



Time to tell



What we know about telling

In the past, parents were often advised not to tell children they were conceived using a donor. We now know that this is not in the best interests of the child. It is best if children learn about their conception from their parents.

Despite growing use and acceptance of donor conception treatment, parents may struggle with the questions related to whether to tell their children about their origins and how to talk to them about it.

Children have the right to know how they were conceived and their genetic history.

Teenagers and young adults who were donor-conceived stress the importance of knowing how they were conceived. They tell us that they understand how difficult it is for parents to tell. However, they want their parents to give them this important information.

What if your child asks for more information about their donor?

Children are naturally curious, and if they have not already met their donor, they may wonder what they are like.

This is normal and healthy and does not undermine your role as their parent(s) in any way. You may be curious too.

In Victoria, donor-conceived young adults, parents and donors have the right to seek information about each other. Applications can be made to the donor conception registers.

Why tell?

Identity

For many donor-conceived people, knowing their origins is an important part of understanding who they are.

Medical reasons

As knowledge about the inheritance of disease increases, it becomes more important to know your genetic history.

Birth certificate

When donor-conceived children born from 2010 apply for their birth certificate as adults, they will be informed that more information is available about their birth. If they are not already aware they are donor-conceived, they are likely to find out when they ask about this additional information.

DNA testing

DNA and blood-group tests are becoming more common. These tests can show that two people, who thought they were related, are in fact not related. Receiving such important and personal information via test results can damage trust and family relationships.

Consanguinity

There is a very small but potential risk that a donor-conceived person may meet and form a sexual relationship with a half-brother or half-sister. Knowing and being comfortable discussing their origins with others may reduce this risk.

Family relationships

Secrets can create a great burden. They can undermine trust and cause conflict in a family. Being secretive about their conception may indicate to a child that their parents are ashamed.

Time to tell

Being open about donor conception may help your child understand that families are created in many ways.

Donor-conceived people who learn about their conception in unplanned or unpleasant ways can feel betrayed or deceived. It is far better that parents tell them in a planned, loving way.

When to tell?

It is best to tell children while they are young but it is never too late to tell them.

Many parents lack confidence in telling their family story. Rather than deciding not to tell, they just keep putting it off. Research shows that the earlier you start telling a child the story of how they were conceived, the more straightforward and stress-free it is for you and your child.

You can practice before your child is old enough to understand so they will never remember a time when they did not know. Tell your family story with love and pride.

How to tell?

Telling is not a one-off event – it is an ongoing conversation. There are many children's books to help you. You might also like to make your own storybook about how you became a family. From then on, you can be guided by your child's development and their questions.

An example of what you could say...

I/we really wanted to have you and become a family but I/we couldn't make you on our own. We went to the doctor for some help. S/he told us about a donor - someone who gives something to someone else to help them start a baby (just like a blood, kidney or charity donor).

A donor offered to give me/us some of their eggs/sperm/ embryos to make you. I/we went to the hospital and the doctor put the eggs/sperm inside mum and you started to grow. Mum's tummy grew bigger and bigger until you were ready to be born. We were so excited to have you.

I/we will always be your parent/s. I/we will always love you and be grateful to our donor for helping me/us to have you and become a family.

In summary:

- Donor-conceived people benefit from knowing about their origins.
- If you do not tell, children are likely to discover they are donor-conceived some other way.
- Secrets in families can undermine trust and the stability of family relationships.
- Telling your child early is better and easier for your child.
- Be prepared to answer more questions as your child grows older.
- It is never too early or too late to tell.