



Fact Sheet 9:

Talking with children about donor-assisted conception

This fact sheet provides information about talking with children about donor assisted conception. Talking to your child about donor-assisted conception (disclosure) is a deeply personal and emotional decision. Parents may have differing views about what is in their child's best interest, but for those parents who have disclosed, there is often a sense of relief. It is only natural that you will have some anxieties and concerns about disclosure; however research suggests that it is considered in the best interest of your child that you are both open and honest with your child about the circumstances of their conception.

Open disclosure

There are good reasons for you to be open with your child about their biological origins:

- A child has the right to know about their origins and identity.
- It is important for the parent-child relationship.
- Keeping a secret may lead to personal and relational stress.
- You can protect your child from inadvertent disclosure.
- Disclosure later in life may cause distress and impact on family relationships.

The process of telling

Parents can find talking to their child about their biological origins quite daunting. However, children who are told early appear to readily integrate this information into their life story. A child's response to disclosure may range from feeling special, to being curious, or to being totally unconcerned.

The practical experiences and views of parents who have told their child include:

- Telling was an on-going process:
 - continues as the child grows up
 - the child's understanding develops over time
- Picking the right time to tell may be difficult; however the earlier disclosure takes place the better.
- It was important that telling did not take place during a time of a family crisis.
- Telling involving both parents was important.
- Having shared views of disclosure had made the family closer.
- The use of simple, age appropriate language was important as the child might be too young to understand.
- The use of story books on donor conception helped.
- Whilst disclosure might have seemed difficult, they had no regrets about telling.

It is thought that it is best to begin disclosure to a child before they are five years old. Natural opportunities present when a child asks where babies come from and where they came from. Parents can prepare for this and give honest answers that are appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding. A number of children's story books have been published, which provide a useful resource for parents to begin the process of disclosure on the [Donor Conception Network](http://www.dcnetwork.org) (www.dcnetwork.org).

The initial feelings and concerns of parents who have told their children include:

- Fear of the impact of telling on the parent-child relationship
 - Telling other family members who may not have known
 - Concerns about their child's reaction to the information
 - Concern about making the decision to tell others and the child's right to privacy.
- Uncertainty about telling a young child because:
 - there is no control over who they might tell;
 - wider disclosure at school may make the child a target.
- Fears for a child who discloses to others when they are young as they cannot regain their privacy.
- Loss of privacy for parents and the wider family.
- Feeling good or relieved.

Parents do express reservations and anxieties, however the actual experience of disclosure is mainly found to be positive and few parents report concerns or regrets.

Some parents may delay or avoid disclosure because they cannot overcome their concerns about other people's reactions. In the past parents were told to keep their child biological origin secret and not to tell anyone, including their child. However, the experience of some donor conceived people who were told later in life, or who found out by chance about their biological origins, has provided insight into the consequences:

- Shock, anger, confusion
- Relief that they finally know
- Feelings of an incomplete identity
- Confusion about their identity
- Curious about the donor

There are a number of resources about disclosure that can help you to decide the best way forward for you:

[The Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority \(VARTA\)](#)

[Reproductive Technology Council fact sheets](#)

[Australian Donor Conception Network](#)

[Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority UK](#)

[Donor Conception Network UK](#)