



## How to Search for Medical Records



How do I find out if I survived an attempted abortion?

Although most people who connect with ASN know that they did survive an abortion attempt, sometimes people reach out to us and suspect that they might be survivors but need verification.

If you suspect that you may have survived an attempted abortion, there are a few steps you can take to try and find out more information.

How can I find records related to the abortion I survived?

**1.) Contact the abortion clinic or hospital where you believe the abortion occurred.** If you have a relationship with your biological mother, you can ask her to contact the clinic or hospital for a record of the procedure that she had.

### **How long are abortion records kept?**

The length of time that abortion records are kept can vary depending on the jurisdiction and the abortion provider or facility. In the United States, there is no federal law that specifies how long medical records, including

abortion records, must be kept. Instead, it is up to individual states to set their own laws and regulations.

In some states, such as California, medical records must be kept for at least 25 years. In other states, such as New York, medical records must be kept for at least six years. However, some clinics or hospitals may choose to keep records for a longer period.

While there may be legal requirements for how long records must be kept, abortion providers and hospitals may choose to keep records for longer periods of time. Anecdotally, we have heard 7 years be commonly referenced as to how long many abortion clinics keep records. If possible, you should contact the abortion provider or facility where you believe the abortion occurred to inquire about their specific record retention policies.

Recognize, though, that due to confidentiality, they may not share anything with you. The record would be related to your mother and be in her name. It's worth attempting if you have information about the clinic or hospital. Having your mother reach out to them directly would potentially yield the strongest likelihood of a response, if records are still being kept there.



If you (or your biological mother) receive a response from the abortion clinic or hospital, follow the instructions provided by the abortion provider or hospital facility to obtain a copy of the medical records. There may be a fee associated with obtaining this copy.

**Note:** Hospital records are typically obtained by survivors of late term abortions, which resulted in their live birth during the abortion. The “birth record” at the hospital is the abortion record. However, we have also seen some cases of survivors obtaining their birth record, which included documentation about the abortion attempt that occurred earlier gestationally.

Other survivors have found the abortion attempt included in their late childhood or adult records after a parent’s admission/other documentation was obtained, like an adoption record.

ASN advocates for clear documentation of all abortion attempts in birth, medical, and adoption files for survivors to have answers, and medical providers to chart a course of care throughout the survivor’s lifetime.

**2.) If you are unable to locate your medical records through the abortion provider or facility, you may want to consider contacting a medical records retrieval service or a lawyer who specializes in medical records access.** They may be able to assist you in obtaining your records through alternative means.

If you’re told by one staff member that there are no records, don’t be afraid to ask if they have a formal release you can fill out to request these records.

Keep trying! If they tell you that the records are inaccessible because they’re old and they now keep records digitally, don’t be afraid to ask if there’s a contact person or process to access the old, paper files. Ask, ask again. And frankly, sometimes it’s just the matter of connecting with the right person – someone who has worked there a long time – someone who is willing to help get answers for you – someone who has a heart for what you’re going through.

**Consider hiring a professional search specialist.** If you are struggling to make progress with your search, a professional search specialist or investigator may be able to assist you with locating your records or at least being able to understand the laws and policies of your jurisdiction and the facility.

**3.) With support, come to a place of peace with “not knowing.”** We know this is easier said than done. But many of us have had to come to accept that we may never know the answers to the questions we have about our lives or even specific questions we have about the abortion attempts we survived.

It's important to approach this search with compassion for yourself and for any family members involved. Remember that this can be a complex and emotional process.



THE  
Abortion Survivors  
NETWORK

[abortionsurvivors.org](https://abortionsurvivors.org)