

CHOOSING BETWEEN A KNOWN & UNKNOWN SPERM DONOR

By Amanda Hopping-Winn

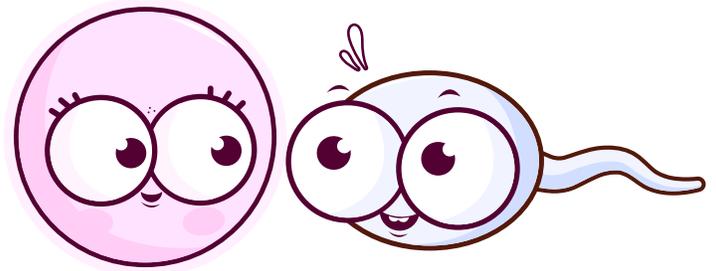
For some individuals and couples, choosing a sperm donor can be one of the most challenging decisions they will need to make on their path to parenthood. This article will attempt to help you work through that process in as pain-free a way as possible. Move through the following questions to help better define what you are looking for in a donor.

1) Is it important to you that your sperm donor has a familial connection to your child?

Obtaining sperm from a family member of the partner whom is not supplying the egg allows for both parents to have a biological connection to the baby. For some individuals and couples, this is highly important and makes the decision to use a known donor a simple one. If you answered yes to this question, you can stop here; a known donor is for you! If you answered no, continue on.

2) Do you want your child to have a relationship with the sperm donor from an early age?

A known donor offers the opportunity for a relationship with the child prior to age 18. While most sperm or cryobanks do offer “identity release” donors, those who have indicated they are comfortable having their contact information shared with offspring who are 18 years of age or older, there is no guarantee that the donor will want a relationship at that point. If a relationship between the donor and child is important to you, you will want to pursue a known donor. It is possible to use a known donor and facilitate an agreement where there is no relationship between child and donor. If you are certain you don’t want a relationship between the two, there are still ways in which you can keep both known and unknown donor options on the table.



3) Are you concerned about the cost of sperm?

Vials of sperm from a cryobank range from \$300-\$1000, and most individuals make multiple attempts over several months before becoming pregnant. The totals can add up quickly. That being said, there are no legal fees associated with terminating parental rights for an anonymous donor. If you opt to use a known donor, there are generally no costs for the sperm sample itself, but you will need to factor in legal fees to ensure that the parentage of the offspring is clearly defined.

To note, every state has laws regarding sperm donation, how it must be done in order to be a legally recognized sperm donation, and who is a presumed parent. These laws vary state to state. This is yet another reason to consult with an ART attorney in your state about your particular scenario.

4) How important is a thorough medical and psychosocial background to you?

Because of the extensive amount of information required by cryobanks in order to become a donor, the cryobanks actually know more about their donors than the donors may know about themselves! This information is gleaned from the questionnaires and medical tests required to proceed. Ironically, the information you acquire from a known donor may not be as complete as the information you obtain when choosing an unknown donor.

5) How comfortable are you asking uncomfortable questions?

If you choose a known donor, there are many questions you will want to ask to ensure the viability of the sperm and the medical health of the donor as well as ascertain any genetic conditions that a child conceived with the sperm may be predisposed to. These questions may include:

- Do you have currently, or have you ever had, an STD? If yes, please specify.
- Do you have a history of drug use of any kind including long-term prescription medication use?
- Do you smoke cigarettes?
- Do you smoke marijuana? If so, how much?
- Do you drink alcohol? If so, how much?
- Are your parents and grandparents alive? If not, at what age did they pass away and from what cause?
- Do you personally have or does anyone in your family (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings) have a history of the following:

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| ✓ Cancer (note type) | ✓ Congenital disease |
| ✓ Heart disease | ✓ Obesity |
| ✓ Schizophrenia | ✓ Allergies/asthma |
| ✓ Depression | ✓ Liver disease |
| ✓ History of addiction (alcohol or drug use) | ✓ Eye disease |
| ✓ Bipolar disorder | ✓ Learning disability (note which) |
| ✓ Other mental health issues (note which) | ✓ High blood pressure |
| ✓ Cystic Fibrosis | ✓ Migraine headaches |
| ✓ Genetic illnesses of personal concern (note which) | ✓ Stroke |
| | ✓ Other |

- Do you have a desire to parent a child that results from this donation?
- What are your current intentions for any child born through your donation (any contact desired, kind of contact, etc.)?
- Are you planning on letting others in your life know about your donation?

- Do you anticipate that your parents or other family members may wish to have a relationship with any resulting child?
- How would you respond if you do not know the resulting child and they wish to meet you and/or pursue a relationship in the future?
- If you have or will have children of your own, do you visualize them having a sibling relationship with any resulting child from this donation?
- If you are not able to have your own children in the future, do you anticipate that this will change the relationship you desire to have with any resulting child from the donation?
- Do you anticipate any change of relationship with the child if you marry in the future (assuming not currently married)?
- Would you want to be the designated legal guardian in the event of my death following the birth of any resulting child?
- Would you consider donating again if I wish to have siblings for my child?
- Would you be willing to have your sperm tested prior to donation?

The best way to protect all parties involved, and to ensure you have asked and addressed all the relevant questions, is to speak both with a physician about medical testing and questions, and with an attorney knowledgeable in assisted reproductive technology who can guide you in this process. In that way, you and the donor are both protected, and the parentage for any resulting child will be assured from birth. If these questions feel too invasive, personal, or uncomfortable to ask, you may prefer having a cryobank take care of ascertaining that information for you. Regardless of the path you choose, known or unknown donor, there will be questions along the way! Family Equality Council is here to help via email, phone, and chat option. For more information, visit www.familyequality.org.

About the Author: Amanda Hopping-Winn joined Family Equality Council in December 2017 as Chief Program Officer. Amanda has always been passionate about serving marginalized families and brings with her over 10 years of expertise in program development and evaluation. She and her partner live in Portland, OR with their two young children.