

# “DIFFICULT RECONNECTIONS”

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## Definition of Reunion:

Reunion is the first face-to-face meeting of members of the adoption constellation who have been separated over time by the placement of a child into an adoptive family.

## Definition of Reconnection:

Reconnection is the process, following reunion, of establishing emotional and social bonds between individuals who had previously been separated by the placement of a child into an adoptive family.

## Main Features and Difficulties of Reconnection:

1. It is the rare reconnection that is instant and meets the needs of all the participants immediately following reunion. **Time** can be measured in days, months or even years.
2. Reconnection with one person is **never independent of others** in the constellation. Relationships between and within all subsets of constellation members have an influence on the reconnection.

For example: Adoptee pulls back from birth family as a result of conflict between herself and her non genetic adopted sib who is feeling ignored by the attention the adoptee directs to the birth family.

Adoptee is worried that close ties with birth kin will jeopardize the relationship with adoptive parents, and will show disloyalty.

Birth parent believes that a successful reconnection is something that negatively affects the relationship with a spouse or with children who do not know.

3. Reconnection is often slowed by **factors outside of the relationships** between reconnecting parties.

Loss or change of job, moving, illness, all of which draw people away from newly developing relationships.

4. Reconnection is a smooth process only when the parties to the reconnection have **compatible personality styles and temperament**. Just because individuals are genetically related does not mean that they share styles of engaging the world and relationships.
5. Reconnection often involves the development of a relationship between people from **widely differing backgrounds** of class, ethnicity, religion and education.

Adoptees are usually raised in middle class homes. Birth families may have fewer resources available to them than do adoptive families, although many birth parents are very disappointed at the choice of adoptive home for their children.) Hence, there might be wide differences in the experiences of the parties to the reconnection.

6. Reconnection is often complicated by the fact that each person may **want something different** from the relationship.
7. Reconnection **changes over time**. Just like a marriage or any other social relationship, it goes through different phases. Rarely does it follow a linear path from weak to strong and positive connections between the parties. More typically, it cycles through phases of growth and withdrawal, slowly edging forward with time.

One consequence of this is that there will be times of withdrawal or “pull back” by one or both parties to the reconnection that may go on for a protracted period of time. This is one of the most painful difficulties of reconnection.

8. Some reconnections will **never meet the needs** of the parties to it. Family dynamics in such reconnections typically mirror the characteristics of more dysfunctional families.

This suggests that such families would have struggled if they had not been separated by adoption.

9. Sometimes reconnections fail to happen because at least one of the parties has a set of **beliefs that are incompatible** with forming close interpersonal relationships.
10. Unfortunately, there are also instances when reconnection is hindered by the **mental health status** of at least one of the parties to the reconnection

### **Strategies to increase the possibility of reconnection:**

1. Go slowly. Pushing beyond the bounds of comfort of one of the parties almost always results in someone drawing back from the relationship.

2. Be patient. It takes time to form relationships with strangers with whom you have not shared a lifetime of experiences.
3. Be prepared to experience strong and not always pleasant emotions.

Remember, you are acting normally in a crazy situation and not vice versa. Keep breathing. Give yourself lots of time-outs whenever you are feeling overwhelmed. When you are not sure of what to do, ask for time to make a decision. Don't seek "therapy" from the other party to the reunion!

4. If you feel yourself feeling sexual attracted to a party to the reconnection, think through whether sexual feelings are being confused with a longing to be fully a part of lost kin. It is a sad truth that those who move these feelings beyond yearning are destined to make secrecy a foundation of their relationship. This is the antithesis of healthy functioning relationships.
5. When the front door is locked, try going in the side door. If it is difficult to form a parent-child relationship, a relationship with siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins may be possible. None of these relationships typically carries as much emotional baggage. Sometimes we must settle for less than we want.
6. Do not give ultimatums or make unrealistic demands. Once stated, there is little room to shift direction. Do not "out" people.
7. Do not immediately put on the table all of your strongly held thoughts and beliefs about the adoption and your feelings about the other person. They may not be ready yet to hear such messages. Some of these thoughts and feelings are better expressed after the parties to the reconnection are more secure in their roles together.
8. Stay calm. Anger drives people away. When things go awry, do not storm off. Wait long enough to approach them again in a calm manner.
9. Keep financial issues far away from the relationship. This is not the place to ask for a loan.
10. Think systemically. Instead of seeking an explanation for slow progress in the make-up of the other person, ask yourself what you are doing to make it difficult for others to come nearer to you. (unlisted phone numbers, different names, low profile)
11. When there is a clear break, do not be afraid to send out non-reconnection messages.

For example: Birthday and Xmas cards are fine, as is information on medical and family history. However, when the other party has only asked for information or has broken off, try to refrain from putting pressure on to reconnect. The purpose of your messages is that whether you are in direct contact or not, whether the other

person is happy with you or not, s/he still remains in your heart. When the other is ready you will also be open to reconnection.

12. Be open with your family about your newly emerging relationships. Secrecy about other children is a fact that is often taken by other family members as a sign of mistrust of them. Share your history. There is nothing so bad that it cannot be told. It will help to explain issues of previous conflict and will make family members more receptive to a full family reconnection.
13. Definitely do not ignore your other relationships. Getting caught up in a reconnection at the expense of other relationships means that the new member of the family will struggle to reconnect to those you are ignoring.
14. Seek out a support group and individuals who understand the experiences of reconnection. They will keep you grounded and sticking to the right path.