

# Navigating Donor-Linking

Advice for those starting the process from those who have been there

Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority



We spoke to donor-conceived people, parents and donors who have accessed VARTA Donor Conception Register Services to ask them whether there was something they wished they had known beforehand. This is what they said.

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## Timing

- Contact VARTA early
- Take it slowly
- Let the process pace itself as needed and as you need it to
- This will be a marathon and not a sprint

"I don't see it as being a negative process at all. It's just an extension of yourself." Donor-conceived person

"Life gets in the way. My parents both died 18 months ago...we started the process thinking, possibly it would be a bit quicker." Recipient parent

## Mindset

### Trust and acceptance

- Let the system help you
- VARTA will guide you through the process every step of the way
- Everyone is hoping for a good outcome and working towards this
- Allow yourself the time and space to adjust to change
- If you decide not to proceed -accept this and move on

"She laid it out re: what could actually happen. She let us go at our own pace. 'I'll let you go ahead – see how you go' and she'd check in with us." Donor

"You just don't know if you don't give it a go." Recipient parent

## Openness

- Have no expectations
- What you learn about the other party may be different from what you have been told or expected
- Be honest with your children/family
- Avoid judging your parents or your donor. They are the reason you are here.

# Navigating Donor-Linking

- You are not alone

"I went with a very open mind and thought well, hey, if nothing comes from this and I can't find out who he [the donor] is, I can photocopy the letter and tell [my child], 'Look, I tried'." (Recipient parent)

"No, never really thought there'd be a fairy-tale ending – it had taken so long to get that far, I was quite realistic with my expectations." (Donor-conceived person)

"In all honesty, all I wanted was genetics and medical history and probably heritage. That's all I expected. I didn't expect any contact with my donor. I was probably more thinking it would be contact with donor siblings." (Donor-conceived person)

## Connecting for the first time

- The initial letter is critically important - get support from VARTA to draft it
- If the donor-conceived person is very young- don't involve your child until after you and the donor has met.
- Think about your social media accounts - what impression may the other person have about you if they see this. Consider changing your privacy settings.
- Consider what next? At each step of the process and agree with the other person about next steps.
- It's going to be emotional and nerve wracking!

I was so worried that they were a criminal – I didn't want to be Ivan Milat's daughter – a serial killer, psychopath, sociopath..." Donor-conceived person

It's a happy ending really. I'm very appreciative – know this isn't what everyone experiences." Donor-conceived person

"It's very emotional – especially catching up for the first time and especially leaving." Donor

"It's still a can of worms I guess that we are opening up – everything so far has been positive." Recipient parent

"If they have any idea of who you are, clean up your Facebook account. You don't want to put someone off." Donor

## Support

- Access the counselling support VARTA provides.
- If you are from the country you can Skype or telephone VARTA
- Seek peer support from others who have already connected.

"My child said it's really nice to know I'm not alone. I don't know whether it was that they felt alone or that they were not the only person like this [donor-conceived] – that this is normal." Recipient parent

"When you're from the country, sometimes you feel the bumps a little more." Recipient parent