



Donor Conception Network

Telling and Talking

'Telling' and Talking about Donor Conception
with people aged 17 and over
A Guide for Parents



By Olivia Montuschi

Olivia Montuschi

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Donor Conception Network

The Donor Conception Network was started in 1993 by five families who were looking for support from others in being open with their children about donor conception. Members now include married and unmarried couples, single women, lesbian couples, parents who have been separated, divorced or widowed, individual adults who are donor offspring and some sperm and egg donors. About half of our members already have children and most of the others are contemplating or currently having fertility treatment with donated eggs, sperm or embryos.

We hold national meetings twice a year – with good child care and an older children's group – have local groups in many parts of the UK, provide a contact list of parents you can 'phone or email, have a twice yearly magazine and a lively website with an interactive forum open to members only.

Do join us.

Find out more from our website www.dcnetwork.org or 'phone 0208 245 4369.

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Olivia Montuschi
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Telling and Talking

17+

"Telling her has released a sense of freedom in us both and reaffirmed our closeness." Chris, mum to an 18 year old daughter.

Introduction

This booklet is for people who have built their families with the help of sperm donation (known in the past as AID and now DI) and are the parents of someone over the age of 17 who does not yet know about their family beginnings. It assumes that, for a range of reasons, you are seriously thinking about or have already decided that you now want to tell your adult child (or children) about how they came to be part of the family and are looking for some guidance on how to go about this. If your child is 17 or 18 then you may also find it helpful to read the booklet for parents of 12 – 16 year olds as well.

This booklet aims to help prepare and support you towards creating as positive a climate as you can when sharing this very personal truth about your family.

Over the next few pages you will find acknowledgement of your own possibly very mixed feelings, some very practical suggestions about how you can prepare yourself for telling, and insights into the potential feelings and responses of your child or children. There is also guidance on setting the scene, language to use at the time of 'telling' itself and ideas on what can help afterwards. Throughout the booklet you will find quotes from donor conceived adults and, at the end, the relieved comments of a mother of two DI conceived daughters a year after she had talked with them about the secret that had been held for so long.

Although infertility is the reason that most people need to use donor conception, some people will have done so in order to avoid passing on a genetic condition. The vast majority of this leaflet is relevant for both situations.

The assumption made throughout this booklet is that at the time of conception you were part of a heterosexual couple. If however you are a single woman or lesbian couple contemplating sharing information about your family's origins with an adult, you are likely to find many of the issues addressed and practical ideas given here helpful and adaptable to your situation.

Deciding to Tell

Thinking about 'telling' is rarely an easy process. You would be unusual if you didn't have quite a mixture of feelings. And even if you had planned to 'tell' at this age, the very thought of talking now with your adult child may make your stomach lurch. But compared to the emotional energy you have had to spend over many years keeping the secret, deciding to tell may be a relief. And the message of this booklet is that although you can't prepare your offspring for this revelation, there is a great deal you can do to prepare yourself.

Your reasons for choosing to 'tell' now will be unique to your family. But it may be that you have been feeling the burden of the secret of donor conception for some time or perhaps a significant relationship in the family has ended or changed in some way. You may also have been influenced by the legal ending of anonymity for donors in the UK in April 2005 or have seen articles about what science is now telling us about our genetic history and our health.

When you attended your clinic so many years ago, you will have done so at a time when the culture and climate in which donor conception took place was one of secrecy. The assumption then was that the best interests of all parties were served by no-one knowing that donor insemination had taken place and that children did not need to know. Time has proved this to be false. Many adults who have found out that they have been conceived in this way have made it clear that they believe they do have a right to know and should have the same legal rights to information as adopted people. It is now realised that it can be unhealthy for family relationships to keep such significant secrets, partly because of the energy that is taken up by doing so and the stress that it can cause. Lelani Arris, an American donor conceived adult who did not learn of her beginnings until her thirties, had the following to say in an email to members of the Donor Sibling Registry in the US –

"Secrecy is just plain bad in a family – looking back with the information I have now I suspect it may have contributed to the break-up of my parents marriage (they divorced when I was 11) and I know it caused some tension between my mother and her sister and mother (who were the only others who knew, and both felt that I should know also). It probably also introduced stress into my father's relationship with me while I was unaware of the reasons for it."

Another reason for 'telling' has to do with family medical history and the long-term implications for health. Nowadays, when so much has been discovered about how certain diseases are passed down through families, it is important that information about biological origins no longer be kept a secret. The UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) now requires clinics to encourage and prepare patients undergoing donor conception treatment to tell their children about their origins from an early age.

You may well be wishing that you had decided to 'tell' earlier. But remember that nearly everyone felt secrecy was the right option in those days. This booklet's aim is to support you and help you prepare for telling your children now.

Preparing to Tell

Whatever your situation, you may well find that despite a wish to concentrate on the here and now of 'telling', you remain full of thoughts and feelings from the time of your fertility treatment. This is not surprising as discussion of feelings was not much encouraged by clinics and many couples found it difficult even to talk together about their infertility – and indeed may still do. However, as part of preparing to talk with your child or children you will need to face at least some of these feelings and particularly to think about why you want to share this information now. For instance, if your main reason for wanting to tell is because

the burden of the secret is such that you feel that you cannot carry it any longer, then the main reason for 'telling' is to meet that need. If you have come to this decision because you feel it is your child's right to have this information, then that is meeting a different need. In many cases it is likely to be a mixture of things, including the possibility that someone else who knows may be about to break the news to your child or anxiety that the information could be revealed accidentally. However, if the main reason for 'telling' is because your feelings as a parent need relief, then it is likely to be helpful if you can get some help with that before you embark on talking with your child – perhaps from a trusted friend, a family member or from a professional source, such as a counsellor.

Donor conceived (DC) adults need their parents to be able to handle the range of complex and often quite strong feelings that result from being 'told', no matter how old or mature they are. If parents are able to listen to their children's feelings and not focus on their own, they are more likely to be able to emotionally support them.

Being prepared allows for more successful, constructive and open communication among family members in the future.

Loss and fertility

You will have used donor insemination to create your family because of a loss. Your child in turn may experience a loss as a result of learning about their donor conceived beginnings. You will find more about the losses felt by offspring in the section on Reactions. We often associate the words loss and grieving with death. But death is not the only kind of bereavement. Going through the process of grieving infertility and the loss of a longed-for biological child of your own can lead to eventual acceptance of the situation and decision making about other ways of becoming a parent. It is never too late to revisit some of these feelings.

Recognising and acknowledging the losses involved for both you and your child can help you understand each other and work towards a new relationship free from the burden of keeping secrets.

Men's losses

Being unable to make a partner pregnant can be felt as a great loss for a man. Fertility and sexual potency have long been confused in public perception and men have sometimes been the butt of cruel jokes about their (in)capacity to make babies. In the early days of donor conception DI was seen as 'the solution' to male fertility problems, but in masking infertility it invited an agreement to keep the secret, that at the time was assumed to be best for all. This was reinforced by the legal situation in the UK prior to 1990, where if the parents told the births registrar that DI had been used, they could not put the father's name on the birth certificate and the donor had the legal status of father. The emphasis at that time was on rational and practical ways to create a child, at the expense of emotional considerations for either parents or the child. Without the opportunity to discuss feelings and mourn the loss of fertility, many men were left feeling that their infertility was a personal failure and something to be ashamed of. Some men may still feel this way.

Women's losses

Not being able to have the biological child of a much-loved man is a great loss for many women. There is also a loss in keeping this and any resulting treatment a secret as women are more likely than men to want to talk about it with others in their support network of family and friends. Women have sometimes offered to keep the secret, against their better instincts, because they could see how hurt their partner was and wanted to protect him. Some women have even 'taken the blame' for fertility difficulties. But the two greatest losses for many women are –

1. the need to keep the secret may have prevented her and her partner from going through the process of grief, mourning and adjustment that would have made it easier to talk to each other about their feelings, and to become closer and stronger as a couple
2. even if she totally agreed with the need for secrecy at the time, it has prevented a relationship of complete honesty with her child or children.

Talking with others as part of preparation for 'telling'

The information you are preparing to 'tell' will belong to your child to share as they choose, but you may feel that it would be helpful to prepare the ground first by telling other significant family members, such as your own parents. There may be people within the family or wider family/friendship networks that your child is likely to turn to for support, so consider letting them know what you are planning to do. Involving someone who has the interests of your child at heart but is not immediately emotionally involved may be very helpful. There is a difference between others having known for a long time whilst your child remained unknowing, and sharing the information immediately before 'telling' in order to provide a network of support.

Thinking about these issues, and talking with each other, a trusted friend, family member or a counsellor and taking your time BEFORE you talk with your child or children is really important: the better prepared you are, the better long-term relationships in the family are likely to be.

Telling

You may want to construct and rehearse a 'script' for the occasion of telling, or you may be more comfortable allowing the words to flow naturally on the day. Alternatively, you may feel you could best express yourself, to start with anyway, by writing a letter that your child could read in your presence. It helps to be as confident as possible when you begin but whichever way you choose to do it, remember that you are starting to tell a story that will be ongoing and may lead to lots of change. Change usually causes discomfort at first, but clearing the cloud of secrecy from the relationship is likely to be well worth it.

It may be that both of you will be involved in telling your child or it may just be one of you for some reason. Whether the telling is done by one or both (and we discuss this at greater length later in the booklet) the following guidelines have been put together following many discussions with donor-conceived adults and their parents.

- **Offspring first** – put the emotional needs of your adult child first. It is the story of how they came to be part of the family. The story of your infertility can come later. Share information with all your children (including those who came into your family other than by donor conception) either at the same time or within a very short space of time.
- **Stage of development** – if your child is still a teenager, remember that this remains a very 'me' focused time in their lives. The older they are, the more they may be able to understand, eventually, your perspective and what you went through to have them. Allow them to come to this conclusion in their own time.
- **Preparation** – think through what you want to say and why, including a clear but short explanation about why you have chosen to tell them now and not before. Don't be shy about talking it through with others first.
- **Support** – make sure there is someone in place for you that you can share your feelings with afterwards – here again it could be a friend you trust to listen to you, a family member or a counsellor. Don't expect your offspring to bear the strong and/or difficult feelings you will undoubtedly have.
- **Timing** – choose a time when there are no other significant events going on in your adult child's life and make sure you have sufficient time after telling for any immediate response, questions and discussion. Don't make an appointment to 'tell them something important'. Try instead to use a time when you would naturally be together or, if they live elsewhere, invite them over for a meal or drink.
- **Place** – home (the one you share or theirs) is better than a public place or a holiday resort. Your child may well need to be able to retreat to a familiar space of their own and/or contact their partner or a friend.
- **Language** – choose the words that convey what you mean in a straightforward way. Talk about how their arrival made you a family, rather than how they were conceived. Give information clearly and simply and don't forget to speak with warmth about how much they were wanted and how loved they are. Your children will remember the feelings of caring you gave them when you shared the truth, long after the facts have sunk in. The following is an example of how such a conversation could be started –

"Mum and I have something we want to tell you. It's about how your birth made us a family. We always wanted to have children, but it turned out that this wasn't going to be possible using my sperm. With the help of a clinic we used sperm from a donor – someone we didn't know – to help make you. We couldn't believe how lucky we were when Mum became pregnant and when you were born we were both extremely happy. We loved you then and haven't stopped loving you since. I imagine this is a bit of a shock and I'm sorry we haven't told you before. When we went to the clinic they seemed to think that children didn't need to know...things have changed since then...[it] didn't seem a right time when you were growing up...[but we] felt you had the right to have this information now."

- **One thing at a time** – give the basic information first and resist the temptation to heap more on them until they are ready. News like this takes time to sink in.
- **Acknowledge** how your child feels and show that you understand, without becoming defensive. Sentences beginning in the following ways can be helpful –

"I imagine that...(this is pretty difficult for you to take in etc.)"

"You may be feeling...(upset/angry that we haven't told you this before etc.)"

"It would be very understandable...(if you had a lot of mixed feelings going round inside you about this etc.)"

- **Follow-up** – let them know that this is a safe subject to talk about and that you are willing to discuss anything at a mutually convenient time. It can be helpful to initiate a conversation within a couple of weeks or so, just to check out how they are feeling and their readiness to talk.

In order to prepare yourself for your child's reactions and response to the information you are planning to give them, you may also want to think about the following –

- how men and women feel about telling
- the words to use when talking about the donor
- issues around telling alone.

Men and 'telling'

Undoubtedly the parent who is not genetically related feels they have most to lose in their child being told. Not only might they fear rejection, but some men particularly fear exposing their infertility, especially if they have avoided acknowledging it over the years and feel that it brings them stigma and shame.

These feelings are very understandable, but they are not a reason for men to take a back seat when it comes to telling. Your children will need you and want you to talk with them. The experience of the vast majority of men who have talked with their children about family beginnings by donor conception is that rejection has not happened. In fact, it may well be your children who will need reassurance from you that they are loved.

In response to a question about whether anything had been unhelpful at the time of being told, Linda said, *"...probably my dad not being open enough about it. I needed to talk to him about it too, but he would rather forget it happened. His way of dealing with it is to block it out, which wasn't very helpful to me when I needed reassurance from him."*

Several years after being told Linda still had issues that she needed to resolve with her father, so she found an opportunity to talk with him.

"It was really difficult and tense, but after my dad understood that it was me who needed the reassurance from him, he was really understanding and couldn't believe I had harboured the thoughts for so long without speaking to him."

Far from rejecting him, Linda needed to know that her father loved her and saw her as his daughter.

Traditionally men have not found it easy to talk about their feelings or to seek help with painful emotional issues such as infertility and donor conception, especially when they have been hidden over many years. In wishing to do what is best after 'telling' men may need to be prepared to reassure their children of their love, even if their children appear to withdraw at first. Although it may be tempting to revert to not talking about it, it is likely that, like Linda, the person who has been told may need their parents to take the initiative in bringing it up from time to time.

Women and 'telling'

The section on Loss explored how many women would have preferred to be open with their children about donor conception from the start, but instead agreed to keep the secret. This was often to protect their partner or because of the legal implications and attitude of society at the time or because they were advised not to tell. Others genuinely felt that there was no reason for children to know. Many women who felt like this have changed their minds since then.

Some other women remain resolute that their children should not be told, sometimes resisting arguments in favour of 'telling' put by their partner. As there will be a genetic connection between mother and child fear of rejection for themselves is unlikely to be the basis of this, but shame and stigma about using donor conception for family creation may play a part. There are likely to be complicated reasons for a woman to feel this way. If you are one of these people it may be that you don't fully understand yourself why 'not telling' is so important to you. But, like men, you need to know that sharing information with your children is in their best interest. Your commitment and involvement in doing so is likely to be much appreciated by your children. It may be that you have never spoken to anyone about how your family came into being or your feelings about this. Talking with a good friend, trusted family member, your partner or a counsellor could make all the difference.

Language

Throughout this booklet the term 'donor' has been used to refer to the person whose gift enabled the building of a family. Using the word 'father' by itself or 'real father' can confuse the role of the donor with that of the person who has loved and actively fathered a child over the long years of parenting. The donor does have an undeniable genetic connection to the children he helped create and deserves to be referred to with respect and gratitude, but he does not have the parenting role implied by the term 'father'.

Adult donor offspring may go through phases of using different words to describe the person who helped to create them, but the quote below is typical of a donor conceived adult who, whilst remaining extremely curious about his donor, is clear who his father is.

"When people ask, 'Who's your real father?' I pedantically stop them and say, 'My real father is the man who raised me'. That's real to me. ... There's a sperm donor and a parenting father and these roles both exist."
Stevens, 2000, The Offspring Speak

Doing the 'telling' alone

In an ideal world both parents would share news with their child about how they came to be part of their family. But there are many reasons why you may be contemplating taking this on alone. Maybe your partner has died and you now feel free to talk about something that he or she would have found embarrassing and difficult. You may be divorced, or you and your partner may still not agree about 'telling' but you believe that this is something you have to do.

Whatever your situation, there seem to be two basic scenarios:

- *either* you are free to make this decision alone, because your partner is dead or has long lost contact with you and your child
- *or* the person you went into parenthood with remains in contact and therefore needs to be consulted or at least taken into account.

If you are free to undertake the telling alone, all the guidance offered here is relevant to you, but it is particularly important to take time to think through your own feelings first and find yourself a back up team. It is possible that you will be on the receiving end of anger and other feelings that are all the stronger because your parenting partner is no longer around. Your response may be to feel angry or sad yourself. It is helpful if you can acknowledge these feelings to yourself but express them to a friend, family member or counsellor instead of to your child, who should not be expected to be your supporter.

If you are not free to undertake telling alone, again all the guidance here is relevant but this is a much trickier situation. Individual circumstances will vary enormously. If the adult child concerned has a relationship, no matter how remote, with your partner or ex-partner then this person has a right to be consulted or at the very least informed about your wish or intention to tell. It will be important for you to think through very carefully your reasons for wanting to tell. These may be quite complex, but remember that from your child's point of view the only valid reason is that it is their need and right to know this information about themselves. All reasonable steps should be taken to involve and include the other parent in the preparation process, even if they are unwilling or unable to be present on the occasion of talking with their offspring.

In the past some mothers have shared information with their child without letting the father know that this has happened. This is a strategy that comes with a high risk of accidental disclosure. It continues the secret and is likely to unbalance family relationships if parents are still together or in contact. Where offspring feel resentment towards the parent who is unaware, it is unlikely that they will keep the secret for very long, leading to an unplanned confrontation that benefits no-one.

Support from good friends or family members, who can give you time without needing their opinion to dominate, support organisations or a counsellor, is highly recommended.

Reactions

You will be well aware by this point that the information you are planning to give is likely to be received with a range of strong feelings. All the suggestions for preparing to 'tell' are intended to support you in being able to acknowledge your child's feelings without crumbling or becoming defensive. The good news is that whilst first reactions may be powerful, openness to discussion on your part and the passage of time are likely to lead to an appreciation of each other's perspective. Your child may have many questions and wish that you had given them this information earlier, but there is also the potential that a different and closer relationship may develop as a result of there no longer being a secret between you.

The power of secrets

It will not just be the information itself that will have an impact, but also the fact that a secret has been kept for the whole of your child's upbringing. Genetic connections that have been taken for granted are now being revealed as not being so. This can be experienced as disempowering and as a betrayal of trust. Feelings of shock, disbelief, anger and a profound sense of loss, often experienced initially as being knocked completely off-balance, have been described by donor conceived people who have had their origins revealed to them as adults. Sometimes as well there is an unexpected sense of relief, as questions that have puzzled them over the years are answered by the news.

"Part of me was shaken and profoundly shocked. Part of me was utterly calm, as things suddenly fell into place, and I was faced with an immediate reappraisal of my own identity."

*'Imogen' in What does it mean to be a donor offspring?
Turner and Coyle 2000*

"It's not the conception that hurts us so much, it's the deception."

Bill Cordray in Let the Offspring Speak 1997

Donor conceived adults sometimes feel power has been taken from them when they find out that people other than their parents, such as other family members or friends, have known for years. One of your goals in 'telling' will be to restore the information to the person to whom it belongs and in doing so to hand back the power.

Questioning of trust – 'Can I really believe you in the future?' and 'What else haven't you told me?' – is also common and represents the loss of a possibly previously unquestioned relationship. Time spent acknowledging feelings and answering questions willingly and honestly as they arise will go a long way to rebuilding trust, but it may be a rocky road for a while.

Who am I?

Donor offspring who learn of their origins as adults may have particular issues concerning identity and self-image. The new knowledge about their biological background is likely to cause them to question – at least for a while – who they are and almost certainly who they look like. The issue of physical likeness may well have come up in your family, particularly if your child does not look anything like either of you or other family members. Some donor conceived children and adults who do not fit in with the physical, intellectual or creative characteristics in a family have asked if they have been adopted or wonder privately if they were the result of an affair. Even though they are biologically related to one parent, they may still feel confused about where they belong in the family.

When asked whether she had any idea prior to disclosure that she might not be genetically connected to her father, Julia (who has an older sister conceived without assistance) said:

"The fact that I felt so different to my family and my sister teasing me that I was adopted. Once she came back from school claiming that in biology they had learnt that one of the features you HAVE to inherit from your parents is the existence of ear-lobes. My parents have lobes, I have none."

Physical likeness seems to be important because it is seen as connecting families together over time. As human beings we establish who we are at least partly in relation to who we think our parents and family are. This new knowledge about half their genetic inheritance means that your child is likely to spend some time re-appraising themselves, your family and their relationships. Adjusting to any new situation can take a while and it may be helpful to know that this re-appraisal is part of a completely normal process of integrating this new information into their sense of who they are. Your patience, support, availability and willingness to listen are likely to be appreciated.

Siblings

If your child has grown up with brothers and sisters, then some of the first questions are likely to be about their relatedness to them. If you have other children by donor conception you may or may not know if they share the same donor. You may also have adopted children or have a child conceived without reproductive assistance. The revelation that brothers and sisters may not be fully biologically related can be a very powerful one. Responses vary depending on the meaning of the information for the siblings involved, but it can be felt as devastating at first.

A young woman interviewed by Professor of Social Work, Ken Daniels in New Zealand felt this way –

"I was more gutted, and it sounds horrible, but I was more gutted that B wasn't my full sister. (Laughs) Oh my God we're not full sisters! And that really, really upset me."

But Stephanie, who emailed the Network, felt that there was a more positive side too –

"Getting my head around the fact that my sister and I have different donor fathers is mind boggling, although I think it's actually made our relationship even stronger."

Beyond the first overwhelming feelings, there are both advantages and disadvantages to a situation where siblings have been conceived by different donors. If, for instance, one sibling wishes to search for their donor and/or half-siblings and the other does not, then it may be an advantage if they do not share a donor. But where both siblings wish for information, it may be more difficult if one is able to make a connection and the other is not. When siblings do share a donor it is important that their different needs for information are taken into account and respected, although this may be tricky to manage practically.

Where there are siblings conceived without reproductive assistance it will be particularly important to give reassurance that the donor conceived person is loved equally. Following 'telling' adult children are likely to think back to how their parents have behaved towards them in the past.

The donor

At some point in the re-appraisal process your child will probably ask questions about their donor. The sort of information they are looking for can include non-identifying information such as medical history, physical characteristics and ethnic and cultural background, as well as more personal information about the donor's identity and personal traits. They are also often interested in the donor's family and the possible presence of half-siblings, both those in the donor's family and any others created through donated sperm.

Searching for genetic connections

The truth is that finding out information about donors is very difficult, if not impossible in the UK. Before the implementation of the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, there was no central register of donors and recipients. Each clinic kept their own files in their own way and some doctors deliberately destroyed the records when they left the practice.

UK DonorLink (UKDL), an organisation that runs a voluntary register of people who were conceived or donated before August 1991, can potentially bring together offspring, donors and half-siblings. Registering with UKDL at age 18

or over and giving a sample of DNA from an inside cheek swab, offers the best chance of making connections, but these chances remain very slim indeed.

You may well have ambivalent or, even more strongly, fearful feelings about your child searching for their donor or half-siblings. But evidence, from the stories told by donor conceived adults, is beginning to show that parents who are able to accept that this is a very normal response and remain calm, confident and supportive, are likely to be rewarded in the long term with a stronger relationship, even if things feel a little uncertain for a while. After all, the identity of your family has not changed. It is information about how that family began, or was added to, that is now known to all members and this new openness can be refreshing. Those who were donor conceived will have gained important information that is relevant to their own unique story as individuals.

Some parents feel that they themselves should search for as much information about the donor as they can before they talk with their offspring. As strong as this impulse may be it is probably better resisted as such actions could be interpreted as 'taking over' or exerting power over information that belongs to your child. It may be better instead to let your child know that you are willing to help them in any way you can. For instance you could tell them where your treatment took place and the name of the doctor (if you can remember it). You may want to mention the UK DonorLink register but then leave it to them to make the decision about whether or not to make contact. Investigating the links at the end of this leaflet could be a shared project, but your child needs to take the lead.

Some adult donor conceived people feel a great need to find out as much as they possibly can about the donor and possible half-siblings, others have a less urgent curiosity and others still do not feel the need to search at all. In this they are very similar to adopted people, but it also seems that those who find out about their origins late are more likely to want significant information than those told early.

Not being able to find information or having their search blocked by officialdom or a retired doctor with files stored in his attic, may trigger further strong feelings.

Final Thoughts

Making the decision that your adult child should have the information about how they came into your family has probably taken you beyond where you would usually feel comfortable emotionally. None of us likes to be in this place for very long. It is impossible to say how your individual child will take the news, but DC Network does not know of any donor offspring who would have preferred not to know.

This booklet has focused a lot on loss. This is because acknowledgement of loss is an important step in the process of re-assessing the decision you took so long ago. Deciding that secrecy may no longer be in the interest of your child or of any of you is a big step. Hearing the truth may cause your children

to feel betrayed at first, but this should not sway you from trying to tell the truth about their origins as best you can. Hopefully they will respect you all the more for preparing yourself and having the courage to tell. Family trust can be re-gained and family connections made stronger because of it.

Deciding to 'tell' is not without risk or anxiety, but many worthwhile things in life involve some risk-taking. After all, we often grow as people as a result of making courageous choices. There is much to gain for everyone and Stephanie, whose mum Claire has the last word below, is clear that she is very pleased to have been told how she and her sister came into their family –

"I think it's been really tough for my mum to have kept everything bottled up inside for so long. I know it was really hard to tell us after so many years and I think it took a lot of guts but I'm so glad that I finally know. She told us everything so beautifully and clearly that it's made it really easy to digest."

Claire sought support from DC Network before she took the plunge in 2004 and shared with her two daughters, then aged 21 and 23, information about their beginnings by donor conception –

"We were persuaded by the medical staff at the clinic that the way to approach the situation was to go home and forget that we had used AID. With that mind set it was very difficult to think about the question of telling the children. I was always extremely unhappy with the situation and I knew it would be difficult to choose the moment for that life changing disclosure. In the end I opted for a time when everyone's life seemed relatively calm and, with a complete feeling of dread, I explained. They were shocked of course, but because they know that in everything else we have always been completely honest with each other, we were able to talk everything through, and even to laugh. I really do have two amazing daughters."

Further Reading

- Ken Daniels and Letitia Meadows. 'Sharing information with adults conceived as a result of donor insemination'
([Human Fertility 2006, vol.9, issue 2](#))
- Geraldine Hewitt. *Exploration into the Identity Issues of People Conceived via Donor Insemination*
([Personal Project 2001](#))
Copy held in the Donor Conception Network library.
- *Let the offspring speak: Discussions on Donor Conception*
([The Donor Conception Support Group of Australia, 1997](#))
This book, which is sadly now out of print, came about as the result of The Donor Issues Forum, in Sydney, Australia, the first gathering in the world of donor conceived people, their parents and professionals concerned with donor conception issues. Copies held in the Donor Conception Network library.
- Caroline Lorbach. *Experiences of donor conception: Parents, offspring and donors through the years*
([Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002](#))
- *The offspring speak: An international conference of donor offspring*
([The Infertility Network, 160 Pickering Street, Toronto, Canada M4E 3J7, 2000](#)) Email: info@infertilitynetwork.org
- A.J. Turner and A. Coyle. 'What does it mean to be a donor offspring? The identity experiences of adults conceived by donor insemination and the implications for counselling and therapy'
([Human Reproduction, 2000, vol.15 pp.2041-2051](#))

Films

- *Are you my father?* ([2001](#)) Video
New Zealand student Rebecca Hamilton follows many leads in her ultimately unsuccessful effort to trace her biological father.
Available to borrow from Donor Conception Network library.
- *A Different Story* ([Donor Conception Network, 2003](#)) Video/DVD
Seven children and young people talk about their thoughts and feelings about being conceived with the help of anonymous sperm donors.
Available to buy or borrow from Donor Conception Network library.
- *Offspring* ([2002](#)) Video
Made by professional filmmaker Barry Stevens, who was born as a result of DI 50 years ago. During his search for his biological father he unearths a half-brother who is also hoping to trace his past.
Available to borrow from Donor Conception Network library.

Useful Contacts

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
BACP House
35-37 Albert Street
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV21 2SG
tel: 0870 443 5252
website: www.bacp.co.uk
email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA)
69 Division Street
Sheffield
S1 4GE
tel: 01744 750 660
website: www.bica.net
email: info@bica.net

Donor Conception Network
PO Box 7471
Nottingham
NG3 6ZR
tel: 0208 245 4369
website: www.dcnetwork.org
email: enquiries@dcnetwork.org

Donor Sibling Registry
website:
www.donorsiblingregistry.com
A not-for-profit registry and Internet forum group started in 2000 by Wendy Kramer and her DI conceived son Ryan in the US. The aim is to offer an opportunity for donor conceived people (children and adults) to make connections with half siblings and donors, by mutual consent of all parties. Open to UK residents.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA)
21 Bloomsbury Street
London
WC1B 3HF
tel: 020 7291 8200
website: www.hfea.gov.uk
email: admin@hfea.gov.uk

People Conceived Via Artificial Insemination (PCVAI)
Register online: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/PCVAI/>
This US based group is for adult donor offspring over the age of 18 to exchange thoughts, feelings and experiences with each other. Parents, donors and others may not post.

UK DonorLink
31 Moor Road
Headingley
Leeds
LS6 4BG
tel: 0113 278 3217
website: www.ukdonorlink.org.uk
email: info@ukdonorlink.org.uk

YoungMinds
48-50 St John Street
London
EC1M 4DG
tel: 020 7336 8445
Parents Information Service:
0800 018 2138
For concerns about young people's emotional and mental health.
website: www.youngminds.org.uk
email:
enquiries@youngminds.org.uk

Other booklets in the Telling and Talking series:

Telling and Talking about Donor Conception
with 0 - 7 year olds
A Guide for Parents

Telling and Talking about Donor Conception
with 8 - 11 year olds
A Guide for Parents

Telling and Talking about Donor Conception
with 12 - 16 year olds
A Guide for Parents

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