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- [Parents](#)
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[Donor Conceived Children, Parents Redefining Family](#)

by [Amy Hatch](#) Apr 9th 2009 3:00PM

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Strides in modern fertility science are changing and extending the definition of family. Just ask the parents of children conceived by sperm or egg donation, who are connected and forming bonds through their kids' genetic siblings. What would you do if your child had potentially hundreds of half-brothers and sisters? Would you want to know?

Donor Conceived Children



7 photos



Wendy Kramer's son, Ryan, was just a toddler when he began asking questions about his biological father. Years later, after some false starts and an appearance on Oprah, Ryan found and was united with several of his genetic siblings, all of whom were conceived using the same anonymous sperm donor.

(Note: Please disable your pop-up blocker)

More and more parents whose children were conceived using an anonymous sperm or egg donor are seeking the genetic siblings of their sons and daughters-and creating a new kind of extended family in the process.

[Research shows that families who set out to find these far-flung siblings](#) are motivated by curiosity and the urge to help their kids "enhance their sense of identity." Often, the seekers don't expect a close relationship; however, many of them form intense emotional bonds.

Wendy Kramer, 50, is the founder of the [Donor Sibling Registry](#); she created the website as a means to find the genetic relatives of her donor-conceived son, Ryan, now 18. "We found that he had siblings when Ryan was 9 or 10," Kramer recalls. "It was the policy of the sperm bank not to say how many children that donor had helped to conceive, but someone told me by mistake that three families requested that my donor go back and re-donate, so they could have a second child."

In September of 2000, the Colorado mom formed a Yahoo! Group, and posted a message seeking information. After several false starts, an appearance on Oprah, and families who shied away from making a connection, Ryan finally met one of his half-sisters, Anna, during a 2007 visit to New York City.

The meeting was incredibly emotional -- and not just for Ryan and Anna. Kramer and Anna's mother also found themselves moved by the connection between their children."We hugged and we cried, because we share the

most important things in our lives," Kramer says. "When we look at each other's kids, there are pieces of our own kids there. There is nothing legal to bind us, but the bond we do have is that we both have kids from this same, anonymous person."

That feeling, she said, is the motivation behind her desire to bring more families together via the Donor Registry Site, which is the outgrowth of that first hopeful Yahoo! posting.

Sherry Forsberg heard about the Donor Registry Site on the news one morning, logged on from her Minnesota home, and immediately found that her kids, Zach and Zoé, had several siblings from their donor.

"I showed Zach the website and told him I was going to put him and Zoé on there, and then we saw two other brothers listed there already," says Forsberg. "They were both pretty happy. Zoé has always wanted me to have a whole bunch of kids and was not happy that I didn't -- in preschool she drew her family as having 21 kids. I guess she knew something we didn't."

Like Kramer, Forsberg found that connecting with her kids' genetic siblings inspired unexpected emotions.

"It's kind of weird, but the kids we find seem to be kind of like my own," she says. "There is a connection there, and I worry about them just like I do mine and am proud of their accomplishments just like they were my own kids. I am interested in their lives just as much as if they were my own kids. They are so much like each other, and that connection we have through the kids having some of the same DNA makes us all 'related.'"

She adds that "even the moms feel somewhat connected," and that she is as close to these women as she is to her own sisters. Kristie Spalding agrees, saying that the bond between her daughter, Kelsey, and Forsberg's children is undeniable.

"I consider all the moms that I have met to be part of my extended family, along with their children," Spalding says. "Kelsey and Zack share a lot of the same characteristics, likes and dislikes, and really understand each other. I really enjoy spending time with [all of them]. Sherry is one of the most kind, nicest people I have ever met. She also made me and Kelsey feel like we are part of her family, and I have tried to do the same for them."

Susan, a 56-year-old psychotherapist in San Francisco, agrees that the emotional bond between the parents is as striking as the physical similarities between the children. Her daughter, Zoe, connected with her half-brother, Tanner, after Susan read about the Donor Sibling Registry in *O Magazine*. After a year of waiting for a match, they found Tanner.

Laura and Fawn, Tanner's parents, traveled to California from their home in Bowie, Md., to meet Zoe and Susan. After the initial awkwardness, the kids – and the parents – hit it off. "It was an amazing visit," says Susan. "I think the kids were completely amazed by the experience."

While the kids splashed in a hotel pool, the parents spent their time examining their children for similarities, recalls Laura. "Immediately, we felt compelled to compare the kids," she says. "They definitely had some characteristics in common."

From that day on, the two families were bonded, so much so that Susan conducted the marriage ceremony between Laura and Fawn last year. "The kids were the honored guests, performed a song together and toasted the brides," says Susan. "All of us had a lovely meal together in celebration."

"All of us" included Kitty and Madeleine. Madeleine is also a half-sister to Tanner and Zoe. While the adults let the kids drive the relationship, Kitty says that she welcomes any opportunity to spend time with Madeleine's

half-siblings. Laura's and Fawn's wedding, she adds, "made us all fee like family."

Kramer says that the relationships created via the Donor Registry Site continue to amaze her, and that the circle of families bonded together in this way will only grow over time. Her goal, she says, is to continue encouraging open and honest discourse between kids and parents.

"We are redefining 'family,'" she says.

What would you do if you were the parent of a child conceived via donor insemination? Would you try to find his or her genetic siblings, or would you try to hide it from them?

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[Mark Lyndon](#) 4-09-2009 @ [9:02PM](#)

It's up to them whether or not they want to find any genetic half-siblings, but you definitely shouldn't hide if

from them. It's just one of those things that people have a right to know. If you try to hide it from them, your going to be keeping secrets from your own children, and there's a good chance they'll find out sooner or later anyway.

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- [Birthdays \(22\)](#)
- [Chores \(54\)](#)
- [Fun & activities \(1815\)](#)
- [Holidays \(297\)](#)
- [Mealtime \(149\)](#)
- [Pets \(16\)](#)
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- [Resources \(94\)](#)

- [Siblings \(244\)](#)

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- [Single parenting \(36\)](#)
- [Adoption \(422\)](#)
- [Divorce & custody \(297\)](#)
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- [Relatives \(241\)](#)
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- [Development \(4636\)](#)
- [Eating & nutrition \(1718\)](#)
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- [Home remedies \(23\)](#)
- [Medical conditions \(471\)](#)
- [Sleep \(69\)](#)
- [Special needs \(44\)](#)

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- [Mommy wars \(135\)](#)
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