



Telling your child about your donation



lifecycle

working together for donor conception

If you are a sperm or egg donor, or considering becoming a donor, you may be thinking about how to share your decision with your own children or any you might have in the future. This leaflet gives you some ideas on when and how you might share your story.

Deciding to become a donor shows that you are someone who is generous and altruistic. Your donation is a wonderful gift, potentially giving others the opportunity to become parents.

If you donated at a UK clinic after the removal of anonymity in 2005, you should have considered the fact that any children born from your donation will be able to apply for information about you when they are adults. This could mean that you are contacted by them in the future.

If you donated before anonymity was removed, you may have thought about becoming an identifiable donor by re-registering. You can find more information about this on the Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority (HFEA) website at

www.hfea.gov.uk/1973.html.



Why tell

Numerous studies into the wellbeing of donor conception families state that it's generally best for donor-conceived people to be told about their origins in early childhood. The same is likely to be true for donors with their own families. To avoid possible misunderstandings, such as your children thinking you are someone else's parent, you might want to consider the benefits of

telling your children – both children you have now and any you might have in the future – about your donation.

Sharing information at the right age and in the right sort of language allows parents to be comfortable talking about their donation and enables their children to explore and gain understanding at their own pace.

When to tell

If you are planning to tell your child or children about your donation, you will want to consider when is the most appropriate time. Here are some examples of how you might approach the subject at various stages in their life:

- **At a very young age** (from birth to preschool): telling now enables you to find your own words before your child or children are old enough to question or be confused.
- **In early childhood** (primary school age): telling in small building blocks and simple stories helps you to find a simple way of explaining in your own words.
- **At an older age** (secondary school age and beyond): opportunities could be found – through books, TV programmes, online videos, friends and other family members

having babies – to talk about how people sometimes need help from someone else to have a child and that this is a very special and important thing to do.

Telling is not a one-off activity. Being comfortable and open allows your child or children to express their feelings and ask questions. Their thoughts and feelings will change as they get older, but if you continue to be comfortable talking about it you are showing that they too can be comfortable with your decisions.



How to tell

A simple story works for all ages

"To make a baby you need an egg from a woman and a sperm from a man. Not all women have eggs so mummy donated some of her eggs to another woman so she could become a mummy."

"Daddy donated some of his sperm to other families so they could have their own children."

The family album approach

While talking to your child about photos in a family album and sharing how much you (and your partner) wanted to become a family, you can describe the point at which you decided to donate to help someone else become a parent. This works regardless of whether you donated before you became a parent or after. If you donated as part of an egg or sperm sharing programme, you can talk about donating at the same time as wanting to have your own family.

If you have more than one child, it is important to explain to them the difference between their siblings and the child or children conceived with your assistance.

Potential questions your child might ask you

Depending on your child's age and how interested they are in your reason for donating, your child may ask you a number of questions about your donation. Some of these questions might be difficult to answer and some may have answers that are personal to you.

You may want to think about how to answer questions such as:

- **Why are you thinking about becoming/did you become a donor?**

You may want to share your reasons by explaining the thoughts, feelings and motivations that led you to thinking about /becoming a donor.



- **When, where and who did you donate to?**

How long ago did you donate? Did you donate to someone you know? Did you donate at a fertility clinic or in a private arrangement?

- **How many children were born?**

Do you know how many children were born following your donation? Not all donations lead to children so there is a chance that no children will be born from your donation.

If you donated at a clinic after 1 August 1991 and want to find this out you can contact the HFEA. More information is available on the HFEA website at www.hfea.gov.uk/1975.html.

- **What do you know about the children?**

If you know the person you donated to, you may know, or have information about, their children. If you had treatment at a UK fertility clinic, you can contact the HFEA to find out the year, sex, and number of children born following your donation. Visit the link above to find out how to do this.

- **Will the children look like me? What is their relationship to you and to me?**

These might be difficult questions to answer and how you deal with them may depend on the age of your child or children. You might want to talk to them about the genetic link they have with any child born from your donation. You might also want to explain the difference between being a donor and a parent: a donor is someone who provides the sperm or egg so someone else can become a parent, whereas a parent is someone who cares for and brings up a child (i.e. their mum or their dad).

You may want to explain that as a donor (unlike a parent) you have no rights over how the child will be brought up or any legal or financial obligation to any child born from your donation.

- **Will you meet the children in the future and could I potentially meet them?**

There are a number of factors that may affect the potential to meet the child or children born from your donation, such as whether you donated anonymously, if the child(ren) is/are aware of their donor conception, whether they wish to meet and what/if any relationship they would like with you and your family.

If you are thinking about re-registering as an identifiable donor, you could share your reasons for doing this with your children.

Find out more

If you want to find out what information you can access about children born from your donation, or what information they can access about you, please contact the appropriate organisation as follows:

- If you donated at a UK licensed fertility clinic after 1 August 1991, or if you want to re-register as an identifiable donor, contact the HFEA: **<http://www.hfea.gov.uk/egg-and-sperm-donors.html>**.
- If you donated before 1 August 1991, contact the Donor Conception Register: **www.donorconceivedregister.org.uk**.

If you would like to access professional support, you may be able to speak to a counsellor at the clinic where you donated. Alternatively your GP might be able to refer you to a counsellor or you could consult the following organisations for services in your area:

- British Infertility Counselling Association: **www.bica.net**.
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy: **www.bacp.co.uk**.
- Counselling Directory: **www.counselling-directory.org.uk**.



Lifecycle is a campaign that aims to find new ways of improving sperm and egg donation in the UK. Find out more on the HFEA website: **www.hfea.gov.uk/lifecycle.html**.