

Adoption Network Cleveland
Adoption Search – Making Contact Suggestions
www.adoptionnetwork.org

Many methods of contact are available and this chart has been prepared to share what we have found to be advantages and/or weaknesses of each method, in order for you to make the decision that works best for you.

Contact Method	Tips	Pros	Cons	Suggestions to Consider
Phone Call	<p>We advise writing out your script so you are well prepared...something like this: This is (FIRST LAST NAME), I'm calling from (your city). I have something very private and personal to talk to you about - is this a good time? (If they say no, try to set up a good time, if yes, continue. Consider asking them to write down your phone number before you start). I was born xx/xx/19xx at (hospital) and placed for adoption. I've been doing some research about my background, and it has led me to you (this gives the found person choices and avoids loaded words like mother/daughter/son).</p> <p>Before the call ends, make sure they take your number and say that you will call back to check how they are doing. Do not make any promises you might regret later (like that you won't contact them again or other family members). You want to leave your future options open depending on how it unfolds.</p> <p>Even if things don't go well in the first call things might eventually work out. Sometimes people are excited to be found, sometimes they are taken aback and need some time to adjust.</p>	<p>This approach is direct and one could argue makes the most compelling case to the person being contacted.</p> <p>The searching person gets to hear the voice of the found person, and have the conversation directly thereby representing themselves as they want to be represented and maintaining control.</p> <p>The searching person is able to confirm that they have found and reached the correct person (in most cases).</p> <p>The searching person can gauge the reaction of the found person and answer questions.</p> <p>Gives a chance to start a relationship and gain trust through interactive conversation.</p>	<p>It can be hard to get/verify phone numbers, especially cell phone numbers.</p> <p>The caller might be calling at a bad time, the found person might not have the time or privacy needed to have the conversation.</p> <p>The conversation might be emotionally charged and difficult, depending on the response of the found person.</p> <p>Some people might feel that calling is more confrontational or emotional than other approaches.</p>	<p>Consider having a support person with you or "on call" when you make the call. Have pen and paper handy.</p> <p>Prepare and plan your response to possible scenarios. Their reaction might be positive from the start, or they might react with concerns or denial. If so - do not be confrontational. Your goal is then to leave the door open even if it's not going well...such as telling them some reassuring things about yourself and your intentions, offering time for them to digest the information, offering what you might like to tell your birthparent if they are denying being the right person. Also be ready to talk in the event it goes great!</p> <p>If there is no answer, try calling at different times during the day. After repeated attempts, it might be necessary to leave a message. Craft one that is compelling but doesn't contain loaded words. Examples: "Hello, this is John Smith. The last time we met was on (your month and year of birth) in (city you were born). I would love to reconnect and learn about you." Or "I have been doing some genealogical research and I believe we are connected through the surnames XXXX and XXXX. I am really interested in learning more about this side of the family". Anyone might hear the message, so be discreet.</p>

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Letter	<p>We recommend keeping a letter brief. You don't know who might see it. Consider using a 'thinking of you' card and write: I've been thinking a lot about you. I believe we last saw each other on (your DOB). My name is now FIRST LAST and I'd love to hear from you. Please call or write me (give phone/email/address).</p> <p>This is discrete depending who else might see it, but your birthparent will know it's you. If you do write a longer letter we advise against giving ALL the info you know - it can be alarming, and you'll hopefully have plenty of time to explain.</p>	<p>Allows found person to respond in the format and time they want.</p> <p>Seen as a less emotional approach, which might feel easier for some people.</p>	<p>Searching person might be compromising the privacy of the found person if someone else opens their mail or sees the letter.</p> <p>Searching person gives up control and needs to wait for a response, often wondering if the found person received the letter or not if they don't hear back quickly.</p> <p>Searching person needs to determine how long to wait before reaching out again if they don't get a response.</p>	<p>Don't send your letter through registered mail as this calls attention to it and might seem threatening.</p> <p>Keep your letter brief and don't say too much – both so as not to overwhelm the found person, and to maintain privacy should someone else see the letter.</p> <p>Send a greeting card with a colored envelope – it is more likely to stand out as personal and get opened. Handwrite the envelope and the card.</p>
Email	See information under Letter.			It is often hard to verify an email address. A work email might be most available, but work is not the best place to contact someone and the searcher will not know if the found person's email might be also read by others.
Facebook	<p>If the found person has a Facebook with open privacy settings, the searching person might be able to learn a lot about them that way.</p> <p>Searching person should consider what found person will see on their profile about them after contact is made.</p>	<p>This might be the only method of contact available, or the most direct.</p> <p>Read receipts are often, although not always, provided.</p>	<p>Someone else might manage the found person's Facebook communications (we have seen this with older people especially) so discretion is still important.</p> <p>If the message sender is not Facebook friends with</p>	<p>The searching person may not know if the person they are trying to reach is active on the site or not. If there is not a response the searching person does not know if the found person got the message or not (even possibly if a read receipt indicates it was read).</p> <p>Facebook changes their policies about messages sent between people that are not Facebook</p>

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	<p>Only contact through Private Message, never through someone’s wall or page.</p> <p>See information provided in this document under Letter.</p>		<p>the recipient, there is an extra step involved to accept a Private Message. If the recipient does not have the Messenger App, the message notice goes in the “other” mailbox and might not be seen and the recipient will be unaware of the message.</p>	<p>friends, and Facebook is not public with these policies. At times, Private Message is a great way to connect, and other times, the message remains unseen by the recipient.</p>
Intermediary	<p>This method is not recommended because in almost all cases, the searcher can make the best case for themselves. You know what is in your heart can express it authentically.</p> <p>If an intermediary must be used, it is recommended that it be someone who knows the searcher very well, such as a priest, rabbi or close family member.</p>		<p>Searching person gives control of situation to someone else.</p> <p>It is easier to reject a third party than it is to reject a person who has a kinship relationship.</p> <p>If there is rejection, the searching person is forced to either deal with that or decide to reach out again him or her self, knowing that no contact has been requested.</p>	<p>Searching person may have some disability which makes this option necessary.</p> <p>Sometimes this is viewed as an easy way out of a difficult conversation, but it can be the least effective approach.</p>
In person	<p>Don’t do this, it is confrontational and risky.</p>			

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Additional Thoughts:

- If the searching person is an adoptee making first contact with a birthmother, we feel it is best not to say that you also want information on your birthfather. The birthfather can be a loaded subject, and will come in time if you reunite, but adds a layer of complexity to what the birthmother needs to process in the first contact. Just knowing that it will open that door could present an extra challenge for some, and delay or prohibit response. We recommend holding back on that conversation at first and broaching it only after you have established at least a bit of a relationship with your birthmother.
- We recommend that you reach out directly only to the actual person sought, and not to other family members. You want to establish trust and don't know who else might know about the situation or what their opinions might be.
- Before reaching out, the searching person may want to review their social media profiles and make sure the profiles are inviting and make a good first impression. Consider that the person you are searching for check these out before responding. This may not be a time to express political views publically.
- Prepare yourself for a wide variety of reactions. Often the first reaction may change over time, so keep doors open.
- Realize that you have prepared for this for some time. For the person being "found", this may be coming out of the blue. Being "found" can be unsettling and they may need some explanation as to how you found them. Many people have no idea how much information is available about themselves on the internet.