

Tracing Handbook for Persons Illegally Adopted

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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

Adoption Rights Alliance has compiled this Tracing Handbook to assist adopted people in their searches. We encourage you to read it carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

In addition to the 42,000+ legal adoptions, an unknown number of illegal adoptions were also arranged, i.e. where the child was registered as the natural child of the adoptive parents. If you are among those illegally adopted, you will undoubtedly have a difficult journey ahead of you, because of the nature of false birth registrations. However, we hope that this Handbook will help you to get the answers you deserve and guide you through the process of obtaining information and/or reunion.

The Adoption Authority does not maintain statistics on illegal adoptions. If you were illegally adopted we ask you to let us know in complete confidence so that we can estimate how many of these adoptions took place.

We encourage you to read this Tracing Handbook carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

Reunion or Information?

If you are reading this document you may have decided you want to trace your natural mother (and/or natural family) or you might be in the process of deciding whether you want to trace or not. Many people feel they just want information to begin with and then wish to take time to consider any further action. Whatever situation you are in, the decisions are yours to make in your own time.

Below we will outline the merits of tracing for yourself as opposed to asking an agency to trace for you. One of the main advantages to tracing for yourself is the fact that in most cases you can get as far as knowing your original identity and your natural mother's identity without having to approach your natural mother or other natural family members. Many adopted people will do their research first and then decide whether they are ready for reunion or not, as it is a safe and discreet way of approaching things gradually. Whatever you decide, take your time and make a choice that you are comfortable with.

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**. 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.

Agency Trace or Own Trace?

As you embark on your trace, you have a choice. Do you want your adoption agency to trace for you, or do you wish to do your own trace? There are pros and cons to each option and we will set some of these out below to help you make your decision.

Note: if you were illegally adopted and the adoption was private (i.e. no agency was involved), you will not have the option of going through the agency. We have provided further information later in this Handbook which may help you to track down who arranged your adoption.

Agency Trace	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Agency has identifying information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × No control over your trace × Long waiting lists × Agency dictates the pace × Often inappropriate handling of tracing & reunion process × Agency may have shut down × Slow progress using an agency to trace × Not as healthy for others to trace for you × Identifying information and no reunion is not an option

Own Trace	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You have control over your trace ✓ You control the pace ✓ First contact is when you want it and how you want it ✓ You can take a break if needed without fear of going to the back of a waiting list ✓ Usually quicker than an agency trace ✓ Healthier to do your own trace ✓ Possible to obtain identifying information without reuniting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × No access to identifying information × Agencies sometimes withholding information

Important!

Whether you have decided to trace through your agency or not, we advise that you gather whatever paperwork you can find in relation to your adoption. This paperwork can include hospital bills, solicitor’s letters, letters from nuns or priests. Please keep everything safe – even if you don’t think it’s of use, the smallest piece of information can often provide a crucial clue so treat everything as important.

Take note of **the informant** on your birth certificate - i.e. the document in which you were registered as the natural child of your adoptive parents – this piece of information is often very helpful in tracking down who was involved in the adoption.

Please note – your date of birth may have been changed!

We have come across instances in illegal adoptions where the date of birth was changed so you should bear this in mind.

Before You Start

Before you embark on your trace we advise that you write to the Chairperson of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. We have provided a sample letter below:

**This is a sample letter.
Please delete/amend details as appropriate to your situation**

[Your Name]
[Your Address Line 1]
[Your Address Line 2]
[Your Address Line 3]

[Date]

Mr. Geoffrey Shannon
Chairperson
Adoption Authority of Ireland
Shelbourne House
Shelbourne Road
Dublin 4

Ref: Illegal Adoption in [insert year of birth]

Dear Mr. Shannon,

I refer to your recent interview on RTÉ's Prime Time in which you gave a commitment to deal with the issue of illegal adoptions. I was illegally adopted in [insert year of birth] and I would appreciate your assistance in tracing my natural mother. I also request that the Adoption Authority conduct an investigation into the circumstances surrounding my adoption.

If you have contacted the Adoption Authority in the past:

I wrote to the Adoption Authority on [insert date] and did not receive a reply/and received the following response (see enclosures 1 to NN/ [delete as appropriate]). *(Enclose a copy of the correspondence if any was received).*

I would be obliged if you could confirm whether the Adoption Authority holds a file concerning my adoption. I would also like to be informed if there is an Adoption Order in respect of my adoption.

I was born at [insert location of birth, if known] and (to my knowledge), my date of birth is [insert date of birth]. The name of the informant on my birth certificate is: [insert name of informant]. My adoptive parents' names are [insert adoptive parents' names] and their address at the time of my adoption was [insert address]. *(We recommend that you enclose a copy of your "birth certificate")*

From paperwork I have found in relation to my adoption, I know that [insert name of facilitator/doctor/nun/priest/other] was involved in facilitating my adoption.

Use/delete the following paragraphs as appropriate:

If you know that an adoption agency was involved in your adoption:

[Insert name of adoption agency] was involved in facilitating my adoption and I enclose a copy of correspondence between the agency and my adoptive parents. I now request that the Adoption Authority obtain my file from the adoption agency for safekeeping.

If you don't know whether an adoption agency was involved in your adoption:

I do not know whether an adoption agency was involved in facilitating my adoption and I would be obliged if you could investigate this for me.

If you have already registered with the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR):

I registered with the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) on [insert date] and I received/did not receive [delete as appropriate] an acknowledgement of my application. I now enclose an additional registration form to ensure the Board's records are up to date. As it is likely that my date of birth was altered, I would like confirmation from the Board on the checking criteria the system uses to ensure maximum likelihood that a match will occur even when the date of birth does not match i.e. what other checks do the NACPR administrators carry out in the case of illegal adoptions?

If you have not registered with the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR):

I have not previously registered with the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) so I now enclose a registration form and would be obliged if you could ensure that my details are entered into the system. As it is likely that my date of birth was altered, I would like confirmation from the Board on the checking criteria the system uses to ensure maximum likelihood that a match will occur even when the date of birth does not match i.e. what other checks do the NACPR administrators carry out in the case of illegal adoptions?

I would appreciate if you could arrange for the following questions to be answered:

[Delete as appropriate]

General:

- What was my original first name?
- What was my place of birth?
- What parties were involved in arranging my adoption?
- Was the Adoption Authority aware of my adoption?
- Does the Adoption Authority possess a file concerning my adoption?
- Is there an Adoption Order in respect of my adoption? If so, what is the date of the Adoption Order?
- Was my date of birth changed?
- What are the circumstances surrounding my being registered as the natural child of my adoptive parents?
- Did my natural mother give informed consent to my adoption?
- Who registered my birth?
- Was my adoption arranged through an agency or private facilitator?
- Who else was involved in my adoption?

Natural Mother:

- What is my natural mother's first name?
- What was my natural mother's marital status at the time of my birth?
- Were my natural mother's parents living at the time of my birth/adoption?
- What age was my natural mother when I was born?
- Where did my natural mother come from?
- What were the occupations of my natural mother's parents?
- What was my natural mother's occupation?
- How many brothers and sisters did my natural mother have?
- Were any other members of my natural family aware of my existence?
- Were any members of my natural family supportive to my natural mother?
- Has my natural mother had any contact with the adoption agency or the Adoption Authority since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- Do you have any knowledge of my natural mother's marital status?
- Did my natural mother leave any messages on file for me?
- What is my natural mother's education level?
- Did my natural mother express her feelings about my adoption?
- Did my natural mother express any feelings about contact in the future?
- Was my natural mother a resident of any other 'institution' offering social care/support either prior to or post my birth?
- Was my natural mother made aware of any other choices apart from adoption?
- Did my natural mother sign a contract or letter requiring/requesting confidentiality or anonymity from [name of agency]? If so, I would be obliged if you could furnish me with a copy of the documentation.
- What support did my natural mother receive after my adoption?
- Did the Adoption Authority or the agency or facilitator give my adoptive parents any information about my natural family, medical or otherwise?

Natural Father:

- Do you have any details regarding my natural father?
- Was he aware of my existence?
- Was he supportive of my natural mother?
- Has my natural father had any contact with the adoption agency since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- What details are on file concerning the relationship that resulted in my conception?

Siblings:

- Did my natural mother lose any other children to adoption?
- Was I my natural mother's first child? If not, please supply any details of prior births.
- Did my natural mother have any children subsequent to my adoption?

Other Natural Family Members:

- Did any other members of my natural family contact the agency or the Adoption Authority at any time?

Birth:

- What time was I born?
- Was my birth normal or were there complications?
- What was my birth weight?
- Were there any difficulties with the pregnancy?
- Was I carried to full term?
- If not, what precipitated early delivery and at what stage in the pregnancy?

Health:

- Did I present as healthy at birth?
- Please supply me with details concerning my health from the time I was born until I was placed with my adoptive parents.
- Prior to my placement with my adoptive parents did my weight increase at a normal pace?
- Are there any hereditary medical conditions in my natural family?
- What was my natural mother's state of health at the time of my birth?
- Is there any medical information available regarding any other children born (either dead or alive) to my natural mother?

Baptism:

- What church was I baptised in?
- Was my natural mother or any other natural relative present at my baptism?
- Who was my sponsor at baptism?
- Was I baptised as the child of my natural mother or falsely as the natural child of my adoptive parents?

Mother & Baby Home/Nursing Home:

- Were any developmental difficulties noted during my stay at [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Were any bonding/attachment difficulties noted?
- Was my natural mother with me prior to my placement with my adoptive parents?
- Were visitors allowed in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Did I receive any visitors? If so, who were they?
- Is there any anecdotal information regarding my stay in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?

I would appreciate if you could deal with this matter at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]

CC: Claire McGettrick & Susan Lohan - Adoption Rights Alliance

Deputy James Reilly, Minister for Health

Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Children

OPTIONAL - ANY LOCAL TD WHOSE ASSISTANCE YOU WOULD LIKE

Using Your Adoption Agency To Trace

If you have decided to use your adoption agency to trace, or if you need to contact your adoption agency for any reason, here are some guidelines to help you through the process. These guidelines are relevant to anyone dealing with an agency. We would also encourage you to continue reading this Tracing Handbook, regardless of what choice you have made.

Guidelines for Dealing with Adoption Agencies

- ✓ Always communicate **in writing** using **Registered (Signed For) Post**. This is absolutely essential with illegal adoptions as the agency may well have something to hide.
- ✓ **Do not** give the agency a contact number. If you absolutely have to contact the agency by phone (e.g. to arrange an appointment), we advise that you use a private number (this can be done from any Irish landline by placing 141 before the number to be dialled).
- ✓ Remember, you are a client of the agency and you should expect to be treated respectfully.
- ✓ If you are seeking **information only** make this clear **in writing** to your agency, telling the agency **not** to make contact with your natural mother on your behalf.
- ✓ If you are told that you have been placed on a waiting list, ask how long the wait is and ask to be kept regularly informed of your place in the queue.
- ✓ If you feel your agency is treating you unfairly, please visit www.adoptionrightsalliance.com where you can make a complaint against your agency.
- ✓ Keep track of your paperwork in a folder or file and keep a copy of any correspondence sent to the agency.
- ✓ If you wish, copy your correspondence to Adoption Rights Alliance, clearly stating that you have done so at the end of the letter.

PLEASE NOTE YOUR ADOPTION AGENCY MAY HAVE CLOSED.

Check for your agency in the Links section of our website and if you discover your agency has been closed, you should be able to locate the relevant agency/HSE to contact there. If you feel you are being treated unfairly, please visit www.adoptionrightsalliance.com.

Tracing For Yourself

If you have decided to trace for yourself, Adoption Rights Alliance's Tracing Handbooks will show you the steps you should take. The method is completely legal and makes use of the Civil Registration system, which is used by genealogists when compiling family trees. It is essential to follow each step very carefully and ask questions if you are unsure of what you are doing.

Key Points To Remember

- Read this document thoroughly
- Prepare yourself emotionally for your trace
- Avail of support
- Decide whether you want to trace for yourself or ask your agency to trace for you
- Take your time making decisions

1.1 If You Were Illegally Adopted Through an Adoption Agency

If your adoption was arranged through an adoption agency you will need to write to them asking for information to help you in your research.

A Note About Agencies and Information

Some adoption agencies have been known to get information wrong, more often than not, the natural mother's age so you should allow for this when you are tracing. Agencies involved in illegal adoptions have more to hide so we advise that you proceed with extreme caution. **If you are unsure of anything, contact Adoption Rights Alliance for further advice.**

If you know what adoption agency dealt with your adoption

Verify the current address of the agency using the list of names and addresses on the links section of our website and contact them asking them for information. There is a sample list of questions below to guide you.

If you don't know the agency

Write to the Adoption Authority asking them for the name of the agency. The sample letter below will guide you in what to say. **Note: The Adoption Authority may not have a file on your adoption as it was not legal, however it is still worth asking for the information.** If the Adoption Authority does not know what agency was involved and has no record and you still don't know what agency was involved, we suggest you write to all of the agencies. Please feel free to contact Adoption Rights Alliance at any stage if you have any questions or if you are unsure what to do next.

Sample Letter to the Adoption Authority:

Information and Tracing Unit
Adoption Authority
Shelbourne House
Shelbourne Rd
Dublin 4

To Whom It May Concern:

I would be obliged if you could inform me of the name and address of the adoption agency that dealt with my adoption. My adoption was illegal and I was registered as the natural child of my adoptive parents.

I would also like a copy of all details held about me on file in the Adoption Authority.

My details are as follows:

Name: Joe/Jane Bloggs Date of Birth: 03-01-67
Name of adoptive parents: John and Mary Bloggs
Address at time of placement: 11 Main Street, Dublin.
My current address: 21 Main Street, Cork.

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your attention at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,

Joe/Jane Bloggs

Sample Questions

Below is a sample list of questions to ask your adoption agency. You could also use the list to guide you in asking questions of your adoptive parents and family members who may know about your adoption. We have included specific questions to ask your adoptive parents and/or family members at the end of the list. You should amend the list to suit your own needs.

If you have already traced (either successfully or unsuccessfully) and see questions you wish you had asked at the time, there's no reason why you shouldn't ask them now.

Note: As your adoption was illegal you should not assume that all information is correct – e.g. if you were told by a relative that your natural mother's name was Mary, it's still wise to ask the agency for this information regardless.

General:

- What was my original first name?
- Where was I born?
- What time was I born?
- Who arranged my adoption?
- Was my date of birth changed?
- What are the circumstances surrounding my being registered as the natural child of my adoptive parents?

Natural Mother:

- What was my natural mother's first name?
- What was my natural mother's marital status at the time of my birth?
- Were my natural mother's parents living at the time of my birth/adoption?
- What age was my natural mother when I was born?
- Where did my natural mother come from?
- What were the occupations of my natural mother's parents?
- What was my natural mother's occupation?
- Were any other members of my natural family aware of my existence?
- Were any members of my natural family supportive to my natural mother?
- Has my natural mother had any contact with the adoption agency since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- Do you have any knowledge of my natural mother's marital status?
- Did my natural mother leave any messages on file for me?
- What is my natural mother's education level?
- Did my natural mother express her feelings about my adoption?
- Did my natural mother express any feelings about contact in the future?
- Was my natural mother a resident of any other 'institution' offering social care/support either prior to or post my birth?

Natural Father:

- Do you have any details regarding my natural father?
- Was he aware of my existence?
- Was he supportive of my natural mother?
- Has my natural father had any contact with the adoption agency since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- What details are on file concerning the relationship that resulted in my conception?

Siblings:

- Did my natural mother lose any other children to adoption?
- Was I my natural mother's first child? If not, please supply any details of prior births.
- Did my natural mother have any children subsequent to my adoption?
- How many brothers and sisters did my natural mother have?

Other Natural Family Members:

- Did any other members of my natural family contact the agency at any time?

Birth:

- Was my birth normal or were there complications?
- What was my birth weight?
- Were there any difficulties with the pregnancy?
- Was I carried to full term?
- If not, what precipitated early delivery and at what stage in the pregnancy?

Health:

- Did I present as healthy at birth?
- Please supply me with details concerning my health from the time I was born until I was placed with my adoptive parents.
- Prior to my placement with my adoptive parents did my weight increase at a normal pace?
- Are there any hereditary medical conditions in my natural family?
- What was my natural mother's state of health at the time of my birth?
- Is there any medical information available regarding any other children born (either dead or alive) to my natural mother?
- Was my natural mother a resident of any other 'institution' offering social care/support either prior or post my birth?

Baptism:

- What church was I baptised in?
- Was my natural mother or any other natural relative present at my baptism?
- Who was my sponsor at baptism?
- Was I baptised as the child of my natural mother or falsely as the natural child of my adoptive parents?

Mother & Baby Home/Nursing Home:

- Were any developmental difficulties noted during my stay at [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Were any bonding/attachment difficulties noted?
- Was my natural mother with me prior to my placement with my adoptive parents?
- Were visitors allowed in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Did I receive any visitors? If so, who were they?
- Is there any anecdotal information regarding my stay in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?

General Questions:

- Did my natural mother give informed consent to my adoption?
- Was my natural mother made aware of any other choices apart from adoption?
- Did my natural mother sign a contract or letter requiring/requesting confidentiality or anonymity from [name of agency]? If so, I would be obliged if you could furnish me with a copy of the documentation.
- What support did my natural mother receive after my adoption?
- Did you give my adoptive parents any information about my natural family, medical or otherwise?

Specific Questions to ask Adoptive Parents/Relatives:

- Who registered my birth?
- Did you go through an agency or private facilitator?
- What was my place of birth?
- What was the name of the doctor who delivered me?
- What was the name of the family doctor at the time of my adoption?
- Who in the family knew I was adopted?
- Who else was involved in my adoption?

IMPORTANT! COMMUNICATE IN WRITING AND USE REGISTERED POST

It is advisable to use **Registered Post** in all correspondence with the Adoption Authority and your adoption agency. We advise that you **do not provide a contact phone number** as you may be contacted at an inappropriate time. We recommend that you obtain any information **in writing** and that all information provided by an agency should be checked thoroughly.

Key Points To Remember

- If you know your agency, write and ask for information
- If you don't know your agency, write to the Adoption Authority
- Communicate only in writing and via Registered Post

1.2 Private Facilitators

While agencies were involved in many illegal adoptions, an unknown number of illegal adoptions were also facilitated by private facilitators. In our experience, private facilitators involved have included social workers, priests, nuns, solicitors and doctors. In order to obtain information you will need to make contact with the facilitator involved with your adoption. We advise that you proceed with caution and remember you are doing nothing wrong – you are only asking for something that already belongs to you.

Don't Know the Facilitator?

If you do not know what facilitator dealt with your adoption and if the information is not readily available (e.g. if your adoptive parents are deceased) we suggest that you search through whatever paperwork you have gathered to look for clues. If you are finding difficulty locating the name of your facilitator, please contact us and we would be glad to take a look at your material in complete confidence.

Sample Letter to Private Facilitators:

Name and address of Facilitator

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an adopted person whose adoption was facilitated through you. I was registered as the natural child of my adoptive parents and I would be obliged if you could provide me with whatever information you have in relation to me.

(Insert questions from sample list)

My details are as follows:

Name: Joe/Jane Bloggs Date of Birth: 03-01-67
Name of adoptive parents: John and Mary Bloggs
Address at time of placement: 11 Main Street, Dublin.
My current address: 21 Main Street, Cork.

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your attention at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,

Joe/Jane Bloggs

Guidelines for Dealing with Private Facilitators

- ✓ Always communicate **in writing** using **Registered (Signed For) Post**. This is absolutely essential with illegal adoptions as the facilitator may well have something to hide.
- ✓ **Do not** give the facilitator a contact number. If you absolutely have to contact the facilitator by phone (e.g. to arrange an appointment), we advise that you use a private number (this can be done from any Irish landline by placing 141 before the number to be dialled).

- ✓ Remember, you are doing nothing wrong, in fact the facilitator is the one who arranged your illegal adoption and you should expect to be treated respectfully.
- ✓ We advise that you seek information only from the facilitator, i.e. do not ask the facilitator to trace for you.
- ✓ Keep track of your paperwork in a folder or file and keep a copy of any correspondence sent to the facilitator.
- ✓ If you wish, copy your correspondence to Adoption Rights Alliance, clearly stating that you have done so at the end of the letter.
- ✓ Contact Adoption Rights Alliance if you are unsure at any stage.

Sample Questions

Below is a sample list of questions to ask the private facilitator. **Please Note:** As your adoption was illegal you should not assume that all information is correct or that the facilitator kept an adequate file on your adoption.

General:

- What was my original first name?
- Where was I born?
- What time was I born?
- Who arranged my adoption?
- Was my date of birth changed?
- What are the circumstances surrounding my being registered as the natural child of my adoptive parents?
- Who registered my birth?
- What was the name of the doctor who delivered me?
- What was the name of the family doctor at the time of my adoption?
- Who else was involved in my adoption?

Natural Mother

- What was my natural mother's first name?
- What was my natural mother's marital status at the time of my birth?
- Were my natural mother's parents living at the time of my birth/adoption?
- What age was my natural mother when I was born?
- Where did my natural mother come from?
- What were the occupations of my natural mother's parents?
- What was my natural mother's occupation?
- Were any other members of my natural family aware of my existence?
- Were any members of my natural family supportive to my natural mother?
- Has my natural mother had any contact with you since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- Do you have any knowledge of my natural mother's marital status?
- Did my natural mother leave any messages on file for me?
- What is my natural mother's education level?
- Did my natural mother express her feelings about my adoption?

- Did my natural mother express any feelings about contact in the future?
- Was my natural mother a resident of any other 'institution' offering social care/support either prior to or post my birth?

Natural Father:

- Do you have any details regarding my natural father?
- Was he aware of my existence?
- Was he supportive of my natural mother?
- Has my natural father had any contact with the adoption agency since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- What details are on file concerning the relationship that resulted in my conception?

Siblings:

- Did my natural mother lose any other children to adoption?
- Was I my natural mother's first child? If not, please supply any details of prior births.
- Did my natural mother have any children subsequent to my adoption?
- How many brothers and sisters did my natural mother have?

Other Natural Family Members:

- Did any other members of my natural family contact you at any time?

Birth:

- Was my birth normal or were there complications?
- What was my birth weight?
- Were there any difficulties with the pregnancy?
- Was I carried to full term?
- If not, what precipitated early delivery and at what stage in the pregnancy?

Health:

- Did I present as healthy at birth?
- Please supply me with details concerning my health from the time I was born until I was placed with my adoptive parents.
- Prior to my placement with my adoptive parents did my weight increase at a normal pace?
- Are there any hereditary medical conditions in my natural family?
- What was my natural mother's state of health at the time of my birth?
- Is there any medical information available regarding any other children born (either dead or alive) to my natural mother?
- Was my natural mother a resident of any other 'institution' offering social care/support either prior or post my birth?

Baptism:

- What church was I baptised in?
- Was my natural mother or any other natural relative present at my baptism?
- Who was my sponsor at baptism?
- Was I baptised as the child of my natural mother or falsely as the natural child of my adoptive parents?

Mother & Baby Home/Nursing Home:

- Were any developmental difficulties noted during my stay at [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Were any bonding/attachment difficulties noted?
- Was my natural mother with me prior to my placement with my adoptive parents?
- Were visitors allowed in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Did I receive any visitors? If so, who were they?
- Is there any anecdotal information regarding my stay in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?

General Questions:

- Did my natural mother give informed consent to my adoption?
- Was my natural mother made aware of any other choices apart from adoption?
- Did my natural mother sign a contract or letter requiring/requesting confidentiality or anonymity from [name of agency]? If so, I would be obliged if you could furnish me with a copy of the documentation.
- What support did my natural mother receive after my adoption?
- Did you give my adoptive parents any information about my natural family, medical or otherwise?

IMPORTANT! COMMUNICATE IN WRITING AND USE REGISTERED POST

It is advisable to use **Registered Post** in all correspondence with the facilitator. We recommend that you obtain any information **in writing** and that all information provided by an agency should be checked thoroughly.

Key Points To Remember

- Establish who the facilitator was and write using the guidelines above
- If you don't know the facilitator, search through the paperwork and contact Adoption Rights Alliance if you are unsure
- Communicate only in writing and via Registered Post

2. Furthering Your Research

At this point you will hopefully have a name for your natural mother. You will need to visit the General Registrar's Office in order to progress your search from this point.

Birth Certificates and Adoption Certificates Explained

Every person who is born has his or her birth entered in the Register of Births, from which **birth certificates** are generated. Adopted people's births are registered in their original identity, however when they were adopted, they were entered into the Adopted Children's Register in their new adoptive identity. The document used by adopted people as a birth certificate in everyday life is in fact an "**Extract from the Adopted Children's Register**". The term "*original birth certificate*" is incorrect, because each person has only one birth certificate.

However, in the case of an illegal adoption, the adopted person was registered as the natural child of the adoptive parents. Therefore, there is only one certificate of birth, which is in fact false.

2.1 Visiting The General Registrar's Office

To progress your research 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 (you might find the ruler useful when 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

2.2 Your Natural Mother's Name

Your adoption agency or facilitator will hopefully have provided you with your natural mother's full name. If you have only been provided with non-identifying information, there are still ways to search, however it is of course more challenging. **Please contact Adoption Rights Alliance if this is the case and we will try to give you some possible leads to follow.**

If you have your natural mother's name the information below should be of help to you. 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.

2.3 Your Natural Mother's Age

Your agency or facilitator 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/facilitator 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

**According to non-identifying information*

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.**

2.4 Narrowing Down Possibilities

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

2.4.1 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	District	Vol	Page
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	2	421
Murphy	Mary	Dunphy	Delvin	3	211
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	4	433
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin N	2	366

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	District	Vol	Page
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	2	421
Murphy	John	Dunphy	Delvin	4	256
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	4	433
Murphy	John	Jones	Dublin N	1	656

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.

2.4.2 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.

2.4.3 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.

2.5 Can't Find Your Natural Mother's Birth Certificate?

2.5.1 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 <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/home.jsp> . Find My Past contains civil registrations, available online.

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
Web: 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
Web: <http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc>

2.5.2 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.

2.5.3 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.

2.5.4 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 for advice on your particular case.

2.6 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.

2.6.1 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 ask for marriages in your natural mother's maiden name from your year of birth onwards. 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.

2.6.2 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.

2.6.3 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 and we will do our best to assist you.

2.6.4 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

3. Next Steps

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.

Please Read Before Proceeding

- Please act responsibly and **do not proceed** without carefully considering your next moves.
- If you have access to the internet and if you haven't done so already, join ASNI, our sister group's online support group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/irishadoptionssupport>
- Please feel free to email us at tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com for advice.

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

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
Web: 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
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, which is a useful website for locating UK based people.

3.5 Search Engines

Search engines such as www.google.ie or 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. Remember your adoption was illegal and if it was arranged through a facilitator, your natural mother may not be expecting contact, so you should bear that in mind. We must stress that you are doing nothing wrong, however if you want your reunion to be successful it's best to approach the situation in a sensible fashion. 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 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. 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

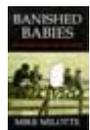
6. National Adoption Contact Preference Register

The Irish Adoption Authority launched the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR), in April 2005. This involved a leaflet drop to most households in Ireland inviting adopted people, natural parents and family members to register. If you have not received a Registration Form, or if you live outside Ireland contact the Adoption Authority at www.adoptionboard.ie or Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4, Tel. 01-2309300.

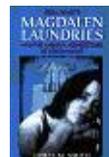
Please Note: Registering with the NACPR does not mean that the Adoption Authority will initiate a trace on your behalf.

Suggested Reading List

Background to Irish Adoption



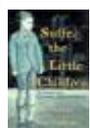
Banished Babies,
by Mike Millotte
Export of over 2000 Irish children to the United States in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's.



Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment
by James M. Smith
Excellent book documenting church/state collusion in incarcerating women in Magdalene Laundries, many of whom lost children to adoption.



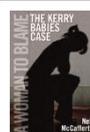
Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland,
by Frances Finnegan
The book focuses on the Magdalen Homes run by the Good Shepherd nuns in Ireland.



Suffer the Little Children: The inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools,
by Mary Raftery and Eoin O'Sullivan
A comprehensive look at the entire state/church child care system in Ireland.



The Light in the Window,
by June Goulding
The author worked as a midwife in the Bessboro', Cork mother-baby home attached to the Sacred Heart Adoption Agency.



A Woman To Blame – The Kerry Babies Case
by Nell McCafferty
Though not directly adoption related, this book provides an excellent window into the social circumstances and pressure faced by natural mothers.

The Adoption Experience



Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child,
by Nancy Verrier



Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience,
by Betty Jean Lifton



Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter,
by Betty Jean Lifton



Journey of the Adopted Self: A quest for Wholeness,
by Betty Jean Lifton



The Adoption Reunion Survival Guide,
by Julie Jarrell Bailey & Lynn N Giddens



The Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America,
by Adam Pertman



Blue-eyed Son: The Story of an Adoption,
by Nicky Campbell



Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew,
by Sherrie Eldridge



Birth Bond: Between Birthparents and Adoptees,
by Judith Gediman & Linda Brown



Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe Versus Wade,
by Ricki Solinger