

How “real” are reality TV shows about adoption?

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Post adoption workers around Australia, including those working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were separated from their families, claim that media attention on adoption reunions has raised unrealistic expectations for people hoping to reconnect with their birth families.

Nikki Hartmann, from Relationships Australia (SA)’s Post Adoption Support Service, says ***“the recent trend in television shows depicting families reuniting after adoption, has highlighted the importance of families, but also reveals that there are complex issues related to adoption, many of which go on for the lifetime of the people concerned”***.

However, Ms Hartmann says ***“many of the stories presented in the media give a simplistic portrayal of what happens when adopted people or their birth parents try to find each other”*** and this seems to have affected the kinds of expectations people have about finding their family members.

Post adoption workers from all over Australia recently met in Adelaide, at the first National Post Adoption Workers Meeting. This meeting recognised that these television shows have significantly increased the numbers of applications to adoption authorities in Australia by people wanting to find out about their children who were adopted, or about their birth parents.

Due to the television stories about adoption reunions, many people expect that it will be easy to find each other, and that when they do, many of their problems and issues will be resolved. This is not always the case in fact; sometimes quite challenging events unfold such as rejection or finding out unexpected or difficult news. People need sensitive support throughout the process of search and reunion. It is more than just obtaining the information about the other person’s identity and going off to find them. The reunion journey can take many years and can, at times, be quite challenging.

The Post Adoption Workers Meeting was held in Adelaide on 15-17 September and was attended by workers from each State and Territory Government Adoption Service, non-government organisations and workers from Link Up services throughout Australia who help to reunite Indigenous people separated from their family members.

Post adoption support services are available throughout Australia to anyone affected by adoption.

For more information about services in your State or to arrange an interview with a local service provider, please see the contact list below:

Contact List

South Australia

Relationships Australia (SA)
Post Adoption Support Services
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www.rasa.org.au

New South Wales and Queensland

Post Adoption Resource Centre
Erin Schrieber, Media Relations Officer
The Benevolent Society
Level 1, 188 Oxford Street
Paddington NSW 2021
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Direct Phone: (02) 9339 9325
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www.bensoc.org.au

Centacare Adoption Services
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International Social Service Australia
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Western Australia

Jigsaw
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Post Adoption Services
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Victoria

Vanish
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Tasmania

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Northern Territory

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