

Searching for a birth relative



If you have decided to search for a birth relative, you may be wondering where to start.

Before you begin your search, we encourage you to contact an adoption counselling and support service, to help you prepare for some of the challenges associated with searching for, and possibly meeting, your birth relatives.

Some people just want to know more about their birth history, family background or medical history, while others hope to establish an ongoing relationship with their birth relatives.

It is important to think about how you would feel about making contact with a birth relative, and what you hope to achieve from the contact.

Having contact with a birth relative can often be a positive experience. However, not all experiences are positive, and sometimes the response from the birth relative may be unexpected and distressing. Being prepared for the initial contact will help you form a realistic expectation as you begin your search, and ease any disappointment you may experience upon contact with a birth relative.

Where do I start?

Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

You must first seek authorisation from Adoption Services to obtain a copy of your original or amended birth certificate, before you make an application to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Once you have obtained a copy of your original birth certificate, you can ask the Registry to conduct searches within Queensland, for marriages or deaths relating to your birth relative. For events that have occurred in another state, you will need to contact the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages in that particular state, for information. Asking for this information might help your search for a birth relative by using their most recent name.

Fees will apply for the Registry to commence searches. Searching for information and the issuing of certificates about your birth relative is at the discretion of the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Refer to the back section of this resource for the Queensland Registry contact details.

Electoral Roll

When you have obtained your birth relative's name from Adoption Services or the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriage you may wish to conduct searching for them via the Australia wide Electoral Roll.

You may be able to access the current elector roll at any AEC office. To find the nearest office telephone **13 23 26** (charges at a rate similar to a local call) or access their website at www.aec.gov.au

Searching by internet or social media

Some people choose to search for birth relatives via the internet and social networking sites, such as Facebook. This can often result in a quick and easy way to find birth relatives, and there are a number of websites that facilitate online adoption searches.

However, there are also a number of drawbacks in using social media to search for, and make contact with a birth relative. For example, making contact faster than you or the birth relative may be prepared for, or having your information passed onto other birth relatives when you may not want it to be. It is important to remember that making contact through social media cannot be 'undone'.

If you are thinking about searching for a birth relative using a social network site, we recommend that any contact you make with your birth relative is conducted in a discreet and sensitive manner, using private messaging options and email.

We also advise against publicly naming the birth relative as a party to an adoption. Your birth relative may not want to be identified in this way. They also might not want their personal information (such as their name and date of birth) posted on websites as part of your search. While the internet enables the possibility of instant connection and communication with birth relatives, it is important to consider that the other person might not want to be contacted this way.

Additionally, in some circumstances it may be against the law to name a birth relative as a party to an adoption without their consent. If you are unsure about how to search for a birth relative using their name, please contact Adoption Services or Benevolent Society — Post Adoption Support Queensland.



Search support services

We encourage you to engage with a support service to help locate your birth relatives and to provide emotional support to you during your search. Refer to the back section of this resource for contact details.

I think I have located a birth relative, what now?

The Benevolent Society's Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ) offers intermediary services for people who want help with contacting birth relatives.

An intermediary service contacts your birth relative on your behalf, and facilitates information sharing between you and your birth relative. PASQ counsellors provide information, practical assistance and counselling support to you (and the birth relative) through the various stages of search, pre-contact preparation, reunion and post-reunion relationship building.

You may prefer to make contact with your birth relative yourself, while PASQ provides support and guidance through this process.

PASQ also provides counselling to people affected by adoption in Queensland who are not seeking contact, or have been unable to make contact with a birth relative.

Refer to the back section of this resource for PASQ contact details.

If you prefer not to use an intermediary service, we recommend that you make initial contact with your birth relative by letter. This allows the birth relative time to think about the contact, seek support and consider their response. This may result in a more positive response to the unexpected contact.

In writing your first letter, it may be helpful to keep it brief, by stating your name, age, date and place of birth, and suggesting that you believe you could be related. If you feel sure that you are contacting the right person, and choose to provide more information about yourself in your letter, we recommend you send your letter by registered mail to ensure that only the person to whom the letter is addressed receives it.

In the past, there was often secrecy involved with adoptions. The birth-relative you are contacting may have family members or friends who are unaware of the adoption and the circumstances. Birth parents may have kept the adoption secret, and may need to privately consider their feelings about the contact.

Alternatively, some people who were adopted themselves may be unaware that they were adopted, or may feel anxious about their adoptive parents knowing that they have been contacted. If you are not entirely sure of the circumstances of the other person you are contacting, it is advisable that you apply caution and discretion when making first contact.

What if my birth relative does not want contact?

While many reunions between a birth relative and adopted person are happy occasions, this is not always the case.

Because of past secrecy with adoptions, and sometimes because of the circumstances of the adoption, some parties to an adoption might respond negatively to being contacted. They may be upset about the contact and fearful of the impact it could have on them and their family. As a consequence, they may ask to be left alone, or try to ignore the contact.

For the person seeking contact with their birth relative, this can result in a range of emotions including rejection, shame, isolation, severe disappointment, and even anger.

Some people feel a sense of entitlement to know their birth family or child, and continue to make contact in the hope that the other person might change their mind, or they may try to contact other members of the family instead. This approach may permanently end any possibility of future contact.

Some people accept the other person's wishes but continue to experience feelings of regret and sorrow, often at times when they least expect it, or at specific life stages such as the birth of their child or grandchild. These are completely natural and reasonable emotions to have, and people deal with them differently.



Confiding in people close to you, and seeking support from a counselling service or support group may help you to better understand and deal with your emotions.

A person who reacts negatively to initial contact may feel differently after having some time to think about the contact, and talk to their family. It is much better to give the other person time to think about the contact and respond to you. In your initial letter, it may be better to provide your contact details to allow the birth relative to decide whether they are interested in making contact in the future.

You can also talk to Adoption Services about lodging a 'contact statement'. This statement lets the birth relative know what level of contact you are comfortable with, and how you prefer to be contacted.

Searching for my birth father

If you have obtained the name of your birth father from your adoption records, you may be informed by Adoption Services that they are unable to verify the accuracy of the name.

Historically, birth fathers were not required to be part of the adoption process, and information recorded at the time of the adoption was usually provided by the birth mother.

In many earlier adoptions, particularly during the 1960's and 1970's, birth mothers were often interviewed by hospital or departmental staff, or asked to complete a questionnaire. Typically, these interviews asked the mother to name the baby's father.

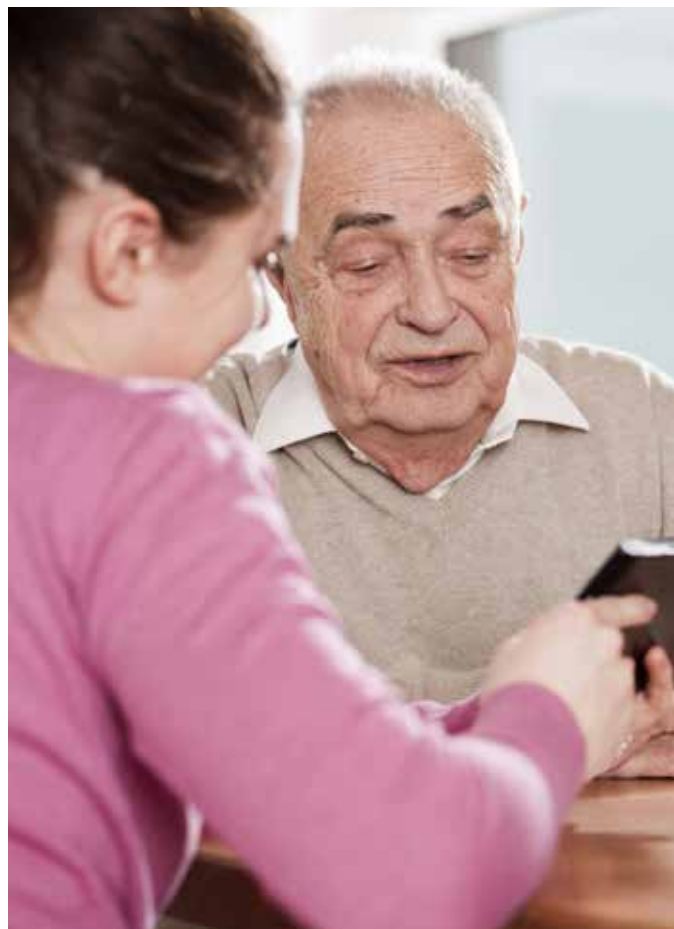
More recently, some birth mothers have said they felt obliged, or pressured, to provide the name of the birth father, which could in some cases, lead to prosecution for financial support of the child. While there may be no information recorded that would contradict the information provided by the birth mother, and there is no reason to question the integrity of the information provided, some birth mothers have claimed to have provided a false name in order to protect the identity of the birth father, or prevent any involvement by him.

Some birth mothers do not recall completing the questionnaire. They suspect their parent or grandparent completed the questionnaire on their behalf, either before or shortly after their child's birth. In these cases, there is the possibility that an incorrect name was provided, such as the name of a boyfriend or friend of the birth mother who was not the birth father.

Should you wish to make contact with a birth father whose identity cannot be verified, it is important to remember that many birth fathers could genuinely be unaware of their child's birth or adoption.

This will make reunion even more complex and possibly more distressing for you, particularly if the man or his family respond in a way that makes you feel rejected, or even accused of dishonesty. Some birth fathers may ask for proof of paternity, such as a DNA test, before accepting you as their birth child. Some may not recall knowing about you or your birth mother, and simply avoid any contact with you.

Being aware of these possibilities may help you form realistic expectations and prepare you for making contact with a birth father.



Useful services

Adoption Registry Connect

A free searchable database of profiles posted by adoptees and birth parents seeking family reunion.

Website: www.adopteeconnect.com/index

Australian Adoptees Network

An online network providing a safe and supportive environment for Australian adoptees to discuss their experiences and raise issues that concern them.

Website: www.australianadopteesnetwork.webs.com

Benevolent Society – Post Adoption Support Queensland

Provides counselling and support to people affected by adoption.

Website: www.benevolent.org.au

Phone: 07 3170 4600 or 1300 914 819

Email: pasq@benevolent.org.au

Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships – Community and Personal Histories Unit

Facilitates access to records of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for researching family and community history. Services are confidential and free of charge.

Website: www.datsip.qld.gov.au/department-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-partnerships

Phone: 1800 650 230 (toll-free within Australia) or 07 3404 3622

Department of Justice and Attorney-General – Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Provides information and access to adoption records.

Website: www.qld.gov.au/law/births-deaths-marriages-and-divorces/birth-registration-and-adoption-records

Phone: 13 74 68

Email: BDM-Mail@justice.qld.gov.au

Office hours: Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm.

International Social Services (ISS) Australia

Connects families from around the world with professional support, search and reunification services.

Website: www.iss.org.au

Phone: 1300 657 843

Email: iss@iss.org.au

Jigsaw Queensland

Offers support to those affected by adoption including peer support groups for adopted people, mothers and other family.

Website: www.jigsawqueensland.com

Phone: 1800 210 313 (within Qld only) or 07 3358 6666

Email: support@jigsawqld.org.au

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Link-Up (Qld) Aboriginal Corporation

Provides services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are over 18 years old and wish to reunite with family from whom they have been separated or removed.

Website: www.link-upqld.org.au

Email: contact@qld.link-up.org.au

Brisbane: 3–5 Reid Street, Woolloongabba QLD 4102

Phone: 07 3034 8444

Mt Isa : 1/81 Miles Street

Phone: 1800 200 855

Townsville: 745 Riverway Drive, Thuringowa Central

Phone: 1800 200 855

Cairns: 18 Scott Street, Parramatta Park

Phone: 07 4041 7403

State Library of Queensland

Provides information about searching for parties to an adoption, personal history and birth relatives.

Website: www.slq.qld.gov.au/blog/slq-connecting-families

Phone: 07 3840 7810

Other search services

There are a number of other online search sites for locating historical family records and researching family history.

Trove

Developed by the National Library of Australia to provide free access to library collections across Australia, including historical news and media publications as well as birth, death and marriage notices.

Website: www.trove.nla.gov.au

Ancestry.com

Facilitates searches for family history family tree connections, and enables access to over seven billion genealogy records including Census, Social Security Death Index (SSDI) and military records.

Website: www.ancestry.com.au

Further information

Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women Adoption Services

Address: Level 11, 127 Creek Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Postal address: Locked Bag 3405
Brisbane Qld 4001

Phone: 07 3097 5100
1800 647 983
(free call within Queensland)

Email: ads@csyw.qld.gov.au

Website: www.qld.gov.au/adoption