

Discussing Donor Conception With Your Child

Communicating with your child about the unique way you became a family starts when s/he is young. A natural beginning point occurs in the context of sex education when preschoolers become aware of their bodies, gender differences, pregnancy, and birth. Or you can also start even earlier, in the form of bedtime stories when they are babies or toddlers (see [Recommended Reading](#) for suggested children's books).

An important advantage of early telling is that from the beginning it is a "normal" topic within the family. Secondly, it gives the parents a chance to begin to get comfortable with the topic; you have time to practice your conversations with your child. If you want to change how you talk about it, you get another chance.

As a child's understanding of family, reproduction and birth, and social relationships increases, so will his or her understanding of his donor conception. Children, then, need to have their story repeated because they will focus on different aspects of it at different developmental stages.

But always, keep it simple, keep it honest. In the early years, the emphasis should be on "who our family is" of belonging and being loved. This is a story about love and connection.

Mommy really wanted to have a baby. A very kind man helped by giving us (sperm, seeds), so Mommy could have a baby. The man who helped us is called a (sperm) donor.

Babies grow when a sperm and egg come together. The baby grows in mommy's tummy. Our donor gave his sperm so I could grow you.

"One day I said 'Have I got a dad?' Then Mum told me all about how a hospital helped her to have a baby, even though she hadn't met the right person to be dad. I am really proud my Mum could do this and I am proud of us and our family (from Our Story, the Donor Conception Network, UK).

As children get older, their questions can become more specific:

What does he look like; do you have a picture? Why did he give his sperm? Will I ever meet him? Do I look like him?

During early childhood, children are working on understanding social relationships. This is the time that they will notice that there are different kinds of families. This is the time when they will probably ask, "Do I have a Daddy?" if you are a single mother or lesbian couple. It is tempting at this point to refer to the donor as the child's father or bio father. I do not recommend this. It is quite fine to use the word "donor" or "sperm donor." While the donor's connection to your child can be important to you or your child, it should not be confused with someone who is an active parent in the family.

There are some books available to help (see [Recommended Reading](#)). You might also want to make your own personal book for your child, using family photographs, pictures, and words.

Discussing assisted conception is not a one time event, but an ongoing process. It happens in the context of a relationship that is evolving and growing stronger. Most important, throughout all discussions and all stages of the child's development, is the need for parents to recognize and accept their children's feelings. Your child will have his own feelings and they are not the same as yours.

For a more detailed discussion see: [Talking with Children about Sperm Donation](#)