

Fathers and the Adoption Experience



1) Fathers were often disempowered

In the past, fathers had very little say about the adoption of their child. In most cases a father's consent was not required for the adoption of a child and the father was not recorded on the original birth certificate. Fathers were often stereotyped as irresponsible and hospital staff/social workers saw them as irrelevant. Some professionals saw fathers as a hindrance, banning or excluding them from participation in the arrangements. As they were not carrying the child or involved in the birth they were seen as "invisible parents" in the adoption process. Contrary to misconceptions, in many instances fathers were in a stable relationships with the mothers of their children and believed that if they had the right support they would have kept their children from being adopted.

2) Some fathers were not informed

In some cases, men were not informed of the pregnancy and may still be unaware that they have fathered a child. This can sometimes cause challenges during reunion as fathers may experience shock, anger and denial about not being informed. A DNA paternity test is recommended and can be helpful in these circumstances. Sometimes an incorrect name or "unknown" may be recorded in the adoption files. DNA test results can therefore provide reassurance before you start building a relationship with the person you have found.

3) There has been legislation barriers for fathers and adopted people

In the past there have been legislative barriers to the release of birth father's name to adopted adults. Since the 2016 amendments to the Queensland Adoption Act (2009), the Department will release information about a father if there is a name in the records. This applies even if the father did not consent to the adoption and is not recorded on the original birth certificate.

Under past legislation, fathers had to have signed the consent form to obtain information about an adopted child. Under current legislation, fathers can now apply for information but will still need to provide evidence for the Department to determine "on the balance of probabilities" that they are the father of the adopted person.

4) Many fathers have experienced grief and guilt

Fathers also experienced grief when they have lost a child to adoption. Fathers can re-experience the events of loss in their minds which may cause worry, depression or guilt.

Guilt may not only arise from being unable to keep the baby but also from a perceived inability to support the mother during the pregnancy.

Fathers may perceive that they abandoned both mother and child when it was their role as a father to be a protector and provider. Compounding the father's experience is the general reluctance of men to seek counselling and support. Men often feel they can 'tough it out', are reluctant to talk about feelings or don't realise their emotions have reached unmanageable levels. .

5) Fathers can experience emotional triggers

Fathers identify a number of things that are difficult for them when they remember their son or daughter. These include birthdays, Christmas, Mother's/Father's Day, holidays and contact with people the same age as their son or daughter. This can trigger memories of loss and grief over relationships lost through the adoption process. Grief over the loss of relationship with the mother can also be a major trigger for many fathers, especially when contact or a reunion may be imminent.

6) The reunion between fathers and adopted people is important

All reunions are highly significant for both the father and adopted people, regardless of whether the reunion results in an ongoing close relationship. Guilt and shame are common hurdles for fathers to overcome when contact is made. The temptation may be to continue to keep the adopted person a secret from others, especially family members who may be unaware of their existence. Working towards openness is recommended with all involved and keeping things at a careful pace. Begin by writing letters and sharing photographs. This will also give you time and space to begin to accept that the adopted child is now an adult and may have formed their own family with children.

7) Some original birth certificates can be amended

Adopted people or fathers themselves may seek to have their names added on to original birth certificates. The first step is to talk through the process with Births Deaths and Marriages Qld . Jigsaw can help you to find the best contact person to assist you. .

Fathers, adopted people and mothers who have added a father's name on to an original birth certificate state that this action has had an important effect on their sense of personal empowerment and justice for past wrongs.

8) An ongoing relationship after reunion can work

A number of factors affect the relationship between a father and an adopted person after a reunion. These include: similarities between parent and adoptee, good communication, realistic expectations, personality mix, support from family and dealing with identity issues. These can appear complicated but can also be worked through quite naturally if time is taken to develop the relationship one step at a time. Each reunion is unique and its outcome can never be predicted. The development of all relationships start with good communication.

9) Support can help

Support is available from Jigsaw Qld . Phone 07 3358 6666 or 1800 21 03 13 (from Qld only) or email: support@jigsawqld.org.au