



# Tracing Handbook for the Adopted Person

## Part Two: Next Steps in Tracing

*Please note, the information we provide is free of charge. However we are all volunteers and do not receive funding of any kind.*

If you would like to make a donation to help cover our expenses you can send a cheque to:

Adoption Rights Alliance  
The Mill House,  
Millview Road,  
Malahide,  
Co. Dublin

## Introduction

In Part One of Adoption Rights Alliance's Tracing Handbook for the Adopted Person you will have learned how to obtain your birth certificate. Your birth certificate is the foundation on which you can build your trace. Before proceeding please read the following checklist to ensure you have thoroughly completed all of the steps involved.

### **IMPORTANT! PLEASE READ THIS CHECKLIST BEFORE PROCEEDING!**

- ✓ Have you thoroughly read Part One of the Tracing Handbook and followed each step carefully? If not, visit [www.adoptionrightsalliance.com](http://www.adoptionrightsalliance.com), download Part One of this Handbook and follow the instructions.
- ✓ Have you obtained non-identifying information from your adoption agency?
- ✓ When you visited the Research Room, did you check **all** of the books for your year of birth? If you assumed the first entry you found was your birth certificate, go back and search **all** of the books for your year of birth.
- ✓ Have you **checked all four quarters** of the books?
- ✓ If you were born late in the year (November or December), have you checked to see if your birth was registered at the beginning of the following year?
- ✓ Have you checked the back of the books for **hand written late registrations**?
- ✓ Have you checked that your non-identifying information ties in with the birth certificate you obtained?

## Support and Emotional Preparation

You are embarking on an exciting journey, one that can be both exciting and stressful and it is unwise to go it alone. We advise that you avail of as much support as possible through family, friends and support groups listed in **Section 3 (Next Steps)** of **Part One** of the Tracing Handbook. We also advise that you emotionally prepare yourself for your trace as much as possible by reading books such as *Journey of the Adopted Self* by Betty Jean Lifton or *The Primal Wound* by Nancy Verrier. Additional reading material can be found in the reading list in the Appendices of Part One of the Handbook.

### **1. Obtaining Your Natural Mother's Birth Certificate**

If you have completed the checklist above, your next step is to try to get a copy of your natural mother's birth certificate. Because you know her name from your birth certificate, this task should be a little easier.

## 1.1 Visiting the General Registrar's Office

To obtain your natural mother's birth certificate, you need to visit the Research Room in the General Registrar's Office. The Research Room is located at Werburgh Street, Dublin 2.



### Checklist BEFORE Visiting the Research Room

- ✓ Read this Tracing Handbook thoroughly
- ✓ Bring a copy of this Tracing Handbook with you to the Research Room
- ✓ Bring pens, a notepad and ruler (for checking the books)

### General Information/Tips for Your Visit to the Research Room

- ✓ Opening hours are Monday to Friday from 9.30am – 4.30pm (open during lunch).
- ✓ Bring sufficient money to cover you for the day.
- ✓ When you pay for a General Search, you can request as many books as you wish for the same fee for that day. However, you will still have to pay for photocopies of certificates individually.
- ✓ When you pay for a Five Year Search, you will receive books for five **consecutive** years (e.g. 1973 – 1977), though when searching for your birth certificate you will only need the book for your year of birth (unless you were born late in the year, in which case see the section below about searching the registers).
- ✓ Only **eight** photocopies of certificates per person per day are allowed, though the GRO will post out any surplus requests to you if you wish.
- ✓ Note: Up to three people can view the registers under the same General Search so bring a friend or relative if they are available to help look through the registers. You can also avail of double/treble the amount of photocopies.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to ask Research Room staff for help.

### **Research Room Fees**

General Search: €20

Five Year Search: €2

Photocopies: €4

Full Certificates: €8 with references, €10 without

## **1.2 Searching the Register of Live Births**

When searching for your natural mother's birth certificate, your two main sources of information are your birth certificate and your non-identifying information.

### **1.2.1 Your Natural Mother's Name**

Look at your birth certificate and take note of your natural mother's name. Unusual names are easier to work with, but **always** exercise caution when researching the books in the Research Room.

Please be aware that many Irish families engaged in unusual practices when naming their children. E.g. your natural mother's name might be stated as "Mary Murphy" on your birth certificate, but her birth certificate might say she is "Bridget Mary Murphy". You should take this into account when searching the books in the Research Room.

It is advisable to request your agency or the Adoption Authority to confirm that your mother's name is correct, though unfortunately there are no guarantees that your request will be granted. **Don't forget to use Registered Post in all correspondence with the Adoption Authority and adoption agencies.**

### **1.2.2 Your Natural Mother's Address**

Check your birth certificate for an address for your natural mother; though bear in mind that it might only be the address of where she worked. Please do not be disheartened if your birth certificate does not contain an address, it is still possible to proceed. You should also check your non-identifying information, your agency may have told you what part of the country your natural mother came from, though as with all non-identifying information, you should treat it with caution and allow for mistakes.

### **1.2.3 Your Natural Mother's Age**

Your agency may have told you your natural mother's age or approximate age. This age might be accurate, but many people have found that the agency made mistakes with this information. Hence, when searching the books, it is advisable to not just look in one year but check the two years either side as well. Please see the example below for further details.

## Establishing Natural Mother's Year of Birth

Adopted Person's Date of Birth: 01-01-1963

Natural Mother's Age\*: 19

*\*Bear in mind the non-identifying information may be inaccurate*

From this information you can deduce that your natural mother would have been born around 1944. (1963 - 19 = 1944)

Therefore you should check the Register of Live Births for at least the following years: **1942, 43, 44, 45 and 46.**

### 1.3 Narrowing Down Possibilities

Your non-identifying information will help you narrow down the possible birth certificates for your natural mother. You should take the following information into account:

#### 1.3.1 How Many Siblings Your Natural Mother Had

This information can be invaluable in terms of establishing your natural mother's identity. E.g. if you know your natural mother had three brothers and four sisters, you can check the books for these siblings to help confirm your possibilities. So, if you have two possibilities, both named "Mary Murphy", both at the age of your natural mother, you can use the information you might have about siblings to help you narrow things down.

Surname	Child's Name	Mother's Maiden Name	Area of Reg.	Vol	Page
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	2	421
<b>Murphy</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Dunphy</b>	<b>Delvin</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>211</b>
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	4	433
<b>Murphy</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Jones</b>	<b>Dublin N</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>366</b>

In the example above, the two Mary Murphys' mother's maiden names are different, therefore (using our example above) you need to check for three brothers and four sisters of each Mary Murphy. Your agency may have told you what order the siblings came in, e.g. two older brothers and all other siblings were younger. You can use this information to guide you in terms of what years you should check. Please see the example below for instances of brothers of both Mary Murphys.

Surname	Child's Name	Mother's Maiden Name	Area of Reg.	Vol	Page
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	2	421
<b>Murphy</b>	<b>John</b>	<b>Dunphy</b>	<b>Delvin</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>256</b>
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	4	433
<b>Murphy</b>	<b>John</b>	<b>Jones</b>	<b>Dublin N</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>656</b>

Hopefully both women would not have had the same number of siblings and this information will help narrow down the possibilities that you have. If not, don't worry; there are other ways of doing so.

#### 1.3.2 Your Natural Mother's Father's Occupation

If the agency told you what your natural mother's father's occupation was, this can also be helpful to eliminate possibilities. This information is usually contained on the birth

certificate. You should allow for paraphrasing of the job title and also allow for the possibility of the father having changed his occupation.

### **1.3.3 Death of One of Your Natural Mother's Parents**

Your non-identifying information might state that one of your natural mother's parents died. If the information includes the approximate year in which the death occurred, it will make it easier for you to search. You can search the Register of Deaths in the Research Room in a similar manner to the Register of Live Births.

If you find that more than one of your possibilities meets these criteria, often the cause of death (which is stated on the death certificate) can help you eliminate one or more possible matches if you have been told this information.

## **1.4 Can't Find Your Natural Mother's Birth Certificate?**

### **1.4.1 Births Outside Ireland**

If you cannot find a birth certificate for your natural mother, don't worry it is possible that she may have been born outside of Ireland.

UK records are relatively easy to search once you have internet access and these can be accessed [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)

### **1.4.2 Non-Registered Births**

It is also possible (particularly if your natural mother is quite old) that her birth wasn't registered. In this instance you should seek church records.

### **1.4.3 Check for a Marriage Certificate**

If you are having difficulty in locating your natural mother's birth certificate, you should check the Register of Marriages in the Research Room to see if there is a record of her getting married. (See further details in the next section) If you locate this information and the details match your non-identifying information you should then be able to work backwards and locate her birth certificate, which might be in the Irish system, but you should also allow for her having been born abroad.

### **1.4.4 Seek Advice**

If you cannot find your natural mother's birth certificate and are unsure how to proceed please contact us at [tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com](mailto:tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com) for advice on your particular case.

## **2. Obtaining Your Natural Mother's Marriage Certificate**

Once you have obtained your natural mother's birth certificate, your next step is to locate more recent details for her. The first step in this process is establishing if your natural mother married or not.

### **2.1 Searching the Register of Marriages**

Searching the Register of Marriages in the Research Room is quite similar to searching the Register of Live Births. Marriages are registered in both the maiden and married

names, so you should look for marriages in your natural mother's maiden name from your year of birth onwards. Recent marriage certificates contain the bride and groom's dates of birth so you should be able to confirm which one is correct without much difficulty. With older certificates you can use details like your natural mother's parents' names to help you narrow things down.

## 2.2 Check for Children from the Marriage

If you find that your natural mother has married, your next step is to establish whether there were any children born to your natural mother from that marriage. This isn't difficult to do and can be completed easily using the method outlined below.

Say for example your natural mother's maiden name was Smith and her married name is Brown. You are looking for children born with that combination of surnames – e.g. Brown/Murphy will not be a match. This is useful information to obtain because the youngest child's birth certificate will contain the most recent address for your natural mother.

## 2.3 Church Records

If your natural mother married within the Catholic Church, normally her **full** baptismal certificate will contain all of the relevant details. If you wish to obtain church records, contact the parish priest for the relevant area and request a full baptismal certificate. If you are having difficulty in finding the details for the church in question, contact us on [tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com](mailto:tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com) and we will do our best to assist you.

## 2.4 Can't Find A Marriage Certificate?

If you can't find a marriage certificate for your natural mother, it is possible that she did not marry. It is also possible that she married outside of Ireland. If you think she went to the UK, you can search the records at [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)

## 3. Present Whereabouts

After spending a lot of time searching you have almost reached your goal and it is difficult not to rush ahead with contact. **We strongly advise you to continue reading this document to the end.** In the next section we will explain how to go about making contact in an ethical and respectful way, so while you might have your natural mother's contact details in front of you right now, please keep reading so that you are as prepared as possible for what can happen.

Your next step is to locate your natural mother's present whereabouts and there are a number of search tools that are available that should help you further your trace.

### 3.1 The Irish Phonebook

The Irish Phone Book is available to search online through <http://www.eircomphonebook.ie> Please act responsibly with any information you obtain and we strongly advise that you **do not** pick up the phone and attempt to contact your natural mother in this manner (see Section 4 below).

### **3.2 Register of Electors**

Another useful search tool is the Register of Electors, which is available from the relevant local library, Garda Station or County Council Offices.

Most Electoral Registers are also available online at <http://www.checktheregister.ie>

### **3.3 Find My Past**

Your natural mother may now be residing in the UK and records for UK births, deaths and marriages can be accessed online at the following location: [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)

When you obtain details from Find My Past you can apply for certificates at:

General Register Office  
PO Box 2,  
Southport  
Merseyside PR8 2JD  
Tel: 0870-243 7788  
Email: [certificate.services@ons.gov.uk](mailto:certificate.services@ons.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.col.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.col.statistics.gov.uk)

OR

Family Records Centre  
1 Myddelton Street  
London EC1R 1UW  
Tel: 0870-243 7788  
General Enquiries: 0208-392 5300  
Email: [frc@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:frc@nationalarchives.gov.uk)  
Web: <http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc>

### **3.4 192.com**

If you find that your natural mother is in the UK, visit [www.192.com](http://www.192.com), which is a useful website for locating UK based people.

### **3.5 Search Engines**

Search engines such as [www.google.ie](http://www.google.ie) or [www.yahoo.co.uk](http://www.yahoo.co.uk) have proven to be very useful searching tools. When you visit a particular search engine just simply type in the name of the person you are looking for and see what results you come up with. Try to use different combinations when you are searching so that you can maximise the results, see the examples below:

“Jane Jones”  
“Jones, Jane”  
“janejones”  
Jane Jones  
“J Jones”

If you know that the person you are looking for lives in Ireland you can also ask the search engine to only find pages from Ireland.

#### **4. How to Make Contact**

When you have your natural mother's present contact details, you are now in a position to make contact with her. We would urge you to remain calm at this point and think things through before acting. Please read this section carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

**Please note! Before making any kind of contact double check your work to ensure you have definitely got the right details!**

##### **4.1 Phone, Visit or Letter?**

Even if you know your natural mother's phone number and know where she lives, we advise that you make discreet contact **by letter or email only**. Phoning or arriving on a doorstep is not a helpful way of making contact because these methods will not give your natural mother a chance to gather herself and get used to the idea that you are in contact. A letter or email is a safer method to use, because your natural mother can read it over and make contact with you in her own time.

Though you might be eager to make contact with your natural mother, bear in mind that while you know you have been tracing, your natural mother doesn't and won't have had time to prepare herself.

Although you might have your natural mother's address and phone number, you won't know what members of her family are aware of your existence; therefore discretion is of the utmost importance. A discreet letter that only your natural mother will understand is the best method to use. Sample letters are provided in the next section to guide you.

Please note if you don't want to receive a phone call from your natural mother in response to your letter, in case you are in work or somewhere you cannot talk, then it is advisable to only give your postal address and email address. Please also note that an email address may not be accessible to everyone, especially older women, so you might want to offer a postal address regardless.

If you are making contact around the time of your natural mother's birthday or Christmas, another method to use is sending a card, which might not be noticed too easily by others. Just remember to be discreet and ensure that only your natural mother will understand the real meaning of the card.

##### **4.2 Sample Letters**

###### **Sample Letter No. 1**

Dear [natural mother's name],

This is [your original first name], you might remember me from [place/city of birth], we used to know each other in the [decade/year of your birth]. I would like if we could make contact and catch up.

If you would like to contact me my details are as follows:

[Your name and address]

Yours sincerely,

[your original name] (now [your adoptive name])

## **Sample Letter No. 2**

Dear [natural mother's name],

This is [your original first name], it must be [your age] since we saw each other last. It would be great if we could write and catch up on old times.

If you would like to contact me my details are as follows:

[Your name and address]

Yours sincerely,

[your original name] (now [your adoptive name])

## **5. After Making Contact**

Once you have sent your letter, the waiting can be very difficult and you are likely to experience a wide range of emotions, ranging from frustration to fear. Talking to other adopted people can help, so visit our website if you would like to join our Facebook group. If you feel you shouldn't have sent the letter in the first place, don't worry as this is very normal. This section deals with possible scenarios that may occur and it is wise to read through them so that you can prepare yourself for what may be ahead.

### **5.1 You Receive a Positive Response**

Most people who receive a positive response to a first contact letter are delighted with the news. Sometimes you can also experience fear at this point, mixed in with the happy emotions. This is perfectly normal so just take your time and move at a pace which is comfortable for you.

### **5.2 No Response Received**

You should allow at least a month to six weeks for a response before considering trying to make contact again as you should allow your natural mother time to absorb the news that you would like to contact her. Remember, you have had time to prepare yourself, but your natural mother has not and this news is likely to come as a shock to her, so give her the time to let it sink in.

### **5.3 You Receive a Negative Response**

In some cases, natural mothers do not want contact and this is undoubtedly a very difficult thing to have to deal with. If this is the response you receive, remember that the right thing to do is respect your natural mother's decision. You should also be assured that you have

by no means reached the end of the road and in most cases there is a possibility of making contact with other family members. Please see our other Tracing Handbooks for further details or contact us on [tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com](mailto:tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com)

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