



8 TIPS FOR PARENTS OF DONOR-CONCEIVED ADULTS Who Are About to Tell

1. When is the best time to tell? Now.

This is not your secret to carry. There will never be a “perfect” time, so the sooner, the better. Make sure you’ve done the psychological work necessary to be emotionally capable to have this conversation, e.g., counseling or soul searching on your own. Take some deep breaths, and try to relax. Many people have walked this path before you, and they have all survived!

2. Tell a little about your story and how you came to use a donor.

You’re setting the tone. Try to keep the conversation light, and use some humor if you can. You need to be as grounded and as level-headed as possible for this conversation because it lays the groundwork for all future conversations.

3. Explain *very honestly* why you haven’t told before now.

Don’t be defensive, and don’t use your story as an excuse. “We forgot about it” isn’t a good excuse, either. Your child wants to hear the *emotion* behind why you didn’t tell. What were you or your spouse afraid of? This can help your child process through their own emotions, which might include anger, sadness, confusion, or even relief.

4. Let your child know that you made the best decisions you could with the information you had at the time.

Explain what you were told by your doctor, including anything you know about the donor. Tell your child how it has felt to carry this information as a secret. Tell them what you’ve recently come to learn about the importance of honesty. Tell them who else knows.

5. Most Important: Apologize. Own it.

This was their information to know, and you kept it from them. *Keep apologizing.* This can allow them to move freely through their emotions without getting stuck in anger. Do not ask them to keep the “secret,” because secrecy implies shame. The shame of infertility should not be passed along to your child as the shame of donor conception.

6. Be ready to continue the conversation.

This is not a one-time conversation. It’s very important that your child knows that this is a welcomed, ongoing conversation and that you will be there by their side as they process this new information, tell family and friends, and incorporate it into their identity. Gently broach the topic regularly if your child doesn’t, so they know you’re there to help them understand what this new information means to them and their life.

7. Telling is just the first step.

Make sure your child knows that any curiosities they have about their half-siblings and/or their unknown biological parent, their ancestry, and their medical history are normal and to be expected. If you are not fully comfortable with this, it’s important that you understand why, so that you can continue to evolve in this area. Be honest as you communicate to your child about it.

8. If your child is curious...

If your child desires to know more about their origins, offer to walk side by side with them to find the information and genetic relatives they feel it’s important to know about. Make sure they understand that their curiosity is not a betrayal to you in any way. This is especially important for the non-biological parent. It’s important for your child to know that many people have also walked this path before them. You can point them to the Donor Sibling Registry for support.



“There is no
greater agony than
bearing an untold
story inside you.”
- Maya Angelou

