

Advice Line Q&A

Social worker supporting an adopted adult seeking to contact biological half-siblings

Question

I'm writing to seek advice in regards to an adopted adult who I'm working with. He made contact with his birth mother via Facebook and she replied telling him not to contact her again.

From his birth mother's social media account, he was able to establish that she is married and has two adult children from this union. The adopted adult is eager to contact his two adult half siblings as he feels he has the right to know them but does not want to make things difficult between them and his birth mother if she has not informed them about him. He is seeking advice in terms of what his rights are in approaching his half siblings.

Answer

This is not so much a matter of rights, the adopted person is an adult, as are his half siblings, and in that sense, there is nothing legally preventing him from making contact with them. Whether it is right to make contact, whether they would welcome it, and if deciding to go ahead how best to approach this, is a different matter.

We can probably guess from birth mother's response that she has not been open with her family about having a child previously adopted. This is a pre-commencement (pre-December 2005) adoption. If his adoption has been kept secret, and there may possibly have been assurances given to his mother at the time that no-one would ever know, then it is hard to know what kind of impact the sudden revealing of this may have on his birth family, something you may already have discussed with him in terms of the sensitivity of making any approach and range of possible outcomes (particularly now he knows how his birth mother initially responded).

A first step, which you may already have supported him with, is to seek access to his adoption records so as to have a good understanding of his history and reasons for the adoption. Has he placed his details on the Adoption Contact Register to register his wish for contact? Does he know if his birth mother has placed a veto on contact, or whether any half siblings have their details on the register (perhaps unlikely if they are unaware of the adoption)?

Direct contact from him out of the blue or via social media may be difficult for birth relatives. The best advice is for him to exercise his right to an intermediary service if he wishes to make contact. As well as approaching siblings, an intermediary might contact his birth mother one further time. She may be more willing to communicate with an intermediary, or at least this may offer her the opportunity, if she wishes, to explain things to her family before any contact is made with the siblings. His birth mother may wish to seek counselling/support for herself. I don't know if your local authority provides an intermediary service, or whether you would need to signpost him to intermediary services – you can find these via the Adoption Search Reunion website here: <http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/search/database/> .

If despite your advice he chooses to 'go it alone' and make contact, he may find the Tracing Guide on searching for birth relatives helpful. You can find this and other useful information via the Adoption Search Reunion website here: <http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/searching/> .