

Information Sharing in 3rd Party Reproduction

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The most common question I get when working with intended parents and gamete recipients is “How and when do we tell our child.” Let me start by saying that it is never too early. Here’s why...When your child is twelve years old and their friend asks him or her, “When did your parents tell you about the donor/surrogate?” the correct answer is “I don’t remember.” The earlier you discuss this with your child, even when they are a baby, the easier it is to normalize the process. Even if your child doesn’t understand, you can still tell them your own story. We talk to our babies all the time. For instance, “it’s getting late it’s time for your bath or “let’s get your sweater on because we’re going to grandma’s house later.” Babies don’t understand all of our language but they are learning. By sharing information about family building early, the child absorbs the information over time. It’s OK if they don’t understand. You get to practice the story and that helps both of you. What’s important to avoid is that big conversation when they are older about the truth. The child will wonder why he or she wasn’t told earlier, What was the big deal? What else are you not telling me? When you talk about your donor or surrogate occasionally, you normalize the process and it communicates your comfortability with how you build your family. It’s an ongoing process over many years where you add information and details over time.

It is important that parents themselves tell their children about how they built their family. Parents should guide the conversation. You don’t want Aunt Sally telling them about their donor at Sunday dinner. I advise you “educate before they ask” because if your child is asking, they likely been wondering for a long time prior to bringing it up.

While there are many published children’s books on surrogacy and egg donation, I always say the best book is the book you write yourself. You can do this with online photo album websites, such as Snapfish or Minted. Collect pictures of your clinic, your donor, surrogate, and doctor. Include pictures of you and your spouse before you were married, marriage photos, or if you are single, other family or friend photos. Don’t forget about pets. If you have pets, include them in your book. Now, here’s how you might word your story.

You will need to adapt the story below to fit your situation. It can be used for all different types of couples and singles, using gametes, embryos, surrogates, or a combination.

Mom and Dad, Dad and Dad, Mom and Mom met (at university, at a party, etc). We fell in love and got (fido or fluffy if you have pets). But we wanted to grow our family even more. But we needed some help. We travelled all the way to (Boise, Idaho) and we met with Dr. Slater. (You can include a map of where you live and where your clinic is located). Dr. Slater said we already have what we need to grow our family. We have love, dedication, the desire to be parents, but...it takes three things to have a baby. Sperm from a man, eggs from a woman and a woman's uterus. We had (one or two) of these things so we needed a helper. That helper was called a donor or a surrogate. Dr. Slater took a part from daddy and a part from the donor and put them together to form something called an embryo. Then she put the embryo into our surrogate (use her name) who grew you in her uterus. We were there when you were born and we wouldn't change anything, because then we wouldn't have you. We are so thankful that we grew our family this way because it allowed us to become your parents. We are so happy that we have you and that we are a family.

In same sex couples, the next question that arises is how to tell our child which one of us is genetically connected. Psychological research tell us repeatedly that relationships are more important than genetics. In fact, I give clients an example in the opposite direction. I say, "There is probably someone in your family you are genetically related to and you wonder, "I can't believe I am genetically connected to them!" We all have people in our family like that. What matters most is our relationships not our genetic connection. It's important to tell donor conceived children early, when they around two or three, or even earlier, that "We are both your parents the same. We both love you. But you share blood or genetics with (genetic parent). However, this information is really just important for our health and for the doctor. In this manner you are sharing your values and the truth. The child will grow up and not need to wonder to whom they are genetically connected. They will learn the value of love and the importance of relationships.