

## Adoption in Ireland

This section is relevant for two main groups of people:

- Adoptees whose parents were Irish
- Irish parents whose children were given up for adoption

Much of the information below is also available in a video presentation on YouTube entitled “How to solve adoption mysteries in your Irish Family Tree” and is available here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=in6eMV5xiX4>

### A brief history

Ireland has a long history of “informal” adoptions prior to the passing of the 1952 Adoption Bill. These continued even after the passing of the legislation and were therefore technically illegal adoptions (e.g. birth certificates being forged to list the adoptive parents as the natural parents). In these latter cases, and in cases prior to 1952, there is no “Non-identifying Information” available for adoptees and DNA may be their only recourse to help identify their birth families.

For those adopted post-1952, “Non-identifying Information” is available only through an intermediary such as a social worker from the Adoption Agency that arranged the adoption (if it still exists). The Adopted Children’s Certificate (available from 1954) is issued in place of a birth certificate and contains a date of birth for the adoptee that is usually within 6 weeks of the actual date of birth. This can be useful for trying to identify a potential birth mother in the Civil Birth Register at the General Registry Office in Dublin (see the video above for further information).

Adoptees in Ireland or adopted from Ireland do not have automatic access to their original birth certificate – the birth mother must be contacted by the intermediary first in order to obtain her permission. If this fails, appeals can be made to the Adoption Authority. Further information is available here - [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth\\_family\\_relationships/adoption\\_and\\_fostering/tracing\\_your\\_birth\\_family.html](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/adoption_and_fostering/tracing_your_birth_family.html)

In 2005, the Irish Government set up the National Adoption Contact Preference Register. This allows anyone (adoptee or any biological family member) to enter the details of any known adoption and to provide contact details. Any new details are matched against details already in the database and any “matches” are put in touch with each other. It is unclear how successful this initiative has been at reuniting adoptees with their birth families. See <http://www.aai.gov.ie/index.php/tracing/contact-preference-register.html>

### General Approach

There are Tracing Guides available to help Irish adoptees trace their birth families and these can be downloaded from the website of the Adoption Rights Alliance here – [www.adoptionrightsalliance.com](http://www.adoptionrightsalliance.com)

Other Irish sources of information on tracing (for adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents) are available here:

- [http://councilofirishadoptionagencies.com/?page\\_id=285](http://councilofirishadoptionagencies.com/?page_id=285)
- [www.aai.gov.ie/index.php/information-a-tracing/contact-preference-register.html](http://www.aai.gov.ie/index.php/information-a-tracing/contact-preference-register.html)
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Three of the most important questions facing adoptees (or biological parents of adoptees) are:

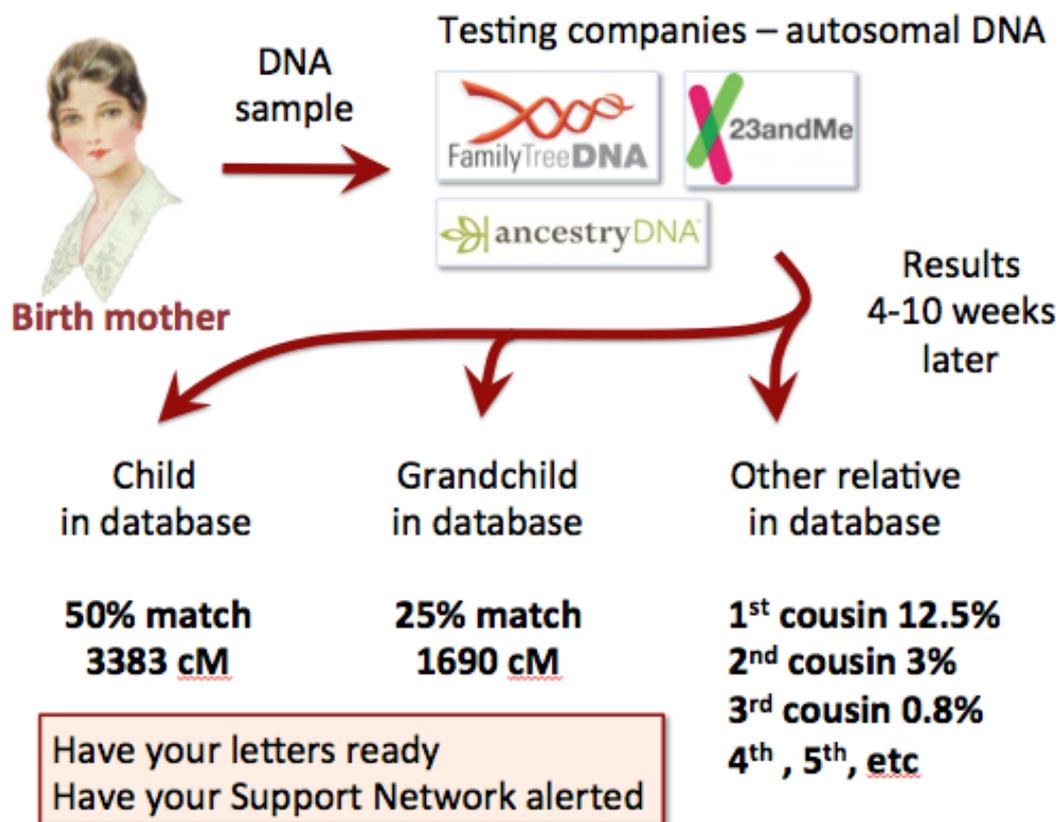
1. How do I identify my birth parents (or my adopted child)?
2. How do I approach contacting them (or their families)?
3. How do I protect people from getting hurt (including me)?

It is important to think these questions through in advance because DNA could potentially reunite you with your birth family very quickly indeed. What will you say to them when you find them? How will you introduce yourself? Often such a discovery can result in very strong and mixed emotions, and it can be very helpful to have your letters of introduction written before undertaking DNA testing. And having a support network of family, friends, and Search Angels ready to encourage and guide you will help maximise the chances of a positive outcome to your research, which is what everyone wants.

This is particularly important in Ireland where the topic of adoption can be a very sensitive matter for many people, and public opinion is split on the right of the adoptee to know who they are and where they came from versus the right of the mother to privacy. Sensitivity, diplomacy, and mutual respect will go a long way toward a positive outcome for all parties concerned.

### **How to help a Birth Parent find his/her Adopted Child**

If you are a birth parent who gave up your child for adoption, it is possible that they have started to search for you and may have taken a DNA test as part of that process. Therefore it is worthwhile taking an autosomal DNA test with all three major DNA testing companies in the hope that you will find your child there (or indeed even one of their own children). If they are not there, your DNA will serve as a legacy so that if, at any point in the future, they or one of their descendants come looking for you, they will find you.



### How to help an Adoptee find his/her Birth Father

This only works if you are man. It will not work if you are a woman. This is because it relies on Y-DNA testing, and Y-DNA is only passed from father to son. It is never passed from father to daughter.

So if you are a man, testing your Y-DNA will connect you with genetic cousins with whom you share a common ancestor of your direct male line, your father's father's father's line. This is the same line down which the surname is passed. So many matches you have on this line are likely to be "recently related" to your biological father (i.e. within the last 1000 years) and therefore will share his surname. (Some matches will be related to you before the time surnames were introduced and will therefore have different surnames, and there may also have been Non-Paternity Events in the past, which will have resulted in matches to different surnames.)

If you are lucky, one surname among your matches will stand out, because it occurs most frequently. Alternatively, two or three surnames will occur with the same frequency, but at least it helps you narrow down the options, and a certain name may tie in with what you know from your documentary research or your non-identifying information. If you are unlucky, your Y-DNA may be relatively rare and you may have few or no matches at all.

The company to test with is FamilyTreeDNA. It is probably best to test out to at least 67 markers (the Y-DNA-67 test), but you can start out with the 37 marker test (Y-DNA-37) and upgrade it a later point in time if need be.

This technique also works for fathers and grandfathers who were adopted, as long as the test-taker is a man on the same direct male line as the father or grandfather.

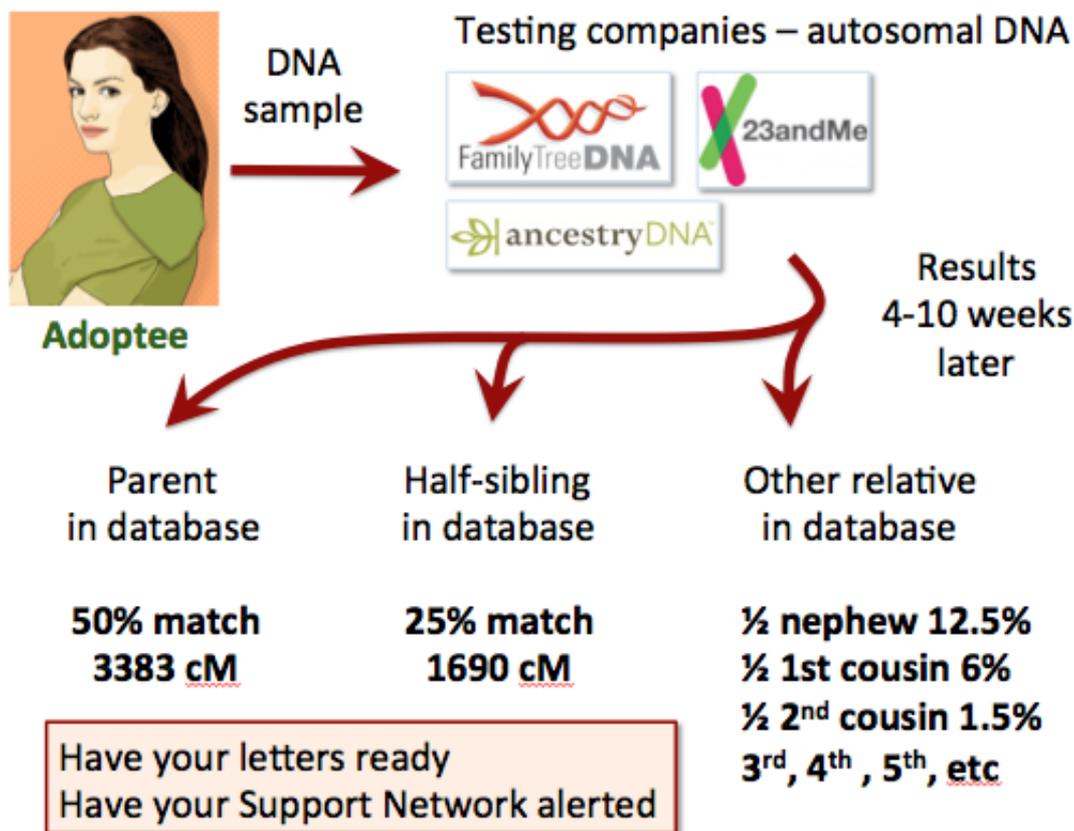
### **How to help an Adoptee find his/her Birth Mother**

If you are an adoptee (or one of your parents or grandparents is), you should take an autosomal DNA test with all three major DNA testing companies in the hope that you will find your birth parents or one of their close relatives there.

Most Irish people who have taken a DNA test have probably tested with FamilyTreeDNA (FTDNA). There are several reasons for this:

- AncestryDNA is not available outside the US at the time of writing (Sep 2014)
- Even though all three companies charge \$99 for the autosomal DNA test, 23andme charge an extra \$80 for shipping on top of the \$99 for the test (Sep 2014). FTDNA only charge about \$7 for shipping.
- FTDNA actively support genealogy events in Britain and Ireland such as Back to Our Past (usually held in October each year in Dublin), and Who Do You Think You Are in the UK (February each year). Many British and Irish people test at these events.
- Many British and Irish people are attracted to test with FTDNA because its database has the largest non-US proportion among the three major companies (about 30% of its database is non-US). This maximises their chances of finding a match in Britain or Ireland.

If a close relative is not revealed by DNA testing, then applying the methodology developed by DNAadoption can be helpful. However this does take weeks and months of work. And you will need to become a genealogist and think like a genealogist. This is because most of your matches, and therefore most of the people you will be communicating with, will be genealogists.



A major limitation to the application of the DNAadoption methodology in Ireland is the fact that there is generally a major Brick Wall in most Irish genealogies about 1800. This is because many of the earlier records were destroyed in a huge explosion in the Public Records Office in Dublin in 1922. However, new techniques and methodologies are being developed that will help overcome some of these limitations and as time goes on, and more British and Irish people test, the chances of finding your birth family will increase.

This is discussed in greater detail in the video “Challenges with Irish autosomal DNA genealogical research” which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5CQsmu8HMA>

## Useful resources

### YouTube videos

- A step-by-step approach to analysing your autosomal DNA matches – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jtpe6u2J5ps>
- Researching your Irish ancestry online & at minimal cost - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGqe4cvccNc>

Records for Children in Care: pre-1952 “adoptions” – a pdf document of a PowerPoint slideset created by Fiona Fitzsimons of Eneclann ... [www.eneclann.ie/NLI-Lectures/FionaFitzsimons.pdf](http://www.eneclann.ie/NLI-Lectures/FionaFitzsimons.pdf)

## Organisations that assist in tracing and connecting

**Adoption Authority of Ireland** – the government-appointed body that regulates adoption in Ireland. They have a whole section of their website devoted to tracing ... <http://www.aai.gov.ie/index.php/tracing/information-service.html>

**Council of Irish Adoption Agencies** – a forum of Irish adoption agencies with useful information on tracing and reconnecting ...  
[http://councilofirishadoptionagencies.com/?page\\_id=285](http://councilofirishadoptionagencies.com/?page_id=285)

**Adoption Rights Alliance** – have useful tracing guides ...  
<http://www.adoptionrightsalliance.com/searchandreunion.htm>

**The Philomena Project** – a project set up by Philomena Lee with the ultimate goal of helping reunite families, in particular birth mothers with their adopted children ... <http://thephilomenaproject.org>

## Tracing Living People in Ireland

Help in tracing living people in Ireland is available from these websites:

- [www.irishfamilyancestry.com/descendant-research](http://www.irishfamilyancestry.com/descendant-research)
- [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/living-person.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/living-person.htm)
- [www.findmypast.co.uk/content/expert-living-relatives](http://www.findmypast.co.uk/content/expert-living-relatives)
- [www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpprestype/offpubs/electreg/traceliv/tracinglivingpeople.pdf](http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpprestype/offpubs/electreg/traceliv/tracinglivingpeople.pdf)
- [www.adoptionrightsalliance.com/tracinghandbooks.htm](http://www.adoptionrightsalliance.com/tracinghandbooks.htm)
- [www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/index.html](http://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/index.html)
- [www.ggi2013.blogspot.ie/p/finding-your-irish-ancestors-online.html](http://www.ggi2013.blogspot.ie/p/finding-your-irish-ancestors-online.html)

Adoption Stories – a TV series produced by Sharon Lawless, which tells the stories of people touched by adoption in Ireland, whether they are adoptees, birth parents, or adoptive parents. The tone of these excellent programmes is refreshingly balanced and factual.

- Episode 1 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alPvFymlyCI>
- Episode 2 - <http://youtu.be/xynDEHwUn1k>
- Episode 3 - <http://youtu.be/T0lMnLA0qZc>
- Episode 4 - <http://youtu.be/Gw8xmZjTlly>
- Episode 5 - <http://vimeo.com/78203108> (Alan Stanford, Irish actor, adoptee)
- Article about Sharon Lawless producer of 'Adoption Stories'  
<http://www.iftn.ie/news/?act1=record&aid=73&rid=4285741&tpl=archnews&force=1>

Long Lost Family – a TV series that helps people find long lost family members. Most of the people searching are either adoptees or birth parents of adoptees, and the majority of cases are British but some have an Irish angle. Lots of emotions, lots of surprises, lots of happy endings. There are four series so far and many of them are available on YouTube -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEfsNZogk6M>

### Facebook Groups - general

- Adoption Support Network of Ireland – ASNI -  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/165837080386/>
- Adoption Voices - UK & Ireland -  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/adoptetracinghelp/>
- Adoption Rights Now 24 hour News channel -  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/387682087978463/>

### Facebook Groups – lobbying for change

A variety of groups are lobbying government for change at both a national and European level. These activities include lobbying for the release of original birth records, and for public enquiries into adoption practices in Ireland in the past (e.g. Mother and Baby Homes, vaccine trials). The following is a list of some of the organisations lobbying for change who have a presence on Facebook (all are closed groups and you have to apply for membership):

- Adoption Rights Alliance –  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/adoptionrightsalliance/>
- Beyond Adoption Ireland -  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1401425226786665>
- Adoption Rights Now -  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/486967967999213/>
- Adopted Illegally Ireland -  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1080951042045507/>

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Sep 2014