

What if your child asks for more information on the donor?

Children are naturally curious and may have questions about the donor. Asking more about their donor does not mean that they are rejecting you. As they get older they may want to explore and find out more information.

There will be non-identifying information about the donor available at the clinic you attended. Sometimes the donor can be contacted to provide more detail. Some donors may not be able to be contacted and you should prepare your child for this.

The reproductive medicine clinics have counsellors who can help. This is a free service to you and your child (and other family members if needed).

Resources

Donor Conception Support Groups provide an opportunity to talk to others in a similar situation and for your children to meet other donor children.

South Australia – Karen: 8296 0537

National - Leonie or Warren (02) 9724 1366

Clinics: Repromed - 8333 8111 and

Flinders Reproductive Medicine - 8204 4343

COPE - 8223 3433, Oasis Infertility Support - 8223 7434,

Child and Youth Health - Parent Helpline 1300 364 100
(24 hour service, cost of a local call)

Reading for parents

'Let the Offspring Speak: Discussions on Donor Conception', Donor Conception Support Group of Australia Inc. 1997

Families Following Assisted Conception - what do we tell our child?, Alexandra M. McWhinnie University of Dundee 1997

The Gift of a Child, Robert and Elizabeth Snowdon 1986

Having Your Baby by Donor Insemination, Elizabeth Noble 1987

How I Began: The Story of DI, Infertility Social Workers Group NSW 1988

Web sites

Dept of Human Services' reproductive technology site -
www.dhs.sa.gov.au/reproductive_technology

The Donor Conception Support Group -
<http://members.optushome.com.au/dcsg/>

Oasis Infertility Support Inc -
www.chariot.net.au/~oasisupport

Access - www.access.org.au

Repromed - www.repromed.com.au

Flinders Reproductive Medicine -
www.flindersivf.com.au

Reminders

- ❖ Everyone has the right to know about their background.
- ❖ Secrets in families can undermine the trust and stability of family relationships.
- ❖ There is now an increasing emphasis for donors to let their identity be known, and this may become law.
- ❖ More and more diseases are now known to have a genetic basis.
- ❖ Tell your children even if they are too young to fully understand.
- ❖ Be prepared to answer more questions as your child grows older.
- ❖ There is a range of support and help available to individuals, couples and groups.

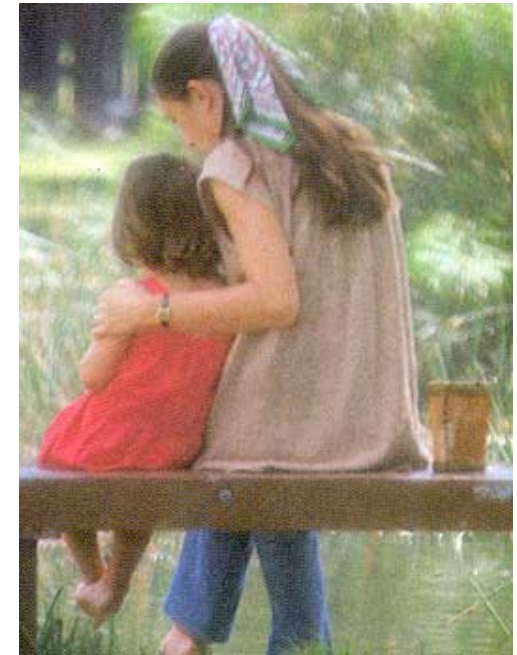
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DONOR CONCEPTION – TELLING YOUR CHILD



Reproductive technology using donated eggs, sperm or embryos may be the only way some people can have a baby.

These children are very much wanted and many happy families have been formed in this way.

In the past parents were often advised not to tell their child of their donor conception. We now know that this is not necessarily in the best interests of the child, and that children have the right to know how they were conceived and about their genetic history. Many people concerned with children's welfare and adults who were born from donated sperm are leading the way to change the law so that in the future all children can find information about their donor origins.



You may have gone through a roller coaster of emotions and will have had to come to terms with not having a child that is genetically 'yours'. You may not have told anyone including the child's grandparents, uncles, aunts and friends. However your child's history should not be kept secret from them. You may need support, and your child may need support. You may have fears that telling your child will harm your relationship with your child. Many parents are now facing this complex issue.

The Law in SA

Under the Reproductive Technology Act 1988 donors have the right to have their identity kept secret unless they agree in writing to release information. Some children have been born as a result of "known" donation from family members or friends. In most cases non-identifying information about the donor has been kept confidentially. This may include details such as height, weight, colouring, interests, occupation and family background. Any person over the age of sixteen years born from donated sperm, eggs or embryos may access this information provided it cannot identify the donor.

In recent years donors are more willing to let their identities be known. Parents nowadays are counselled to tell their children about their origins.

Why telling is important - the right to know your history

Our genetic identity is part of our history - it is the beginning of our life story. Knowing our history helps us to understand who we are. Secrecy is not in the best interests of the child. Experience tells us that knowing of donor origins is not a problem in itself.

The circumstances in which disclosure or discovery occurs can, however, cause problems. We also know that the absence of such information can damage self-esteem.

If your child is told by somebody else or accidentally finds out, they may feel a sense of betrayal.

Why telling is important - medical reasons

We are born with an inherited tendency towards developing certain diseases later in life. If we know our history it can help to either get an early diagnosis or prevent diseases developing, eg bowel or breast cancer. Donors are asked to record the diseases in their families and this information is available from the clinics, for your child.

DNA testing and blood group testing are becoming more common and such tests can show that two people may not be related as thought. Receiving such important and personal information in this way can seriously damage a sense of trust and family relationships.

There is a very small but real risk that when your child becomes an adult they will meet, fall in love and have sex with their half-brother or sister. If both knew their origins they could check on whether they were related before this happened.

Why telling is important - family relationships

Secrets in families can undermine the trust and stability of family relationships. Secrets are hard to keep for long - the idea of a life-long secret is a great burden.

The stress of keeping secrets can cause arguments, conflict and stress.

Being secretive may indicate to others that we are ashamed, especially to the child. Infertility is a health problem, not a reason for shame.

When to tell

Children should be told as soon as they are able to understand rather than be left to guess. They may wonder why you waited so long or they may find out from somebody else.

How and when you tell your child is important. There is no set age that is best - children develop at different rates. Start telling your child even if you think they are too young to understand.

Try telling it like a story, especially for younger children. Don't make it sound like a big secret. Remember many people had their children this way.

Make your child feel special in this knowledge. Tell them how wanted they were. Compare it with other ways of family formation such as adoption and step-families.

Telling family and friends

All families are different and talking to a counsellor about how to tell may be helpful. If children know, they may tell others. If you have told a family member and not your child, the 'secret' may come out.

Choose people who will be supportive when told and who can provide moral support. Remember infertility is common (1 in 7 couples).

Surveys have shown that most people approve of and support the use of donors to help create families.

How children respond

Be prepared for reactions that you may not be expecting.

Your child may reassure you that it doesn't alter how much they love you. Some children may not be at all interested.

Your child may tell you that they thought something was different because no one talked about them having 'mum's eye colour' or 'dad's nose' for example.

Children may be curious about how it all happened. Practice for what you might tell them.