



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.

We all need to know where we come from so it's important children know their story from the start.

Why telling your child is important

There are many reasons people have babies with the assistance of donors. You may be a sole parent, a same-sex couple or have medical issues. You may use a donor you know, who becomes involved in your child's life or obtain a donation from a reproductive clinic.

Whatever the situation, it is important children grow up knowing their origins. Knowing where we come from helps us to understand and feel good about who we are. Knowing our medical history is important too. We can take steps to prevent or get early help for any diseases passed on in our genes, eg some cancers or heart disease.

Talking to your child from an early age about how they were conceived 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'.

There is also a small but real risk that when your child is older they could be sexual with someone they are related to, eg half siblings. If both people know their background they can check whether they are related before this happens.

Secrets can be risky

Some parents think that not telling their child will protect them from being teased or talked about. This means keeping a secret. Secrets can come out by mistake and may undermine trust in family relationships.

Keeping a secret about how they were created can also make a child and others think you are ashamed of having a baby this way.

Think about what might happen if your child finds out how they were conceived from someone else or by chance. They might have a DNA or blood test for some reason that shows they don't share the same genes as you.

Telling your child

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

You might want to make a book about their life story and add to it as they get older. You could start with photos of you and your partner at the clinic and at different stages of your pregnancy. You could put in copies of forms and certificates, and photos of their birth.

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 is just one of the ways people make a family
- use words that suit their age and maturity
- let them know how happy you are about bringing them into the world with the help of a donor. Make it clear that the donor is someone who gave you an egg or a sperm, just like people give blood to help others. A donor is not their 'real parent', you are their parents
- repeat stories in positive ways as they grow up so that it becomes a normal part of their life
- make sure they know they can talk to you at any time.



If a child is not told until they are older they could feel that parents haven't been honest. They may feel a sense of betrayal and that their life is not what they thought it was.

Having open and relaxed conversations with your child about where they came from 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. They may watch to see how you feel about it.

As children become teenagers they may want to know more. One of the important tasks for teenagers is to work out their own identity. Even though you may be very close, your child might want to learn more about and meet their donor. This doesn't mean you are any less their parent. It just means they want to meet others who share their genes.

It is important for them to have realistic expectations if they meet their donor, and to have your support. It may also help for them to get to know other donor-conceived young people.

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

Currently in South Australia donor information is kept by the reproductive clinic and can include things such as a donor's height, weight and build, skin colour, interests, occupation, and medical and family background. Donors are asked to record health problems in their family so that you and your child are aware of any possible issues. A recipient parent can request non-identifying donor information at any time.

Before 2004 donors were usually anonymous. From September 2004 donors must have consented to being identified once a child reaches 18 years.

At 18 years of age (or from 16 if they are considered mature enough) a donor-conceived young person can request information about their donor. Whether the information identifies the donor or not will depend on when the donation was made. If it was prior to 2004, the donor may not have given consent for their identity to be shared.

A Donor Conception Register is scheduled to be available in November 2021. It will be a central place for donor-conceived adults, donors and recipient parents to access information.

Support from reproductive clinics

Some clinics provide ongoing services to parents as part of their donor program. Talk with your clinic about the services they offer and any costs involved.

Want more information?

Registered reproductive clinics

Some clinics provide ongoing services for parents and donor-conceived children, young people and adults including how parents can talk with their child, other family members and friends. Find information about registered clinics at www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority

Resources on telling children about where they came from and talking to other family members/friends. Support groups for parents, including solo mums, as well as donor-conceived adults www.varta.org.au

Solo Mums by Choice

Online forum for solo mums <https://smcaustralia.org.au/our-forum>

Donor Conception Network (UK)

Parent-led family support network. 'Out of Europe' annual membership available www.dcnetwork.org

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'About babies', 'Being a parent', 'Being a Mum', 'Being a Dad', 'Self-esteem' www.parenting.sa.gov.au



Government of South Australia

Parenting SA

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

Ph: 08 8303 1660
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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