

The Journey Issues & Feelings

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council of irish adoption agencies



Barnardos

This booklet is one of a series prepared and published by Barnardos Adoption Advice Service and the Council of Irish Adoption Agencies. The series is designed to provide general guidelines for all those seeking information and/or contact with their families of origin. It may also be useful to adoptive parents who wish to have more information on the tracing and reunion process. This booklet does not offer an interpretation of the law in respect of adoption or related matters.

Advice should be sought if you feel you need help with legal or other issues.

A list of useful addresses and contact points is provided at the end of this booklet. A booklist is also included.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, the granting of an adoption order generally meant that contact with the adoption agency ceased. As more and more people return to agencies seeking information a new openness has developed and agencies welcome contact from anyone involved in the original adoptive process.

This booklet outlines some issues and feelings that may arise as part of the adoption experience. For some people intense feelings are experienced during the search, reunion and post-reunion journey.

WILL THE JOURNEY AFFECT ME?

People who consider seeking information about their families of origin, or who hope to meet birth family members, often wonder what affect this could have on their lives. Whilst it is not possible to say in advance how any individual may be affected, a number of common issues have been identified. This leaflet provides information on these.

Loss:

When adoption is discussed, the experience of loss is not always considered.

All parties involved in adoption experience loss to some degree. In gaining a new family through adoption a child loses contact with the birth family. The birth family loses the opportunity to raise the child and is usually not involved in the child's life. The adoptive parents may have experienced the loss of never having a biological child.

Traditionally, secrecy was and still can be, a part of the adoption process. It was believed that secrecy offered the best protection to everyone involved in adoption. This emphasis on secrecy has made it difficult for people to express sadness with regard to their feelings of loss. This experience of loss can continue and during the search there are times when one may feel incredibly sad. It can be good to express that loss to others who can understand it because of their own personal experiences, or because of their professional training and experience.

Grief:

When loss is hidden it is more difficult for people to grieve for that loss.

Although grief affects people in different ways, there are five identified stages of grief. (1) shock and denial, (2) guilt, (3) anger, (4) sadness and (5) resolution. The process of grieving consists of working through some or all of these stages time and again in different sequences, each time with a little less pain. This can take a long time.

Birth parents who have kept their child's placement a secret may have been unable to grieve for a long time. They may not remember information about the adoption and talk about "keeping a lid on their pain".

Adopted people may have difficulty grieving because they are not encouraged to mourn a loss which was often not recognised. Some adopted people do not feel they have experienced grief around the issue of their adoption.

The overwhelming joy and happiness experienced by adoptive parents at the time of the placement pushes any feelings of loss into the background. They often describe finding it difficult to talk about their own sense of loss.

This need to grieve can sometimes be overwhelming. It is important to be able to seek support from those close to you and/or a social worker with whom you feel comfortable.

Rejection:

Adopted people often wonder if they were placed for adoption because of some fault within themselves. This can lead to feelings of having been rejected by their birth parents.

Birth parents may feel they have been judged not to be 'good enough' parents. They often fear that people close to them will reject them if they confide that they have previously placed a child for adoption. They may also fear that the child they placed for adoption will reject them or be hostile towards them.

Adoptive parents may feel that they have been denied what others have - their own biological child. The infertile partner may fear rejection by his/her spouse. The couple may also fear that their child may some day reject them in favour of the birth family.

Whilst most adoptive parents have come to terms with the inability to conceive, the painful feelings associated with infertility may occur at any time.

Guilt and Shame:

When people blame themselves with regard to a loss, they can experience guilt. Adopted people may feel shame at being 'different' and may feel guilt about their need to search.

Adoptive parents may feel ashamed of their infertility and may feel guilty about the negative feelings that may arise when their child expresses a need to search.

Birth parents may feel guilt and shame about placing their child for adoption in the first place. They may feel they should have been stronger at the time, and should have taken full control of the situation.

Identity:

'Who am I really?' is often the first question which motivates people to search, but it also influences everyone connected with adoption. Adoptive parents can question their identity as parents because they do not have a biological tie with their child. Birth parents' identities as care-taking parents can never be reclaimed. They often find it difficult to respond when asked how many children they have.

Adopted people lose their birth family identity through adoption and take on a new identity with their adoptive families. Most people take for granted the availability of information such as who we look like and other related family traits. This information contributes to the development of a sense of self and it is not available to adopted people.

Doubts about one's identity can lead to doubts about one's worth as a human being (low self-esteem). As new information and new relationships become available during the search and reunion journey, new questions concerning identity may also emerge.

Intimacy:

People who have experienced confusion about their identity may have difficulty getting close to others. Since they have experienced significant losses in their lives, they may have difficulty becoming intimate with others because they fear they may experience another loss.

A fear of intimacy can lead to:

- lack of trust in relationships
- an inability to give an on-going commitment to others

Control:

All those involved in adoption have experienced the sense of a lack of control over a significant aspect of their lives. The loss of control may have a longterm effect because it can induce a sense of insecurity.

Birth parents may feel victimised and powerless about the decision to place their child for adoption. Adoptive parents may not feel entitled to be full parents to their adopted children because they are not the biological parents.

Adopted people were unlikely to have been in a position to exert any control over their own adoption.

These are some of the reasons why control is such a significant issue during a search. Control is also an important issue within the traditional adoption system and it can be perceived that control lies with another party, e.g. with the social worker in the agency, with the birth mother in relation to any meetings, and with the adoptive family in relation to acceptance of the need to have a relationship with the birth family.

Some of these issues may seem familiar to you, others may not. However, it is likely that some of them may emerge or re-emerge during your search journey. Exposing such issues may cause pain and grief to come to the surface which is why it is important to seek support during your journey. This support can come from many sources. It is important that you select an appropriate source for yourself. The leaflet, " The Journey - Search Phases and who to tell along the way", outlines possible sources of support

This section is based on an article entitled

"Seven Core Issues of Adoption" by Lois Melina, which first appeared in 'Adopted Child' newsletter, Vol. 8, No. 12, October 1989.

Lois Melina is an adoptive parent and a psychologist working in the United States of America.

SOME USEFUL READING

Search and reunion

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY PREPARATION FOR REUNION

Adopted people, adoptive parents and birth parents tell their stories.

Children's Society 1994, London.

FARRELLY Conway Eileen SEARCH AND REUNION IN THE ADOPTION TRIANGLE

Occasional Paper 3 from Dept. of Social Studies, Trinity College, Dublin 2.

GEDIMAN, Judith & BROWN, Linda BIRTHBOND

Re-unions between parents and adoptees

New Horizon Press USA 1989

McCOLM, Michelle ADOPTION & REUNION

Second Story Press Ontario, Canada 1993

McMILLAN, Ros, IRVING, Owen HEART OF REUNION

Some experience of re-union in Scotland

Barnardo's, Essex, England

SANDERS, Patricia & SITERLY, Nancy SEARCH AFTERMATH AND ADJUSTMENTS

Novels with Adoption Theme

BAINBRIDGE, Beryl
**AN AWFULLY BIG
ADVENTURE**
Duckworth, U.K. 1992

CARTER Angela
WISE CHILDREN
Chatto & Windus U.K. 1992

FORSTER Margaret
**THE BATTLE FOR
CHRISTABEL**
Chatto & Windus U.K. 1992

FORSTER Margaret
SHADOW BABY
Chatto & Windus U.K. 1995

GEE Maggie
**WHERE ARE THE
SNOWS?**
Heinemann, U.K. 1992

HOUGAN Carolyn
BLOOD RELATIVE
Headline, London 1992

MARGOLIS Seth
THE OTHER MOTHER
Headline, London 1993

USEFUL ADDRESSES AND CONTACT POINTS:

The Adoption Board

Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
Tel: 01-6671392

Barnardos Adoption Advice Service

Christchurch Square, Dublin 8.
Confidential telephone line: 01-4546388. Tuesday 2pm - 5pm, Thursday 10am - 2pm

Council of Irish Adoption Agencies

Chairperson: Mary Lillis, Clarecare, Harmony Row, Ennis, Co. Clare. Tel: 065-28178
Secretary: Julie Kerins, Cunamh, 30 South Anne Street, Dublin 2. Tel: 01-6779664

The Adult Adoptees Association

do Wynn's Hotel, 35 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.
Support groups' month Wynn's Hotel, Dublin 1, last Tuesdays of each month.

Adopted People's Association

27 Temple View Green, Clarehall, Dublin 13.
Tel: 01-4624430. email: apa@connect.ie. www.connect.ie/apa
Monthly meetings held through sister organisation Adult Adoptees Association (see above).

Adopted and Fostered People's Association of Ireland

Bachelor's Inn, Bachelor's Walk, Dublin 2 (meet 8pm every 2nd Wednesday)
c/o 99 Grace O'Malley Road, Howth, Co. Dublin
Tel: 01 - 4510425 or 01 - 8463270

Adoptive Parent's Association

PRO: Helen Scott, Albain, Piercetown, Dunboyne, Co. Meath: Tel: 01-8252043
Secretary: Helen Gilmartin, Tomriland, Annamoe, Bray, Co. Wicklow Tel: 0404-45183

International Adoption Association

P.O. Box 5522, Co. Dublin.

TREOIR

Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children.
36 Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin 6. Tel: 01-4964155.

THE REGISTERED ADOPTION SOCIETIES

DUBLIN

Telephone

- CÚNAMH (formerly C.P.R.S.I.),**
30 South Anne Street, Dublin 2. (01) 6779664
- Protestant Adoption Society (P.A.C.T.),**
15 Belgrave Road, Rathmines, Dublin 6. (01) 4976788
- Rotunda Girls Aid Society (R.G.A.S.),**
1A Cathedral Street, Dublin 1. (01) 8744262
- St. Brigid's Orphanage,**
Holy Faith Convent, 16 The Coombe, Dublin 8. (01) 4542917 or (01) 450244
- * **St. Louise Adoption Society,**
1st Floor, Park House, North Circular Road, Dublin 7. (01) 8387122
- St. Patrick's Guild,**
82 Haddington Road, Dublin 4. (01) 6681908 or (01) 668176S

CLARE

- St. Catherine's Adoption Society,**
Clarecare, Harmony Row, Ennis, Co. Clare. (065) 28178

CORK

- Sacred Heart Adoption Society,**
Sacred Heart Convent, Blackrock, Co. Cork. (021)357730 or (021) 357841
- Southern Health Board Adoption Service,**
St. Finbars Hospital, Douglas Road, Cork. (021) 312848
- St. Anne's Adoption Society,**
Cork and Ross Family Centre, 34 Paul Street, Cork. (021) 273213/4/5/6

DONEGAL

- ** **St. Mura's Adoption Society,**
The Pastoral Centre, Cathedral View, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. (074) 21853

GALWAY

- Clann,**
Western Regional Adoption Committee,
Western Health Board, 25 Newcastle Road, Galway. (091) 523122 ext. 330

KERRY

- The Kerry Adoption and Fostering Team,**
6 Denny Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry. (066) 20300

LIMERICK

Mid-West Regional Adoption Society,

Fostering and Adoptive Centre, Glenbevan House,
Upper Mayorstone, Limerick.

(061) 328336

LOUTH

North Eastern Health Board Adoption Service,

Child and Family Centre, St Mary's Hospital,
Dublin Road, Drogheda.

(041) 41038

OFFALY

Midland Health Board Adoption Agency,

Arden Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

(0506) 21868

(0506) 21898

SLIGO

St. Attracta's Adoption Society,

St. Mary's, Co. Sligo.

(071) 43058

WATERFORD

(S.E.E.K.) South Eastern Health Board,

32 The Mall, Waterford.



(051) 78574

Barnardos Adoption Advice Service is an independent service offering information, advice, individual and group counselling to all those with a query on adoption matters.

The Council of Irish Adoption Agencies represents statutory and voluntary adoption agencies. The Council aims to: standardise adoption policy and practice, highlight adoption issues, influence policy, campaign for changes in adoption legislation, develop services for all those with concerns in relation to adoption.

* These societies are operated entirely by staff of the Eastern Health Board and South Eastern Health Board, respectively.

** These societies are run in association with the local Health Boards.



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