



PATIENT FACT SHEET

Gamete Donation: Deciding Whether to Tell

When a couple is unable to get pregnant on their own, sometimes they use a donor's egg or sperm. This is called "gamete donation". When a child is conceived this way, parents must decide whether to tell their child or keep this information private. This may be a difficult choice to make and sometimes parents do not know where to begin. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine encourages parents to tell their children about the gamete donation. Many countries have laws that allow children to know who their gamete donor is. However, it is ultimately a parent's choice.

Deciding whether to tell your child

You and your partner should discuss your personal values, culture, religious beliefs, and those of your community. Using a professional, such as a fertility counselor, in these conversations may be helpful. As your child grows up and your situation changes, you may change your mind about early decisions you made. Be prepared to have periodic discussions over time.

An important question you must weigh is your right to keep information you believe is private from your child against the child's right to know the circumstances of his/her conception and genetic origins.

You should consider the possibility that your child might find out from someone other than you. If family members or friends know about how your child was conceived, it might be hard to keep this secret. And you should consider any circumstance in which the 'secret' could be used negatively by anyone. Also, there is a very small chance you could lose your privacy if laws change.

You may have difficult emotions about infertility and the fact that you had to rely on a donor to build your family. It's important to resolve these feelings-and your thoughts about a child conceived with the help of a donor-before pregnancy and parenthood.

Benefits of disclosure

If you tell your child, you can make it a positive message. In addition to giving your child the basic information, you can explain the positive reasons why you chose to have a child through gamete donation. You also can explain the donor's good intentions of helping people start a family.

How to tell your child

Many couples would like to tell, but do not know how and when to go about it. You should tell your child at a young age. Later disclosure, when the child is a teenager or adult may make it more difficult for your child to integrate this information into his or her identity.

Plan on having not one conversation but many ongoing conversations with your child. You'll need to add new information as your child gets older and is able to understand. Giving information in a calm, loving manner will set the tone for open family communication later. If you don't know how to begin a conversation about disclosure, there are books that provide scripts to give you some ideas. A good place to start is ASRM's Mental Health Professional Group book list (www.asrm.org) or consumer support organizations, such as RESOLVE (www.resolve.org) and the American Fertility Association (www.theafa.org).

Reasons that you should consider regarding whether to tell or not tell your child that they were born through the help of gamete donation include:

For telling

- Secrets can harm family relationships
- Children often "sense" something is different
- The manner in which you disclose has a powerful impact
- Disclosing in a loving manner has the best impact
- Disclosure may be in the best interest of the child

For not telling

- Your child may question your role as a parent and his or her own attachment to you
- Knowledge of your infertility may become public
- In some communities, your child may be treated differently
- Sperm donation is a practice that is centuries old and has historically involved privacy and anonymity. It has created many stable loving families without significant pathology
- Belief that privacy is in the best interest of the child