

Talking to your children about using an egg donor to become a family

Interview with Kim and her children Devon, Rachel and Jesse

May 2008

Kim:

I think the most important thing is to not have it be a big deal. To me the earlier you tell the easier... the less of a big deal you can make it.

..... I'm Kim, I used an egg donor for my 11 year old twins. And I have a genetic son who is 16. The story that we told was that my eggs didn't work for whatever reason. And so we found a woman who was willing to donate some of her eggs and we put them together with Dad's sperm and then those eggs were put back in my uterus and grew into babies. I had been very anxious initially about how I was going to feel about having babies who were not my genes. And once I got over that I decided that I was going to take the opportunity to make it easier for other people. Kind of potentially a political decision. Well this was being talked about before they had any reaction, before they knew. I mean mostly when they were babies it was talked about with other people in front of them. So it was just one of those things that they just became familiar with over time because it was talked about with Devon, talked about with friends....

Devon:

I'm Devon. I'm Rachel and Jesse's brother, older brother. I'm 16, turning 17 in September.

It hasn't really bothered me. I've treated them as brother and sister. I guess that I found out... as normal brother and sister. I guess that I found out at younger age. I didn't really fully understand. So I thought that they'd come around like everyone else, come around. I guess now that I understand it doesn't really matter. I love them. They're my brother and sister. They always will be.

They've grown up with me and the family all their lives. So they're going to act the same way as anyone who is fully part of the family. And I think it's good that Rachel and Jesse know as opposed to finding out much later in life where it could have been a shock to them. And they could have experienced trouble in other aspects of their life.

Announcer:

Some parents don't tell their children about using a donor. But should children know? Rachel and Jesse have known about their beginnings for a long as they can remember.

Rachel:

I think they should know...I think they should know.

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Jesse:

Yeah, I agree well I don't think it should be kept as a secret or something.

Rachel:

Well I don't think it should be kept as a secret or something.

Devon:

Definitely go up and let your kids know. Make sure it's not....a complete shock.

Kim:

Well I don't think you need to start out feeling comfortable to make the decision to do it. I wasn't comfortable the first... million times I said it. But it was a decision I had made. I had decided I wanted the kids to know. I wanted it to be something they weren't ashamed about. I wanted it to be something that was just part of their story about their lives and to that end I was going to talk about it as if it were a normal, ordinary thing even though telling people about it initially did make me anxious. I was never 100% sure of how people were going to respond. Although 999,000 out of a million have been positive or neutral about it. I can't really remember anybody having a negative reaction to it. It's occasionally provided discussions about the mysteries of what must this egg donor be like and... One of the kids can turn their tongue upside down and I can't or their dad can't then we know it must be the egg donor who can. I don't remember some of the other things we've discussed but these. But otherwise it's made no difference at all.

Announcer:

There was a time when Kim would talk about her donor-egg children with complete strangers. But now that the children have grown older would she still do so?

Kim:

Now I wouldn't but it's not because I don't think it's perfectly fine information. Now I feel like it's their information to share if they want to. When they are babies that was my information. But at this age I wouldn't have told their school, or friends. I told my friends because it was important to me that my friends knew. And I told people that I was never going to see again. But I think at this point it's pretty much their information. I don't necessarily tell friends that I've made here in the last few years because again I don't think it's relevant information. Unless it's a close friend of mine that kind of information is not public information any more. But were I to do it again, sure...

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Announcer:

While parents react in different ways, Kim's children have never been surprised by their beginnings.

Kim:

Jesse never could care less. He was very interested in the process, he wanted to know from when he was very young how it was done so that when he got older he could do the same thing and have a baby. Rachel was much less curious about the science of it. But Rachel expressed, from time to time, real sadness about not being my genes. She used to come up and say to me, I wish I looked more like you. And at times even get teary about it. It wasn't often. But it was every now and then. And at one point she came up to me... several years ago now, and said; remind me why the donor gave me away. So over time we've had to re-visit the situation as their understanding has increased. To re-visit that, it wasn't the donor giving you away etc. It was a few years ago she came to me and said, you know it's probably a good thing because you had breast cancer and I might not get breast cancer. Or if I were your genes I might have to worry about breast cancer but now I don't have to worry about breast cancer. So I think there has been a real shift as her understanding of things have improved, increased. But my guess is that we'll go in and out of that over time as well. My guess is that there'll be... I can imagine at least perhaps when she has a child or something like that there'll be a re-emergence of some of those feelings, I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised.

Announcer:

Then there was the extended family to consider; parents and grandparents.

Kim:

Well mother was dead so it wasn't an issue so I would not have been concerned about her. I was concerned about how my father was going to react, whether he would see these as grand children - because they were not his genes. And of course I was completely wrong about that. A baby is a baby, is a baby, is a baby. So he adores them and the rest of the extended family has treated them exactly the same as they've treated Devon and anyone else in the family. Both sides, Tom's family and my family have both treated them like my kids, 'cause they're my kids.

Kim:

I used to go help out in Devon's kindergarten class once a week and it was the year I was pregnant. I was very, very big. And in the morning when I would help out it was generally in "show and tell". It was circle time it was called. So kids would sit in a circle and teacher and I would sit with them and the kids would share whatever they needed to share. And Devon decided to share that particular day; in his Mum's uterus were two egg donor twins. And he had all the terminology exactly right. In my uterus there were two egg donor twins. And one of his class mates piped up; what's an egg donor twin? And I looked at the teacher and I said "go for it!" And he explained. He explained that sometimes women's eggs don't work and so an

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egg donor provides the egg and the dad provides the sperm. And that's what an egg donor baby is. And in my case there were two of them growing in my uterus. When the eggs were put together with the sperm those embryos, those little tiny babies were put back in the mother's uterus. And that's what's growing in my uterus. And the kids were perfectly content with that. Nobody had any more questions. Telling is about not having it be a big deal. Because there's no shame, no embarrassment. There's no feeling of I wish this weren't true. It's just, some people have two mums. Some people are looked after by their grandparents. Some people were born in the US. Some people were.... this is our particular story.