

Supporting your donor-conceived child

A guide for parents through every developmental stage

Supporting donor-conceived children requires ongoing commitment to honest communication, emotional validation, and professional guidance when needed. Children's understanding of their conception and curiosity about their donor evolve as they mature. This guide helps you navigate conversations and emotional needs at each developmental stage.

Core principles:

- Start conversations early and keep them ongoing
- Use positive, age-appropriate language
- Validate all feelings and questions
- Normalise their story as part of your family's journey
- Seek professional support when needed

Early childhood (Ages 0-5)

Understanding at this stage

Very young children have limited understanding of reproduction but can grasp that families are made in different ways. This is the ideal time to begin normalising their conception story.

How to talk about it

Use simple, positive explanations: "Some families need special help to have babies, and a kind person helped our family" or "We loved you so much that we got help from a special person called a donor." Key messages: they are deeply loved and wanted, many people helped bring them into the world, and their family is special and complete.

Age-appropriate books

- The Pea That Was Me series (various family types)
- Hope and Will Have a Baby by Irene Celcer
- Before You Were Born, We Wished for You by Amy Verlander

Common questions and responses

Children may ask "Where do babies come from?" or "Who is the donor?" Keep answers brief and concrete. Young children don't need detailed explanations - if they want more, they'll ask. It's fine to say "That's a great question - we can talk more about it as you get older."

Supporting their emotions

Welcome curiosity with simple answers, use repetition for confusion (you'll tell this story many times), and reinforce how special their story is.

School age (Ages 6-12)

Understanding at this stage

Children develop more sophisticated understanding of genetics and reproduction. They may compare themselves to family members and friends, and encounter reproduction topics at school.

How to talk about it

Build on earlier conversations by explaining genetics in simple terms (traits come from egg and sperm), describing the specific role their donor played, and discussing why your family needed assistance.

Example: "Remember how we've talked about the donor who helped us have you? Now you're older, do you want to know more about how that worked?"

Age-appropriate books

- My Story by Argos Gonzalez (customisable)
- Zanna's Gift by David Hamilton

Common questions and responses

Children may ask "What does the donor look like?", "Do I have brothers and sisters from the donor?", "Can I meet the donor?" Be honest within age-appropriate boundaries. Share donor information you have (physical description, interests, occupation), explain your fertility journey simply, and be truthful about contact possibilities based on your donor arrangement.

Supporting their emotions

- **Curiosity:** Provide factual donor information you have, show them the donor profile if appropriate.
- **Identity questions:** Reassure them about their place in the family, acknowledge genetic connection whilst emphasising family is built on love.
- **Social concerns:** Prepare them for peer questions, practice comfortable responses, discuss who they want to tell.
- **Feeling different:** Connect them with other donor-conceived children/families and normalise diverse family structures.

School situations

Work with teachers on inclusive alternatives for family tree projects (family forest, garden, or circle). Provide accurate genetic information during genetics units. Discuss how your child wants to participate in Mother's/Father's Day activities.

Adolescence (Ages 13-18)

Understanding at this stage

Teenagers undergo intense identity development. Interest in donor information and potential contact often intensifies as normal adolescent exploration. This curiosity doesn't mean they're rejecting their family - it's healthy identity formation.

How to talk about it

Support identity exploration by revisiting the conception story with more detail, discussing their feelings about genetic connection, and exploring interest in donor contact if possible. Keep communication open through regular check-ins without forcing conversations, and validate any emotions that arise.

Age-appropriate books and podcasts

- Donors, Dads, and Daffodils by Diane K. Prescott
- Finding Our Families by Stephanie Brill
- Secrets and Lies: Surviving the Truth About Donor Conception (podcast)

Common Questions & Honest Responses

Teens may ask "Can I contact my donor now?", "What medical history should I know?", "Why did you choose donor conception?" Provide all information you have honestly.

If your donor is identity-release, explain the process and timeline. Share medical information you received. Be prepared to discuss your fertility journey in depth and help navigate sibling registries if interested.

Supporting their emotions

- **Renewed curiosity:** Support research into donor information and contact options, help navigate registries/databases, discuss realistic expectations.
- **Anger or grief:** Validate complex feelings as normal, don't take them personally - they're processing, not rejecting you. Consider family counselling if needed.
- **Identity questions:** Acknowledge genetics as one piece of identity, discuss other aspects (interests, values, experiences), connect with other donor-conceived adults for perspective.
- **Desire for contact:** Support curiosity whilst managing expectations, discuss boundaries and what contact might look like, prepare emotionally for various outcomes.

Contact preparation (Identity-release donors)

Review the process and timeline for when contact becomes possible. Discuss hopes and fears. Consider counselling before initiating contact. Manage expectations - donors may not respond, initial meetings may feel awkward, relationships develop slowly, and feelings (yours and theirs) may be complicated. Acknowledge your own feelings whilst supporting your child, set family boundaries, and recognise donor contact doesn't diminish parent-child relationships.

Throughout all stages

Ongoing best practices

Create a culture of openness by making the conception story a normal part of your family narrative and welcoming questions anytime. Validate all feelings - there's no "right" way to feel about being donor-conceived, and interest may fluctuate over time. Connect with community through support groups, family events for donor-conceived families, and peer connections for your child. Maintain relationships by staying connected with your fertility clinic, keeping donor information accessible, and updating contact information if your donor is identity-release.

When to seek professional support

- **For your child:** Persistent anxiety or sadness related to conception, significant identity struggles, difficulty with peer relationships, intense anger, depression or behavioural changes, or processing contact experiences with donor.
- **For your family:** Communication breakdowns, parental anxiety about disclosure or contact, disagreements about handling donor information, preparing for significant milestones, or processing outcomes of donor contact.



Supporting your donor-conceived child is a journey, not a destination. You won't have all the answers, and that's okay. What matters most is creating an environment where questions are welcome, being honest within age-appropriate boundaries, validating your child's feelings and experiences, staying connected to resources and support, and demonstrating that your family's story is one of love and intentionality.

Remember

Children who grow up with open, positive communication about their donor conception typically have better outcomes than those who discover the information later or experience secrecy. Your willingness to engage with this topic thoughtfully is one of the greatest gifts you can give your child.

Need support?

We're here to support you throughout your journey with us.

Contact your Genea fertility counsellor or the organisations listed below for guidance specific to your family's situation.

Australia

- **Australian Solo Mothers by Choice:** Facebook group supporting individuals considering or pursuing children through donor conception.
- **Rainbow Families:** Not-for-profit organisation advocating for LGBTQ+ parents, providing support and connection.
- **Raising Children Network** - LGBTQIA+ families: Government-supported parenting website with extensive support group listings.

International

- **Donor Conception Network** (UK): Excellent resources, workshops and community for parents and donor-conceived people.
- **We Are Donor Conceived** (USA): Resource centre for donor-conceived people globally, sharing stories and experiences.
- **Donor Conceived Community** (USA): Peer support groups for navigating donor conception.
- **Donor Conceived Aotearoa** (NZ): Advocacy group focused on donor-conceived people's needs and experiences.
- **Paths to Parent Hub** (UK): Webinars, courses, podcasts, and support groups for parents of donor-conceived children.
- **Donor Sibling Registry** (USA): Global registry to connect with genetic half-siblings.