

Finding a surrogate



Finding a surrogate within Australia can seem impossible. You may ask yourself – ‘Where do I begin? Who could I possibly ask?’ You may also feel apprehensive about needing someone’s help for such a personal purpose.

This information aims to help guide you through this process. You may also wish to contact a fertility clinic counsellor for advice and support.



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Some women in Australia are willing and happy to help others to become parents through surrogacy.

Engaging an Australian surrogate has the benefit of legal protections that ensure that she is known to your potential child and to you. She is perhaps more likely to have a similar value set, cultural background, and language to your own.

Treatment using an Australian surrogate within a local clinic is a medically safe and controlled option that is also much more convenient than travelling abroad.

Surrogacy in Australia poses fewer legal challenges regarding immigration, citizenship, and recognition of parentage.

For more information about the legal, emotional and practical aspects of surrogacy, visit www.varta.org.au/surrogacy.

You may also wish to contact your clinic counsellor for advice and support.

Are you emotionally ready?

Intended mothers, ask yourselves:

Have you have given yourself as much time and space to reconcile not being able to be pregnant and give birth, before you start looking for a surrogate? Most people need time to grieve for such a loss. If you want your child to be comfortable that they were carried by a surrogate, you need to be too.

Intended fathers, ask yourselves:

Is surrogacy the most comfortable option for you? Have you explored other avenues to become a parent? It is important if you will not be genetically connected to the child that you feel comfortable with this and that you have given yourself the time and space to let go of not being able to pass on your genes.

Your child is much wanted and planned for. It is important that you show them that you are positive and proud of the journey you took to bring them into the world, so that they can be too. You may benefit from talking to other parents who have children as a result of a surrogate's help.

Many intended parents experience doubts. Many fear that the surrogate will want to keep the baby or will want to intrude or interfere with your family. These concerns are not borne out by reality. Few surrogates do not relinquish the child. Internationally, there are more cases of the commissioning parents not wanting to take responsibility for the child. Remember, a surrogate carries to help you become a parent. All surrogates and commissioning parents in Victoria have counselling to ensure that they are fully aware and are emotionally prepared as possible for what is involved.



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Who makes an ideal surrogate?

People often wonder what sort of woman is willing to be a surrogate and what qualities you should look for.

Surrogates are preferably:

- aged between 25 – 40 years. Women younger than 25 are not legally permitted to act as surrogates in Victoria. They may also not be able to fully appreciate the implications of surrogacy. Women older than 40 are at greater risk of health issues during pregnancy, including birth complications. It is possible to use an older surrogate in Victoria if their medical specialist considers it safe.
- already mothers themselves. This is a legal requirement in Victoria. Having already given birth indicates a surrogate is able to carry a pregnancy safely and means they are more likely to understand the significance of acting as a surrogate and what it means for you to become a parent. It is also preferable, though not essential, if they have completed their own family.
- healthy – physically, mentally and in terms of lifestyle.
- motivated by a desire to help others. It is illegal in Australia to pay surrogates. However, they can be reimbursed for travel and medical expenses.
- sensible and settled. It is advisable that a surrogate's life is stable and they have a good support network. If someone is recovering from a recent break-up or has started a new job, coping with a pregnancy is likely to be demanding.
- prepared to be identified to the child, as Victorian legislation requires this.

It is important that you have the same views as your surrogate as to how your arrangement will work and that you 'click' with her. It is likely you will have some link with your surrogate for the rest of your child's life so it is important that you get along.

How to find a surrogate?

Here are two ways you may consider:

- Asking someone you know
- Finding a surrogate you don't know

Asking someone you know

If you prefer your surrogate to be someone you already know, it can be potentially awkward to ask them directly. If the person is not comfortable with surrogacy, this may affect your future relationship with them. Rather than directly asking someone to help, it may be preferable to let it be known that you have been advised by your fertility specialist to consider surrogacy and that you are looking for a potential surrogate. Then wait to see who offers. If you have been private about your journey towards creating a family, this may seem very challenging. Discussing your situation with others can help you to feel more comfortable.

Potential surrogates are everywhere. However, they won't know you need one unless you let it be known. It helps to be proactive and step outside your comfort zone. The more people who know that you require a surrogate, the more chance that someone will offer to help you.





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Finding someone you don't know



Be aware that in Australia it is illegal to advertise for a surrogate. You cannot advertise or publish a statement or notice that you are seeking a surrogate. You will need to be careful in making public statements, even on some wide circulation social media. If in doubt, seek professional advice.

You may find a surrogate through your networks, through word-of-mouth or other means. It may be that a friend of a friend has been considering acting as a surrogate for some time and offers when she hears of your experience. You may wish to discuss the issue with your clinic.

Many people find it helpful to join a support group for advice and emotional support. A popular support group for people considering surrogacy is **Surrogacy Australia**. Surrogacy Australia is a members-only community. There is an online forum and face-to-face social meetings.

When accessing an internet forum, it is advisable to follow the usual social media practices to protect your privacy.

When a potential surrogate responds

Whether it is someone you know well or someone you don't, the principles of discussing surrogacy with a potential surrogate are similar. If you don't already know the person, initial discussions can take place online, by email or on the phone. Conversations can be continued in person at a neutral location.

It is important to thank the potential surrogate for considering this and to offer to send them further information about what is involved physically, emotionally and legally. Potential surrogates need to be aware that surrogacy will involve medical treatment, including injections, embryo transfers and internal examinations. If donor eggs are required, this needs to be discussed with the potential surrogate.

The fertility clinic where you are considering having treatment is likely to be able to provide information. You might also suggest they read the information on surrogacy and assisted reproductive treatment on the **VARTA website**.

When meeting with an unknown potential surrogate

It is important for these conversations to be as relaxed as possible so that neither person feels like they are going for a job interview! Expect both you and your partner (if you have one) and the potential surrogate to feel quite nervous when talking or meeting for the first time. Be yourself. Be honest. Be prepared to share personal information about yourself.

It can seem like quite a surreal experience – a bit like a blind date except very different. Over time you can relax and get to know each other.

At the back of this brochure, you'll find a list of questions that may be used as a guide.



Finding a surrogate

Take your time. Don't rush

It can be difficult to take the time needed when the desire to have a child is so strong. You can feel like you just want the surrogate to get pregnant as quickly as possible. However, the issues are complex and both you and your surrogate need time and space to think them through and to decide whether or not to proceed.

Each party is assessing the other, trying to gauge whether they can trust each other and whether their views are compatible. Many conversations are needed to build a strong foundation of trust and commitment. This foundation will be vital, especially if anything unforeseen occurs.

Ask yourself:

'Can I imagine my child approving of our choice of surrogate and the way we have gone about this?'

'Will I be comfortable about our arrangement at my child's twenty-first birthday and beyond? Will my child? Will the surrogate? Will her partner, children and extended family?'

While you may have been thinking through the implications of surrogacy for some time, your potential surrogate might have only recently considered it. If you don't know her well, she needs to get to know and trust you and be sure that you are the right commissioning parents for her. It is crucial to give your potential surrogate the thinking space she needs and to avoid putting any undue pressure on her. However, stay in contact, as the potential surrogate may assume if they don't hear from you that you are no longer interested.

Don't presume if your potential surrogate is a sister or a close friend that she will automatically have similar views. It is just as important to talk it through carefully with someone you know well. You do not want to risk losing her and the long history you share.

It is important that the surrogate's partner is also involved. Sometimes the partners of potential surrogates are not comfortable with the idea. The potential surrogate also needs time to consider the implications for her immediate and extended family. If your potential surrogate, or their partner, realises that surrogacy is not for them or would only proceed out of a sense of obligation to you, thank them and reassure them that it is better to withdraw.

Think it through together

Little issues can become big issues if they are not dealt with. It can be difficult to have these conversations as you don't want to upset each other or jeopardise your relationship. If there are any potential 'red flag' issues that you don't agree on between you, it is important to pay particular attention to these and to talk these issues through, even though these are likely to be challenging conversations. It is important that you continue to like and respect your surrogate and are able to stay in touch for your potential child's sake.

Beside the initial matching, it is important to explore the long-term expectations of all parties, including their partner's, about future contact and the potential role the surrogate might have in the child's life. Ideally you and your surrogate will have similar ideas about how you will stay in touch and what role your surrogate will play in your child's life. Some commissioning parents and surrogates agree to ongoing occasional contact and the exchange of photos/cards/emails/Skype. Others prefer to have more contact – some commissioning parents and surrogates develop strong friendships.



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Next steps

If any of the parties have doubts or different expectations about the arrangement that cannot be overcome, then it is probably better that you don't go ahead. In the long run it is better for you and your potential child that you find someone with whom you share compatible views.

However, if you and your surrogate feel comfortable about going ahead, all parties will have counselling, medical and legal appointments and there will be detailed consent forms to sign. This process is to ensure that you are all fully informed and prepared and there is a positive outcome for all.

Beware

While the vast majority of potential surrogates are wonderful, generous people you do need to be careful. There have been occasions when a potential surrogate has asked for significant payment. If your potential surrogate asks for payment, stop all contact and inform your clinic counsellor.

Further resources

VARTA has information about surrogacy issues including films, podcasts, articles and recommended books on the VARTA website: www.varta.org.au/surrogacy

Questions to ask your potential surrogate

When a potential surrogate is already known to you

Notes

- How do you think being a surrogate might affect our relationship?
- Do you think your relationship with a potential child born from surrogacy would be different from your relationship with a child I was able to have without your help?
- Who in our circle of friends and family do you think should be aware of our arrangement?

When a potential surrogate is known or unknown to you

These questions are intended as a guide and some would not apply if your potential surrogate was already known to you.

Motivations

- What makes you interested in carrying for us?
- How long have you been thinking about being a surrogate?
- What attracted you to me/us?
- Have you ever been a surrogate for anyone else?
- Is this the right time for you to be a surrogate? What else is going on in your life right now?

Questions to ask your potential surrogate

Family and work

Notes

- What is your family situation?
Partner? Children? Extended family?
- Is your family comfortable with you doing this?
How might this affect them? Are they willing to support your decision if you choose to do this?
- If you haven't told people, do you intend to?
If so, when might you do this? How might you explain your pregnancy to others including your children, friends, family, and people in the supermarket?
- Do you work outside the home?
How flexible is your workplace if you need to take time off?

Health

- How old are you?
- Do you or your extended family have any medical conditions that might affect the pregnancy?
- Do you smoke, drink, use recreational drugs?
- Can you tell me about your previous pregnancies? Have you ever had a termination, miscarriage, stillbirth or relinquished a child for adoption?

Questions to ask your potential surrogate

Medical procedures

Notes

- What do you know about the medical procedures involved in being a surrogate? Are you comfortable with having injections, internal ultrasounds and embryo transfer procedures and the possible risks they entail?

- How would you manage with treatment and work including looking after your own children?

- If an egg and/or sperm donor are being used – are you comfortable with this?

- Are you aware there are health risks to you during the pregnancy and the birth?

- The IVF process may not be successful. How would you feel if you do not become pregnant or miscarry?

- It can take a long time to complete all the steps before we commence treatment (medical, legal and counselling appointments and approval from the Patient Review Panel). How much time are you prepared to commit to this?

- If the first or second embryo transfer were not successful would you be prepared to try again?

Pregnancy

- How would you feel if you became pregnant with twins?

- What tests regarding the baby's health and wellbeing would you consider having?

- How would you feel if you were to become pregnant and the baby was diagnosed with a serious abnormality and we wanted to terminate the pregnancy? What if you thought there should be a termination and we disagreed?

Questions to ask your potential surrogate

Pregnancy continued

Notes

- How involved would you want us to be involved during the pregnancy? Would you feel comfortable if we/I came to medical appointments with you? How much contact is too much contact? How little contact might be too little for you?

- Would you agree to us finding out the gender of the baby? Would you be disappointed if we didn't?

- How would you manage with pregnancy and work including looking after your own children?

- If you became sick during the pregnancy and needed bed rest or hospitalisation, how would you manage? What support could we give you?

Birth

- What is your ideal birth? Where would you want to deliver? What obstetrician and hospital would you prefer?

- Would you like us to attend or would you prefer we wait outside? Who should cut the cord?

- Some surrogates express colostrum and breast milk for the baby. What is your view on this?

- Have you thought about possible complications occurring at birth or if the child was delivered and was very sick or disabled?

Questions to ask your potential surrogate

Future contact and role

	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you think you will feel towards the child you helped us make?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would you be prepared to stay in contact with us if the treatment is successful and we are able to have a child with your help?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How much contact would you ideally like to have and would you prefer it to be face-to-face contact or via email/Facebook/mail. Will it possibly involve family celebrations?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We plan to tell our child about you as we think it will be important for our child to know where they have come from and your special part in their beginning? Are you comfortable with this?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What role do you imagine you might have in our child's life?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would you like our child to call you?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you imagine there will be any future contact between our child and your children?	

Legal implications and costs

As part of the process, you will be required to have independent legal advice so the legal implications for you will be explained in detail. This lists some of basic considerations but is very limited. To find out more about the legal issues, visit www.varta.org.au/surrogacy

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you aware that it is illegal for us to pay you? We will pay any necessary expenses e.g. medical, counselling, legal and travel expenses and expenses relating to pregnancy, including life insurance.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you aware that at birth you would be the legal parent until parentage is transferred to us at a later stage?	