

Preparing for your adoption records: Adopted persons

Making the decision to apply for your adoption record is very personal and deeply significant and may give rise to a whole range of complex feelings, including anxiety. Some people may be seeking their information only and will not decide to engage further in the search journey. Others will anticipate accessing their adoption records as the first step towards possible contact with birth relatives.

The impact of receiving your adoption records may trigger a range of emotions which you may not have anticipated. It's important to explore your expectations in preparation to receive your adoption records. You may also wish to consider the context of adoption at the time of your birth. In addition to receiving information about your birth relatives (including their names) and the circumstances of your adoption there may be other information which may not be expected. Issues for adopted persons to consider are:



1) How much information?

Some people anticipate detailed and comprehensive information and it can be disappointing when the contents of the record are limited. Others may be unprepared for the extent of the detail of the record.

2) A different name at birth.

Most adopted persons were given a name at birth which is different to their adoptive name. This can be confronting to one's sense of self and identity. It may even raise emotions around why your name was changed.

3) Another birth certificate.

Learning for the first time that there was an original birth certificate before the one which you have always considered to be your birth certificate can be confusing.

4) Not being adopted for some time following your birth.

Learning that you were not immediately adopted can raise a whole range of emotions and questions such as where was I and who cared for me?

5) Not being named on your birth certificate.

Some original birth certificates will have the name of the child listed as "Unnamed". Although this may trigger issues around self-worth it is important to remember that mothers were often actively discour-

aged from naming their children.

6) Your mother or father has signed a contact statement wanting no contact.

This can be extremely difficult for adopted persons who may already be feeling vulnerable about applying for their adoption records. It may exacerbate feelings of negative self-worth. It is important to remember that some mothers have not told their husbands and families about the adoption and that this is most likely the reason for the contact statement. Most contact statements were signed many years ago and we encourage you to remember that people's life circumstances change.

7) Limited or no information about your father.

We now know that fathers were often excluded from the birth and the adoption process by authority figures. Lack of information about the father can be frustrating particularly when the only other source for that information is the mother.

8) Limited or no medical information.

Many adopted people apply for their adoption record simply to access medical information for themselves or their families. Receiving limited and not up to date information may be frustrating. If you are requesting medical information regarding a specific condition we recommend including a letter with your application requesting this as department staff may be able to contact your relative to obtain this information.

9) Disparaging remarks about the child or the mother.

The practice of record keeping during the time of your adoption was quite different from what it is today. Some comments made by practitioners at the time appear to be irrelevant, derogatory and strange.

10) It doesn't appear that my mother was "forced" to give me up?

Consents obtained from unmarried mothers who were not fully informed of alternatives to adoption, were unaware of the consequences of adoption, or were influenced and manipulated by authority figures including their parents, doctors, social workers and church figures, cannot be said to be informed consent. (National Archives Exhibition *Without Consent* 2015)

While the list above provides examples of how adoption records may cause a range of complex emotions, it is only intended as a guide to exploring your expectations about your adoption records. Certainly if you feel particularly anxious about any of the above, please contact **Forced Adoption Support Service at Jigsaw Queensland Inc** on 1800 210 313 (Qld only) or 07 33586666 to discuss your concerns.

This is your journey. Well-meaning family and friends may be very excited for you and want to be as involved as possible. Set your own pace. We also recommend that you attend one of Jigsaw Queensland's Support Groups where you will be able to confidentially discuss your feelings with others who have already accessed their records.