

she wishes. You may also find these books a good starting point and both can be bought from the Donor Conception Network.

Finally

We have never regretted using donor conception to build our family. This is not an easy road to travel and you will face many challenges. The past five and half years of parenting have been rewarding, challenging and tiring! To see our children flourish and grow and to be part of their development is deeply satisfying and we look at them with a great sense of achievement.

If you are considering using donor conception:

- Take your time to decide to go ahead. The process of talking it through time and again is a valuable one.
- Clarify who is around to support you through all of this, and consider a support group or counselling. A person in that role can really help you deal with your feelings.
- Be proud of who you are and what you are doing.

Good luck with everything and feel free to use the Donor Conception Network for support.

*With very best wishes
Bridget and Andrea*



Donor Conception Network



Planning a family as a lesbian: a letter from Bridget and Andrea to lesbian women

Dear Would-be Lesbian Parent(s)

This letter is to any single lesbian woman or couple thinking of building a family through donor conception. We hope that these thoughts will help clarify your own, may answer some questions and enable you to go forward with confidence in your decision.

We spent a great deal of time agonising about “the right thing to do”, in other words, was it right to have a family in such a way, what would others think, what about the child, and should the donor be known or unknown? Were we even sure about becoming parents? Some of these questions are common to all would-be parents, and

some of them are unique to lesbians. At the time many of our discussions were circular and not resolved. It was a time of turmoil and one that we could have been better prepared for. We hope therefore, that sharing our experiences will help to encourage you; despite things being difficult at times we have never regretted our choice to have a family in this way.

At First

As we have already said the discussions used to go round and round and coming to a decision took us a long time but this isn't the case for

everyone and you may be quite clear. We found that we had some key questions that we have since discovered, through talking to others, are common when considering donor conception. Will we encounter any prejudice because we are Gay? Do clinics provide treatment to lesbians? Do we want to use a known or unknown donor? Do we want to import sperm? Some clinics will assist with importing sperm and it may mean

the donor will be happy to be contacted when the child is 18.

“... To see our children flourish and grow and to be part of their development is deeply satisfying and we look at them with a great sense of achievement ...”

We decided to approach our nearest clinic and use an anonymous donor. This was really because of the convenience of getting to and from treatment and because we were clear that the donor would not be part of our family life. It

therefore felt more comfortable to us that he should be unknown. Costs of treatment can be high and it is important to know what they are before signing up with a clinic as they may influence the choice of where you go. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority can give information on clinics around the UK but currently they will not identify ones that are “lesbian friendly”. However, you can use the Donor Conception Network or Pink Parents to speak to someone who has used services local to you and get more of a personal insight on the clinic in question. It can also be great support

Further support and information

The Donor Conception Network was started in 1993 by a group of families who had all chosen to be open with their children about their origins. We wanted to help break the isolation felt by so many people using donor assisted conception methods, and to share our experiences of talking to our children, and to family and friends, about DI and more recently egg donation. We have two national meetings a year, one in London and one in the North of England, produce a Newsletter twice yearly, have a library of books, videos, audio tapes and articles that can be borrowed and, most importantly, we put people in touch with each other.

Network Membership

You can join the network as an individual or a couple. Annual subscriptions are £15 (£5 unwaged). To join download a membership form from the website or simply send a cheque to our PO Box below.

The Donor Conception Network is a registered charity, registration number 1041297

Useful addresses

Donor Conception Network
PO Box 7471, Nottingham NG3 6ZR
Email: enquiries@dcnetwork.org
Website: www.dcnetwork.org
020 8245 4369

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
30 Artillery Lane, London E1 7LS
020 7377 5077
Website: www.hfea.gov.uk

British Infertility Counselling Association
69 Division Street, Sheffield S1 4GE
Information line: 0114 263 1448
Website: www.bica.net

Pink Parents UK
Box 55, Green Leaf Bookshop, 82 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB
Email: enquiries@pinkparents.org.uk
Website: www.pinkparents.org.uk
Helpline: 0117 377 5794 (Thursday 7 to 10 pm)

Letters in the Planning a Family Series

*A letter from Walter to would-be DI Dads
A letter from Olivia to would-be DI Mums
A letter from Olivia to would-be DI Parents about “telling”
A letter from Emily to single would-be mums
A letter from Rachel to would-be egg donation parents
A letter from Bridget and Andrea to lesbian women*

There is no charge or cover price for Planning a Family Letters and they are copyright free - you are welcome to copy this leaflet so long as it is not sold. But if you have found it valuable, a donation to the Donor Conception Network, a registered charity, would be most welcome.

Visit www.dcnetwork.org/planfamletters where you can download free copies and find details of costs for bulk orders of printed copies. Single copies can be obtained free by sending an A4 SAE to:

Network Publications
PO Box 7471
Nottingham NG3 6ZR

and isolation breaker to be able to speak directly to someone who has been through similar experiences.

Once we'd decided to go ahead it was a case of going to our GP to be referred for treatment and going on a waiting list. However, this isn't the case for most lesbians as many approach private clinics directly. The waiting itself was hard at times as we were impatient to begin treatment, but after a number of months the ball was rolling. On our first visit we chatted to the Consultant about the forthcoming treatment, saw the counsellor, had a number of tests to look at Bridget's fertility and thought we were fit to begin.....

Treatment Issues

But, although she was only 32, there were concerns about Bridget's fertility. We were told that she might find it difficult to actually get pregnant. This had become evident as a result of some blood tests the clinic had done. Of course this is not the case for many of you but that news really did clarify how much we wanted a family and all of our previous concerns paled. It also showed us why we needed to have the tests at all, so please don't be alarmed when the process is explained in terms of "fertility tests".

"... We were made to feel very welcome at the clinic, were supported well and made to feel equal to everyone receiving treatment ..."

With clinical advice we were able to make a start once we'd understood the options available to us. The insemination itself was something that caused great anxiety. Bridget thought it might be painful and we were both anxious about whether or not it would work. However it was uncomfortable rather than painful and took only slightly longer than a smear test. The staff

explained things well and we knew what to expect. Above all we were made to feel very welcome at the clinic, were supported well and made to feel equal to everyone receiving treatment. There was never a time when we felt that we were being dealt with differently and we hope that this is the case for you.

"... Life can feel as if there is nothing but watching the date, doing urine tests and constantly waiting..."

Following the insemination it was then time to wait and we stepped on that emotional roller coaster familiar to all who want to have children. Our feelings went up and down in extreme peaks and troughs as we spent all hours wondering if it had worked or not. Having spoken to others about this crucial time, it does appear that many of us start to feel obsessed and unable to think of anything else, no matter how hard we try to put it out of our minds. Life can feel as if there is nothing but watching the date, doing urine tests and constantly waiting. If your period starts and you are not pregnant the disappointment can be huge and can leave you reeling. However it is soon time for the next month's treatment and back again to the emotional ups and downs. Of course not everyone feels this way, but many do and it is important to be prepared for this.

Support during treatment

To help you through these times support from the clinic staff is vital. It is always possible to go back and meet with the consultant or counsellor to talk things through. The counsellor that you meet at the beginning may be a person that you feel you could approach for help with a whole range of issues that arise as you go through treatment.

Family, friends and colleagues are all people that you may get your support from and we all know who is able to help in our own situations. We found that just a few people in each aspect of our lives worked for us, just so that someone knew why we might be a little preoccupied and therefore distracted at times.

Coming out again

This was something we hadn't expected but we discovered that once noticeably pregnant, people, in all innocence, would start to ask about Bridget's husband and the baby's daddy. This was mostly at work from people who were not aware of our sexuality and so in some instances it did involve coming out. For some this meant confusion as they didn't understand the circumstances around the pregnancy and so would have many questions. We made choices about who to tell, when to do it and how much information to share and it was interesting to be in the role of educator and information giver. We sometimes dealt with shock and surprise rather than prejudice, but mostly those interested wanted to understand and learn more.

Telling Others

This was something we worried about a great deal, and certainly the first time we did feel anxious.

"... With experience we learned that we didn't have to tell, that the information belonged to us as family and that we could divulge details when we felt happy to do so ..."

'Others' tended to include colleagues, friends and other children and this was quite challenging as they questioned us directly. But again this wasn't as bad as we'd imagined. We found it easier to deal with questions as they arose rather than trying to have "scripts"

prepared in advance. We did find it necessary to tailor responses to different people in our lives and you may also prefer to do this. With experience we learned that we didn't have to tell, that the information belonged to us as family and that we could divulge details when we felt happy to do so. Above all, people's reactions were positive and showed us that there was far more support for us than we'd assumed.

Telling the children

This was an area that gave us great cause for concern during the years of deciding whether or not to have a family in this way.

"... We felt very anxious about "getting it wrong" and then would wonder how to put it right. ... Experience has shown us that it's much less complicated than we'd imagined ..."

Questions about how to tell, what to say and how to say it to a child came up frequently. We felt very anxious about "getting it wrong" and then would wonder how to put it right. Our experience has shown us that it's much less complicated than we'd imagined. We initially gave our daughter very simple information, such as "all families are different, in our family there are two Mummies". As she got older more details were given in response to her questions, and she led this process. The questions didn't come all the time but we found all she usually wanted were short and simple answers, and then she would return to what ever she was doing at the time. The books "My Story" and "Our Story" have been invaluable in providing clear information that can then be discussed further once the story is finished. These books sit on her bookshelf for her to pick whenever
