

Thinking about known egg donation?

Advice about what to consider

In the UK it is possible to donate or receive eggs in what is referred to as a 'known donor' arrangement. Simply defined this is 'donating to someone you know'. This kind of donation raises particular questions for those involved, which might relate to the kinds of relationships the egg donor and recipient have at the outset of treatment, as well as to any future relationships with one another and any offspring. As part of a research project looking at the experiences of egg donors (the 'EDNA' study) De Montfort University, in collaboration with the SEED Trust, Pride Angel, Fertility Network UK and Donor Conception Network have produced this short guide for those thinking about known donation. It is based on the advice of women who have acted as a known egg donor and is intended to be of use primarily for those considering providing eggs in a known arrangement. It may also be of interest to recipients of donor eggs as well as professionals who are supporting families using this arrangement.



Take your time deciding to donate

Women gave the advice not to rush into donating eggs to someone you know, but to take enough time to decide whether it's the right thing for you and your family. Some women said that being clear about boundaries was especially important with people you know, and not to feel pressured to become a donor because of a friendship or family relationship, if it's not right for you.

"I really liked the idea of having a friendship and some sort of a relationship in the future. I quite liked the idea of the child always knowing who I was, in some capacity, rather than it being a big secret."

Get to know one another

Women looking to meet possible recipients, rather than donating to family or friends, wanted to find people that they felt would be good parents and who shared their desire to be open with the donor-conceived child. It was also important that they could get along with each other in what would be a long-term (if sometimes distant) friendly relationship.

"Find out more info in writing before calling and chatting to a prospective couple. It's harder to turn someone down you've spoken to."

"Get to know the couple first and have the same expectations for ongoing contact."

Be clear about what you want

If you are planning to do a known donation, even if it is with family members or friends, it's important to make your own decisions about how you want things to be after the donation and birth, rather than simply accepting the recipient's wishes.

"Do a ton of research. Feel comfortable speaking up for yourself and surround yourself with loved ones and/or other donors who can help you identify what questions you should be asking."

"Known egg donation is amazing but do not feel pressured into having more involvement with the family in the future if you do not feel that you want or need to."

Most donors said that they discussed contact with the child and with the recipients after donation, and the timing and legal implications. Some donors had talked about what would happen to any leftover eggs or embryos, and what would happen if the donation affected the donor's health.

"[We discussed] at what age recipients would tell their children, the fact that I could tell my children whenever I wanted, and social media disclosure agreements. All of our shared contacts and whether or not we would tell them."

Consider drawing up a donor agreement

In some countries, including the UK, the relationship between donors and recipients is defined by law if they donate at a clinic, even if they know one another. Legally-binding agreements are more common in the USA. Even so, some donors said that drawing up an agreement was important because it helped make sure that everyone was clear about their expectations from the beginning and got people to think through what they wanted after the child was born, which could avoid problems later on. Some women felt they had already prepared really well and would not do anything differently, while others thought they could have prepared more.

"I wish I'd done more to formalise the plans I made with each family, about our plans for the future. I'm unsure of where that info may have come from, but it would have been helpful."

This was particularly important if things changed after the birth, which may be the point when it becomes clear whether everyone has the same understanding of how things are going to be.

"I'd struggle to believe that the IP (intended parents) would stick to the plans that were discussed in the early part of the relationship. If I was giving advice to someone else being a known donor, I'd stress the point of how important it is to have a formal, legal agreement drawn up to safeguard the expectations of all concerned."

Think about what to tell your own children

Most of the donors who had children at the time of donation said they talked to their children before they donated, as well as their spouse. This meant their children were aware of the potential for there to be half-siblings and that they may be able to have contact. One donor, who had her children after donating, said that she didn't think about this issue at the time, so she didn't plan what to say.

"The DC (donor conceived) children I helped create were born before my own children and I feel that now I have my own children, they receive something of a short shrift in these situations. They have no legal entitlement to search for their own DC sibling connections and I didn't protect their rights enough when I entered into the known donor arrangements"

Anticipate future changes

Some women found that the relationship with the recipients changed a lot after the child was born, which could be distressing if it was different from the initial agreement. Some recipients wanted less contact than before, or none at all.

"[The recipients wanted] less contact, rather than regular contact before [the donation]."

"One couple changed their mind about explaining to their daughter how she was created. This put me in a tricky position when it came to telling my own children, who I preferred to be very open and upfront with."

For others, the opportunity to meet their donor-conceived child after the birth helped them keep the boundary they wanted.

"I actually got to meet my first donor baby after my recipient asked if I wanted to see him. That was an extra bonus and made me happy that I didn't feel any ties to the baby."

Get support from other donors

Although support from their spouse, parents, friends, children and sometimes colleagues was important, participants especially valued the experience of other known donors, who understood what it was like to go through egg donation and had informed advice to give on the kinds of issues that came up and how to handle them.

"I don't remember thinking that talking to friends, outside of the fertility industry, was particularly helpful, as they knew so little about the process, that conversations often revolved around me educating my friends on how things worked and having little opportunity to talk through my thoughts and opinions very much."

Women found this support in a number of places including online forums and fertility-focused social media sites.

"I found the closed Facebook group 'We are Egg Donors' an invaluable source of support and comfort."

Make the most out of the counselling

Most women thought that the counselling (as is provided by many fertility clinics) was a good idea as it can help explore feelings about the donation and raise issues that hadn't been considered, and it can also help prepare for how things might turn out.

"Have counselling, don't be afraid to ask any question or talk about any worries you may have."

"The therapist helped me think of possible conversations, questions, outcomes, etc."

Women advised that counselling could be particularly useful if the donation didn't go to plan or if the relationship between the donor and recipients became strained after the donation.

"Be prepared for it to be devastating if it doesn't work."

Enjoy the process!

Finally, there was encouragement to 'enjoy the process' and to remember that it makes a difference.

"From a purely selfish perspective, it feels so good to help someone have a family. I think we often underestimate the personal value gained from helping others. The minor inconveniences of taking medications and the procedure were more than worth the satisfaction of being able to give a friend the help they needed to have a baby."

About the EDNA project

This resource was developed based on the findings from the EDNA Project which explores the social, political, economic and moral configuration of egg donation in the UK, Spain and Belgium.

For more information about the project, visit the [EDNA project website](#) or contact Principal Investigator, Professor Nicky Hudson: nhudson@dmu.ac.uk

You can also follow the project on Twitter: [@edna_project](#) and the [EDNA project blog](#).

For more information about egg donation, visit:

[**SEED Trust**](#)

[**Pride Angel**](#)

[**Fertility Network UK**](#)

[**Donor Conception Network**](#)

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