

Donor conception: telling your child

There are many ways to make a family. Donor conception is when people use eggs, sperm or embryos donated from someone else to have a baby.

Knowing where we come from is important so it's good for children to know their story from the start.

Why telling your child is important

There are many reasons people have babies with the help of donors. You may be a solo parent, a same sex couple or have medical reasons. You may use a donor you know who becomes involved in your child's life, or a donor from a reproductive/fertility clinic.

Whatever the situation, it is important children grow up knowing their origins.

- Knowing where we come from helps us understand our genetic makeup and more about who we are.
- Being aware of our medical history means we can take steps to prevent, or get early help for, any diseases passed on in our genes, eg some cancers or heart disease.
- When children are older they can avoid the small but real risk of being sexual with anyone they are related to, eg half siblings.

While it is never too late, talking to your child from an early age about how you became a family makes it a normal part of your family story. You don't need



to worry about sitting down and having 'the big talk' at the 'right time'.

Secrets can be risky

Some parents think that not telling their child will protect them from being teased or talked about but this can be a risk.

- Secrets can come out by mistake, eg if your child needs a medical test that shows they don't share your genes.
- They may find out from someone else or by chance. This could undermine their trust in family relationships.
- Your child and others might think you are ashamed of having a baby this way.

Telling your child

Children often want to know where babies come from when they are about 3 or 4 years old. You could:

- say to young children 'A baby is made from an egg from a woman and sperm from a man.'

Some families need to get an egg or a sperm from someone called a donor. A kind donor helped us to make you'

- make a book of their life story, eg photos/ certificates from the clinic, during pregnancy and their birth. You can add to this as they grow.

Donor-conceived young people say it is best when their parents are the ones to tell them.



In talking with your child:

- make it normal and natural – it's just one of the ways to make a family
- use words that suit their age and maturity
- have ongoing conversations over time rather than a 'one-off' talk
- let them know how happy you are about bringing them into the world with the help of a donor. Make it clear you are their 'real parent'
- repeat positive stories as they grow up
- make sure they know they can talk to you at any time
- support them as they get older if they want to access information about the donor and any donor-related siblings.

Having open and relaxed conversations with your child builds their confidence and helps them feel loved and cherished.



How will my child respond?

- Your child's responses may vary as they grow up. They may ask lots of questions, or not seem that interested.

- As teenagers they may want to learn more about and meet their donor. If this happens it's important for their expectations to be realistic, and to have your support.

If your child wants to know more about their donor they are not rejecting you. They just want to know more about where they come from.

South Australian law

In South Australia a recipient parent can at any time ask the reproductive clinic for non-identifying donor information, eg height, weight, build, skin colour, interests, occupation, medical and family background.

On 26 February 2025 a statewide Donor Conception Register was established to give donor-conceived adults, the parent(s) of a donor-conceived child and donors access to information about the people they are connected to. See www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/donorconception

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people.

Want more information?

Scan the QR Code to see the full version of this Parent Easy Guide.



Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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