

Tips for parents of donor-conceived adults who are about to tell or who have DCP who have found out on their own

- **When is the best time to tell? Now.** This is not a parent's secret to carry. There will never be a "perfect" time, so the sooner, the better. It's important that parents do the psychological work necessary to be emotionally capable to have the conversation and adequately support their children, including talking about and understanding the reasons why they haven't told before now.
- **Remind them that this process can be very positive,** affirming, and lead to a more honest and open family system with relationships now based in truth.
- **Parents can tell their stories and how they decided to use donor conception.** Remind these parents that they are setting the tone for all future conversations about their children's conception, and should try to keep the conversation light, using some humor if possible. They need to be as grounded, calm, and as level-headed as possible, because their donor-conceived children will look to them for answers about why their conceptions stories were kept from them. Openness and honesty are crucial.
- **Explain very honestly why they haven't told before now.** Parents shouldn't be defensive or use their personal stories as an excuse. Donor-conceived people want and deserve to hear the truth and the *emotion* behind why they were not told earlier. What were they or their spouse afraid of? Knowing all of this can help their children adequately process through their own emotions, which might include anger, sadness, confusion, or even relief, while also feeling empathy towards their parents.
- **Parents can let their children know that they made the best decisions they could with the information they had at the time.** Many parents were advised by their gamete vendor or doctor to keep the secret. They can tell their children how it has felt to carry this information as a secret and how they've recently come to learn about the importance of honesty. Parents should also tell their children who else knows.
- **Share any and all information.** For parents with children born before the 1980s (fresh sperm), they may have little, if any, information about the donor, while most parents with children born from the 1980s through present time (frozen sperm) usually do have a donor profile or some other non-identifying information about the donor that can be shared.
- **Most important: Apologize. Own it.** In both scenarios where DCP learned the truth on their own, or when parents disclose it to them as adults, it's important for parents to apologize. This was their children's information to know, and the parents kept it from them for too long. Parents can keep apologizing to allow their children to move freely through their emotions without getting stuck in anger.
- **Recognize the negative implications of asking children to keep the "secret".** Secrecy can imply shame and/or guilt. DCP can respond negatively when asked to carry on the shame of infertility in the form of secrecy. This is a burden that should not be passed along from parent to child.
- **Parents should be ready to continue the conversation.** This is not a one-time conversation between parents and their donor-conceived children. Some parents make the mistake of telling, but then never talking about it again. This gives their children the idea that the topic of their conception story is unwelcomed or too shameful to discuss. It's very important that DCP know that their origin stories are a welcomed, ongoing conversation and that they will be there for them as they process this new information, tell family and friends, and incorporate it into their identity. It's ok for parents to disclose their own discomfort while admitting that they too are on a healing journey. Parents can gently broach the topic regularly if their children don't, so they

know they're there to help them understand what this new information means to them and their life.

- **Telling is just the first step.** Parents must make sure their adult children know that any curiosities they have about their half-siblings and/or their unknown biological parents, their ancestries, and their medical histories are normal and to be expected. If a parent is not fully comfortable with this, it's important they understand why, so they can continue to grow and heal in this area.
- **If their children are curious...** If their children desire to know more about their origins, parents can offer to walk side-by-side with them to find the information and genetic relatives they want to know about. Parents should understand that their children's curiosity is not a betrayal in any way. If they are uncomfortable helping their children learn more, they can honestly express that in a way that lets their children know their discomfort is not their fault, and that they're working on it. This is especially important for the non-biological parent.
- **It's important for DCP to know that many other DCP have also walked this path before them.** Parents should share that although their children's conception stories may be different than most, their stories are not rare and there are opportunities to connect with other DCP via the Donor Sibling Registry and on various other social media groups.