

# Information for Young People Who Want to Know About Their Origins

## Turning 18

Turning 18 is important because this is when the law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland gives an adopted person:

- the right to apply for a copy of their original birth certificate.
- the right to apply for a service from an agency to trace their birth family, if they wish to do so.

The law also says that when an adopted person is 18, their birth family members can also request help from an agency to let the adopted person know that they would welcome contact.

Whoever makes the request, it is called asking for an 'Intermediary Service'. This is where the agency acts on behalf of the person wishing to trace their relatives and makes the initial approaches for them. It is very important for you to know though, that the law says it is always the adopted person who decides whether or not they want contact with their birth family. No information about you can be given to birth family members without your permission.

## What Can I Do Now?

This is what the law says can happen when you are 18 or older but this may seem a long time off. What can you do now?

The first step you can take is to talk to your adoptive parents. If you are in your teens now it is likely they were given some information about your birth family background at the time you were placed for adoption with them. Even if they did not receive a lot of information at that time they may be able to help you by contacting the agency which arranged your adoption to ask for whatever information is available there in the records. They can also see if any news has been received from your birth family in the years since you were adopted.

## An Emotional Time

It is very natural for you to wonder about your first family but you may feel unsure about bringing up the subject of your birth family with your adoptive parents. Perhaps you have not talked about adoption for a long time but this could be because your parents are just waiting for you to show your interest and to ask before telling you what they know about your past.

However, it can be more difficult than this and sometimes adopted people are worried that their adoptive parents may be upset if they show an interest in their birth family. It can be hard for some adopters to realise that their daughter or son is wondering about this and they sometimes ask themselves if it means they haven't been good enough parents. If things haven't been going particularly well in your family recently - and this happens to most families from time to time, even where adoption isn't an issue - you may be wondering more than usual about the family into which you were born but

not finding it easy to bring the subject up. For young people whose adoptive family is of a different race or culture to their birth family, there can also be particular questions and queries for you to consider when you think about 'who am I?'

Although the majority of adopted people, at some time in their lives, feel that they would like to know more about their birth family, adopted people who have decided to search for and find birth relatives tell us that it is usually quite an emotional and sometimes upsetting experience. So, even when you are 18, it is a good idea to take it slowly and to avoid searching at times which are going to be stressful in any case, such as when you have exams coming up, for example.

### **Applying for a Copy of Your Birth Certificate**

When someone is over 18 and decides to undertake a search the first step is to apply for a copy of their original birth certificate from:

General Register Office

Website: [https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/contact\\_us.asp](https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/contact_us.asp)

Telephone: 0300 123 1837 (8am to 8pm Monday to Friday. Saturday 9am to 4pm).

Try to remember that requests for information and reunions are likely to be emotional for all concerned, including birth family members. Your birth parents are likely to know that the law gives you the right to have a copy of your original birth certificate when you are 18 and that this will have the name of your birth mother and her address when you were born. It may also have the name of your birth father too, though this is not certain. Remember that they may not have prepared themselves for any contact from you before you are 18 and that their lives may have changed a lot since you were born. We strongly advise that, whenever the time comes, you ask for an experienced person to advise you and to act as your intermediary to make the first approach for you.

### **You Are Not Alone**

There are over half a million adopted people living in the UK today and many millions more around the world. You are certainly not alone in having questions and concerns about your family history.

