

Beginner's Search Checklist

Know your rights. Get a copy of the adoption records law for the state where your adoption took place at your local library, online or from the American Adoption Congress website: www.americanadoptioncongress.org. Find out if the state where you were born has an adoption registry or adult adoptee access to the original birth certificate and/or state adoption record.

Contact the agency that handled your adoption. Ask what services they provide, how much they charge, and how long the wait is before a response can be expected from them.

Register with the International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR). You can download a form at www.isrr.net.

Talk to your adoptive parents. Explain your need to know the “beginning of your story”.

Write down everything you can think of that you already know about your adoption. Even if you already have non-identifying information, think about asking for additional information about your birth parents' health, education, background, and interests.

Join a support group in your area. Talk with other adoptees and birth parents who have searched or have been found. Try to gain the perspective of those who are the same age as the person you are trying to locate.

Join a support group in the area where you were born and/or adopted. You may need someone to do “footwork” during your search.

Find a computer and look for adoption resources on the Internet. Use caution at sites as not all sites are created equal and some sites do NOT update their information on a regular basis. You do not want to be using outdated information during the search.

Take time to understand what your search means to you and why you are taking each step in your search.

Read about adoption. Many people recommend *The Adoption Triangle* by Sorosky, Baran & Panor, *Lost and Found* by Betty Jean Lifton, and *Birthright* by Jean A.S. Strauss as being particularly helpful at the beginning of a search. To read about experiences after reunion, try *Birthbond*, by Judith Gediman and Linda Brown, or, for a perspective on the birth mother's experience, read *The Other Mother*, by Carole Schafer, or *Birthmothers: Women Who have Relinquished Babies for Adoption Tell Their Stories*, by Merry Bloch Jones.

When you are ready to contact, think about the means YOU typically use to communicate. If you are a “phoner” then consider calling – if you are a “writer”, try writing to the person. Often the method you prefer to use in communicating is the same for birth family members. Remove all call blocking programs from your own phone immediately!

Respect the other person's privacy. Do NOT announce to other family members that this woman had a baby as a teen and relinquished her for adoption at birth. Make SURE you are in contact with the correct person.

Many searches are completed very quickly. Start thinking NOW about what you want to say to any birth family members.