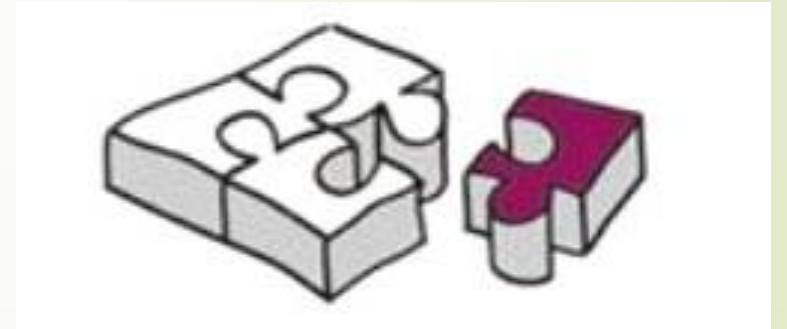


Reunion in adoption and implications for donor search



By Isabel Andrews, Adoption Jigsaw

Adoption - Brief history WA

1896 - first adoption laws to ensure security and inheritance rights. Adoption was open.

1921 + - records closed, the beginning of secrecy and hiding a child's status.

1950s - 1970s – Estimated that approx. 150,000 women had to relinquish because they were single.

1960s – 1970s – 1960s were a decade of political and social upheaval in Australia with young people challenging traditional values. By the 1970s individual rights had gained more traction. In 1973 supporting parents benefit came in and the landscape of adoption began to change.

1978 - Jigsaw set up by adopted people as part of a wider societal movement of individual rights, over 4500 reconnections since it was set up.

1986 - WA records open for adoptees.

1995 – Birth Parents get access to adoptive birth certificate.

2010 – WA Premier delivers apology to birth parents and adoptees. First in world.

2012 – Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, delivers “Forced Adoption National Apology”







Similarities ~ Adoption and Donor Conceived

- Development of a child outside the traditional family model
- Conscious choice to create a family
- Lack of access to records and biological information eg birth father information often not available in adoption
- Importance of identity and missing pieces
- Secrecy or only superficial discussion about conception and how they came to be in family
- Both adoptees and Donor Conceived can feel disloyal if they want to pursue their biological family
- Birth mother and donor father may have been promised anonymity

Differences

Adoption

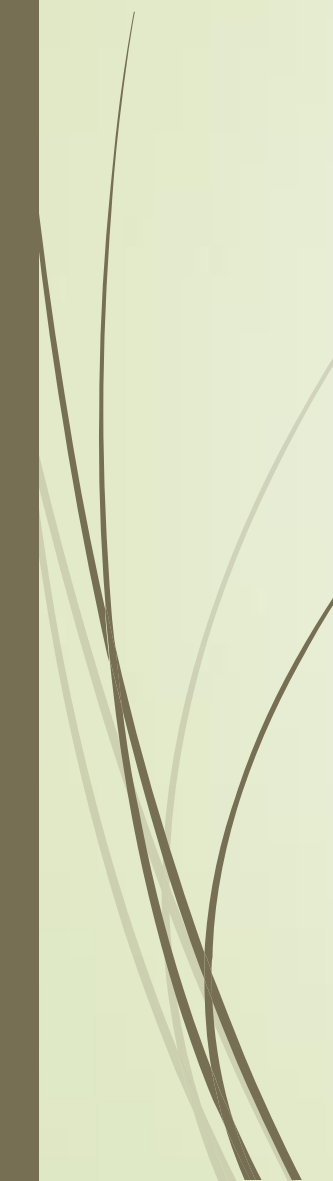
- Child exists and adoption is to meet the child's needs
- Highly regulated, parents assessed, records kept, two birth certificates
- Domain of State Protections Authorities, State centralised records
- Rarely grow up with biological relatives
- Adoptees may struggle with abandonment issues
- Unique story about conception, relinquishment and placement

Donor Conceived

- Child is created to meet the needs of a couple
- In the past records not required to be kept. One birth certificate
- Health Dept. in older cases records held by clinics and may have been destroyed
- Usually grow up with their biological mum
- May be more a sense of loss an not being conceived naturally.
- Generally same story, parents had medical assistance.




Beliefs

- Adoption is a **lifelong** event with the separation of biological family having an impact on all parties
 - Loss is the cornerstone of all adoptions
 - Every person has a right to information about themselves and their family
 - Every person has the right to refuse contact
 - Honesty and openness is best
- 



Principles

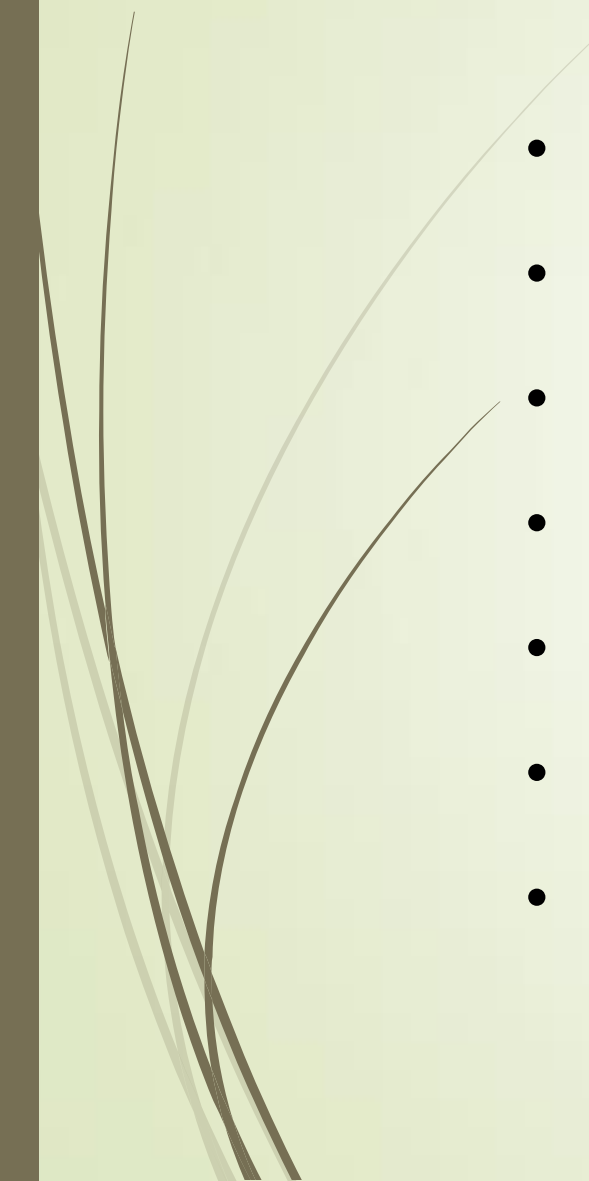
- Impartiality
 - Self-determination
 - Informed choice
 - Timing at the pace of the slowest party
 - Don't assume
- 

Process

- Articles on adoption issues sent to new client
- Invitation to attend support group
- Search
- Interview with initiating party – including what can be shared
- Outreach letter to found party
- Service to found person, interview if possible
- Support to both parties can be for weeks, months, years



Special Issues

- Death of a party to the adoption
 - Abuse
 - Homosexuality
 - Physical or mental illness
 - Criminality
 - DNA tests - Ancestry
 - Genetic Sexual Attraction
- 

Genetic Sexual Attraction

Which people are most vulnerable?

- Strong physical resemblances
- Low Self-esteem
- Narrow age difference
- Romantic fantasies about reunion
- Anger and violence (male adoptees)
- Absence of a sexual partner
- Inability to say 'no', feel guilty
- Mental health issues
- Previous unsatisfactory relationships
- Physical/sexual abuse in the past
- Enjoy taking risks



What Can Help

- Knowing of possibility – normalizing strength of feelings
- Talking about it honestly instead of shame and secrecy
- Using ‘names’ ie my sister, my father
- Finding more appropriate ways to express affection
- Doing something physical together eg jogging to work off energy
- Meet in public or with others – may have to avoid meeting for some time

Counsellors

- Dealing with own feelings
- Educating client
- Helping client to explore past losses and trauma and their vulnerability