



Adoption Search in Missouri

For adoptions that were finalized in the state of Missouri, there are processes and requirements set by law determining who can search, what information can be shared, and steps that must be taken. LFCS provides an avenue for support and search completion within these state statutes.

There are three types of searches in Missouri: Adoption Information Registry, Non-Identifying Information, and Identifying Information. We have included important information about each type of search, as well as general information about what you can expect. More specific details about how to utilize LFCS search services are provided later in this document.

Navigating the Adoption Search Types:

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Missouri Adoption Information Registry

- This is a service provided through the Missouri Department of Social Services.
- Adult adoptees (age 21 or older), biological parents, and biological siblings can indicate their desire to be contacted by each other by voluntarily adding their information to the registry.
- Information released could include: name, address, phone number, and place of birth.
- Additional information and registration forms can be found at: <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/adoption/adoption-information-registry.htm>
- NOTE: There is no fee for this service.

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Non-Identifying Information Search

- Non-Identifying information is defined by Missouri law as “information concerning the physical description, nationality, religious background, and medical history of the biological family member(s).”
- This information may be released by the court that granted the adoption or by the agency which arranged the adoption. There is no court order required.
- Information may be released to adoptive parents, legal guardians, or adopted adults age 18 or older.

Non-Identifying Information Search - Continued

To initiate an Non-Identifying Info. Search:

- Submit your request in writing: (a) to the court that granted the adoption, or (b) to the agency that arranged the adoption.

Note: If the adoption agency is closed, send the written request to the agency that is responsible for the records of the closed agency.

- Provide verification of your identity (government- issued, picture ID)

- A summary of non-identifying information will be prepared and shared with you.
- NOTE: There may be a fee as the law allows for the cost of all services involved in releasing the information to be passed on to the requestor.

“We look for ourselves in our family histories and in our genes, but such things alone do not make identity. We human beings are the meaning-makers, each of us a product of a particular time and place, with ideas about what we value and, indeed, what we hope to find when we look.” – Libby Copeland

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Identifying Information Search

- Identifying information is defined by Missouri law as “information that includes the name, date of birth, place of birth, and last-known address of the birth parent(s) or biological siblings.”
- This information may be released only by court order either through the court or by the agency that arranged the adoption.
- Information may be ordered by the court to be released to adopted adults age 18 or older.

Submit your search request in writing to the court that finalized your adoption. Include the following:

- Date of birth
- Name at time of birth, if known
- Date the Court issued the Final Decree of Adoption
- Cause Number, if known
- Adoptive Parents' Names
- Birth Parent's Name(s), if known
- Your Maiden Name – if applicable
- Your current address and phone number

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Identifying Information Search - Continued

- The court will authorize the agency to conduct a search for the birth parent. This is required for an agency to begin a search.
- The agency will research and attempt to locate the birth parent and obtain a notarized consent allowing the release of their identifying information – if they are in favor of their information being shared. Please note:
 - If both birth parents were named in the adoption petition, both must sign consents.
 - If the birth father is named in the record but not in the petition, he must be notified, but his consent may not be required to release information about the birth mother.
 - Consent from the birth father is required to release his identifying information.
- Within three months, the agency reports to the court regarding steps taken to contact the birth parent(s) and outcome of the contact. If additional time is required, the searcher may request an extension from the court.
- The court determines the order regarding the release of identifying information to the adoptee.
- NOTE: There may be a fee, as the law allows for the cost of all services involved in releasing the information to be passed on to the requestor.



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Possible Outcomes of Identifying Information Search:

- The court orders a report of identifying information to be prepared and shared with you.
- Only one birth parent can be located – if the consent of both birth parents is required but only one can be found, the searcher will report their attempts to locate the other birth parent to the court. The Judge will make the decision about the release of information regarding the consenting birth parent.
- Birth parents cannot be located – if either birth parent cannot be found, the searcher's attempts to locate must be documented and reported to the court. Another request for search can be made by the requestor after one year.
- Birth parent refuses to consent – if birth parent(s) are located but refuse to consent, another request for search can be made after three years.
- Birth parent is deceased – verification of the death(s) will be obtained. Medical information available on the death certificate may be shared as non-identifying information. No identifying information can be released regarding a deceased birth parent unless the other biological parent has filed a prior consent with the court/agency of record; is known but cannot be found or is deceased; or is unknown.
- Birth parent(s) is incapacitated and not able to sign the consent – proof of incapacitation must be submitted to the court. The Judge will make a decision regarding the release of information.

Additional information related to adoption search

- At the time of adoption, adoptive parents are given non-identifying medical / health information and social history that was provided by the birth parent(s) at the time of placement. This information can be included in a Non-Identifying Search.
- An adoptee does not need the permission of their adoptive parents in order to search.
- Lineal descendants can search if the adoptee is deceased. This includes children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc.
- Prior to 1986, MO law did not contain any specific language allowing for future contact between birth parents and adoptees. For adoptions prior to 1986, birth parents were assured by judges, attorneys, and others that their information would remain confidential indefinitely, which is no longer the case.
- Not all birth parents consent to having their identifying information released to their children. If birth parents are contacted and decline the opportunity for contact, it does not mean that they do not love their children. Some birth parents have never shared information about their adoption experience with others in their life and some birth parents find the adoption experience too painful to revisit. There are various, complex reasons why a birth parents might decline contact with an adoptee.

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Additional information -- continued

- Under the MO Adoptee Rights Act, adoptees, adoptee's attorneys, birth parents, and lineal descendants of deceased adoptees can request a copy of the adoptee's original birth certificate. Birth mothers do have the right to contact the MO Department of Health and Senior Services and request that their identifying information be removed from the original birth certificate. Additional information and forms for application can be found at <https://health.mo.gov/data/vitalrecords/obtain-vital-record.php>
- A complete copy of MO Law 453.121 RSMo 1989 that dictates search in MO can be found in your library.

Search Services with LFCS:

The decision to search for an adoptee's biological family may be a difficult one with many conflicting emotions. It is the desire of LFCS to support all people impacted by adoption regardless of their role or their current perspective and feelings about their adoptive experience. LFCS believes that knowledge about an adoptee's history is important. To support this, we offer services for adoptees related to adoption focused mental health, search services, and reunion support.

Now that you have reviewed the information provided, take some time to determine where you are in your adoption journey and what services are most beneficial to you. Please contact us at 1-866-326-5327 or via email at help@lfcs.org and let us know how we can best assist you:

- For additional general information about search services & determining what is next for you
- To start the Non-Identifying Information Search process with LFCS
- For help in determining next steps for Identifying Information Search process with the court
- To access adoption competent mental health services that can assist with preparation for a search outcome or for support after a search experience

