



Access to Birth Records and
Adoption Case Records

June

2021

AMENDMENT

This chapter was amended and updated in March 2021 to add new sections on services and Intermediary services to adults who have been adopted and include:

- **Section 7, Services to Adopted Adults;**
- **Section 8, Birth Relatives and Access to Files;**
- **Section 9, Adoption Contact Register;**
- **Section 10, No Contact Requests and Vetoes.**

Additionally, appendices have been added to promote a consistent practice approach to working with adults who exploring their past.

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1. All Cases - Provision of Counselling

In all cases where an application or request is dealt with under this procedure, the allocated social worker must provide written information about the availability of counselling to the applicant and to the subject, including information about agencies that provide counselling in the relevant area and any fees that may apply.

Where the applicant indicates a wish to receive counselling, the allocated social worker must ensure that the person receives the counselling, which may be through another agency. Where another agency is used, the allocated social worker should ensure that the counsellor will have the necessary skills and experience.

Where a referral is made to another agency for counselling to be provided, the allocated social worker should provide the agency carrying out the counselling with sufficient information about the applicant and/or the subject to enable the counselling to be beneficial.

2. Access to Birth Records

Adopted people aged 18 or over can apply for access to and a copy of their birth certificate. The procedure for dealing with any such application will differ depending on whether the Adoption Order was made before or after 30 December 2005.

2.1 Adoption Orders made before 30 December 2005

When a caller enquires about access to birth records, the caller should be referred to the AiM Adoption Support Team.

If it is established that the caller was adopted and that the caller is a resident of Merseyside, (Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton or Wirral) the enquiry can be pursued. In the event that the Borough was involved in arranging the adoption but the adopted adult is not a resident of Merseyside, the caller should be advised to re-direct his or her enquiry to the appropriate agency.

Where an enquiry is accepted, counselling will be offered in accordance with [Section 1, Provision of Counselling](#).

The Adoption Support Service will advise enquirers to write to the General Register Office (Adoption Section), Room C202, Smedley Hydro, Trafalgar Road, Southport, PR8 2HH, to ask for an application form.

On receipt of the relevant papers containing the linking information from the General Register Office, the Adoption Support Team Manager will advise the allocated worker to contact the relevant agency dealing with Access to Records on behalf of Adoption in Merseyside.

The relevant agency will deliver the following service. At the interview, the adoption social worker will ask for proof of the identity of the adopted person to ensure confidentiality, for example a passport or driving licence, before providing any information.

The adoption social worker should share the information provided by the General Register Office on the Information Sheet. The adoption social worker should also give the adopted person the application form (CA5) to obtain a copy of his or her birth certificate.

The adoption social worker should then complete the form (CA7) confirming the interview has taken place, and return it to the General Register Office.

Where issues of concern have arisen at the counselling interview, for example in relation to the adopted person's instability, the adoption social worker should alert the General Register Office.

The adopted person should be advised about the [Adoption Contact Register](#), the right to seek access to their [Adoption Case Record](#) (see [Section 3, Access by Adopted Persons to Adoption Case Records](#)) and, for those who wish for help in tracing members of their birth family, the availability of Intermediary Services - see [Intermediary Services Procedure](#).

He or she should also be advised where appropriate about the right to register an absolute or qualified [Veto](#) on their Adoption Case Record - see [Intermediary Services Procedure](#) and informed of any other relevant agencies offering support.

2.2 Adoption Orders made on or after 30 December 2005

When a caller enquires about access to birth records, the caller should be referred to the Adoption Support Team.

If it is established that the caller was adopted and that the borough was involved in arranging the adoption or that the caller is a resident of Merseyside (Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton or Wirral) the Adoption Support Manager will advise the allocated worker to make a referral to the agency dealing with Access to Records requests on behalf of Adoption in Merseyside. In the event that the borough was involved in arranging the adoption but the adopted adult is not a resident of Merseyside, they should be informed that they can make an application for access to their records, but will be directed to their own agency.

The agency completing the work on behalf of Adoption in Merseyside will complete the following steps and will arrange for an initial interview to take place.

At the initial interview, the adoption social worker will ask for proof of the identity of the adopted person to ensure confidentiality, for example a passport or driving licence, before providing any information.

For those adopted persons who confirm their wish to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate, they should be given the appropriate information to enable them to complete the application form to obtain a copy of their birth certificate. Where the requisite information is not held by the borough, the adoption social worker should seek the information from the General Register Office on the adopted person's behalf.

Adopted persons should be advised of their right to have a copy of the Child's Permanence Report.

For those who wish to trace members of their birth family, they should be advised of the various courses of action they can take - see [Section 3, Access by Adopted Persons to Adoption Case Records](#).

The social worker should continue to offer support and advice to the adopted person for as long as he or she needs it and will also inform him or her of any other relevant agencies offering support.

If it is considered that the adopted person should not have access to the information, legal advice should be obtained regarding a possible application to the High Court to prevent access.

3. Access by Adopted Persons to Adoption Case Records

See Adoption Case Records Procedure - to follow for the contents of the Adoption Case Record.

3.1 Adoption Orders made before 30 December 2005

The Adoption Service provides a service to adopted persons seeking access to their Adoption Case Records where they are borough residents or where the borough arranged their adoption and/or where the borough holds the files relating to their adoption.

Any request by an adopted person for access to their Adoption Case Record must be in writing and accompanied by a photocopy of identifying information, such as passport or driving licence.

The adoption agency has discretion to disclose to the adopted person material from the Adoption Case Record, and this discretion should be exercised in the context of the particular circumstances of each request. The adoption social worker should discuss the case with the Adoption Manager before arranging any access to the Adoption Case Record.

There should be a clear record on file of all information disclosed. Where copies of documents have been provided, this should also be recorded.

Third Party Information

Careful consideration should be given to the disclosure of information held on third parties. Specific consent from the third party is not required, but consideration needs to be given to the nature of the information, the relevance and benefit to the adopted person of knowing the information and the likely effect on him or her of receiving it.

There may be instances where the information held has been given by a third party (for example a birth relative) with a clear understanding that it may be disclosed to the adopted person in the future.

Conversely, there may be information held about a third party which is highly confidential and would serve no purpose for the adopted person to know - for example information that a birth mother had had a number of terminations prior to the adopted person's birth.

All decisions should be based on professional judgment and the adoption social worker should discuss the case with his or her line manager before making a decision.

All decisions should be recorded on the file, with reasons.

Where there is information about siblings held on the record, again consideration needs to be given to the benefit and relevance to the adopted person of knowing the information. Where, for example, a sibling has been placed

for adoption separately, and the disclosure of information about the sibling may reveal confidential information about the sibling's new family, then extreme caution must be exercised.

However, if the information relates to the past family history, will provide no identifying information about the sibling's present whereabouts and the disclosure will enable the adopted person to understand more about the family and the reason why the siblings were separated, then disclosure is more likely to be appropriate.

The most difficult situations arise when the information relates to past family history, concerns confidential information about a sibling or family member and would clarify for the adopted person the reason why children were removed from their family of origin, or siblings were separated. These situations should always be discussed with the line manager and the discussion and decision to disclose or not to disclose information should be clearly recorded on the file, together with reasons for the decision.

3.2 Adoption Orders made on or after 30 December 2005

Any person may apply to the appropriate adoption agency for the disclosure of protected information about any person involved in adoption. Applications for the disclosure of protected information* may therefore be made by adopted people, birth relatives or any other person involved in an adoption. The adoption agency has discretion not to agree to the requested disclosure. It must record its decision and the reasons.

*Protected information is defined as information which is about a person and contains identifying information about that person.

The adoption agency must consider the following matters before deciding whether to disclose protected information to the applicant:

- The welfare of the adopted person;
- The views of the person to whom the information relates and if this is a child, his or her parents;
- All the circumstances of the case.

The agency cannot disclose identifying information about an adopted person to birth relatives without the consent of the adopted person.

Where the request relates to an adopted child, the obtaining of consent will depend on the child's age and understanding and the consent of the prospective adopters will also be required.

Persons involved in adoptions can provide their consent in advance to the disclosure of identifying information about them at some point in the future.

Decisions made in relation to applications for disclosure of protected information must be communicated in writing both to the applicant and the subject, and the reasons for the decision must be outlined.

Where an application for disclosure of information relating to an adult is refused, this is a **Qualifying Determination** and the applicant may apply to the **Independent Review Mechanism** in relation to the decision.

Where an application for disclosure of information is agreed despite the objection of the subject, this is also a "qualifying determination" and the subject of the information may apply to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The person requesting an Independent Review must apply within 40 working days of receiving notification of the decision.

There is no similar right to an Independent Review where the application relates to information held on a child and is refused.

Where a matter is referred to an Independent Review Panel, the Independent Review Panel will send their recommendation to the adoption agency. The agency is not obliged to follow the recommendation, but must take it into account when reconsidering the application.

The agency must then notify the applicant, the subject and the Independent Review Panel of the decision and reasons.

4. Access by Birth Relatives to Adoption Case Records

4.1 Adoption Orders made before 30 December 2005

Where a birth relative requests access to an Adoption Case Record, there is no entitlement on their part to such access and it is for the adoption agency to decide whether information contained within the records may be disclosed. Any decision to disclose such information can only be taken after discussion with the Borough Data Protection Officer, Legal Services and with the agreement of the Service Director for Targeted and Specialist Services.

Only birth relatives living in the borough or birth relatives of an adopted child with a Contact Agreement in place will be able to receive a service from the adoption team. All other birth relatives must request a service from the local authority in whose area they live.

In all cases, a balance must be struck between the confidentiality of the information, the enquirer's need to know, the relevance of the information to the enquirer and, when considering a request by a birth parent or relative, whether the anonymity of the adoptive placement can be preserved.

Information which would enable the birth relative to identify the adopted person should not be given, for example whether or not there was a change of name on the adoption, or the name of the adoptive family. However, sometimes the records include information received in the intervening years such as news of progress made at school, health problems, achievements, requests for post-adoption support. Careful consideration needs to be given as to whether it may be appropriate to disclose any of this information to a birth relative.

Where the birth relative makes an enquiry in relation to an adopted child who is still under 18, consideration should be given to approaching the adopters to request up-to-date information about the child and/or to offer to pass on information about the birth family and/or to seek the views of the adopters about any future exchange of information. Adopters may also be asked to clarify whether the adopted child is to be told of the birth family's request although there should be no implied expectation that they should do so against their wishes - and they should be given information about independent support agencies which may be able to assist them.

The response to a birth relative should take into account any contact between the birth family and the agency since the child was adopted and any arrangements/agreements for post-adoption contact and how these have worked.

4.2 Adoption Orders made on or after 30 December 2005

Only birth relatives living in the borough or birth relatives of an adopted child with a Contact Agreement in place will be able to receive a service from the adoption team. All other birth relatives must request a service from the local authority in whose area they live.

For the procedure where an application is accepted see [paragraph 3.2](#) above.

5. Access by Adopters to Adoption Case Records

5.1 Adoption Orders made before 30 December 2005

In the case of requests for information by adopters, regard must be had to the requirements on the part of the agency to share full information about the child and his or her history with prospective adopters prior to the placement. If the disclosure of information would assist and enhance their ability to care for the child in the placement, then the balance should weigh heavily in favour of the disclosure of the information save for confidential details about a birth parents' medical history, which would have no relevance to the adopters in their care for the child.

5.2 Adoption Orders made on or after 30 December 2005

See [Adoption Orders made on or after 30 December 2005](#) above.

6. Access by Others to Adoption Case Records

Any other request for access to Adoption Case Records must be referred to the [Adoption Team Manager](#). In some circumstances, the Adoption Team Manager may decide to seek the authority of the Children's Service Manager before giving consent, for example a request from a researcher authorised by the Secretary of State.

In the case of members of staff within the Children and Families Service who are involved in adoption matters regularly, they will be asked on appointment to their post to sign an agreement to maintain the confidentiality of all adoption information.

In all other cases, the person making the request will be asked to sign a form of declaration relating to confidentiality before access can be agreed.

Access to information contained in Adoption Case Records is normally limited to:

- The [Regulatory Authority](#) (mandatory);
- The Ombudsman (mandatory);
- Any person undertaking a Statutory Inquiry under section 81 of the Children Act 1989 (mandatory);
- [CAFCASS](#) Officers (mandatory);

- The Court and officers of the Court (mandatory);
- Any person appointed to deal with a complaint or representation in respect of which access to the Adoption Case Record is required in order to carry out the responsibilities of his or her appointment (mandatory);
- An Independent Review Panel convened to consider a **Qualifying Determination** of an adoption agency, e.g. where an adoptive applicant has exercised his or her right to challenge a decision of the adoption agency as to their suitability to adopt or where a decision has been made in relation to the disclosure of protected information. (mandatory);
- The Secretary of State or persons authorised on his/her behalf (usually mandatory unless for research purposes);
- Social workers and other professional/administrative staff directly concerned with the case who establish a genuine 'need to know' (discretionary);
- Legal and **Medical Advisers** (discretionary);
- Other adoption agencies or specialists taking part in the adoption (discretionary);
- Adoption agencies or local authorities undertaking birth records counselling (discretionary);
- Any person undertaking a **Serious Case Review** in relation to a child (discretionary).

Disclosure of information is also mandatory where a child is to be or has been placed for adoption when the placing authority must notify the child, parents, prospective adopters and their GP, the local authority, health trust and education authority for the area where the prospective adopters live - see **Placement for Adoption Procedure**.

7. Services to Adopted Adults

7.1 Counselling

Adopted adults will come to counselling knowing varying amounts of information with regard to details of their adoption. They will also be seeking different outcomes from the counselling itself - from very specific information to wishing to trace their birth family. It is important for the worker to support their particular wishes and offer appropriate advice. (See **Appendix 3: Format for the Initial Counselling Interview** for details of areas to be covered during interview).

They are entitled to information regarding the original name of the birth mother and the district where they were registered to enable them to get a copy of their original birth certificate. They will also be able to obtain from the Court the name of the adoption society or local authority who were involved in their adoption. At some stage, they may wish for the worker to approach those agencies for the information they hold. Having received the information from the adoption agency, judgement should be exercised as to whether all or part of the information should be shared with the adopted person. If all of the information is NOT shared, the adoption agency who sent the information should be informed and a record kept on file.

Where there is little or no information in the agency record, then the worker will assist the adopted person to apply to the Court where the Order was made for the information held by the Court to be released. There is no automatic right to information but Courts are now increasingly helpful.

The worker also has a duty to consider the impact of receiving information on the adopted adult and therefore assess this risk. This may, for example, be relevant when the person concerned has mental health issues. Where appropriate, permission should be sought from the adopted person to liaise with other professionals involved who could then offer additional support.

When there are concerns that the adopted person is at risk to either themselves or others as a result of receiving the information, then the worker should discuss this with their manager.

After receiving counselling, if the adopted adult requires additional professional support, then the worker should signpost them to the relevant service.

Although the worker from this Agency will not usually be involved in the tracing and searching, the worker should help them consider the potential difficulties and benefits of such a trace. It may be helpful to discuss some of the methods that could be used - traditionally registers of birth, marriages and deaths, as well as electoral rolls - and the potential risks. Thus, using Friends Reunited or a website would result in the contact being unexpected for the birth family member and no support available for them. A fact sheet will be provided as an initial step (see [Appendix 4: Summary Format](#)).

7.2 Preparing the File

Consideration needs to be given as to what information should be shared from the file in order to give the adopted person a clear understanding of the issues which led to them being placed for adoption. Generally excluded from being shared would be confidential and third party information. Many more recent files will have very detailed information and it may be useful, as a first step, to discuss with the adopted person what they particularly want to know. In general, a good starting point would be a summary of the main issues plus a copy of the Form E/Child's Permanence Report. In addition, any personal documents may be of particular interest to the adopted person. Care must be taken when there are a limited number of personal documents to be shared by a number of siblings.

The adopted person is entitled to know about their birth family and its constitution. This will occasionally have information about siblings also placed for adoption. Only the birth name of these children should be shared and no detailed information about them.

Occasionally it will be necessary to share what the experience of these siblings was when living at home in order for the adopted adult to understand the circumstances of their adoption - for example, when children were removed at birth because of family history.

Clearly information about the birth parents should be shared which relates to their ability/inability to offer appropriate care. However some information which is held on file about them will not be relevant to that issue - for example, a birth mother having had a termination previously.

All Court reports held on file are the property of the Court and cannot be shared with the adopted adult unless the permission of the Court has been given. However, it would be possible, in preparing the summary outlined above, to include relevant information from those reports which relate directly to the adopted person and/or close

relatives within their birth family. This can include relevant information extracted from a report written by another agency when it is not appropriate to share the document itself.

If there is specific medical information to be shared, unless it is entirely straightforward, the possible implications of it must be discussed with the Agency **Medical Advisor**.

With regards to addresses, it is appropriate to disclose the birth family's address when they were born as this is available on public records. Careful consideration would need to be given to disclosing more relevant addresses without, at least, reference back to the birth family.

It would be very unusual to share information about adoptive parents as this is clearly 3rd party information. However, such a request should be considered on its own merits. A decision may be reached to share the information if the adopters died many years ago and/or the adopted adult is alleging abuse by the adopters.

The file may make reference to introductory visits and correspondence between the agency and the adopters. The worker should consider the impact on the relationship between the adopters and the adopted adult in sharing this sort of information.

It would not usually be appropriate or necessary to share sensitive or judgemental comments made by visiting social workers about the adjustment of the adopters or their anxieties as new parents. However, this situation may change if the adopters have died or the placement disrupted.

Correspondence between the agency and the prospective adopters that will help the adopted adult make sense of the process of the making of the Adoption Order may be helpful - in addition, such correspondence may contain positive comments about the adopted adult made by their adoptive parents that the worker may consider it appropriate to share.

More generally it is important to put all information shared into a context, including the social context of any judgemental/discriminatory comments that may have been recorded. This is not excusing them but to explain them in the context of the time. Each piece of information should clearly describe the context of the information and provide all cautionary notes for the adopted adult. This would normally be provided in the form of the Summary.

Workers should clarify where possible whether the information recorded is fact or opinion. For example, a worker may have recorded the birth mother as being 'aggressive' others may have described her as 'spirited'. It depends on who recorded the information and the culture of the organisation.

The name of the alleged father is important for the adopted person. However the record in the file may be unconfirmed. This information should be shared but again placed in the context - for example, 'your mother told the worker that your father was Fred Smith who lived down the street, however there is no record of whether or not he too thought he was the father or knows of this information'.

8. Birth Relatives and Access to Files

Intermediary services to birth relatives are provided by adoption support agencies as identified earlier. On occasions we will hold the adopted child's file in situations where the birth parent is wishing to locate the 'child' (now adopted adult).

In these circumstances we would read the file and advise the intermediary agency as to whether these were any potential risks to the adopted adult in continuing with the search.

We would share with the agency details of the adopted person and the adopted parents so that they can progress their enquiries.

9. Adoption Contact Register

Adoption workers should inform both adopted people and birth relatives that they can register their interest in contact via the Register which is held by the **General Register Office (GRO)**.

Research shows that many adopted people and birth relatives are unaware of the existence of the register so it should not be presumed that their absence from the register is an indication that they would not welcome an approach.

Leaflets regarding the work of the Adoption Contact Register will be given as appropriate.

10. No Contact Requests and Vetoes

Since the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, it has been possible for adopted adults to register a wish for no contact on the Register. An adopted person does not have to go via the Adoption Agency to register a wish for no contact with the GRO. They can do this directly by completing the appropriate forms.

There is provision for adopted adults to register a veto to prevent an intermediary agency from making contact to inform them of a birth relative enquiry.

An absolute veto prevents an intermediary agency making contact with the adopted person. The Appropriate Adoption Agency (AAA) may, in exceptional circumstances, make contact to share information with the adopted person that is so significant that the AAA makes the decision that it is imperative it is passed to the adopted person, for example vital medical information.

A qualified veto is one that restricts the circumstances in which an intermediary agency can make the approach. The qualification of the veto may apply to the person asking for the approach, for example, 'maternal relatives only' or 'siblings adopted by another family'. Alternatively there may be a qualification about the nature of the request, for example an approach should only be made if the reason is to pass on a legacy or if the person requesting contact is terminally ill.

Any veto can only be registered with the AAA. This is the local authority that placed the child for adoption, or in cases of private adoptions the Local Authority that was notified. The AAA must be satisfied that the adopted person fully understands the implications of registering a veto. Therefore when an enquiry about registering a veto has been received, where possible an appointment should be made to meet with the adopted adult. This will enable the adoption worker to confirm the adopted person's identity and also to help with consideration of some of the implications registering a veto might have for the adopted person.

If after considering the potential benefits/disadvantages the adopted person wishes to record a veto the adoption worker should facilitate this. A written record will be kept on the adopted persons file and any relevant intermediary agency will be notified as necessary. We will keep a register of all vetoes placed for easy reference and to enable a prompt response to be made to enquiries from an intermediary agency.

It is important to inform adopted adults that registering an absolute veto may not preclude the AAA contacting them in the future where it considers it necessary to do so. For example, the AAA may consider that the adopted person needs to be informed of life threatening medical condition or that it has come to the AAA notice that a birth relative has obtained identifying information and intends to make contact. The AAA does have discretion to initiate contact with the adopted person in such circumstances even if a veto is in place. A veto will however prevent any intermediary agency from making an approach as a result of a request from a birth relative covered by a veto.

Because of the serious nature of a veto and its implications - which therefore understandably necessitate, if possible, a discussion with the adopted adult - it will be necessary to develop some joint working practices with other authorities particularly within Adoption 22 (see [Adopt North West](#)). This is because, in practice, most of this authority's adopted adults will not live in and around Knowsley.

Appendix 1: Birth Record Counselling (Already Applied to the General Register Office)

Information Sheet (1)

BIRTH RECORD COUNSELLING (Already applied to the GRO)

We have recently been notified by the GRO that you have expressed an interest regarding accessing your adoption records. Knowsley adoption agency recognises the importance of this information to you and we endeavour to offer you an appointment within 2 working weeks.

People who were adopted before 1975

If you were adopted before 1975 you would have been adopted at a time when the sharing of information was a not very open. There was an air of 'secrecy' and people were told not to expect any further communication from the adopted child. However attitudes have changed over time and a much more open approach is now expected, this is reflected in adoption law and practice.

This may be the first time you receive knowledge/ information about the circumstances your adoption. We recognise this can be an emotional experience, and we endeavour to provide an interview that is sensitive, empathic, helpful and informative.

What if I was adopted after 1975?

Even though the law changed at this time and you might know more about the circumstances to your adoption, accessing your records can still be an emotional experience and therefore we believe it is good practice to offer you an interview with an adoption counsellor.

What we need from you

As you will appreciate your information is highly confidential and we wish to protect your confidentiality. Therefore we need you to bring with you some form of personal identification. This should include one photographic document such as a passport or driving licence. If you think you may have difficulty with this please do not hesitate to contact us.

It will also be helpful if you could bring along any information already in your possession received relating to your adoption, as this may assist our enquiries.

You may wish to bring along someone with you for personal support, however it may be necessary for this person not to be involved in the duration of the interview.

Please inform us in advance if you have any specific needs in relation to mobility, need for an interpreter etc.

What will happen at the interview?

We will have a discussion with you about your interest in accessing your information and what you hope to achieve from this process.

We will share any information received from the GRO, which may include information of your birth name and your birth parents' name.

For some people that is all the information they wish to know and our involvement can end here. However you may wish to proceed in learning more around the circumstances to your adoption, if that is the case we will write to the court that dealt with the adoption in order to ascertain the name of the agency that dealt with your adoption.

What happens next?

Once we have received the name of the agency that dealt with your adoption we will write to them advising them of your interest in accessing your records. This is usually provided in a form of a summary rather than the actual adoption records. There will be some information that cannot be shared, because they come from third party sources, or relate to information about individuals other than you.

Please be aware that this process can take some time. We understand that this can be very frustrating and we will do all we can to make the process as smooth as possible.

What happens if I wish to trace a birth relative?

If you feel you want to make contact with a birth relative you may be able to use some of the information already obtained in order to trace that relative. There are various ways to do this including obtaining information from public records etc. However we strongly advise you to use an intermediary before making contact. We are able to advise you of services/agencies that specialise in this area, at the time of the interview.

If you have any questions regarding the above information, or you wish to speak to somebody prior to your appointment, please do not hesitate to contact the adoption support worker named on the letter.

We look forward to hearing from you

Appendix 2: Birth Record Counselling (Access to Information on Adoption File)

Information sheet (2)

Birth records counselling/Access to information on adoption file

How does this work?

You recently contacted AiM Adoption Support Team expressing an interest in learning more about your birth history. This information sheet may help you understand what to expect at the interview and the process involved in accessing your adoption records.

People who were adopted before 1975

If you were adopted before 1975 you would have been adopted at a time when the sharing of information was a not very open. There was an air of 'secrecy' and people were told not to expect any further communication from the adopted child. However attitudes have changed over time and a much more open approach is now expected, this is reflected in adoption law and practice.

For many people this is the first time they will receive knowledge/ information about the circumstances of their adoption. We recognise this can be an emotional experience, and we endeavour to provide an interview that is sensitive, empathic, helpful and informative.

What if I was adopted after 1975?

Even though the law changed at this time and you might know more about the circumstances to your adoption, accessing your records can still be an emotional experience and therefore we believe it is good practice to offer you an interview with an adoption counsellor.

What we need from you

As you will appreciate your information is highly confidential and we wish to protect your confidentiality. Therefore we need you to bring with you some form of personal identification. This should include one photographic document such as a passport or driving licence. If you think you may have difficulty with this please do not hesitate to contact us.

It will also be helpful if you could bring along any information already in your possession that relates to your adoption as this may assist our enquiries.

You may wish to bring along someone with you for personal support, however it may be necessary for this person not to be involved in the duration of the interview.

Please inform us in advance if you have any specific needs in relation to mobility, need for an interpreter etc.

What will happen at the interview?

We will have a discussion with you about your interest in accessing your information and what you hope to achieve from this process.

Together we will complete an application form, which will be sent to the GRO. This will enable us to receive 3 pieces of information;

1. An application form for you to apply for your original birth certificate;
2. The name of the court that dealt with your adoption (which enables the counsellor to then write to that court to obtain the name of the agency that dealt with your adoption);
3. A form to register your name on the contact register.

What happens next?

Once we have received the information from the GRO we will invite you in for a further appointment and share the information with you. For some people their interest is only in receiving their birth name and if that is the case our involvement will end there. However others are interested in learning more about their circumstances to their adoption and wish to access their adoption file. In this instance once we have received the name of the agency that dealt with your adoption we will write to them advising them of your interest in accessing your records. This is usually provided in a form of a summary rather than the actual adoption records. There will be some information that cannot be shared because they come from third party sources, or relate to information about individuals other than you.

Please be aware that this process can take some time. We understand that this can be very frustrating and we will do all we can to make the process as smooth as possible.

What happens if I wish to trace a birth relative?

If you feel you want to make contact with a birth relative you may be able to use some of the information already obtained in order to trace that relative. There are various ways to do this including obtaining information from public records etc. However we strongly advise you to use an intermediary before making contact. We are able to advise you of services/agencies that specialise in this area at the time of the interview.

If you have any questions regarding the above information, or you wish to speak to somebody prior to your appointment, please do not hesitate to contact the adoption support worker named on the letter.

We look forward to hearing from you

Appendix 3: Format for the Initial Counselling Interview

Why now?

(Has something/or crisis led to the adopted adult starting this process now?)

Attitude of the adoptive family

(What does the adopted adult know about his history? How does he/she feel about his adoption? How long have they known they were adopted? How open has his/her adopters been?)

Support

(Do they have support systems? Discuss that this is an emotional journey. Who will support them? Do they intend telling/have they told their adoptive parents of their interest? Do they think that they will go on and search/trace/ implications of not telling family).

What is she/he hoping for?

(Discuss fears fantasies hopes and expectations. Tracing? Reunion? Explore their feelings behind this what are they hoping for? Punish? New family life? Are there any risk issues?)

Process and Summary

Explain the process, possible timescales. Summary /original documents. Agreements when/how they will be contacted.

Information of contact register

Vetoes

Information of other services.

Tracing leaflet.

NB. The counsellor throughout the interview session is making an assessment as to whether the agency will share all or some of these records (taking into consideration the impact/risk to self and others

involved). In reaching this decision the worker must have regard to the welfare of the applicant. Legal advice may be necessary.

If Knowsley is the AAA the worker will prepare a written summary of their adoption record.

Appendix 4: Summary format

The ethos of Knowsley adoption support team is to be open as possible with the adopted adult. This is their opportunity to unlock their past and obtain information that other people may take for granted. Therefore not only 'factual' information should be sought, but other anecdotal information that helps put the pieces together of their early history.

Birth Mother

(Name, description, description of personality, date of birth, family history including her siblings, education, interests, location at the time of her birth.)

Birth father

(Name, description, description of personality, date of birth, family history including siblings, education, interests, location at the time of his birth.)

Grandparents (maternal)

Grandparents (paternal)

Birth history

(Where, when, time of birth, length, weight)

Circumstances/decision(s) leading to adoption

History of the child with their birth parents. Dates of child protection plans

Interventions of the agency Movements/placements

Court dates

Form E/ CPR

Their medical report.

Other information:

School report/interest/hobbies/clubs attended/friends/pets/testaments from other people, teachers, carers.

This information is valuable to the adopted adult and should be treated respectfully. Information should be presented in a wallet document that can be preserved. Time and care should be taken to check accuracy.

The adopted adult may wish to view all care files and information should be given as to how they can request these via the Local Authority.

End

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