

Post Reunion Relationships Some Points to Consider

Reunions are the beginning of a new relationship and the following points are to assist you on your relationship building journey.

Relationship building over time

Immediately following a reunion there may be a “honeymoon” period which can be full of idealisations (about the other party and the relationship) followed by a time when the “reality” sets in and things may not be exactly how you expected or had fantasised about. This “reality” extends to the impact that the new relationship has on other family members and friends.

A post-reunion relationship changes over time and, like all relationships, may need to be worked at. This may be ongoing over many years as life experiences can impact on your relationship with one another.

This relationship is a particularly complex one because of the unique individualised history of both parties and the heightened and deep emotions involved. So, at times, you may feel like it is an emotional roller coaster – highs and lows, positive and negative feelings – as you try to negotiate a relationship with someone who may appear to have similar traits, but with a different personality, history, set of values and expectations.

Like other relationships, there may be some rough spots where you have to work out differences in a compassionate and respectful way. It may be a case of “one step forward and 2 steps back” as you negotiate a relationship that is mutually acceptable.

The relationship has a “ripple effect” – relationships within both families will shift and everyone has to adjust to accommodate the new situation.

Try to see any issues in the relationship as an opportunity for personal growth – what can you learn from the situation and how you can use your strengths, skills and experience to work on the relationship being as good as possible.

One of the things that can occasionally emerge is a sexual attraction to the other party – this is known as Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA). It is helpful to talk this through with a counsellor so that it can be acknowledged and strategies developed for dealing with the situation.

Communication/Language

Differences can lead to misinterpretations of the other party’s intentions and behaviours. For example, a birth mother/father may be calling an adoptee every day and think that this is showing that she/he loves him/her. The adoptee may be feeling pressured by the phone calls and feel overwhelmed.

If differences emerge it is best to think about how you can communicate as honestly as possible while still being conscious of the other party's feelings. If you are feeling very emotional try to calm down before speaking with the other party about the issue. Think about what you want to say and how best to say it. If you are unsure you could talk it over with someone or write down what you want to say.

If you perceive the other party as being rude or tactless you could let them know that your feelings have been hurt by saying: *When you said ..., I felt ... because*, rather than using blaming/judgmental language, e.g., *You are rude*.

Be aware of your own feelings and take responsibility for these rather than assume a blaming attitude towards the other party. You may be sensitive to feelings of being rejected and get upset by something that was not intended to be hurtful.

Be careful with email and social media. Misinterpretations can occur more easily in these mediums, such as with Facebook communication, especially in the early stages of the relationship. When you email, the other person does not get to hear the tone of voice and may interpret the message differently to how it was intended. Something written is recorded for all time and can't be taken back. You also don't know how the other party is receiving your message. Face to face and telephone communication provides more chance of adjusting and repairing communication when needed.

Be aware that communication via social media can create problems with confidentiality and privacy. For example, an adoptee may post on Facebook about their reunion and the birth mother may be upset by this if her family or friends do not know about the adoption or reunion.

Respect and openness

Secrets can be destructive and erode trust; hence it is important to be open and honest in a sensitive way. Sometimes we keep secrets hoping to protect the other party but this is not usually helpful in the long run.

Be aware of a possible desire to please the other party by trying to be someone you are not – it is better to be true to yourself.

Be respectful of the other person's relationships (e.g., with their adoptive family) and acknowledge that these are important to them. Being critical or resentful of other relationships in their life can negatively affect your relationship and may place them in a situation where they may feel they have to choose.

Acceptance and patience

You need to respect the pace of the other party which may be different to what you want – patience is often needed to develop an enduring relationship.

Try to value what you have rather than expect or demand more than what the other party is willing or able to give.

Both adoptees and birth parents have experienced some lack of control regarding the adoption which can result in both wanting more control. Be aware of this issue and try to be accommodating of each other.

Parents who have raised their children have had a long time to store memories that help them to navigate and tolerate the difficult patches in the relationship over time. After a reunion between adults without this history, it can be harder to work through the tough times so more patience and effort may be needed.

Practice forgiveness and acceptance towards yourself and the other party. When things go awry, focus on how to repair the relationship rather than blame yourself or the other person.

Be aware of expectations for your relationship – it will be what it is and that will be a function of who you are as people and how much effort each party is willing or able to put into the relationship. Relationships are not something one can demand of another person.

Reunions as part of a journey

Reunions mark the end of searching for birth families and the beginning of the next phase. This phase of your life journey will present opportunities as well as challenges – try to see the opportunities for personal growth – what can you learn from the situation and how can you use your strengths, skills and experiences to work on the relationship being as good as possible.

Support

Find others you can talk through any issues with, such as trusted family, friends, support groups, or a counsellor at PARC.

For more information and support contact The Benevolent Society:

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