



New help for parents of donor conceived children and their friends and family

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How do you go about telling your mum that her much-longed for grandchild has been conceived with help from a donor? And if your sister, son or friend tells you their child is donor-conceived then how do you make sure you can offer the right kind of support?

Advice for people facing these questions is published today by the Donor Conception Network in two new guides: one that helps parents of donor-conceived children share this information with friends and family, and another that offers advice to friends and family members on how best to support parents. With over 35,000 donor conceived children born in the UK since 1991, these issues are relevant to a growing number of people.

The guides were produced with funding from the Nuffield Foundation and can be ordered in print or electronic format from the Donor Conception Network website, www.dcnetwork.org, along with a range of other guidance, books for children and adults, films and online resources. This wealth of resources is designed to help families be open with their children, and is regularly accessed by people in 18 countries across the world.

20 years of “open family” donor conception

Publication of the guides coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Donor Conception Network. Inspired by the pioneering approach of Dr Sheila Cooke of the Jessop Hospital in Sheffield, the Network was formed to support parents and those intending to use donor conception and who intended to challenge the clinical advice of the time that children should not be told about their origins. Since then, over 1,600 families have joined the Network.

An advocate for a change in the culture of secrecy surrounding donor conception, the Network supported the change in the law that enabled those born after 2005 to have access to information about their donors when they become 18. It also successfully campaigned for the introduction of a legal requirement for fertility clinics to advise parents that it was best to tell their children about their origins at a young age, and where they could obtain support.

Walter Merricks, Network Chair, says:

“20 years ago fertility doctors said that secrecy was best. But we felt we wanted to be honest with our children. We know of too many donor conceived individuals who learned the truth as teenagers or adults who feel angry that they had been misled about a key fact relating to their identity. When children are told when young there is never any shock or feeling of deception, and they can integrate this information into their lives as they grow up.

Telling isn't necessarily easy, and for many parents the biggest challenge is not so much telling the child but telling family members and friends. So we know that these publications will meet a real need.

It is heartening to reflect just how far the culture has changed since our Network started, and we are proud to have played a part in bringing that about.”

Dame Suzi Leather, chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 2002 – 2006, says:

“As chair of the HFEA, I saw the Network leading a profound change in attitudes to donor conception. and hugely admired how it combined support for families with influential policy lobbying. That telling donor conceived children of their origins at a young age is now universally accepted as the right thing to do, is the result of its pioneering work. Many thousands of donor conception families in the UK and beyond have cause to be grateful to those who started it, those who have led it, and the many volunteers and members families who have helped sustain it over the years.”

Professor Susan Golombok, director of the Cambridge Centre for Family Research, the UK’s leading researcher on donor conception families, says:

“The support and information provided by the Donor Conception Network to parents faced with the often daunting task of telling their children about their donor conception is unsurpassed, and it is thanks to this ground-breaking organisation that many parents have felt able to be open about this deeply personal and emotive issue. The new materials aimed at family and friends will provide an invaluable addition to their outstanding array of films, books and online resources and will be welcomed by families around the world.”

Notes

- 35,000 donor conceived children have been born as a result of treatment in UK licensed clinics since 1991, and there is an unknown number whose parents had treatment abroad. There are around 10,000 children who have been born following UK clinic treatment since 2005 and who will be able to access information about their donors when they reach 18.
- The Network’s membership includes those who are contemplating or undergoing assisted conception treatment by egg, sperm or embryo donation, and those who are already parenting children. Our membership includes heterosexual couples, single mothers by choice, lesbian couples as well as professionals in the field.
- The two new guidance booklets are written by Olivia Montuschi, a Network founder member, mother of donor conceived children, and author of five other guidance booklets. *“Telling and Talking with Friends and Family about Donor Conception”* and *“Our Family: a guide for the relatives and friends of those contemplating donor conception, undergoing treatment or parenting your donor conceived children”* are available in hard copy (£11.50 each, or £19.00 for both) and can be ordered from www.dcnetwork.org; or as online downloads (£7.00 each).
- The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. More information is available at www.nuffieldfoundation.org

For further information or contact details of donor conception parents and young people willing to talk/appear

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