

The Adoption Reunion Register

In 1985, South Carolina enacted SC CODE, SECTION 20-7-1780 (E) (1) - (3), establishing a confidential REUNION REGISTER to allow the identities of those separated by adoption to be disclosed. This is a "passive" register that relies on the registration of participants to create a "match." The South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) does not provide search services. The register was created for public adoption agencies and includes those persons served by DSS and the former Children's Bureau of South Carolina which was merged with DSS in 1987. An amendment to the law was passed in 1990 which removed the requirements related to notification of the adoptive parents.

The law provides that:

- Registration must be requested in writing.
- Biological parents, biological siblings of adoptees, and adoptees, age 21 and over, may register. They must complete an affidavit that states they are willing to have their identity revealed and includes a statement releasing the agency from liability due to disclosure.
- Those who register must notify the agency of any change in status, name or address.
- All parties to the reunion must receive counseling regarding the effects of disclosure, before disclosure can be made.
- A waiting period of 30 days is required after counseling is completed. This waiting period may be waived by the Director of the Department of Social Services under extreme circumstances.
- The agency may delay disclosure, for 20 days after the 30-day waiting period, to seek a court order to prohibit disclosure upon a showing of good cause.
- The agency may charge a fee for these services, but must not deny services based on inability to pay.

The agency will:

- Notify the registered parties when a match is completed and schedule counseling.
- Upon completion of the requirements of the law, exchange names, addresses and telephone numbers of the registered parties, at which time they are free to contact each other.
- Upon request, facilitate the actual reunion.

Division of Adoption Services

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South Carolina Department of Social Services
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For more information, or to request reunion registration forms, contact the Intake Worker for Adoption Services at (803) 898-7561 in Columbia or call toll-free within S.C. 1-800-922-2504.

Division of Adoption Services

Human Services
South Carolina
Department of Social Services

In accordance with Title VI, Section 801 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title V, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the State Department of Social Services will administer its programs in such a manner that no person shall solely by reason of his race, color, national origin or qualified handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity administered by the Department.

The Adoption Reunion

Adoptees often need to know their biological heritage, to link their past and present lives. Birth parents and birth siblings often need to know what has happened to the child placed for adoption. While many people handle these needs by receiving only the non-identifying information provided by the agency, others want to meet and have the opportunity to ask questions, face-to-face.

A reunion can be an exciting, fulfilling experience or a painful disappointment. More often it is something between these two extremes. It is important that one goes into a reunion knowing what to expect. In this way, the disappointment can be minimized and the possibility of warm, rich and deep personal relationships enhanced.

This brochure describes some of the issues which should be thoughtfully considered before entering into a reunion. Some issues will be similar for all three parties to the reunion.

Issues for the Biological Siblings

- If you have grown up in the biological family, the reunion may feel like the completion of a puzzle. The adoptee may or may not have similar feelings.
- The adoptee may be overwhelmed with all of the family history, names, places and events. Allow the adoptee to have time to absorb the information and proceed at a pace which is comfortable to him/her.
- The adoptee has the right to meet all of the family members and form their own opinions.
- If you are both adoptees, remember that you and your biological sibling may have differing opinions about meeting your birth parent.

Issues for the Adoptee

- You may never get answers to all of your questions. Many birth parents find memories of the past so painful that they can handle only so much discussion of it.
- Few adoptees or birth parents fulfill the fantasies or expectations of each other.
- One person may expect or desire more of a relationship than the other.
- Often neither party gives enough thought to the number and complexity of relationships that may develop from a reunion, such as:
 - adoptee and birth parent's spouse
 - adoptee and birth grandparents
 - birth parents and adoptee's spouse
 - birth parents and adoptee's children
- Social and financial situations may be very different. Neither should feel obligated to provide assistance.
- The birth parent may not have been open with everyone about the adoption and may ask you not to approach certain people, for example, your birth siblings. It may become increasingly difficult to honor this request as time passes.
- What to call one another can be tricky and more important than one might think, for instance, some adoptees can and do call the birth parent "Mother" with ease. How will the adoptive mother feel if she hears this? Although such labels as "adoptive" and "birth" may seem cold and unnatural, they may be necessary.
- Time is required, as in any new relationship, to determine common interests and differences. The biological tie does not produce immediate compatibility. Times of argument and disagreement should be expected.
- Whether or not new relationships continue, meeting the birth parent completes the identity search for many adoptees and birth siblings.

Issues for the Birth Parents

While some of the issues identified for adoptees may also be of concern to birth parents and birth siblings, there are some additional points to consider:

- Some adoptees need a parent-child relationship. Others do not want it and will resent any attempt to develop one. Carefully determine the kind of relationship the adoptee wants and try to respect these feelings.
- Since you have a memory of your child as a baby, your emotions as a birth parent may be greater than your child's. Remember, your son or daughter may have no such memory of you.
- Adoptive parents may have mixed feelings about a reunion and may fear rejection from the adoptee. To assume they approve or have no worries about the reunion is a mistake. Be cautious and proceed carefully.
- Adoptees may experience guilt concerning the reunion. Even when the adoptive parents are supportive, adoptees may feel they have broken the ultimate taboo by meeting the birth family.
- Some adoptees will want to call their birth parents "Mother" or "Dad" while others will not want to do so.
- If you have other children who were not released for adoption, the adoptee may feel resentment toward the siblings or toward you for not keeping him or her, also.
- The adoptee may ask questions about topics that are difficult for you to discuss. Your feelings should be presented as openly as possible.
- It is important to consider the rights of the other birth parent when discussing the situation with the adoptee.

Issues Concerning the Adoption Reunion