.

- It is possible to see a counsellor from your local authority, from the adoption agency that arranged your adoption or from a registered Adoption Support Agency (ASA).

- Birth counsellors can help with tracing birth records, even if the adopted person's original name isn't known, find the agency that handled the adoption and where that agency's records are stored, and discuss the emotional impact of tracing birth relatives. They can also help plan contact with birth parents and may act as intermediaries.

- Some adoptions before 1982 were handled by private agencies that may no longer exist in which case birth counsellors can suggest alternative ways of tracing information.





The Adoption and Children's Act 2002 for England and Wales gives birth parents and other birth relatives the right to ask an intermediary service to help them make contact with their son or daughter who they had placed for adoption, providing the adopted person is now 18 years old and over. However, birth relatives cannot be given any identifying information about the adopted person without the adopted person's consent. Within a new Act which comes into effect on 30 December 2005, there will be a facility for adopted people and birth relatives to register a wish for 'no contact' on the Adoption Contact Register which is held by the Registrar General (see also Adoption contact registers). Adopted people will also be able to register with the appropriate adoption agency for either an absolute veto, where they do not wish to be contacted at all by a birth relative through an intermediary agency, or for a qualified veto which allows the adopted person to specify the persons or circumstances in which an approach be made through an intermediary agency (for example, passing on information about hereditary medical conditions). This new system will apply to all adoptions which have taken place since 1926.

The new Act also requires all voluntary adoption agencies acting as intermediaries in tracing birth relatives and facilitating contact to be registered as an Adoption Support Agency (ASA). All ASAs will be inspected regularly to make sure that they are operating within agreed standards of practice. Local authorities may also offer intermediary services but there is no statutory requirement for them to do so.

Agencies that can help

The following are some of the agencies that offer support to people who have been affected by adoption. Many of them also offer services for people wanting to adopt. There are other agencies that run local services and act as adoption agencies, details of which can be found on the databases of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering at www.baaf.org.uk and the Adoption and Fostering Information Line at www.adoption.org.uk. In addition, all local authorities have a statutory duty to provide adoption services, including post adoption support. In Northern Ireland the statutory

services are provided by Health and Social Services Boards.

ADOPT is a self-help organisation for adopted people and birth and adoptive parents in Northern Ireland offering support groups, tracing services and personal peer counselling.

ADOPT 7 University Street, Belfast BT7 1FY
028 9031 9500 www.adoptni.org

Adoption UK provides information and support to prospective and established adopters, long-term foster carers and their families. Adoption UK runs and helpline, local support groups, a monthly and bi-monthly magazine, online community, publications and training programmes.

Adoption UK 46 The Green, South Bar Street, Banbury OX16 9AB

01295 752240 (switchboard)
0870 7700 450 (helpline)
www.adoptionuk.org

After Adoption provides many independent support services to the adopted person, the birth family and the adoptive family. In addition to its main helpline it runs TALKadoption, a helpline for people under 26.

After Adoption 12-14 Chapel Street, Manchester M3 7HN
0800 0 568 578 (main helpline)
0800 808 1234 (TALKadoption helpline)
www.afteradoption.org.uk

BAAF runs a wide range of services for adopted people, birth parents, those considering adoption and professionals, including information, advice, publications, an online discussion forum, campaigns, training and consultancy.

BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) Skyline House, 200 Union Street, London SE1 0LX
020 7593 2000 www.baaf.org.uk

IAS offers post adoption services, including advice, support and regular workshops for adoptive parents, plus counselling and assistance for adult adoptees and birth families. It also places children and recruits potential parents living within a 35-mile radius of London and provides support to adoptive families.

IAS (Independent Adoption Service)
121-123 Camberwell Road, London SE5 0HB
020 7703 1088 www.i-a-s.org.uk

Natural Parents Network is a self-help organisation for birth relatives who have lost children through adoption. It provides a helpline and offers support nationwide in a safe and confidential manner.

Natural Parents' Network 8 The Crest, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 0RR

08454 565031 www.n-p-n.co.uk

NORCAP offers support, advice and practical assistance to adults affected by adoption. Members have access to a telephone helpline, adoption contact register, searching facilities and advice, as well as a research service, intermediary service, newsletters and a foundling network.

NORCAP supporting adults affected by adoption
112 Church Road, Wheatley,
Oxfordshire OX33 1LU
01865 875000 www.norcap.org.uk

The Intercountry Adoption Centre provides information and advice to anyone in the UK considering adopting a child from abroad, to adoptive families, adopted people and adoption professionals.

The Intercountry Adoption Centre
64-66 High Street, Barnet, Hertfordshire EN5 5SJ
0870 516 8742 www.oah.org.uk

The Post-Adoption Centre offers confidential advice, support and information for anyone involved in adoption through its advice line open weekdays from 10am to 1pm except Thursday, 5.30-7.30pm.

Post-Adoption Centre 5 Torriano Mews,
Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2RZ
0870 777 2197 (Advice line)
www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk

SSAFA Forces Help (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) is a registered voluntary adoption agency serving Forces families. It offers a service to prospective adopters, birth parents and adopted adults, and post adoption support to adoptive families, both in the UK and in overseas commands.

SSAFA Forces Help Central Office Specialist
Adoption Social Worker, 19 Queen Elizabeth
Street, London SE1 2LP
020 7403 8783 www.ssafa.org.uk

Adoption contact registers

Adoption Contact Registers hold the names of birth parents and relatives who want to get in touch with people who were adopted and adopted people wanting to trace their birth relatives. From 30 December 2005 they can also hold details of adopted people who do not want to be contacted by a birth relative (see also Tracing birth relatives).

You must be over 18 in England, Northern Ireland and Wales (16 in Scotland) before you can register your details. Write to the appropriate agency requesting an application form and a leaflet. Adopted people and birth parents/relatives then need to pay a fee to register their details. If there is a matching registration the agency will inform the people who are registered. Adoption Contact Registers are not widely known

about so it may take some time for a matching registration to occur.

The Adoption Contact Registers for England and Wales and Northern Ireland are held by the respective General Register Offices (see below) while the Scottish Adoption Contact Register is held by Birthlink.

Birthlink also offers a searching service, counselling services, can help get information about adoptions from the courts and runs a post-adoption information line.

Birthlink 21 Castle Street,
Edinburgh EH2 3DN
0131 225 6441 www.birthlink.org.uk

As well as the General Register Offices' registers, NORCAP has the largest UK contact register.

General Register Offices

When a court grants an adoption order the adoption is entered in the Adopted Children Register. A certificate of adoption is then sent to the adoptive parents. When an adopted person reaches 18 (16 in Scotland) they can apply for a copy of their original birth certificate (see also Tracing birth relatives).

General Register Offices hold birth, marriage and death (BMD) records and adoption certificates. They handle enquiries about BMD registrations and requests for copies of certificates.

Applications for copies of BMD and adoption certificates should be made through the relevant office. There are charges made for certificates. It is possible to apply for copies of certificates online, over the phone or in person by visiting the relevant General Register Office.

For BMD and adoption certificates for England and Wales contact:

The General Register Office for England and Wales Certificate Services Section, PO Box 2, Southport PR8 2JD
0845 603 7788 www.gro.gov.uk

For general enquiries about adoption services for England and Wales contact:

The General Register Office for England and Wales Adoptions, Room C201, General Register Office, Trafalgar Road, Southport PR8 2HH
0845 603 7788
www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/adoptions/

If you want to search the BMD indexes for England and Wales in person then you need to visit the Family Records Centre, which also holds the census records for England and Wales, as well as the adoption records from 1927 onwards. The FRC is open Monday to Saturday and there is no fee for searching the records. However, copies of certificates have to be paid for and

ordered from the General Register Office.

Family Records Centre 1 Myddleton Street, London EC1R 1UW

0845 603 7788 (births, marriages, deaths, adoptions and overseas enquiries)

020 8392 5300 (census and general enquiries)
www.familyrecords.gov.uk

People wanting to search the BMD indexes for Northern Ireland in person can visit the Public Office at the GRO between 9.30am to 4pm Monday to Friday. You can also view the Adoption Contact register at this office and obtain certificates.

The General Register Office for Northern Ireland Oxford House, 49-55 Chichester Street, Belfast BT1 4HL
028 9025 2000 www.groni.gov.uk

There are two addresses for the GRO Scotland. New Register House is where the family records are held while Ladywell House holds the population, census and other statistical information. Both offices are normally open to the public between 9am and 4.30pm Monday to Friday. It's advisable to book a place at New Register House to view the BMD indexes in person.

The General Register Office for Scotland New Register House, 3 West Register Street, Edinburgh EH1 3YT
0131 314 4433

Ladywell House, Ladywell Road,
Edinburgh EH12 7TF
0131 314 4254 www.gro-scotland.gov.uk

You can search the entire indexes for Births Marriages and Deaths in England and Wales since 1837 and order copies of BMD certificates online. There are also online guides with further advice and suggested resources to help trace your family history. There are various payment options for viewing and printing images, which start from £5 for 50 images. www.1837online.com

You can carry out free online searches for birth, marriage and death certificates for England and Wales at <http://freebmd.rootsweb.com>. Not all records have been transcribed yet and you should always check the accuracy of the records against original documents.

Tracing your family history

The best place to start is to talk to living relatives about their memories and any family photographs, letters or diaries that they have kept. However, with adopted people this sometimes isn't possible, in which case there are documents that are kept in public places such as certificates, wills and newspaper articles that

can help you piece together your family history.

You can hire a professional genealogist to trace your family history although anyone considering doing this should be clear about the nature of the services they offer, their experience and their charges. The Society of Genealogists (below) can help and your local County Records Office may also have details of researchers they use.

Further information and advice about tracing your family history, together with details of events, online discussion groups and extensive databases of information covering the UK are available at the genealogy search engine www.originsearch.com.

Genealogy groups

Society of Genealogists is a support group for people tracing their family trees. It runs lectures and courses, produces publications and has a huge library.

Society of Genealogists

14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road,
London EC1M 7BA
020 7251 8799 www.sog.org.uk

The Federation of Family History Societies organises talks, courses and seminars as well as producing publications and help leaflets. There are also Family History Societies serving in Northern Ireland (www.nifhs.org), Scotland (www.safhs.org.uk) and Wales (www.fhswales.info).

The Federation of Family History Societies

PO Box 2425, Coventry CV5 6YX
www.ffhs.org.uk

Archives

Archives are records produced by individuals, families or organisations (such as local government organisations, companies or universities). They may be in various formats, including paper files, parchment documents, maps, audio and video recordings and photographs and can date from early centuries up to the present day. Archives are retained by their creators or stored in record offices, libraries, archives units or other institutions.

An extensive list of archives and genealogy resources is available at www.britishlibrary.net/family.html. While many English archives can be viewed online at the Access to Archives website (www.a2a.org.uk).

The London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) holds numerous documents relating to the Greater London area and runs a search service for people who cannot visit in person.

London Metropolitan Archives

40 Northampton Road, London EC1R 0HB
020 7332 3820 www.cityoflondon.gov.uk

You can search the National Archives in person Monday to Saturday by ordering a free reader's ticket at least one hour in advance of your visit.

The National Archives Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU
020 8876 3444
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

The archives for Northern Ireland are held at:

The Public Record Office Northern Ireland 66 Balmoral Avenue, Belfast BT9 6NY
028 9025 5905 www.proni.gov.uk

In Scotland these records are held at:

The National Archives Scotland Historical Search Room, HM General Register House, 2 Princes Street, Edinburgh EH1 3YY
0131 535 1334 www.nas.gov.uk

It is possible to search the 1901 National Census records online at www.1901census.nationalarchives.gov.uk. Searching the archives is free but there are charges for viewing and printing records.

You can view 19th century census records for England and Wales for free at <http://freecen.rootsweb.com>. Not all records have been transcribed yet and you should always check the accuracy of the records against original documents.



Parish registers

Parish Registers record the baptisms, marriages and burials carried out by particular churches. They were first introduced in 1538 but few survive from this time. The early ones are handwritten, some of them in Latin. Nonconformist registers only became widespread after 1780. Local County Record Offices (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/bicentenary/bilinks.html) hold details of the parish registers available in their area or they can be found in local libraries.

You can view registers of parish and Nonconformist churches in England and Wales for free at <http://freereg.rootsweb.com>. Not all records have been transcribed yet and you should always check the accuracy of the records against original documents.

Libraries

Libraries may have information on census returns, parish records, local histories, information about genealogical societies, archives of local newspapers (for reports and personal columns), pamphlets, wills and property records. Further details of family history resources available in public libraries in Britain and Ireland can be found at www.familia.org.uk.

Finding out more

Support and information

www.adoption.org.uk – a web and phone based information service on adoption and fostering in the UK, including a database of local adoption agencies. Visit the website or call free on 0800 783 4086.

www.bereavement-network.org offers support to anyone who has experienced bereavement following adoption, fostering or separations while www.rejection-network.org offers support to anyone who experiences rejection following attempts to contact their birth families.

www.dfes.gov.uk/adoption – the Department for Education and Skills site with information about adoption law in the UK, adoption reforms, the government's programme to improve adoption practices and intercountry adoption, plus links and contact addresses.

Help with searching

www.adoptionmatch.co.uk – a free register for people over 18 affected by adoption to make contact with each other.

www.adoption-search.co.uk – UK message board of people looking for relatives separated by adoption.

www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory – case studies, plus information and advice on finding out more about your family history.

www.findaparentorchild.co.uk – a resource for parents and children who are searching for each other.

www.lookupuk.com – online database of people looking for lost relatives or friends.
www.missing-you.net – free message posting service for people looking for lost friends, relatives, former pals, etc. thought to be in the UK.
www.norcap.org.uk – NORCAP provides support and advice on searching, offers an intermediary service and operates its own contact register.

Genealogy

www.bigenealogy.com – genealogy links for the UK, the Channel Isles and the Isle of Man.
www.cyndislist.com – a huge number of links for genealogists including many specifically for adopted people.

www.familytree.com – a variety of links for those tracing their family histories.
www.genealogylinks.net – links for USA, UK, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, including links to surname databases, parish registers, censuses, cemeteries, marriages, passenger lists, city directories and military records etc.

www.genesreunited.co.uk – family tree, genealogy and ancestry website.
www.genuki.org.uk – resources, archives and

information for research in the British Isles.
www.rootsweb.com – the largest and oldest genealogy site.

Books

Love Child: A memoir of adoption, reunion, loss and love by Sue Elliott (Vermilion, £14.99) has been published to coincide with the ITV series. It traces the author's personal story of being adopted in the 1950s and her decision to find her birth mother, together with the history of adoption in Britain over the past 100 years. *The Adoption Reunion Handbook* by Liz Trinder Julia Feast and David Howe (Wiley, £12.99) – this is a comprehensive guide drawing on real life experience.

Preparing for Reunion: Experiences from the adoption circle by J. Feast, M. Marwood, S. Seabrook and E. Webb (The Children's Society, £7.95) includes case studies which highlight the experiences of those involved in reunion.

Elephants Never Forget: Reunions between birth parents and adoptees (K. Coleman and E. Jenkins, £5.99) addresses the processes, problems, sorrows and joys of reunions.

Adoption, Search and Reunion: The long-term experience of adopted adults by David Howe and Julia Feast (BAAF, £14.50) reports a study of nearly 500 adopted adults of the adoption search and reunion experience.

Searching Questions: Adoptions, origins and identity by J. Feast and T. Philpot (BAAF, £15.95 book, £35.25 video). This book is also accompanied by a video which has 10 adopted people speaking about their experience of adoption search and reunion.

The Adoption Triangle revisited: a study of adoption, search and reunion experience by J. Triseliotis, J. Feast and F. Kyle (BAAF, £14.95) offers new information through an original study for all those with an interest in adoption and the search and reunion experience. *The Adoption Reader: Birth mothers, adoptive mothers and adopted daughters tell their stories* by S. Wadia-Ellis (The Women's Press, £10.50)

Talking about Adoption to your Adopted Child by Marjorie Morrison (BAAF, £7.50) – guide outlining the whys, whens and hows of telling the truth about an adopted child's origins.

Where to Find Adoption Records by Georgina Stafford (BAAF, £20) – a guide for adopted people, birth relatives and counsellors on where to find historical adoption records.

Directory of Intermediary Support Services (BAAF, £14.95) – listing of intermediary support services, both local authority and voluntary agency.