

If my child contacts a birth relative through Facebook what shall I do?

First of all don't panic. You may feel shocked, upset, lied to, angry and afraid. Give yourself a chance to absorb the information.

Let your child know that there is support available and the need for outside help may be a good idea. Talk to them about the importance of confidentiality and that any personal information they give out cannot be taken back and may be passed onto others.

If a birth family member contacts my child what shall I do?

Again don't panic! It is important to buy you and your child some time.

If your child has told you about it, suggest that they reply "I wasn't expecting to hear from you. I need some time to think it over. I'll talk it over with my mum and dad." or just not respond at all.

If you have found out and your child has not told you, take a deep breath and open a calm dialogue about what has happened, what they would like to do and possible consequences.

Contact BASS for help and support.

We have first hand experience of similar cases and can facilitate safe contact if appropriate and discuss options with you and your child.

B.A.S.S.

Children's Services (6th Floor, B-Bond)
Bristol City Council
PO Box 3176
Bristol BS3 9FS

Phone: **0117 353 4041**

Email: adoption.support@bristol.gov.uk

Find out more

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Facing up to Facebook – Eileen Fursland

BAAF (book for adoptive parents)

Social networking and you – Eileen Fursland BAAF (leaflet for adopted teens)

www.thinkyouknow.co.uk – good advice on internet safety, with videos on what can happen if you don't protect your privacy.

www.childnet.com – website giving internet safety advice and links for young people, parents and teachers.



Social Networking and Contact
A brief guide for Adoptive Parents



Why now?

Social networking and technological advances have fundamentally changed the shape of adoption contact. Social networking has made searching or making contact with birth family much easier. Some adopted children are being connected to their birth families via social networking: some children have actively searched for their birth family members without their parents knowledge; others simply received an email in their Facebook inbox from birth family out of the blue.

Young people need to know about their past

When children reach their teenage years the issue of “identity” comes to the fore and it is very normal for adopted young people to be curious about members of their birth family. (They may be dealing with issues such as grief and loss, teenage rebellion and curiosity.). Questions such as “who am I?”, “why was I adopted?” “what do birth family look like?” etc, may make life confusing for the young adopted teen.

It is not you– your child’s curiosity is natural.

What are your fears and worries?

Contact is instant– reconnection with birth family can be a shock with no time for child or parents to prepare or reflect.

What is the truth?- this kind of contact can be confusing and painful. A young person may get uncensored or misleading information from the birth family and there may be a painful discrepancy between fantasy and reality.

Contact can spread– within days of the first contact, an adopted child can be linked to aunts, uncles, grannies, mums new boyfriend and a young person can be inundated with emotional messages. Things can snowball in ways that were not expected.

Will they will go back to them?– you may worry your child will want to be with their birth family. This may feel like a threat to you as a parent.

Things will never be the same again
Social networking is here to stay. Children can legally register on networks at 13 and are generally a few steps ahead of their parents in their confidence and knowledge of technology. Young people can now access the internet via mobile phones, games consoles, at school etc so it is impossible for parents to monitor or control.

What you can do

Be open and honest about your child’s past. Be clear. Statements such as ‘your birth mother couldn’t look after you’ are no longer enough once a child is older. They need more details.

Revisit life story in an age appropriate way. Remember that your child’s need for information will grow as they develop.

Keep lines of communication open– they are more likely to talk to you if they know you are open to talking as well.

Maintain letterbox if appropriate..

Help your child know the implications of contact via social media.

Have “what if” conversations. What if your birth mother contacted you? What if you wanted to know more about birth relatives?

Find out what your child may need in terms of historical information– limit their need to search.

Ensure you and your child understand how to protect their privacy on social networking sites.