

Finding Out You Are Donor Conceived When You Are a Teenager

Interview with Narelle aged 25

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“ I think some parents think they shouldn’t tell and I think once their child is past a certain age. But I think, regardless of the child’s age, the sooner you tell the better, even if they are 21 it’s better knowing then and knowing the truth than never knowing at all.”

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Narelle: I was initially quite shocked as you would be. I laughed initially, out of shock I think and thought it was funny really. I was what I used to call a test tube baby. That’s the only term of reference that I really had in my mind and didn’t know much about it. So it was a bit confusing as well I guess.

I’m Narelle, I’m 25 years old and I’m donor-conceived. I’m currently a social worker, working in the foster care system.

I found out I was donor conceived when I was 15 years old and had no idea of my donor-conception status before that time.

I think Mum and Dad left it a long time to tell me due to the era of the time of my conception being that of secrecy, anonymity - being the underlying factor. I think they thought it would be best that they didn’t tell me at all because that’s what the doctors were advising them at the time, that it would be in my best interests that I don’t, or didn’t know about my donor-conception status. So I think with the late 80s and the shift in thinking around donor-conception and telling children they began to think that it might be the best thing for me to know. And 15 years old it probably wasn’t the best time. However I’m glad they told me at all, and really once you passed a certain age it’s going to be something that you remember. Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority PO Box 16123 Collins Street West, Vic 8007 Tel (03) 8601 5250 Fax (03) 9521 5277

Announcer: For Narelle’s parents this was a difficult decision. How do you break news like this to an impressionable teenager? Narelle remembers the moment.

Narelle: They said they had something to tell my sister and I. My sister is seven years older and she was conceived naturally, quote unquote. And they sat us down at home and said that, er, they had some news or information about me they thought I should know. They said they went through the IVF process which initially was a bit confusing because I didn’t know whether that meant there was a donor involved. But they

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soon disclosed that my Dad was infertile and he could no longer have children after they had my sister. That they sought treatment with Prince Henry's and used another man's sperm to conceive me.

Yeah, so I think being told at 15 wasn't necessarily the best age. And some people think that my parents should have waited. However I really think that 15 was better than being told at 18 or 21 or any time after that really. And the older you get I think the harder it will be to process. Almost having a previous self and having to reform your identity after having been told. And it's a process that you go through and it is difficult. I think some parents think they shouldn't tell and I think once their child is past a certain age. But I think, regardless of the child's age, the sooner you tell the better, even if they are 21 it's better knowing then and knowing the truth than never knowing at all.

Announcer: Narelle has known the truth for more than ten years. That's given her time to consider just when donor-conceived children should be told about their beginnings.

Narelle: I think that donor-conceived people should know that they are donor-conceived from the time that they're born. It should be part of their life story from before they're even born, you know. Start telling the story, start practising telling the story when the baby's in the belly. I guess it's like explaining the birds and the bees you. You practice that and it's something that. It must be scary. I can't say that I understand personally that experience but from the earliest stage possible. You know children can adapt quite well news and much better than adults at times.

I think it depends on the family what words you use. It will depend on cultural differences. It will depend on the form of the family. So I think what ever you are comfortable with. However not to sugar coat it as well. I think sometimes there is the potential for parents to use words like the donor is like this "magical man", you know, not to fantasise the donor or the situation. And just to tell it in plain English so that it's no confusing as well.

I think that parents should be honest with their children and have always believed that, that everything, not just donor-conception. Donor-conception is a different way of forming the family. It should be... if you've chosen to go down that path it should be something that you are honest about and with that honesty I think will come mutual respect between parent and child. And I know that I definitely respect my parents a lot for having told me given that they could have kept that information from me. So be honest with your kids, they'll love you no matter what.

Narelle passed away in March 2013. She was able to meet her donor shortly before she died. This brought both her and her donor great happiness. It was very sad however, that they did not have more time to spend with each other.

VARTA would like to acknowledge the enormous help and support Narelle gave to our 'Time to Tell' campaign and public education programs.