

Donor conception: Telling your child

Donor conception is when people use eggs, sperm or embryos donated from someone else to have a baby. This may be the only way some people can have a child.

We all have a right to know our own history so it is important for children to know where they come from.

ParentLink

informing



supporting



connecting



Why telling your child is important

Our life story begins with our biology and the characteristics we inherit. Knowing where we come from helps us to understand who we are. Knowing our medical history is also important. It means we may be able to take steps to prevent or get early help for some diseases that may be passed on in our genes, e.g. some cancers or heart disease.

Talking to your child from an early age about how they were conceived makes it a normal part of your family story. You don't need to worry then about sitting down and having 'the big talk' at the 'right time'.

There is also a small but real risk that when your child is an adult they could be sexual with someone they are related to. If both people know their background

they can check whether they are related before this happens.

Secrets can be risky

Some parents think that not telling their child will protect them from being teased or talked about. This means keeping a secret. Secrets can come out by mistake and can damage trust in families.

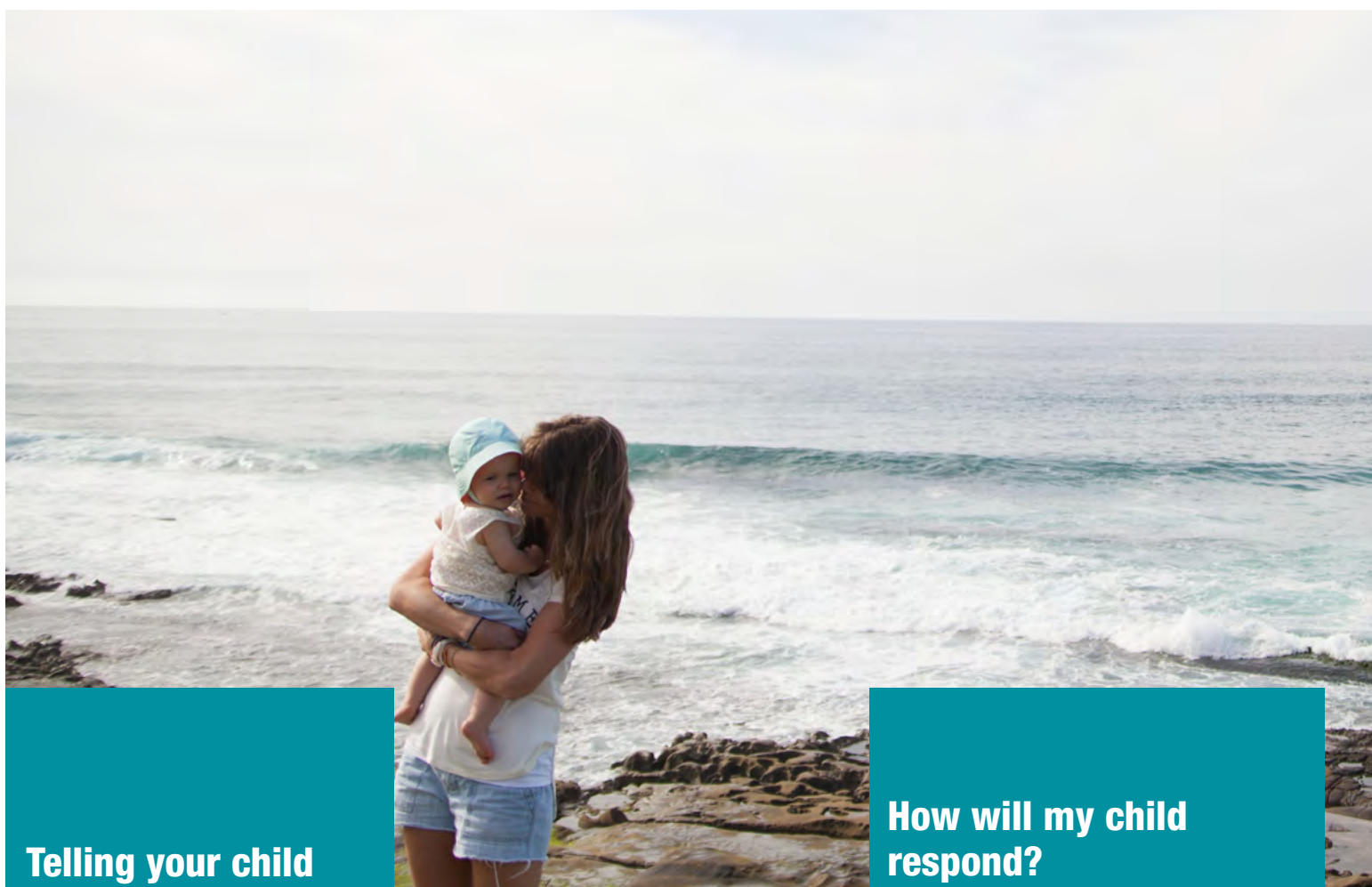
Keeping a secret about how they were created can also make a child and others think you are ashamed of having a baby this way.

Think about what might happen if your child finds out how they were conceived from someone else or by chance. They might have a DNA or blood test for some reason that shows they don't share the same genes as you.



ACT
Government

A PARENTLINK PARENTING GUIDE
www.parentlink.act.gov.au



Telling your child

Children often want to know where babies come from when they are about 3 or 4 years old. You could tell them 'a baby is made from an egg from a woman and sperm from a man. Some families need to get an egg or a sperm from someone called a donor. A kind donor helped us to make you'.

You might want to make a book about their life story and add to it as they get older. You could start with photos of you and your partner at the fertility clinic and at different stages of your pregnancy. You could put in copies of forms and certificates, and photos of their birth.

Young people born from donated tissue say it is best when their parents are the ones to tell them.

In talking with your child:

- make it normal and natural. It is just one of the ways people make a family

- use words that suit their age and maturity
- let them know how happy you are about bringing them into the world with the help of a donor. Make it clear that the donor is someone who gave you an egg or a sperm, just like people give blood to help others. A donor is not their 'real parent', you are their parents
- repeat stories in positive ways as they grow up so that it becomes a normal part of their life.

If a child is not told until they are older they could feel that parents haven't been honest. They may feel a sense of betrayal and that their life is not what they thought it was.

It's important that children grow up knowing their origins. Family secrets can be harmful.

How will my child respond?

Your child's responses may vary as they grow up. They may ask lots of questions, or not seem that interested. They may watch to see how you feel about it.

As children become teenagers they may want to know more. One of the important tasks for teenagers is to work out their own identity. Even though you may be very close, your child might want to learn more about and meet their donor. This doesn't mean you are any less their parent. It just means they want to meet others who share their genes.

It is important for them to have realistic expectations if they meet their donor, and to have your support. It may also help for them to get to know other young people born through donated tissue.

If your child wants to know more about their donor, they are not rejecting you. They just want to know more about where they come from.



ACT law

Your legal rights and responsibilities in the ACT are covered by the *Parentage Act 2004*. This states that the domestic partner of the recipient is presumed to be a parent of any child born from the donation of gametes or embryos. The donor is conclusively presumed not to be a parent (mother or father) of any child born as a result of pregnancy. Hence the donor has no rights in relation to the child and no responsibilities, even if the donor is known to the recipient.

All donor conceived individuals after age 18 years have the right to access identifying information regarding the donor upon request.

Support from reproductive clinics

Some clinics provide ongoing support services to parents after their baby is born. This can include different types of counselling, support groups, workshops or other resources.

Talk with your clinic about the services they offer and if there are any costs for these.



Donor conception: Telling your child

This guide's content was produced by Parenting SA, Women's and Children's Health Network.

© Department of Health and Ageing, Government of South Australia (revised 06/16). Reproduced with permission and adapted by the ACT Government to reflect Australian Capital Territory laws (12/16).

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

Published by ParentLink, Community Services Directorate
GPO Box 158 Canberra ACT 2601

e parentlink@act.gov.au
t 13 34 27

Looking for more information?

ACT Government Publication No. 16/1363 (December 2016)

ParentLink — for other parenting guides, online parenting information
www.parentlink.act.gov.au

Child and Family Centres — for parenting information and support
www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs/childandfamilycentres

Raising Children's Network — covering topics for parenting newborns to teens
<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

