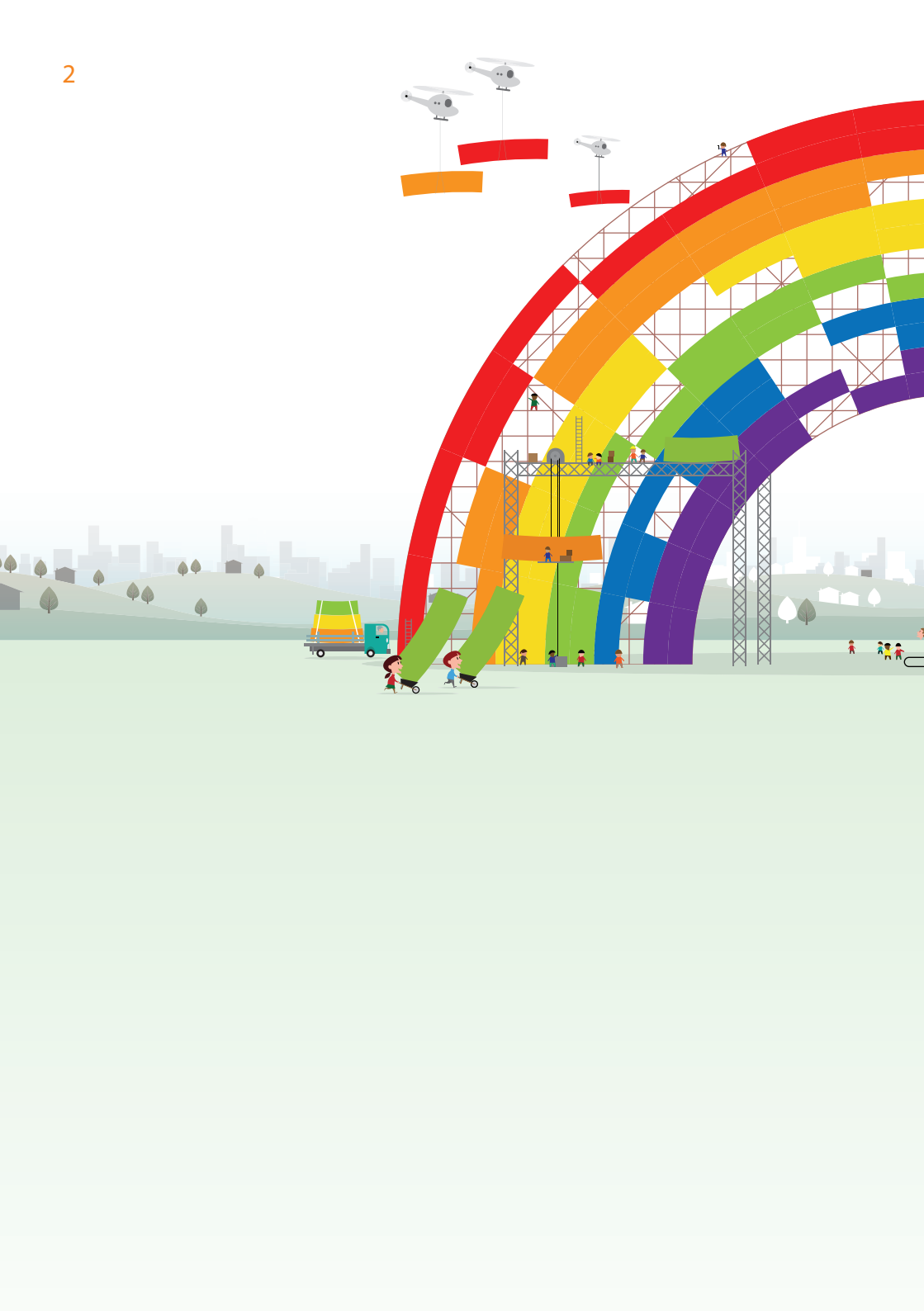


# Adopted adults and adult birth relatives: Tracing and contact

Adoption



department for  
children, schools and families



## Introduction

Although there has been adoption legislation in the UK since 1926, it was not until 1975 that adopted adults were given the right to apply for their original birth certificate – and the chance to find out more about their birth family. But adult birth relatives, never had such rights themselves. Although an adopted adult could take the initiative to seek out a birth relative, the opposite generally was not possible. Many birth mothers were not even able to find out whether a child they had relinquished for adoption was alive and well.

The creation of the Adoption Contact Register in 1991 was the first opportunity for adopted adults and their adult birth relatives formally to register their wish for contact with each other.

Relative, in relation to an adopted person, means any person who (but for their adoption) would be related to them by blood (including half blood), marriage or civil partnership.

## The Adoption Contact Register

The Registrar General runs the Adoption Contact Register, which puts adopted adults and their adult birth relatives in touch with each other – if that is what both parties want. This is how it works:

- adopted adults register on Part 1 of the Register;
- birth relatives register on Part 2;
- if an adopted adult and a birth relative have both registered a wish for contact, an automatic link is made;
- the Registrar General then sends the birth relative's name and address, with details of the relationship, to the adopted adult;
- the birth relative is told that this has been done;
- it is for the adopted adult to decide whether they want to make contact with the birth relative.

Since 30 December 2005 adopted adults and their adult birth relatives have been able formally to register a wish for no contact, and adopted adults have also been able formally to register their wish for contact with or no contact with specific adult birth relatives.

A wish for contact or no contact can be changed at any time by notifying the Registrar General.

A fee will be charged by the Registrar General to register on the Adoption Contact Register or to amend that registration.

## Adopted adults - finding out about your birth family

Many adopted people want to find out more about their family history and early life before they decide whether to try to contact a birth relative. Adopted people, who were adopted before 30 December 2005 and are aged 18 or over, may:

- apply to the **Registrar General** for the information necessary to enable them to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate. The Registrar General may also provide the name of the court that made the adoption order and, if held, the name of the adoption agency that arranged the adoption. Those people who were adopted prior to 12 November 1975 and who do not know their original name will have to have attended an interview with an adoption worker before the Registrar General can disclose the information they need to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate.

Attending an interview with an adoption worker is optional, but recommended, for those adopted prior to 12 November 1975 who already have their birth certificate or the information needed to obtain it, and for those adopted on or after 12 November 1975 but before 30 December 2005;

- apply to the **adoption agency** that arranged their adoption if known (or that holds the adoption file, if different) for access to their adoption records. The adoption agency has discretion to disclose information, including the information needed to get a copy of the original birth certificate;
- ask the **local authority** in the area where the adoption took place whether they have any details about the adoption, if the adoption agency is not known. Even if they did not arrange the adoption, the local authority may hold some information about adoptions that took place in their area;

- apply to the **court** that made the adoption order (if known) for any details about the adoption, if the adoption agency is not known.

## **Intermediary services - adopted adults and adult birth relatives**

Intermediary services are available to adults who were adopted before 30 December 2005, and to their adult birth relatives. Intermediary services can be provided by an adoption support agency or an adoption agency. Those agencies which do provide intermediary services are referred to as an 'intermediary agency'.

Birth relatives can ask an intermediary agency to trace and facilitate contact with an adopted adult. Similarly, adopted adults can ask an intermediary agency to trace and facilitate contact with their birth relatives.



Some adopted adults prefer to undertake their own research to establish the identity and whereabouts of their adult birth relatives. Should they choose not to contact their relative direct, they can ask an intermediary agency to make the initial approach and facilitate contact.

As there are likely to be large numbers of people applying for intermediary services, intermediary agencies are required to give priority to applications involving adoptions that took place before 12 November 1975. In addition, agencies may choose to give priority to providing a service to those who are in poor health or elderly.

An intermediary agency must consider the welfare of the adopted adult, the birth relative and any other person who may be affected. If the agency accepts the application, it will gather information from the person asking for the service, from the adoption agency involved, and possibly from the Registrar General and the court that made the adoption order. The agency will consider this information and all the other circumstances of the case in deciding how to proceed. If the agency decides it is inappropriate to proceed, this will be explained to the person asking for the service.

Intermediary services operate with proper safeguards to protect all concerned. When an intermediary agency initiates contact at the request of someone who does not know the current identity or location of the person sought, it must ask the person with whom contact is sought if they consent to being identified and to having contact. If they give their consent, the intermediary agency can help facilitate contact, and provide any counselling, advice and support that is needed. If the person does not give their consent, it may still be possible for the intermediary agency to share some non-identifying information about their domestic or family circumstances, their general health and well-being. But this information will not identify them or their whereabouts.

If the person seeking contact already knows the identity and/or location of the relative, the agency will only share with them additional personal information agreed by the relative or possibly non-identifying information if consent to contact has not been given.

It is important to be aware of the impact an approach by an intermediary agency may have on an adopted adult or birth relative. Adopted adults may not know they were adopted; some birth relatives, especially younger siblings, may be unaware of the adopted adult's existence. They may need time to think about how to respond. Even if they decide that they do not want contact – perhaps because it is not the right time for them – they could change their mind some time in the future.

## What you can do if you have no wish for contact

Adopted adults and their adult birth relatives can register a wish for **no contact** on the Adoption Contact Register, and adopted adults can also register a wish for no contact with a specific adult birth relative.

In addition, adopted adults who do not wish to be approached by an intermediary agency can, if they know the adoption agency that arranged their adoption (or that holds the adoption file, if different) contact this agency and register a **veto**. This will prevent an intermediary agency from approaching them. An adopted adult can register an **'absolute'** or a **'qualified'** veto with the adoption agency.

An **'absolute'** veto means that an intermediary agency cannot approach an adopted adult in any circumstances. Because registering an **'absolute'** veto could have major consequences for both the adopted adult and their adult birth relatives, the adoption agency will wish to talk this through with the adopted adult to ensure they fully understand the implications of their decision.

However, if the adopted adult prefers not to discuss this with the adoption agency, they can still register an **'absolute'** veto.

An **'absolute'** veto would mean that the intermediary agency could not contact the adopted adult, for example:

- on behalf of a terminally ill birth relative (including a brother or sister the adopted adult may not even know about);
- to pass on information about a possible hereditary medical condition;
- to advise that they had been left money in a birth relative's will.

An **'absolute'** veto would not preclude the adoption agency that arranged the adoption (or that holds the adoption file, if different) from contacting the adopted adult when it considers it necessary to do so.

If an adopted adult registers a **'qualified'** veto with the adoption agency, they can specify the circumstances where they would not mind being approached by an intermediary agency. Again, this is an important decision and the adoption agency will wish to talk this through with them to ensure they fully understand its implications. However, if the adopted adult prefers not to discuss this with the adoption agency, they can still register a **'qualified'** veto.

In registering a **'qualified'** veto, the adopted adult could specify, for example, that an approach on behalf of a birth parent would not be acceptable but an approach on behalf of another relative (such as a brother or sister) would be welcome; or an approach would not be acceptable unless it was for important hereditary medical reasons.

An **'absolute'** or a **'qualified'** veto remains in place until the adopted adult decides to amend or withdraw it.

## What an intermediary service costs to use

An intermediary agency may charge a fee to the applicant for providing counselling or for any costs incurred in processing an application, for example in identifying the adoption agency that arranged the adoption (or that holds the adoption file, if different); tracing the person with whom contact is sought (including paying for birth, death, marriage or civil partnership certificates from the Registrar General); searching for and obtaining information from other sources.

## Further information

For further information on intermediary services you can contact your local authority's adoption team, a voluntary adoption agency or an adoption support agency. You may also find the following web-sites useful:

**The Adoption Search Reunion:**  
[www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk)

**AAA-NORCAP:**  
[www.norcap.org.uk](http://www.norcap.org.uk)

**After Adoption:**  
[www.afteradoption.org.uk](http://www.afteradoption.org.uk)

**The Post-Adoption Centre:**  
[www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk](http://www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk)

**Information on the Adoption Contact Register can be found at:**  
[www.gro.gov.uk](http://www.gro.gov.uk)





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