

Single Mums: how to talk to your donor conceived children about their origins

Notes from the workshop held on 4 October 2014

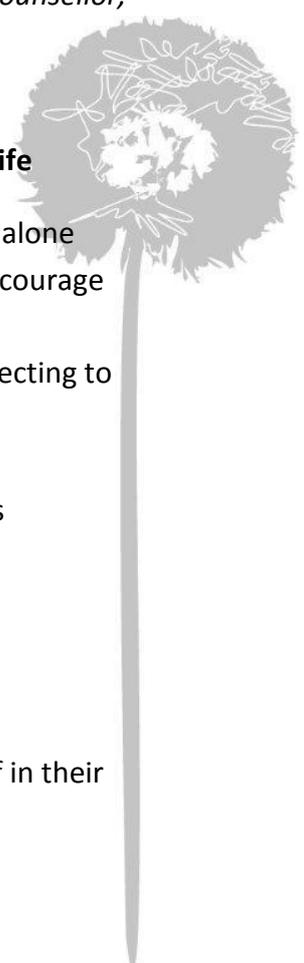
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Parenting as a single mother is perhaps not how you expected or planned your life

- You have thought through the issues and arrived at the decision to parent alone
- This process demonstrates certain qualities including resourcefulness and courage
- These children are highly valued
- There is positive research coming through about the children of women electing to parent on their own
- Don't be hard on yourself
- Concentrate on the similarities with your peers rather than the differences

When talking to your child

- Willingness to be open is more important than choosing the 'right' words
- Remember to try to see things from your child's perspective – put yourself in their shoes
- There is no right/wrong way to do this
- Your own comfort level with the messages you share is very important
- Sharing information is a process which will happen over time
- Childrens' responses will vary – some will not show interest, so do not push it. Be in tune with your child's need for information
- Be open to questions
- If the subject hasn't come up for a while, you may like to drop something into conversation
- Use books to suit your circumstances and the child's age, and prompt questions
- Knowing similar families can help your child (and you) greatly
- Use language that is accurate but that you feel comfortable with – e.g. make sure you feel comfortable using terminology using terminology such as eggs and sperm before you talk to your child using these words. You can start practising these



conversations with your child even when they are a young baby which will help to build up your confidence

Name for the donor

- You may feel comfortable making up a name (be careful not to use a name of anyone known to you, as this may be confusing), or making up a name together
- Ask your donor how he would like to be known to the child, if known
- Some people use 'Donor' or 'Father' or 'Donor Dad'
- Be wary of using the term 'Dad' or 'Daddy', particularly in case you meet someone later who takes on this role. Also be aware that your donor may feel uncomfortable with this term
- You may wish to keep a distinction between the terms 'Dad' and 'Father'

Communication and age

- Be aware of your child's developmental stage and especially their emotional development as these things vary between children and you will know your child best
- Around age 2, there can be triggers for this kind of conversation – e.g. other kids asking about Daddy; Fathers Day
- Age 2-4, be prepared for basic questions, e.g. 'Do I have a Dad?' Try to keep the answer as simple as possible, and appropriate to what they will understand
- Age 6+ - more detail / facts
- Age 8+ - be prepared for detail
- If the donor is known, your child may reach their own conclusions about their relationship "he's not my daddy, he's my friend"
- As children get older, it is their information and they will tell their own story
- Up until ages 6-8, it can be helpful to give your child's friends' parents a heads-up on your situation
- Children should be respectful of older siblings' (e.g. teens') privacy, when sharing the family situation
- If you have pictures of the embryo, this can be part of your sharing / explanation, particularly when learning about genetics (ages 8-12)
- There may be a stage when your child has an imaginary Dad – don't worry about this

Strategies

- When talking about their family / origins, define their family – e.g. grandparents, aunts and uncles
- Let your ‘inner circle’ know when you plan to talk to the child, messages you plan to give them (e.g. name for the donor) and also how they can support you with this
- Fathers Day can be Grandfathers/Uncles Day (or another Mothers Day!)
- Some teachers are better equipped than others – but either way, it is helpful to brief your child’s preschool or school teachers, including the language you use
- Use resources and stories available and mould to your own situation
- Keep a journal of conversations to share when your child is older – or as part of a growing journal
- Male role models are positive, if you have any available

General tips

- Remember that there are a vast number of family ‘types’ in today’s society
- Confidence in your own parenting and situation is important – and this is tied into openness of communication
- If you don’t make a big deal out of it, the child won’t
- Remember that people will judge – not everyone has all the information they need to make decisions

Be sensitive to your child’s needs

- Follow their lead
- Don’t give too much information all at once to young children
- Ask questions back to clarify what they want to know
- Most important is that your child feels loved and valued

Suggested resources

- ‘You were meant to be’ children’s book
- ‘A Very Special Baby’ series of children’s books by Amanda MacLeod and Sam Taylor. Dreambaby, Napier (available through Facebook or search for Dreambaby Books). Picture books for young children, including a topic on single women using donor sperm

- Single Mothers by Choice: A Guidebook for Single Women who are Considering Or Have Chosen Motherhood, Janes Mattes, LCSW Three Rivers Press
- Going It Alone: The Single Woman's Guide to Pregnancy and Birth, Natasha Mirosh and Geraldine Johns, New Holland Publishers, Auckland 2003
- 'Our Family' children's book
- Knock Yourself Up, Louise Sloan
- Choosing Single Motherhood, Mikki Morrissette
- Building a Family, Ken Daniels
- <http://www.varta.org.au/talking-to-children-about-donor-conception-and-surrogacy/> - Australian website with good resources, videos and advice