

Access to adoption records

The Achieving for Children (AfC) Adoption Team offers a counselling service to adults who were adopted and now want information about their birth history. If you are over 18 years of age and living in Kingston or Richmond boroughs or if Kingston or Richmond boroughs were involved in your adoption and hold your adoption records, you can contact us to get help accessing your records. We can also act as intermediaries between you and birth relatives you want to contact.

A change in the Adoption Law in 1976 gave adopted people easier access to information that used to be confidential. Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 kept the legal right of people who were adopted to apply (on reaching the age of 18) to get a certified copy of their birth records, held by the General Register Office (GRO). If you wish to obtain a copy of your original certificate you should write to the GRO at:

A: Trafalgar Road, Southport PR8 2HH

T: 0151 471 4830

W: www.gro.gov.uk

You will need to state in your letter that you are an adopted person. The GRO will send you an application form that you should complete as much as possible and then return.

If you were adopted before 12 November 1975, you will have to attend a counselling session with an adoption counsellor before the GRO releases your birth details. A relative or friend can attend the appointment with you if you feel that you would benefit from their support. If you were adopted after 12 November 1975, you are not required to have counselling, but it can be helpful.

How to get counselling

The GRO application form asks you to choose the counselling service that you would prefer. This could be at the Family Records Centre in London, the agency where your adoption was made (if known), or with the local council where you live.

The GRO will get your birth details from the Adopted Persons Registrar. It can send them to you direct (if you were adopted after 12 November 1975) or forward them to the counselling service that you have nominated (if you were adopted before November 1975). Once the GRO has told you that your details are available, you can contact the counselling service to arrange an appointment. The counselling service is free of charge, but you will need to produce some form of identity such as your birth certificate, driving licence or passport.

Initial counselling session

The GRO will have sent your counsellor the following information.

- A copy of your application form confirming the date of the adoption order and the name of the court where the adoption order was made.
- A form for you to complete to apply for your original birth certificate. This form will tell you your birth name, your birth mother's name, your date of birth, the date when your birth was registered and the registration district. You will be charged a fee when you apply for your certificate.
- A letter, which should be sent either by you or by the counsellor, to the court where your adoption order was made (who should send the letter depends on the date of your adoption).

This will be returned with details of the agency involved in your adoption and the council that was informed about your adoptive placement (if these details are available). There are occasions when records may have been damaged or lost. If this is the case the counsellor will be able to tell you how to proceed with your search for more information.

- An application form and explanatory leaflet so you can place your name on the Adoption Contact Register held by the Office of National Statistics.
- Form CA7, confirming brief details of your counselling session, which your counsellor will return to the GRO.

Additional support

As well as providing you with information, the counsellor will take this opportunity to discuss your feelings about your adoption. They will ask about your expectations and your motivation to start looking for your birth family. They will also talk about your search, how your search may affect your adopted family and help you to consider some of the difficulties that you might experience in your search.

No one else will have been told about your search and it is important to remember that only you can take the matter further at any stage.

The counsellor will provide you with information and guidance and will assist you in tracing your adoption records. If these records are available, you will be offered another appointment for them to be shared with you.

Contacting a birth relative

If you decide to trace your birth relatives, we strongly advise that you discuss your decision with a counsellor before attempting to make contact.

Contact from a birth relative

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 also states that birth relatives of an adopted adult can request an intermediary service to approach the adopted adult on their behalf. If you are contacted by an intermediary on behalf of a birth relative, you would then decide whether or not you wanted to communicate with that birth relative and if you wanted to receive or provide any information.

You can place a veto on your adoption records saying how much contact you want from a relative through an intermediary. The veto may outline certain circumstances when you want to be contacted, such as when important medical information has come to light. See our 'Registering a veto' factsheet for details on how to control the amount of contact you have from birth relatives trying to contact you, via an intermediary service.

Agencies that offer support and information to adopted people and their families

- Adults Affected by Adoption (NORCAP) supports people who have been adopted and their birth relatives. They have a contact register and will act as a contact between different groups involved in the adoption.

A: 112 Church Road, Wheatley, Oxon OX33 1LU

T: 01865 875 000

W: www.norcap.org.uk

E: enquiries@norcap.org

- Natural Parents' Network (NPN) organises local support groups and offers support for birth parents.

A: 18 Bishops Way, Stradbroke Eye Suffolk IP21 5RJ

T: 0161 287 8737

W: www.n-p-n.co.uk

E: administrator@n-p-n.co.uk

- The Post Adoption Centre provides independent advice, counselling and support to anyone affected by adoption.

A: 5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2RZ

T: 020 7284 0555

W: www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk

E: advice@postadoptioncentre.org.uk

Please contact the Achieving for Children Adoption Team if you would like any information or further support on 020 8547 4620.