Preparing you and your family for the possibility of contact: Questions to consider

Online commercial DNA testing as well as the shift to identity-release donation in the UK, mean that any donor whose donation has led to the birth of a child is potentially identifiable. This does not mean that every donor will be identified or contacted or that every donor conceived person will be able, or want to trace people related to them via donor conception.

However, you may wish to think about what being identified would mean for you so that you can prepare yourself and, potentially, other people in your life for the possibility of being contacted by people born as a result of your donation.

It may be that:

- You have not thought about the potential implications of your information being released since the donation.

- You may have become curious about children created from your donations if you don't have children of your own.

- Or you may have always been curious about the families and children created from your donations and looked forward to the possibility of contact.

- You have spoken with family and/or friends regarding your past donation.

- You have considered speaking to somebody about being a donor but might have found it difficult to know what to say or even how to start a conversation.

- Or you have not told anybody about your donation.

- You may know how many people (if any) have been born from your donations.

- Or you may never have been told or requested this information. Did you know that you can ask the HFEA for this information if you donated after 1991?

- You may be uncertain where you can seek advice, guidance and support.

- You may feel unsure what contact might look like, what might be expected of you, or how you are 'meant' to respond.

It is entirely normal to be experiencing a whole range of emotions when considering speaking to others about your donation, especially if this is an area of your life you have kept personal and private from friends and/or family.

Preparing for (possible) initial contact

Contact might happen in a variety of ways – or not at all.

- If you are an identity-release donor and you've kept your address details up-to-date with the HFEA, then you may first receive a letter from the HFEA to inform you that someone born from your donation has requested your identifying information. Bear in mind, that they might not subsequently choose to contact you or may wait some time before doing so.

- It is possible but unlikely that a donor conceived person will make first contact by knocking on your door. (knocks on the door tend only to happen when people have received no responses from other attempts to contact their donor).

- It is possible that someone related through donor conception will attempt to contact you via out-of-date contact information (e.g. out of date address details held with the HFEA).

- If any of your relatives has used an online commercial DNA test, someone conceived from your donation may identify you via one of your relatives (particularly if they are easier to trace or contact) and so the initial contact may come through them.

Preparing yourself for contact

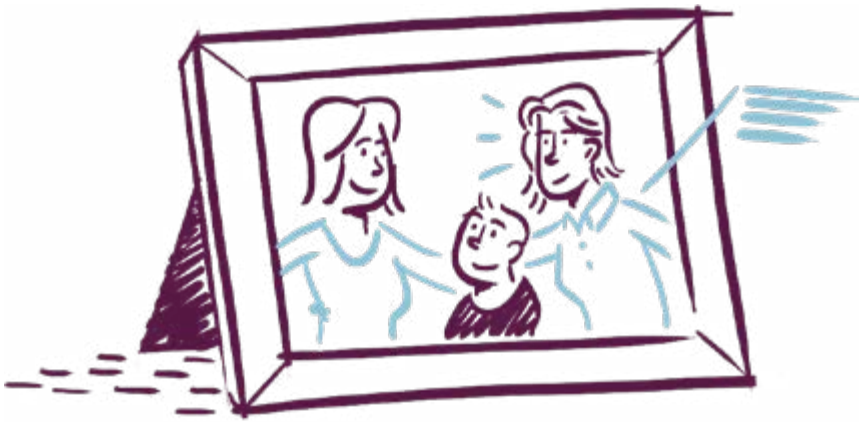
Donors often feel that they should follow the lead of the donor conceived person in terms of how contact happens. However, it may be helpful to explore your own feelings and preferences too.

Consider:

- What are your own hopes and expectations in respect of contact with the donor conceived person? Do you have any worries or concerns? What would you like to know about them, or ask them?

- Have you considered whether you want to establish any boundaries, and what your boundaries might be? It is OK for you to feel that boundaries are necessary.

- What is going on in your life right now? Is this a good time for you to have ongoing contact?



- Have you considered that you might want to turn down or postpone a request to meet the donor conceived person if they contacted you? What would it feel like to do this?

- How will you feel if the donor conceived person looks very like you, or one of your family members or relatives?

- And how would you feel if you are very different? You may not have anticipated the donor-conceived person's lifestyle and circumstances, and they may not have anticipated yours. For example, you may not have considered each other's sexual orientation or family set up (for example, single parent or divorced/separated family). You may not share the same social/educational/cultural background, you could have very different life experiences and lifestyles and your first language may not be the same.

- How would you feel about being contacted by someone conceived from your donation, before they are eighteen? This is possible in the context of online commercial DNA testing or if they are the younger sibling of someone also conceived from your donations who is an adult. How would you respond?

- If you are contacted by someone conceived from your donation, they may also be interested in genetic half siblings. You may not have any information about genetic half siblings. If you do, think about whether you could/should disclose their identity.

- If you have agreed to meet with someone conceived through your donation, how would you feel if they brought someone along with them?

- If you decide to meet a donor conceived person, think about whether you would want to take someone with you for support. Who could you ask?

Preparing your family for the possibility of contact

- Is your partner aware of your donation? Have you considered what the impact of this might be on your relationship with your partner?

- Do you have any children? Are they aware of your donation? Are they aware contact may be made from a genetic relative? What are their feelings about this? They may see these connections differently to you.

- Have you considered how your wider family might feel about the possibility of contact? How will you manage it if your parents see things differently to you?

- What expectations do you have about your family members' involvement in any contact? Do they feel the same way?

- If you and your partner donated an embryo, any donor conceived person will be fully genetically related to your children – what might this be like for you all? How do you feel about this?

- If you do not have your own family, have you considered how contact may affect you? This may make you experience a range of emotions, such as jealousy, envy, anger, sadness, happiness, or curiosity.

- If you have recently been bereaved, contact may lead to renewed grief.

Preparing for no contact

- Not all donor conceived people will be interested in making contact with their donor and those that do have identity-release donors will not necessarily choose to do this at age eighteen. How will you feel if you are not contacted?

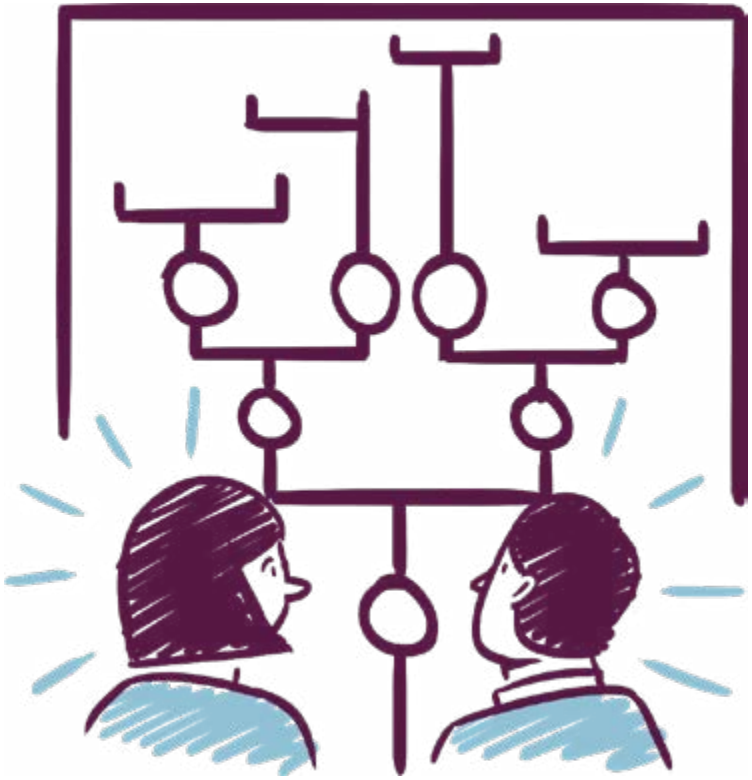
- Not all donor conceived people know they are donor conceived and this can be another reason why you may not be contacted.

- Consider that people conceived from your donation might be more interested in contact with donor siblings than with you the donor.

- Have you considered how you would feel if you were notified by the HFEA that a request has been made to release your identity but no one contacts you following that?

- As well as preparing your family for the possibility of contact, consider discussing with them the possibility of contact not happening after all.

Preparing for multiple requests for contact



- Do you know, or can you estimate, the number of people who have been born from your donation? Consider how you would feel if you are contacted by several donor conceived people, and that contact might take place over a number of years.

- Is it important to you to offer everyone who gets in touch a similar kind of relationship? Consider what is possible for you, practically and emotionally.

Preparing for contact as a result of online (commercial) DNA testing

- If a relative of yours has used an online commercial DNA testing site (such as 23andMe or Ancestry) it is possible that your relative(s) may be contacted by a person conceived from your donation before you are.

- This is possible even if you have never registered with an online DNA testing site but one of your relatives has (depending on the privacy settings they have chosen).

- Where people have been ‘matched’ with you or your relatives on an online commercial DNA test you may be contacted by people conceived from your donation (and/or their parents) before their eighteenth birthday. This is because the HFEA rules about age and information disclosure do not apply to online commercial DNA testing sites.

- Have you considered the possibility that the people conceived from your donations do not know they are donor conceived? If they discover that you are a ‘match’ from an online commercial DNA test, they may not know how you are related to them. If they contact you, how would you feel about disclosing that information to them?

Whom to contact for information and to seek support:

HFEA

You can contact the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority:

- for practical advice and support:
  https://www.hfea.gov.uk/

- if you wish to remove your anonymity:
  https://www.hfea.gov.uk/donation/donors/remove-your-donor-anonymity/

- to apply for information (opening the register):
  https://www.hfea.gov.uk/donation/donor-conceived-people-and-their-parents/apply- for-information/

- if you wish to contact the clinic for counselling support or to update contact details:
  https://www.hfea.gov.uk/choose-a-clinic/

BICA

If you would like to speak to a professional person trained in this area, then the British Infertility Counselling Association (www.bica.net) has a list of counsellors on their website who are specialist in the area of fertility.

Donor Conceived Register

This voluntary contact DNA register, formerly known as UK DonorLink (UKDL), was set up to enable people conceived prior to August 1991 through donated sperm or eggs, their donors and half-siblings to exchange information and, where desired, to contact each other:
Donor Conceived Register (DCR) - Liverpool Womens NHS Foundation Trust

Donor Conceived UK

A peer-led charitable organisation dedicated to representing donor-conceived individuals, donors, and those affected by donor conception practices in the United Kingdom. Our mission is to champion, empower, and amplify the voices of the donor conceived community in the UK through support, education, and advocacy.
https://donorconceiveduk.org.uk

Donor Conception Network

DC Network is a charity offering information, support and community to donor conception families and prospective families:

https://dcnetwork.org/who-are-we/who-are-dcnetwork

The development of this resource was funded by an UKRI ESRC Impact Accelerator Award (University of Manchester).

The resource was developed in 2022-2023 by a team of professionals across a number of organisations: Joanne Adams, Nina Barnsley, Laura Bridgens, Meenakshi Choudhary, Helen Clarke, Roy Davis, Debbie Evans, Lucy Frith, Leah Gilman, Debbie Howe, Jackson Kirkman-Brown, Patricia Lambert, Charles Lister, Kevin McEleny, Petra Nordqvist, Angela Pericleous-Smith, Caroline Spencer, Caroline Redhead and Wayne Vessey.

Illustrations and design by James Huyton of Burograph Ltd.