

RECORDS EXPLAINER

This guide is for people who were adopted in England and Wales.

Records created around your adoption	Your rights
Birth certificate	<p>You have a right to your birth certificate from the age of 18.</p> <p>If you know your birth name, you can apply directly to the General Register Office (GRO). The index to birth registrations is available on the GRO website, on genealogy websites and at FreeBMD.</p> <p>If you do not know your birth name you need to apply to the GRO using the Birth certificate Information Before Adoption (BIBA) service https://www.gov.uk/adoption-records</p> <p>If you were adopted before 12 November 1975 you will need to attend a counselling session. This is not counselling per se, but to advise you that prior to 1975 mothers understood that children would have no way to identify or contact them.</p>
Adoption file created by the agency or Local Authority involved in your adoption	<p>If you were adopted before 2005, you do not have a right to your adoption file. Information within it can be released at the discretion of the organisation that holds it. It can only be released to you. If you do not know which organisation managed it, you can ask the BIBA service. If you were privately adopted it is less likely that a file exists.</p> <p>You should approach the adoption team within the Local Authority where you currently live. If you know the agency or Local Authority who managed your adoption, you can approach them directly. This website contains a listing of organisations, records and locations. To note, It is no longer updated.</p> <p>If you were adopted on or after 30 December 2005 you have a right to the information provided to your adoptive parents at the time of your adoption. Information might include a Child Permanence Report, lifestory book, letters and other documentation. You are not entitled to see other documents created by the organisation but you can request them. You are entitled to copies of court records. You should contact your adoption agency in the first instance.</p>

	<p>Organisations that hold records will review adoption files prior to release, and redact information to protect third parties. Adoption social workers are now encouraged to be as open as possible so it may be worth resubmitting an old request.</p> <p>There were no clear retention rules prior to 1975, so files may have been lost. Since 1975, the retention on all adoption files has been 75 years, and for adoptions since 30 December 2005, 100 years. In 2025, the Chief Archivists of Local Government Association recommended that adoption files should be kept for up to 125 years. Adoption files are open but have strict access controls. They can only be accessed by the adoptee or by a registered intermediary.</p> <p>Files are at risk of being destroyed once the retention date has passed but practice varies from archive to archive. It is unfortunately the case that archives can be affected by floods and fire and that records can be lost accidentally.</p>
Care records	<p>If you were in care, you have a right to see your records. Please see the Information Commissioner's Office guide.</p> <p>If you were in care for a short period prior to adoption, your records may have been destroyed under short retention schedules but you can put in a Subject Access Request (SAR) to the Local Authority who was responsible for you. There will be information available on the Local Authority website on how to put in a SAR.</p>
Court records	<p>A file was created by the court that managed your adoption. If you were adopted before 30 December 2005 you do not have a right to see it but you can put in a request to the court. The court will be named on your adoption certificate.</p>

For more information see

[Adoption: Access to Information and Intermediary Services A Practice Guide](#)

[Family Connect website](#)