
President and CEO

Department Vice President

February 8, 2000

Effective Date

Social Services Department

Prepared by

SOCIAL SERVICES POLICY

ASSISTED SEARCH

We support the right of adoptees and their birth parents to search for each other. We comply fully with Oregon law which permits adoptees and their birth parents to begin this search when the adoptee is 18 or older. Because adoptees who are 18 have often just begun their physical separation from their adoptive families, we recommend that adoptees be 21 and that birth parents wait until their child is 21 to begin a search.

Searching internationally poses complexities that a domestic search does not. One of these complexities is working with the different language, laws, and culture of the birth or adopted country. While geographic distance and language can be difficult, the greater challenge is often understanding the cultural context and communication styles of the other country. Because broad differences between values, attitudes, and communication patterns in the US and those that characterize other cultures affect efforts to search as well as the nature of contact among birth family members when it is made, we encourage adoptees and their birth parents to develop an understanding of the cultural traditions of the other country before searching.

Consistent with Oregon law, we do not permit adoptive parents to search for identifying information. We recommend that adoptive parents encourage their minor children to pursue cultural information and support their adult children in their decisions regarding search. We back this recommendation with the observation that the stakes in the search and reunion process are much higher for adoptees and their birth parents than for adoptive parents. It is the adoptees or their birth parents who should be driving the search.

All members of the triad should have access to counseling and support as needed throughout the search and reunion process. No matter how positive the experience, an adoption search can be intensely emotional for all members of the triad. Even contemplating a search can be emotional. Like other experiences that require complex decision-making and intense soul-searching, it can be helpful to consult a professional with relevant experience.

We further respect and abide by the laws of the countries that we work in and the policies of our overseas partner agencies. We encourage those who search to do the same. It is important to honor the birth country and critical not to circumvent its system, government officials, orphanage staff, or others who assist or are part of the search itself. To do otherwise is shortsighted and potentially undermines the immediate search as well as future search activities.

The Assisted Search program is limited to countries that can meet the requirements set out in Oregon Administrative Rules 413-130-0450, 0460, and 0470. These countries are listed in the Assisted Search Procedure in the Social Services Procedure Manual.

Origination Date: January 1, 1998
Revised: February 8, 2000