



**The Adoption and Children Act 2002
Access to Information Regulations - Section 98**

INFORMATION LEAFLET: INTERMEDIARY SERVICES

PACT has registered as an Adoption Support Agency in order to provide an intermediary service to birth families of people placed for adoption through Parents and Children Together (previously known as the Oxford Diocesan Council for Social Work/Oxford Diocesan Council for Moral Welfare). From 1st August 2007 PACT will provide services to any family seeking information.

What is an intermediary service?

An intermediary service assists adopted adults, over the age of 18 and adopted before 30.12.2005, and their birth relatives in:

- seeking information about their relative's adoption
- seeking assurance their relative is alive and well
- obtaining the information they need for the purpose of tracing a relative and establishing contact with them

Are there other changes involved?

- As a birth relative you are able to express informed consent about being approached by an adopted adult who is searching for you
- Adopted adults are able to register a formal veto if they do not want contact from birth relatives

Some birth relatives do not feel confident about initiating contact especially if many years have passed. If you feel like this, you could still ask PACT, as the placing agency to put a letter from you on the adopted person's file, advising them that you would be happy to have contact from them if they seek it.

Who are Birth Relatives?

Under the Act, a birth relative is 'any person who (but for his/her adoption) would be related by blood, including half brother and marriage'.

This allows natural parents and a wider range of birth relatives, including grandparents, full and half brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts and cousins the option to seek assistance.

Couples registered under the Civil Partnership Act 2004 will be recognised as birth relatives in the same way as those related by marriage.

What service might PACT provide?

PACT has experienced, suitably qualified adoption social workers and volunteers who can offer the following services:

- 1. The opportunity to discuss your situation with someone who understands the impact that adoption has had on your life. You will be able to explore your options and the potential outcomes*
- 2. PACT needs to ensure that the General Register Office has been contacted to check whether any views or veto have been registered by the adopted person.*
- 3. PACT's Intermediary service is allowed to provide non-identifying information from the records which would not identify the adoptive family but would help to answer some of your questions.*
- 4. If PACT was not the placing agency, it will seek agreement from the appropriate agency involved with the adoption to the sharing of records and information.*
- 5. The opportunity to find out if the adopted person has registered a qualified or absolute veto with PACT or any other agency.*
- 6. The opportunity for you to provide information to be kept on the adoption file to be passed on if and when the adopted person contacts the agency*
- 7. The opportunity to ask for a search to be made for the adopted person.*
- 8. If the search is successful in locating the adopted person you will then be able to ask PACT to make an approach to the adopted person to find out if she or he wishes to respond to your enquiry*
- 9. Support and advice to all parties following contact and reunion*

What if my relative was adopted through PACT and I am unable to get to PACT offices?

You are able to approach any local authority or voluntary adoption agency or an Adoption Support Agency, including Norcap. You will need to ask whether they are registered to provide Intermediary Services. If you know that PACT was involved in the adoption, the agency will then contact PACT on your behalf, asking for the information needed.

What if I live abroad?

If you live abroad this should not deter you from making an enquiry. Agencies can liaise with each other, although it may be a more complex process.

What if PACT had any concerns about sharing information?

In providing intermediary services, PACT is required to have regard to the welfare of the adopted person, your welfare and that of any person who may be identified or affected by your application.

PACT and any other agency involved in the adoption has a general discretion not to proceed or continue proceeding if we consider it inappropriate to do so. In the event of a decision not to proceed, you may apply for an independent review of the decision.

Will there be charges for this service?

- The search and reunion process can be an intensive and costly process. Birth relatives will be asked to meet the costs incurred in counselling, tracing, obtaining agreements and any intermediary work.
- Birth relatives will be able to buy into different packages, depending on what PACT services they wish to use.

Will I have to wait for a service and is there a priority in allocations?

PACT will aim to allocate a request for a service within 6 weeks. PACT is required by law to give priority to requests from applicants whose relatives were adopted before 12th November 1975. Please note that if PACT is experiencing a high level of applications a waiting list may operate. You will be informed in writing if this is the case. In the event of a waiting list operating, priority will be given to adoptions which took place in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Given the agency's limited capacity, it may not be possible to process applications in respect of adoptions which took place on or after 12th November 1975. In this situation, a waiting list will operate and applications will only be processed when and if there is capacity to do so.

PACT's policy is that the agency will not contact adopted people before they are 25 years old, given the very sensitive nature of this work, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The final decision in all cases lies with the Chief Executive.

Can the adopted person always be found?

Not always. Sometimes it may be impossible to find someone. PACT will tell you if it is unable to take the search any further. It is important to appreciate that whenever a search is made it may result in you learning that the adopted person has died or is very unwell. Your social worker will discuss such possibilities with you.

What can I do if my son or daughter does not want to have contact with me?

It can be very distressing if this happens, if you have been longing for contact for many years. However, it is important that the intermediary agency does not put the adopted person under pressure. They need to have the space and time to make their own decisions about whether or not they want to respond to your request. Hearing from you may be very unsettling for them and they may not feel ready for contact. If this happens, perhaps you can

take some comfort in knowing that, unless there is an absolute veto in place, they are now aware of your interest and your wish to have contact and therefore may take a different view in future.

If I decide to ask PACT for a service?

Your request must be made in writing to PACT. You will then be offered an Initial Interview with a social worker who will give details of PACT's service and charges and will offer advice, counselling and support.

You will be asked to verify your identity and relationship to the adopted person through the following documents:

- Documentary evidence of your identity (passport, driving licence). If you have changed your name we will require to see your original birth certificate and certificates confirming name changes (marriage certificate, deed poll)
- Any evidence you have of your relationship to the adopted person (original birth certificate)

What's the outcome likely to be?

In the past adoption was a closed process. Birth relatives separated by adoption had no chance of finding out what had happened to their relatives. From the 1950s to the mid 1970s, young single mothers in particular faced intense social pressure to give up their children for adoption. The grief and trauma experienced by birth parents was not acknowledged. They were often left to deal with these feelings in isolation and without support. Many parents are still deeply affected by adoption. After a lifetime of distress, they continue to suffer the pain of not knowing whether their child is safe or well.

In recent years, adoption has become more open, recognising the benefits of some ongoing contact with their birth family for adopted children. However, some birth relatives continue to be deeply affected by separation and loss.

It is important that we recognise and respect that:

- *Some adopted people may decide they do not want to have contact with birth relatives*
- *Some birth relatives, especially birth mothers, may feel unable to have contact with an adopted adult*

Recent research suggests that for those who have decided to search

- *Contact and reunion is a happy and satisfying experience for most birth parents and adopted adults*
- *In a small minority of cases, contact and reunion can be distressing and help may be needed*
- *In the majority of cases, contact and reunion has a long lasting positive impact for the adopted person, birth parents and adoptive parents*

PLEASE CONTACT

Chris Foote - Senior Practitioner Adoption Support on 0118 9387600 for further details.

Other sources of Advice and Support

BAAF Adoption and Fostering – Saffron House, 1-6 Kirby Street, London. EC1 8TS

Tel: 020 7421 2673

Website: www.baaf.org.uk

Website: www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk

Post Adoption centre – 5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2RZ

Tel: 0207 284 0555

Website: www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk

Natural Parents' Network – 18 Bishop's Way, Stradbroke, Suffolk. IP21 5JR

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

Norcap – 112 Church Road, Wheatley, Oxon. OX33 1LU

Tel: 01865 875000

Website: www.norcap.org.uk

Useful Publications

Searching Questions, Identity, Origins and Adoption by Julia Feast and Terry Philpot (BAAF 2003)

The Adoption triangle Revisited: A study of Adoption, Search and reunion Experiences by John Triseliotis, Julia Feast and Fiona Kelly (BAAF 2005)

The Adoption Reunion Handbook by Liz Trinder, Julia Feast and David Howe (Wiley 2004)

Love Child – A memoir of Adoption Reunion Loss and Love by Sue Elliot (Vermillion 2005)

Half a Million Women by D. Howes, P. Sawbridge and D. Hinings (Post Adoption centre 1998)

Within Me, Without Me by S Wells (Scarlett Press 1994)