

COLAGE

DI

DONOR INSEMINATION

GUIDE

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MY STORY

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Welcome to the DI Guide! As the principal author of this resource, I am very much excited for you to read this publication. Before you jump in, please, allow me to share the perspective I bring to this work. I was conceived through donor insemination (DI) and raised by my two out lesbian mothers in Corvallis, Oregon, a small college town in the western half of the state. As my mother now puts it, “I wasn’t trying to be an activist, I just wanted to be a mother.” Her road to this goal was not easy. Several known donors failed to produce a pregnancy and one of her doctors refused to help her conceive because she is a lesbian. Finally, on her last attempt, I was conceived. My donor was an anonymous friend of a doctor who agreed to help my mother.

As so many of the people represented in this guide, I struggled to explain my family and genetic origins. I would avoid questions about my “dad” at all costs and would never tell people I had two moms. I can imagine that many of my friends in elementary school thought I had a super mom who happened to be both a middle school teacher and nurse practitioner. When I was pressed to answer questions about my father, I never told the truth. One of my well-meaning elementary school friends even looked up my last name in the phone book and, upon coming across a man with my last name, announced he had found my father.

As awkward as these early experiences were, I grew older and became more “out” about my family and being born through DI. I found friends who were strong allies and supported me in situations when I was too scared or embarrassed to be out about my family. When I went to college, I began to embrace being different and the mystery that is my “father.”

I feel extremely fortunate to be at the forefront of a movement of donor-conceived people who are coming of age and speaking out about our experiences. I hope this guide is just the beginning of many publications by my fellow “DI COLAGers” that elevate the voices of this constituency and help make the world a more accepting place for donor-conceived people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ) parents.

Jeff DeGroot
April 2010

San Francisco, California

DI Guide Acknowledgements

This project is the culmination of much thoughtful and passionate work that started long before I began working at COLAGE. Without COLAGE's dedicated founders, volunteers and staff that have built the organization over the past twenty years, my fellowship and thus this guide would have never come to be. Specifically, I want to thank all of the DI COLAGErs who helped increase awareness of the DI constituency within COLAGE.

Few people have contributed more of their time and effort to COLAGE than Meredith Fenton, the former National Program Director, and Beth Teper, the current Executive Director. Meredith Fenton, who first introduced me to COLAGE, served as my direct supervisor during the first half of my fellowship and helped me formulate a vision for this project. Moreover, Meredith proved to be invaluable in the research and writing phases of this project, during which she edited full drafts of this guide on short notice. Beth Teper also acted as a supervisor throughout my fellowship and provided sage advice throughout the project.

In addition, the entire COLAGE staff including Bethany Lockhart, Carlos Uribe, Chiah Connolly-Ingram, Jack Ryder, Jamon Franklin, Mark Snyder and Monica Canfield-Lenfest, have stepped up in countless ways to ensure the success of this guide. In particular, Monica Canfield-Lenfest deserves recognition for her support as my supervisor during the second half of my fellowship. Whether editing an outline or helping me design a workshop, Monica has always been a source of inspiration and support.

A passionate cadre of volunteers also contributed significant time to ensure this guide could be published. A number of people including Marcus Liefert, Ruby Cymrot-Wu, Morgan Green and Jamie K. Evans were always willing to step up when I needed advice or help with a project. A team of dedicated readers also volunteered to serve as the principal editors of the guide. This team included Alice Ruby, Jean Benward, Joanna Scheib, Tasha Jackson, Laura Goldberger, Liz Coolidge and Emily McGranachan. Special recognition must be given to Alice Ruby and Emily McGranachan who were my go-to advisors throughout my fellowship. Cathy Sakimura of The National Center for Lesbian Rights also deserves thanks for helping me understand the complex set of laws that impact our families and for the authoring the legal resource section of this guide.

My gratitude also goes out to Ryan LaLonde who generously donated his time and talents to design the layout for the guide. While I was frantically attempting to copy edit this guide, my friends stepped up and helped me read through multiple drafts. Sally Hughes specifically deserves credit for putting her life on hold to help me edit the final copy of the guide.

Finally, I must thank my parents. Despite their insistence otherwise, they each acted courageously when they decided to become out lesbian parents in the mid 1980's. They have both given me so much, including the passion and strength that were required to complete this project.

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INTRODUCTION

What is a DI COLAGER?
How This Guide Came To Be
How To Use This Resource
A History of the DI COLAGER Boom



To Parents/Service Providers

This guide was written primarily with the interests of DI COLAGers in mind. However, this guide is also intended to be a helpful resource for parents, prospective parents and service providers. In other words, this guide was created for DI COLAGers and is intended to be read primarily by this constituency.

It is likely that parents will be the first ones to receive this resource before children have access to it. This means parents will be the ones deciding if this is an appropriate resource for children. **Parents, prospective parents and service providers are encouraged to read this guide to gain a better understanding of the experiences of DI COLAGers.** While it is of course suggested children be able to access this guide as they please, there is some pertinent information parents should know before deciding if their child should read this resource.

First, this guide is intended for youth who are of fifth grade age or older. All definitions and descriptions of insemination are meant to be age appropriate for that age group. If your child is of fourth grade age or younger, you can read the guide to them or with them to help them understand both the language used and the topics discussed throughout this resource.

Second, this guide deals with potentially sensitive topics for families. This guide would not be needed if everything was always easy for DI COLAGers and, given this, it takes on topics that families can have problems talking about.

Finally, this guide in no way takes a stand on how parents should conceive or raise their children—other than to suggest broadly that open dialogue is a powerful tool for all family members. Instead, the guide only attempts to present how both DI COLAGers and their parents feel in order to facilitate important discussions on topics facing this constituency.

At the end of this guide there are separate resources including one for prospective parents and another for parents (see p.54). In addition to these two stand-alone fliers, there are also information sheets for school administrators/teachers and for medical professionals. Parents may want to access and distribute these if their child is too young to use them on his or her own (see p.65).

What is a DI COLAGER?

What is a COLAGER? And for that matter, what is a DI COLAGER? **A COLAGER is a person who has or had a parent who identifies(d) as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ). A DI COLAGER is a person who has or had an LGBTQ parent and was born through donor insemination.** It is important to remember that DI COLAGERS come from all kinds of families and that “donor insemination” means different things to different people.

For the purposes of this guide, donor insemination means any process through which your biological mother became pregnant by means of a donor’s sperm. A handful of LGBTQ parents who contributed to this guide said they decided to have a child through “donor insemination” but chose to inseminate by having sex with the donor. Through whatever process you were born to LGBT parent(s) with the help of a donor, this guide is for you.

While some DI COLAGERS have anonymous donors, others have donors they can meet when they turn 18, and still others have known donors who they have known their entire lives. Additionally, there are DI COLAGERS who have situations that do not fit into any of these three models.

In this guide, most chapters are organized by the donor type. To simplify the guide, three general categories of donors are used: anonymous donors, open identity donors (donors who are willing to be known when you turn 18), and known donors. Because there are many situations that do not fit neatly into one of these categories, these categories are meant to encompass varying experiences. In the known donor section, for example, experiences range from people who have only met their donor a few times to people who relate to their donor as their active parent.

It also should be mentioned that DI COLAGERS use different vocabulary to describe their donor. When discussing their “donor,” they use many different terms such as, “biological father,” “donor dad,” “seed dad,” “father” and many more. **Throughout this guide the term “donor” is used to describe the person who donated sperm for a pregnancy.** However, it should also be mentioned that DI COLAGERS use different words to describe their donor, such as, “biological father,” “donor dad,” “seed dad,” “father” and many more. Remember that it is up to you to decide what label you want to use, even if it is not listed above.

It is important to remember that DI COLAGERS come from all kinds of families and that “donor insemination” can mean different things to different people.

For more definitions of commonly used terms in this guide, see the glossary on page 11.

How This Guide Came To Be

It is important to understand how this resource was assembled and whose viewpoints it represents. This section is primarily meant for adults to understand what information was used to create this guide. If you are a youth, you may want to get your parent's help reading this section or skip to the *How to Use This Resource* section.

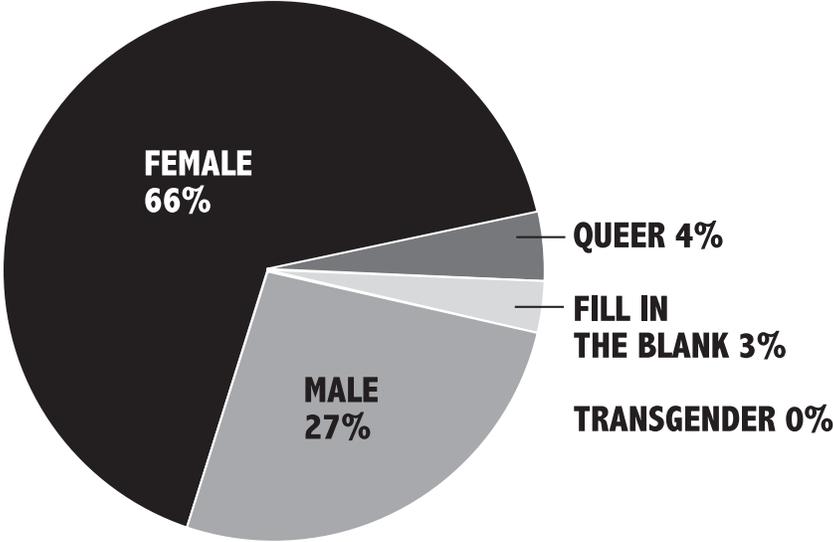
The author spent several months conducting one-on-one interviews with people born through DI, LGBTQ parents of donor conceived youth, and experts working in the LGBTQ fertility field. This initial research informed the creation of two national surveys, one for donor conceived people with LGBTQ parents and one for LGBTQ parents with donor conceived children. These surveys were advertised on the COLAGE website and further distributed nationally by a number of LGBTQ advocacy and parenting organizations.

In total, 311 people responded to the surveys over a three-month period—235 parents and 76 DI COLAGERS. Of the 235 parents who took the survey, 90.4 percent identified as Caucasian, they ranged in age from 22 to 65, had a household median income range of \$99,000-\$104,000 and represented 32 states. The 76 DI COLAGERS who took the survey ranged in age from 11 to 37, were from 21 states (including the District of Columbia) and were predominantly Caucasian, with only 5.3 percent identifying as a Person of color. Of the DI COLAGERS who responded to a question about their gender identity, 66.7 percent identified as female, 26.7 percent identified as male, 4 percent identified as genderqueer and 2.7 percent chose the "Fill in the Blank" option. Finally, of the DI COLAGERS who answered the question about their donor, 31.1 percent said they had a known donor, 24.3 identified as having an open identity donor (a donor who becomes known at age 18), 29.7 said they had an anonymous donor, while 14.9 percent chose the "Fill in the Blank" option, meaning they did not believe their situation fit any of the listed categories. The results from the surveys were supplemented by recordings of two in-person discussion groups of DI COLAGERS and one parent discussion group where themes covered in the surveys were explored in detail.

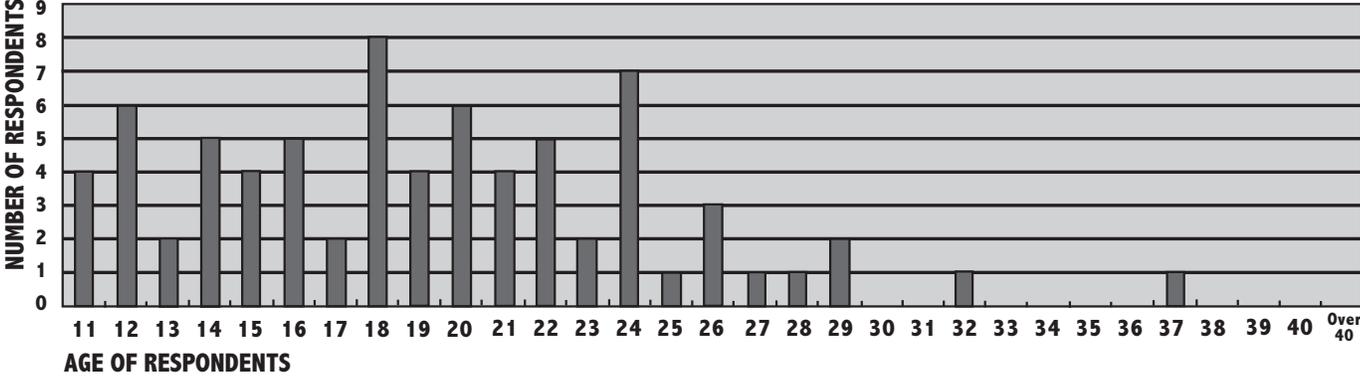
Since neither of the surveys were meant to be formal research studies, the quantitative results from the surveys are mostly omitted from this guide. Instead, qualitative answers to questions on the surveys that represent general trends in the data are given. This guide is not intended to make generalizations about how this constituency feels about certain issues. Instead, it is meant to offer a sampling of different experiences and opinions on the range of issues this constituency commonly faces. In other words, the guide was published to share how different DI COLAGERS have dealt with the situations they face as donor

This section is primary meant for adults to understand information that was used to create this guide. You may want to get your parent's help reading this section or just skip to the *How to Use This Resource* section.

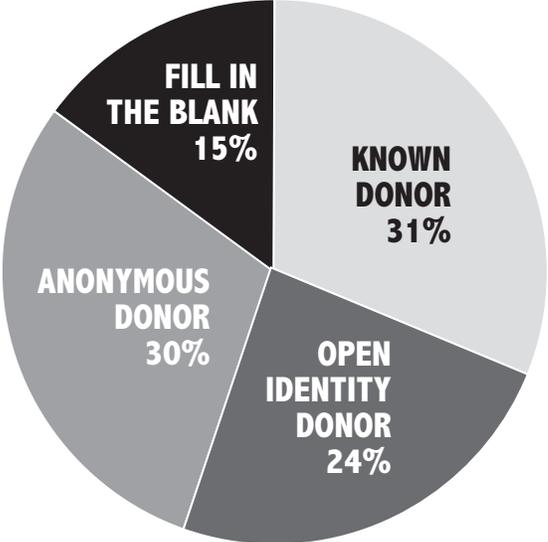
Gender Identity of DI COLAGEr Respondents



Age Distribution of DI COLAGEr Respondents



Donor Relationships of DI COLAGEr Respondents



conceived children of LGBTQ parents. Because the research is presented in this fashion, the guide often provides first person accounts of situations DI COLAGERS commonly face. The majority of the quotes are taken from the surveys, while a small number are from the national discussion groups discussed above. The first names of the people quoted are given whenever possible, unless the survey respondents chose to remain anonymous.

While the number of respondents to both surveys surpassed original goals and expectations, there are still significant gaps in the responses that must be highlighted. As discussed above, all survey responses were voluntary and required a computer and internet connection for submission. Next, the

“Yes! My family’s racial identities have made our queer identity more visible. We have to come out more because people don’t think we are related.”

survey was disseminated through the COLAGE community, partner organizations, and sperm banks. In addition, at present, there is a lack of research on members of the LGBTQ community using donor insemination to conceive children. This means it is hard to know the approximate average income of LGBTQ people using DI to have children. While the survey results revealed it is not always necessary to have wealth to utilize donor insemination, these results represent the experiences of the more affluent members of the LGBTQ community, as the median household income of parent respondents was \$99,000 - \$104,000 per year. Many LGBTQ families experience

economic conditions that are quite different than those represented here. In fact, according to a recent study by the Williams Institute (An entity associated with U.C.L.A. School of Law), children with LGBT parents are twice as likely to be living in poverty as children with married heterosexual parents.¹

A majority of respondents identified as white, and little data exists to confirm how many people of color with LGBTQ parents are born through DI. However, this does not mean that racial issues do not have an impact on DI COLAGERS. When asked if the racial identity of any family members had an impact on her life, one DI COLAGER with a multi-racial family responded, “Yes! My family’s racial identities have made our queer identity more visible. We have to come out more because people don’t think we are related.” Only a few of the survey respondents reported similar experiences. Hopefully, in subsequent editions of this guide more perspectives from people of color can be represented.

How To Use This Resource

You’ll find three main sections in this guide. The first will help you explore your own relationship, or lack of relationship, with your donor. The second addresses how DI COLAGERS can express their feelings about their relationships with their families. The third gives ideas and tools for how to talk about your family with friends as well as other non-family members in your life.

This guide is divided into eight chapters. The “Introduction” explains

how to use this resource and outlines the history of the LGBTQ parenting movement and how and why the boom of DI COLAGERS began in the mid-1980s. The “Shared Experiences, Different Lives” chapter details the vast number of family situations within this constituency and the common experiences all DI COLAGERS face. In “The Donor” chapter, the different kinds of relationships DI COLAGERS have with their donors are introduced along with a discussion of the range of emotions people feel about these varying relationships. The “Who is My Donor?” chapter details how DI COLAGERS can discuss their donor with their parent(s). In this chapter, parents’ perspectives are presented to provide understanding of why parents make certain decisions about the donor. Chapter 5, “You Must Have A Dad,” details how DI COLAGERS have described insemination and their families to peers and authority figures. The “I Love My Life” chapter outlines how DI COLAGERS have triumphed over sometimes challenging circumstances and embraced their family and genetic origins. In the “This is Only the Beginning” chapter, further ways to get involved with COLAGE are listed along with descriptions of further resources for DI COLAGERS. Finally, the “Additional Resources” chapter is a collection of five stand-alone resources that includes fliers for prospective parents, current parents, teachers and medical professionals as well as a legal guide for DI COLAGERS.

Even though each section builds on the chapters before, you don’t have to read this guide in order. Find the chapters that seem most interesting and important to you and begin there.

A History of the DI COLAGER Boom

The publication of this guide is the result of the coming of age of a generation of people born to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women who chose to have children while being out about their sexuality. Although COLAGERS, people with an LGBTQ parent, have most likely been around for all of human history, it has only been in the last 30 years that large numbers of out LGBTQ people started creating families. This means that DI COLAGERS who are in their twenties are the first generation to be conceived by openly gay parents. We can think of ourselves and our parents as pioneers!

The historical roots of this new generation of DI COLAGERS can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century. In the United States, the 1960’s were a time of social upheaval following the consensus and conformity of the 1950s. As assumptions about foreign policy, economic theory and race relations were challenged, many minority groups began to speak out and demand equal rights. This was when the women’s rights movement was born. Inspired by the 1963 publishing of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, middle-class white women started expanding the female role beyond its traditional bounds of wife and mother.

DI COLAGERS who are in their twenties are the first generation to be raised by openly gay parents. We can think of ourselves and our parents as pioneers!

As the woman's rights movement gained momentum in the 1960s, so too did the LGBTQ liberation movement. Spurred on by the riots outside the Stonewall club in New York in 1969, this movement gained greater acceptance in the 1970s.

Women were also working toward gaining control over their reproductive freedom. Contraception became more widely available in the early 1960s and *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision granting women the right to abortion, was decided in 1973. As lesbians were becoming more accepted in society and reproductive freedoms for women were becoming more prevalent, lesbians began to explore how they might have children on their own.

As Liza Mundy details in her book *Everything Conceivable*, The Sperm Bank of California was at the dawn of this new movement of lesbians starting families on their own. During the early 1980s, Barbara Raboy was a women's rights advocate in the San Francisco Bay Area. As part of her work, she taught classes for women on fertility awareness so women could control how and when they became pregnant.² As she was teaching these classes, women—who were mostly lesbians—began approaching her wanting to know how to “have a child”, rather than how to prevent pregnancy.³

During this time, there were sperm banks, but they only served married heterosexual women with fertility problems. The idea of lesbians accessing sperm banks was still a radical idea. Raboy realized there was a growing need for an organization to offer donor sperm to lesbians and single women. Thus, in 1982 she helped start what would become The Sperm Bank of California.

Given that providing lesbians and single women with sperm to have children was a radical concept at this time, starting such a sperm bank met with surprise from the public. At the press conference to announce its opening, Raboy stated that the Sperm Bank of California would be serving all women regardless of marital status or sexual orientation, to which one reporter gasped, “They can be lesbians—oh my God!”⁴

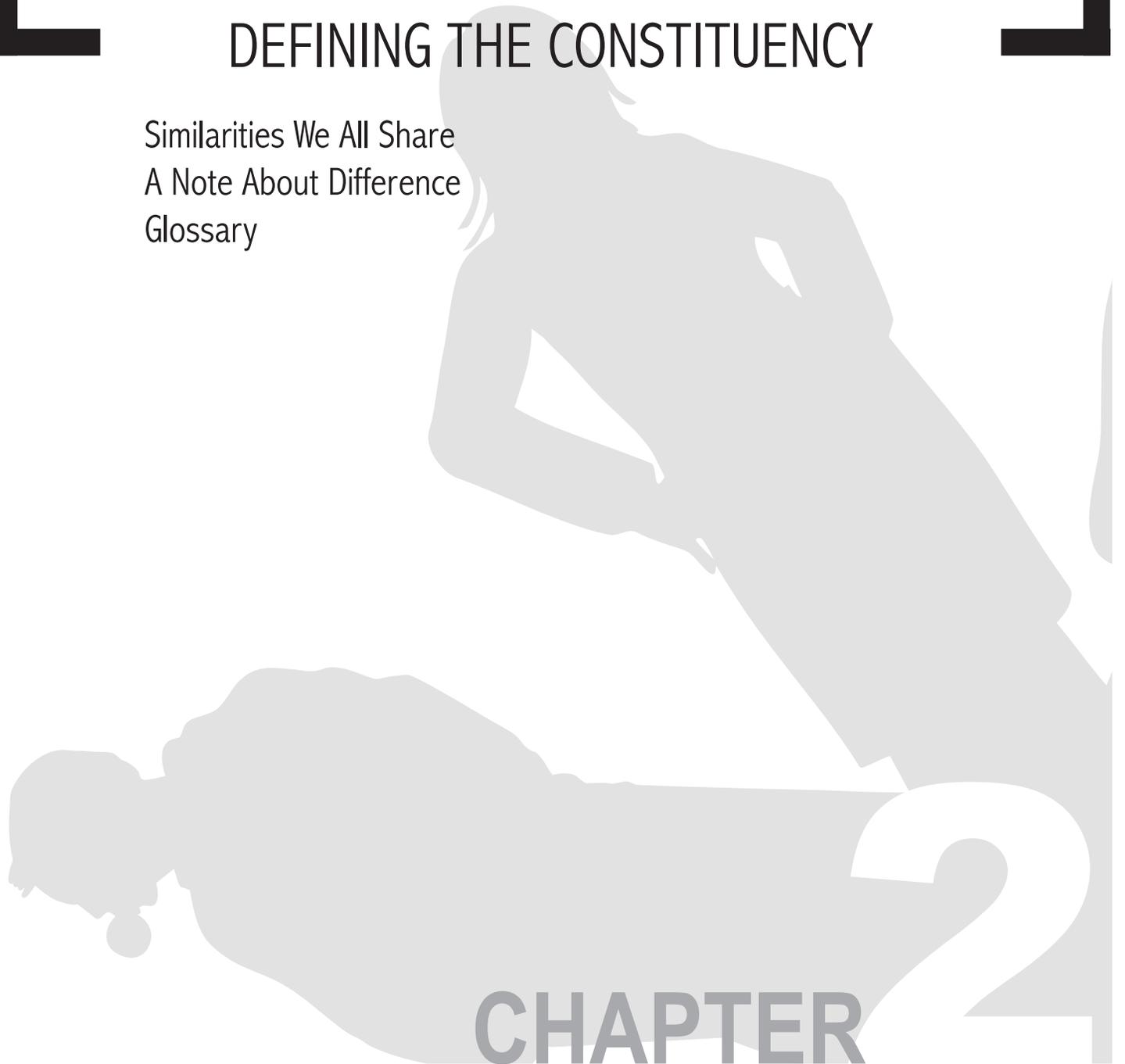
There is no doubt DI COLAGERs were conceived before the opening of The Sperm Bank of California, but its opening represents the beginning of the time when a notable increase of out lesbians accessed sperm banks to expand their families. Today, there are an estimated nine million people with an LGBTQ parent, a significant and growing number of which are DI COLAGERs.

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SHARED EXPERIENCES, DIFFERENT LIVES

DEFINING THE CONSTITUENCY

Similarities We All Share
A Note About Difference
Glossary



The Similarities We All Share

DI COLAGERS come from a vast number of family situations. **A person with an anonymous donor who was born to a single bisexual mother can be a DI COLAGER, while a DI COLAGER can also be someone who was raised by her lesbian moms and gay dads.**

We were all conceived through insemination and must face questions about our origins on a nearly daily basis.

If each DI COLAGER is so unique, how is it that we can all relate?

Firstly, we all have a donor. Whether that donor is a person you know or not, the relationship (or lack of relationship) with this person has had an impact on your life and identity. At some time in our lives we have all had to work out what this relationship (or lack of relationship) means to us. For many DI COLAGERS, defining this relationship is a matter of understanding our curiosity about a person we do not know, while for others it is deciding if we want to have a relationship with our donor when we turn 18. No matter the situation, we have all been given life by a donor and must decide what this person means to us.

Secondly, we were all conceived through insemination and must face questions about our origins on a nearly daily basis. Even if we try to avoid these questions, we all have to figure out ways to answer questions about how we came to be.

Finally, as people with LGBTQ parents born through donor insemination, our families and origins are intertwined with two topics that many people see as taboo—insemination and being LGBTQ. This means that beyond coming out and telling people about our families, we all must decide when to come out about being born through DI and often explain the process of insemination at a young age—a difficult topic for many youth and adults.

This guide is meant to celebrate both our differences and our similarities through stories and research of people with all different experiences and beliefs. It is also meant to build community for DI COLAGERS so we can come together and gain strength by celebrating our difference.

A NOTE

About Difference

Beyond having different kinds of families, we are also individuals who react in varying ways to similar situations. You will read comments from some people with anonymous donors who are extremely curious about their donor and want to meet him, while other people with anonymous donors rarely consider meeting their donor. **Because we are all different, some of the sections and perspectives in this guide will resonate with you, while others will not.** You are in no way meant to feel a certain way about any of the issues presented. Hopefully, you will be able to relate to these perspectives and stories, and take comfort in the fact that you are not alone in your situation.

Glossary

What is an open identity donor? What is in vitro fertilization? What exactly does queer mean? Here are the answers to these questions, along with definitions to commonly used terms in this guide. Even if you are already familiar with these words, it is a good idea to make sure you know how they are being used in this resource. Some words are used differently over time or may mean different things to you and the author of this guide.

Ally: Ally generally refers to someone who does not belong to a particular group, but supports that group. In this guide, “Ally” is used to discuss people who support DI COLAGERS.

Anonymous Donor: A person who donated his sperm with the intention of never meeting the people who were created with his sperm.

Artificial Insemination: An alternative term for donor insemination (see definition below). While artificial insemination is the commonly medical term for donor insemination, COLAGE prefers the term donor insemination because it does not imply there is something “artificial” about DI COLAGERS and counters statements that imply LGBTQ families are not real.

Assisted Insemination: An alternative term for donor insemination (see definition below).

Bisexual: A term used to describe a person who loves both men and women.

COLAGE: The only national youth driven network of people with a lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer parent. (For further information on COLAGE see the last page of this guide.)

COLAGER: A person who has or had a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender parent and/or queer parent.

DI COLAGER: A person who was born through donor insemination and has or had a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender parent and/or queer parent.

Donor: A person who donates sperm to help another person become pregnant.

Donor Insemination: The process through which donated sperm is placed inside a woman to cause her to become pregnant.

Donor Siblings: People who are biologically related to one another by having the same sperm donor.

Egg: A collection of cells inside a biologically female person’s body that when combined with a biologically male person’s sperm creates a baby inside the female person’s body.

Gay: A term used to describe a man who loves other men.

Half-Siblings: People who are related through only one of their biological parents.

Insemination: A process through which donated sperm is placed inside a woman to fertilize her egg and cause her to become pregnant.

In Vitro Fertilization (IVF): The process through which donated sperm is used to fertilize a woman’s egg, donation sperm is used to fertilize a woman’s egg outside of her body, after which the fertilized egg is placed inside her body. This process is sometimes used because it increases the chances of the woman becoming pregnant.

Known Donor: A donor whose identity is known to the people who were created through his sperm donation.

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Queer

Lesbian: A term used to describe a woman who loves other women.

Open Identity Donor: A donor who donated his sperm with the intention of having his identity and contact information released to the children his donation created when they turn 18. (Alternate terms for this kind of donor include: identity release donor and willing-to-be-known donor)

Parent: An adult, who may or may not be biologically related to you, who has helped raise you.

Queer: An umbrella term that includes LGBT people and more.

Sibling: A person, who may or may not be biologically related to you, with whom you have been raised.

Sperm: A collection of cells inside a biologically male person’s body that when combined with an egg from a biologically female person creates a baby inside the female person’s body.

Straight: A man who loves women or a woman who loves men.

Surrogacy: The process through which a biologically female person helps a biologically male person have a child by becoming pregnant with the biologically male person’s child.

Transgender: An umbrella term describing anyone whose gender identity or expression differs from their biological sex.

THE DONOR

HOW I RELATE TO MY DONOR

Anonymous Donor
Open Identity Donor
Known Donors

All DI COLAGERS have a donor. This section explores how DI COLAGERS relate to their donors and the experiences that come out of these relationships or lack of relationships. This chapter is divided into three general sections. The first section is about people with anonymous donors, the second is about people with open identity donors, and the third is about people with known donors.

[Anonymous Donors

An anonymous donor is someone who donated his sperm with the intention of never revealing his identity to the people who were created through his sperm donation. Many different families use anonymous donors. Some anonymous donors are sought out through a sperm bank, others are friends of doctors who help people inseminate, and others are known to people's parents but not to them. This last scenario is the case for a teenager from Michigan who states, "I personally have not been in contact with my donor, but I know my mom was once or twice when I was younger. However, I do not know whether they are still in contact."

| Where did I come from?

Depending on whether or not your parents used a sperm bank and what information the sperm bank released, you may know a few details about your donor. The information many sperm banks release is usually confined to a donor's physical characteristics, such as his height and eye color and possibly a brief description of his personal interests. Due to this limited information, many

DI COLAGERS with anonymous donors wish to know more about their donor and what traits they gained from this person. For some people this curiosity is intense, while for others it is a passing interest that only is present at certain times in their lives. These varying levels of curiosity take different forms and can change depending on age.

Many DI COLAGERS are content with their families, but still want to know about the person who helped create them. "Although I am curious about the donor that my parents used, I don't feel as if my life is incomplete and unhappy because I don't have more information about him," says Morgan, a 24 year-old from California. A 14 year-

old DI COLAGER from Connecticut shares her similar feelings about her donor, stating, "I love my family more than anything else, but I still want to know what the donor looks like, if my brother and I look like him, if we have any of the same mannerisms, or anything like that."

Finally, a 16 year-old DI COLAGER says his family is "complete," but he still wants to know what his "donor does as a profession, where he lives, if he has a family, if he is LGBT, and especially if he has achieved the goals of being a doctor outlined in his personal biography."

On the other hand, many DI COLAGERS have only a moderate interest in their donor. "I don't know who my donor is, and while I have been curious at times, it isn't something of any importance to me or my family," says a 14 year-old DI COLAGER. Another 18 year-old college student echoes these thoughts stating, "I mean, if I got to find out, it would be interesting, but I'm not going to go out of my way to look." While a majority of people with anonymous donors express some interest in their donors, some say they have none. One 11 year-old says simply

"Although I am curious about the donor that my parents used, I don't feel as if my life is incomplete and unhappy because I don't have more information about him."

that he is not curious because “I don’t know him and I like my parents.”

Still other DI COLAGERS can be so intensely curious about their donor; they feel a sense of loss because they do not know their donor. One 20 year-old from California says the hardest part about being a DI COLAGER is “the lack of knowledge I have about my donor.” Another parent comments that her daughter feels “anger” and “grief” about not having her donor in her life. These intense feelings about a donor can mean you are angry at your donor for donating his sperm without seeming to care about what happened after you were born. If you are feeling this way, it is important to express your feelings to someone who is sympathetic and can be understanding and supportive. See the “Who Is My Donor” chapter on page 23 for ideas on how to approach this topic with your parents.

“I don’t know who my donor is, and while I have been curious at times, it isn’t something of any importance to me or my family.”

Accepting having an anonymous donor

For people who are struggling with not being able to know about their donor, it is important to remember that many other DI COLAGERS have been in similar situations and have come to accept having an anonymous donor. This does not mean that you should feel as though you must be comfortable with having an anonymous donor, but it might be helpful to hear how some people have learned to cope with a similar situation. For some older DI COLAGERS, there is the realization that their original desires to know their donor were caused by other people telling them they should have a father. As Sierra, a 19 year-old college student from Iowa, explains, “My discomfort in not knowing my donor came from my peers who did not understand how I could not know my father.” She adds, “If I had known him, it may have been easier to talk about my family but I know it would have created a strange dynamic within my family....In retrospect I am happy he was not a part of my life,” she concludes.

“My discomfort in not knowing my donor only came from my peers who did not understand how I could not know my father.”

Other people with anonymous donors focus on what they have and embrace the mystery that is part of their identity. One DI COLAGER offers the advice, “Try to focus on what you have rather than what you don’t have.” Aaron, a 29 year-old college professor from California, goes farther by stating, “My advice (for people with anonymous donors) would be to embrace not knowing your donor. As a child I wanted to know more about my donor, but as I grew up I found it great to have this big question mark on that side of my biological family tree. The mystery was interesting and felt unique.” He goes on to say that while he might have avoided “some uncertainty as a child, and perhaps some moments of pain” if he had known his donor, he would be a “different person” and “I have to say that I like who I am now.”

“...to have this big question mark on that side of my biological family tree...was interesting and felt unique.”

What if I want to look for my anonymous donor?

One DI COLAGEr with an anonymous donor wrote in his survey that he would like “a guide for how to go about finding out about your anonymous donor.” This person is not alone; many people with anonymous donors want information on how they can locate their donor. Although, it is usually extremely hard to locate an anonymous donor, there are ways you can

Unfortunately, it is usually extremely hard to locate an anonymous donor, but there are ways you can try.

try. Nearly every sperm bank ensures that both the donor and your parent sign away any legal right to contact each other, which means it is unlikely a sperm bank would be able to help you locate your donor. However, if your parent did use a sperm bank, the bank should be able to give you your donor number. This number is used by the sperm banks to keep track of their donors and can help you locate your donor if the person wants to be found. An organization called the

Donor Sibling Registry (www.donorsiblingregistry.com) has compiled thousands of these numbers. For a fee, you can log onto their site and see if your donor has entered his contact information into the site or if any other people with the same donor have logged on as well. Remember that only donors who log onto the site and enter in their information can be found, so it is not certain you will be able to find your donor this way. People have used other means besides sperm banks and the Donor Sibling Registry such as DNA databases to locate their anonymous donors, but these alternatives are rarely successful.

What if I have a medical condition that could be linked to my donor?

Some DI COLAGErs have different medical conditions and wonder if these conditions were passed down to them from their donors. One adult DI COLAGEr says she has Crohns Disease, and, while the donor didn't indicate a history of this condition, she still “wonders” if she got the disease from him. These curiosities can also center around what conditions might be passed down to potential children. Another DI COLAGEr explains her curiosity, saying, “My little sister has mental illnesses and I've gone through periods of depression and I would like to know whether or not they were genetic and if I could possibly pass them on to my future kids.” Kinsey, a 13 year-old from Kentucky, explains how she “suffered from many auto-immune issues...and hyper-thyroidism” but was never able to contact her donor to see if he had a genetic condition that would explain her disease. A genetic counselor, a person who specializes in determining what traits people can pass on, is a resource you may want to access if you are in a similar situation.

If you do suffer from a serious medical condition that you believe might be linked to your donor, it is important to contact the sperm bank your parents used for a number of reasons. First of all, most sperm banks keep files on every person who has been born through a specific donor. This means that

the sperm bank can most likely inform you if other people with the same donor have been having the same health condition. Secondly, if the health issue is a genetic condition, the sperm bank needs to know so they can stop selling your donor's sperm to other people. The sperm bank might also want to contact other people with the same donor so they can watch for signs of the condition you experienced. Finally, if it is an extremely serious condition the sperm bank might be able to contact the donor if this would help treat your condition.

Open Identity Donors

As discussed above, an open identity donor is a donor who donates his sperm with the expectation that his identity and contact information will be released when children born with his sperm turn 18. Because people with open identity donors will most likely have the option to meet their donor when they turn 18, they usually do not have as intense curiosities about their donors as some people with anonymous donors experience. However, people with open identity donors can still have strong feelings about their donor at a young age. As Emily, a 20-year-old from Massachusetts who has met her open identity donor explains, "I was extremely curious to know who my donor was, why they had chosen to be a donor, and their medical history. Finding out who he was had been on my mind for years."

Many people with open identity donors embrace having the opportunity to obtain their donor's contact information when they are 18. A 12 year-old DI COLAGER from New York states, "When I am 18 I will try to locate my donor. I want to know who my donor is because I think I deserve to know who my biological other half is."

Another person with an open identity donor explains that it is exciting to wait to meet your donor. He says, "It's pretty cool to not know who your dad/mom is. You have to wait and see. It's like a checklist. Each year, as you get older, you get to cross off a year. And before you know it, you'll be 18 years old, and get to meet you donor."

However, there are people who have open identity donors who would rather not meet their donor. One DI COLAGER with an open identity donor who has decided not to meet her donor explains her decision by stating, "Though I would love to see a picture of him just to see the ways in which I am like him, I know that he has not played an important role in my life. I suppose I feel as though seeking him out might bring back old insecurities and emotions that I have worked hard to overcome."

It is also good to keep in mind that despite a sperm bank's best efforts, it is not always possible to meet your donor. Most sperm banks do not guarantee you can meet you donor, but will release his contact information to you.

"When I am 18 I will try to locate my donor. I want to know who my donor is because I think I deserve to know who my biological other half is."

Do I want to meet my donor?

The decision to seek your donor's contact information is your own. Many parents, other family members and friends will most likely be interested to see if you choose to try to contact your donor. As one DI COLAGER with an open identity donor puts it, the hardest part about having an open identity donor is "Talking about my decision to meet or not meet my donor." As DI COLAGERS who have gone through the process of meeting their open identity donors stress, make sure you personally evaluate if it is the right time for you to contact your

"Let expectations go, and if you are interested in meeting your donor, wait for the right moment for YOU."

donor. As Jesse, a 24 year-old living in New York advises, "Talk about the situation with all of your friends and your parents and siblings. It's an intense experience if nothing else, and it's just good to check in with your support system to make sure you know how you're feeling about the whole thing." Marcus, who has also met his donor, agrees, and stresses that the decision should be a personal one. He states: "Let expectations go, and if you are interested in meeting your donor, wait for the right moment for YOU. Let the process be about you, and getting more information for yourself, as you want it."

If you are a person with an open identity donor and are considering accessing your donor's contact information, there are a number of common questions you have most likely thought about. Will this person be like his description? Will he want to meet me? Will he be LGBTQ friendly? What kind of relationship should I have with him after I meet him? What if I don't like him? What if I do? There is no way to answer any of these questions for sure, until meeting your donor, if that is what you choose.

What will it be like when I contact my donor?

If you are considering contacting your donor, you have no doubt thought about what this person will look like or what kind of personality he might have. While many open identity donors most likely fit their description, a number of people who have met their donors warn not to get set on what this person will be like. As one DI COLAGER simply advises, "anticipate a surprise!" Another person from Massachusetts, who has met her donor agrees, saying, "Before being able to contact my donor I thought I knew he was tall, a Catholic, of German descent, and liked to run. ...In fact my donor is not German and not a runner."

It is also common to wonder if your donor has an interest in meeting you. As one 19 year-old DI COLAGER says, "I ... know his decision (to donate sperm) was not about me and, thus, I wonder about his own interests in potentially meeting me."

Again, it is impossible to know what your donor will be thinking when you decide to contact him, but it is important to remember that this person did agree to be contacted when he donated sperm and will most likely have had to update his contact information with the sperm bank.

Despite knowing the risks, many DI COLAGERS decide to try contacting their

donor. One DI COLAGEr, who is not 18, but is set on meeting her donor says, “I would hope that he would want to stay in touch with me and that I would make a good impression, but I would take the risk of not finding him or him not wanting to be in contact.”

For DI COLAGErs considering meeting their donor, another common question is: Will my donor be LGBTQ friendly? Most sperm banks do inform donors that many of the people who purchase sperm are lesbian couples wanting to start a family. This means it may not come as a great surprise to your donor that you have an LGBTQ parent.

For people who are set on contacting their donor, there is often the question of what kind of relationship to establish with this person. Most importantly, brainstorm what kind of relationship you think you want. Try to decide how you are feeling. As one 19 year-old DI COLAGEr advises, “For those who are meeting their donors when they are older, I would advise to know the parameters of what you want from the relationships beforehand.” This person says she had to go through a process of figuring out what kind of relationship she wanted as she grew up. “Until I was about 13, I was still hoping to establish a father/daughter relationship. Now that I am older I can let the relationship develop naturally and embrace having someone new in my life,” she says.

Trying to strike the right balance in a relationship with your donor can be tricky. As the person quoted above advises, make sure you think about what boundaries you might want in the relationship. After meeting the donor you might have a better idea of what these boundaries will be and it is important to be clear with your donor about these boundaries. One DI COLAGEr from Washington D.C. who has just met his donor, describes the relationship he has set with his donor by stating, “This person is your father, but not necessarily your dad.” While you may have considered this topic, remember that your donor and your donor’s family may feel strongly one way or the other about the relationship.

“For those who are meeting their donors when they are older, I would advise to know the parameters of what you want from the relationships beforehand.”

Known Donors

A known donor is a donor whose identity was known to you while you were growing up. Relationships with known donors can be very different depending on your family situation. Some people with known donors have a donor who co-parents with other parent(s). Other people have a known donor who they have only met once or twice in their lives.

Many people with known donors are enthusiastic about their family situation and relationship they have with their donor. Hannah, an 18 year-old DI COLAGEr from Maine, embraces having a known donor. She explains, “I think it is... wonderful for a child to be able to see where that half of their genes come from and know that it was really a team effort to bring them into the world.” “I love

having a non-traditional family. It has also taught me that biology is not the only thing that makes a family. I love my dad and my dad loves me but we are VERY different people,” she adds.

Defining the relationship with your known donor

Many people have similar experiences to Hannah’s and have established a solid relationship with their donor, but this can take time and be a process as you grow up. **Because all known donor relationships are different, it is hard to say what will be right for you, but other DI COLAGERs who have gone through the process of forging a positive relationship with their donor offer the following advice.** Most people stress that it

is important to not let outside forces influence the relationship you want with your donor and not to automatically view this person as a parent. One DI COLAGER advises, “I think it’s important to really be honest with yourself about your feelings and expectations. Try not to let the expectations and assumptions that others have for you overrule your own feelings.” Rachel, a 24 year-old living in Philadelphia, also agrees that it is important not to let outside influences pressure you and determine the relationship you want on your own. “Don’t try to place a structure for dad/mom you learn in society - on tv etc - onto your relationship with your donor. Take the relationship for what it is and nurture it as you become an adult. When you’re a kid your parents sort of decide when you and your donor will spend time,

but when you get older you can have a say in it,” she says. A 16 year-old with a known donor from Massachusetts agrees with Rachel about not necessarily seeing your donor in a parent role. He advises, “Have a good relationship. Close, but not too close. They’re (donors) not parents, but they should be second to none.”

While you are trying to establish the relationship you want with your donor there can be bumps along the way. Sometimes you may want more from the relationship and other times you may want space from your donor. One DI COLAGER from New York faced this kind of situation and says, “I grew up having certain expectations of what roles my dad(s) would play in my life and when they didn’t fulfill those expectations, I was hurt.” Maddy, who is 17 and has a known donor, says she had a similar experience. “My donor doesn’t seem to be particularly into the whole father thing with me, and it caused me quite a bit

of pain trying to get him to be,” she states. She advises that other people in similar situations should realize that, “You don’t have to make them (your donor) into a father, just because that’s what they are biologically.” She goes on to add that people should not force a relationship and let it “take its own form.” Other people may find that they do not want to be as close with their donor as others want them to be. This can be harder when you are younger and do not have as much say in who you spend time with, but as you grow older it is

“I love having a non-traditional family. It has also taught me that biology is not the only thing that makes a family. I love my dad and my dad loves me but we are VERY different people.”

“You don’t have to make them (your donor) into a father, just because that’s what they are biologically.”

good to remember that you can speak up and have a say about the relationship. As a DI COLAGEr from California advises, “Feel free to have full control over the kind of relationship that you want to have with your donor. If you’re not interested in having a full relationship, then don’t. You have control over that relationship, so don’t let others dictate it for you.” (For advice on how to talk with your parents about the relationship you want with your donor see the Who Is My Donor chapter on page 23.)

Known donors who have become estranged from the family

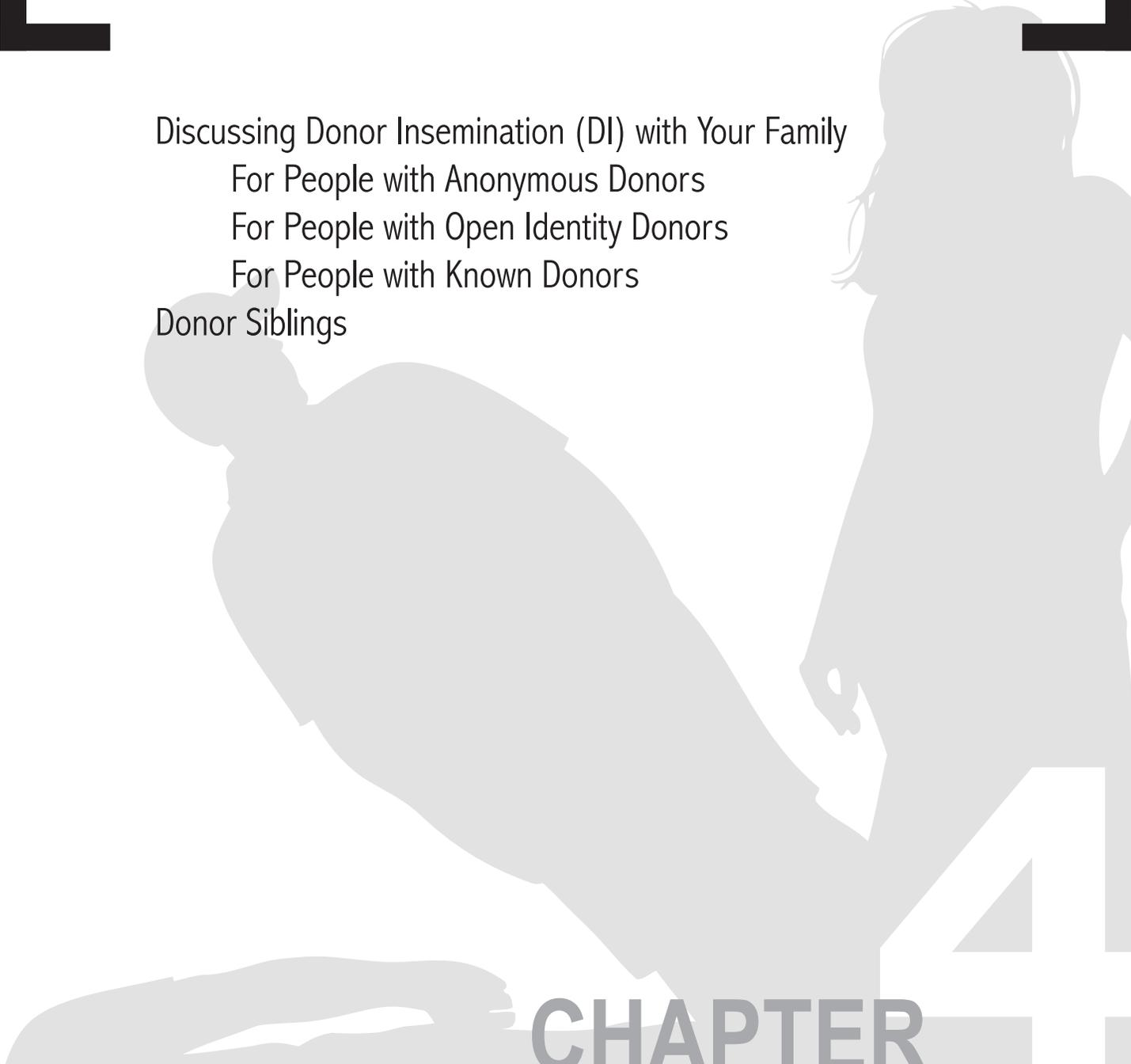
Sometimes known donors become estranged from the family and are no longer able to be contacted. Or, due to disagreements between donors and family members, you are still able to contact your donor but members of your family do not want you speaking with him. If you are in this kind of situation you may be curious about your origins just like people with anonymous donors. For perspectives on people with anonymous donors see page 14. Also, for advice on speaking with your parents about a known donor who has become separated from your family, see page 32.

Positive experiences with known donors

Despite the sometimes challenging task of defining the relationship with your known donor, many people have come to cherish the bonds they are able to build. For one DI COLAGEr from Pennsylvania, it was the chance to meet her donor’s parents and understand more about her heritage that meant the most to her. “I...really like knowing my donor’s parents because they are Holocaust survivors who have given me a good perspective on life and my cultural heritage and made me aware of how much of my Eastern European ancestry is missing (on my moms’ sides too).” For another DI COLAGEr from Massachusetts, having his donor and his donor’s partner be part of his family has been a wonderful experience. He says, “It’s great to have a massive extended family and know people! I have it, and it ROCKS!!!!” .

WHO IS MY DONOR?

Discussing Donor Insemination (DI) with Your Family
For People with Anonymous Donors
For People with Open Identity Donors
For People with Known Donors
Donor Siblings



CHAPTER 4

Discussing Donor Insemination with your Family

No matter your situation, the relationship—or lack of relationship—you have with your donor has been affected in some way by decisions your parent(s) have made. Whether you have an anonymous donor who you know nothing about or a known donor who is no longer in contact with your family, your parents have largely shaped the relationship you have with this person. Often, talking with your parents about their decisions that

shaped this relationship and your own curiosities about your origins can be an easy one. Many people, in fact the majority of survey respondents, say they are able to speak openly with their parents about their donor and any curiosities they might have about this person. A 15 year-old from Colorado explains that her family is “very open....They are happy to talk to me, I’ve looked at his file several times with my moms there,” she adds.

“My moms don’t mind my brother or me asking questions, I just sometimes feel awkward asking about the donor.”

Many parents also agree that they want a family environment where a donor can be discussed openly. One parent whose child has an open identity donor states, “We want him (our son) to be able to connect with the other half of his gene pool, as well as any half siblings. We feel it only broadens his family, and increases his opportunities to expand his circle of friends.” Another parent adds that her daughter “needs to know that there is a generous man who donated his sperm so we could make a family.”

In some family situations, however, the topic of your donor can be awkward to bring up with your parents. “It feels uncomfortable to talk about, but I could if I wanted to,” says one DI COLAGER with an open identity donor. “It’s more my own feeling of awkwardness talking about my donor than my parents’ unwillingness to,” she adds. Another DI COLAGER with a known donor agrees, saying, “My moms don’t mind my brother or me asking questions, I just sometimes feel awkward asking about the donor.”

Your parents might also not be comfortable with the topic, making it hard to start a discussion. A DI COLAGER from Texas with an anonymous donor says that it can be “uncomfortable” to bring up the subject with her mom. She explains, “My mom always says that I can ask but when I do it seems like she finds a way to change the subject or just doesn’t have the information.” Another person from Washington, DC with an anonymous donor says it is hard to talk about her donor with her mother and adds simply, “My mom does not feel comfortable with this subject.”

Sometimes, it can be difficult to discuss your donor with a parent that is not biologically related to you. This is by no means something that happens in all families, but many DI COLAGERS have expressed a difficulty with discussing

their genetic origins with a parent who is not biologically related to them. One DI COLAGER says, “It’s kind of awkward with my non birth mom.” Another DI COLAGER explains that it is awkward to talk with her non-biologically related mom because she has felt that a donor could supplant her as a parent. “My family is very open to talking,” she says, “but it is certainly more uncomfortable talking about my donor with my non-biological mom who might feel like the donor would replace her as my second parent.” This person goes on to say that she has worked with her non-biologically related mother to overcome these feelings. “We have talked about it and it is understood that [my non-biologically related mother] will always be my other parent, and meeting my donor would never change that,” she states.

“We have talked about it and it is understood that [my non-biologically related mother] will always be my other parent, and meeting my donor would never change that.”

For People with Anonymous Donors

If you have an anonymous donor, you probably have curiosities both about your donor and why your parent chose to use a donor who you could not later meet. As discussed in the previous section, for some people these curiosities can be just a passing interest and for others they can be long-term concerns. No matter the situation, it is important to understand your parent’s perspective and possible reasons why he or she chose to use an anonymous donor. Depending on if your parent used a sperm bank and the policies of that sperm bank, your parent may have been given a small amount of information about your donor.

Given that the information is usually very limited, your parent probably does not have a lot of information on your donor, but it is still a good idea to be open with your parent(s) about your curiosities. “I haven’t been able to do anything with my curiosity,” says one 19 year-old with an anonymous donor, but adds “I think it does help to express [curiosity] to your parents.” She then concludes curious people should work to understand their parents’ point of view, even if they do not agree with it. “Don’t accuse them of wronging you. They probably thought they were making the right decision at the time,” she advises.

“Open a dialogue with your parents about why they chose to use an anonymous donor.”

Knowing more about why your parents made their decision can help you know more about your origins and build understanding with your parents. Benjie, 24, from California, stresses the most important thing for people with anonymous donors to do is “Open a dialogue with your parents about why they chose to use an anonymous donor.” This does not mean you have to agree with your parent’s decision, but understanding their feelings on the subject can help you start a conversation with them about your donor.

In order to begin this dialogue with your parents, it is a good idea to understand the range of reasons LGBTQ parents choose to use an anonymous donor. Unfortunately, most of these reasons have something to do with the

lack of legal protections for LGBTQ parents. Many parents surveyed for this guide who chose to use an anonymous donor said they did so because they were scared that a known donor could take their child away because they were LGBTQ. One lesbian couple said they were scared of using a known donor due to their lesbian status because they were “afraid of losing [their] child in [a] court battle.” Another parent agrees and admits, “I am somewhat paranoid that

a known donor would somehow try to claim custody of my child.” Finally, a third parent expresses the statements of many parents who were surveyed by saying, “The absurd lack of laws that protect us made us feel concerned that a known donor may [have] tr[ie]d to change any agreement we may have come up with [and] then in the court process could possibl[y] win custody. So we felt we had to protect our child/children from that traumatizing possibility.”

Indeed, just because your parent chose an anonymous donor in no way means they did not want you to have information about your donor. Many parents said they would have preferred their children had the chance to know their donor, but did not feel a known donor was safe legally. One parent who chose an anonymous donor says, “I wanted a donor who would get to know his daughter, but this is easier legally.” Another parent has gone so far as to help search for her son’s anonymous donor now that her son is over 18. “We would love to hire a private detective to help find out who the donor is, now that our son is over 18,” she says. “The sperm bank we used told us they destroyed all their records, but we wonder if the identifying information, medical school he attended, etc, would lead to being able to find him so that our son could know who his donor is,” she adds.

Beyond legal reasons, many parents who choose anonymous donors also do so because they want to create a stable family environment and fear that a known donor could disrupt this and hurt their children. One parent explains that she was scared of bringing an unknown person into their family as a potential parent. “We started seeking known donors, but ultimately went [with an] anonymous [donor]...mostly because we didn’t want to triangulate our parenting or form a life-long negotiated relationship with anyone else but ourselves.” Choosing to become a parent can be an involved process and often people only want co-parents whom they know and trust. If your parents did not know any potential known donors they wanted to parent with, they may have wanted to be your only parents. One lesbian couple says, “we wanted [our children] to have 2 parents who were moms only.” Even when agreements can be made between a parent and a donor that a donor will not take on a parenting role, a parent still may be concerned that a donor could change his mind.

Parents may also fear that you may want to seek out your donor as a parent and be emotionally hurt if your donor did not want a parenting relationship. A lesbian couple from Michigan who chose an anonymous donor, say they had a “fear that our child [would] at some point wish for a father and embrace a relationship with the donor seeking this, in ways that harm[ed] our child or displace[d] our

Many parents surveyed for this guide who chose to use anonymous donor said they did so because they were scared that a known donor could take their child away because they were LGBTQ.

Many parents said they would have preferred their children had the chance to know their donor, but did not feel a known donor was safe legally.

parenting relationship.”

Finally, your parents may have been limited in their choices of donors. For those people wondering why their parents did not choose an open identity donor (a donor whose identity is revealed to you when you turn 18), it is important to remember that some sperm banks have only started offering these kind of donors fairly recently. Also, sperm banks may not have a wide selection of open identity donors. There are other factors that are important to parents when choosing a donor and it is possible that the sperm bank your parents used did not have an open identity donor that had the characteristics your parents wanted. Parents must make many decisions about what kind donor they want and think about how different donors will impact the lives of their children.

For example, one couple said they believed it would be very important for their child to look like the non-biologically related parent and the only donor who had the non-biologically related parent’s characteristics was anonymous. “We wanted an open identity donor but we also wanted a Latino donor and we needed a sperm bank that our local alternative insemination program would use,” says the couple. “We had to give up something,” they added, referring to not being able to use an open identity donor.

Like the couple just discussed, different reasons can force prospective parents to choose a sperm bank that has few, if any, open identity donors. “We had to use the sperm bank that our MD (doctor) used and they did not offer a donor that could be revealed in the future,” says one parent from Massachusetts. Another parent from California faced a similar situation and says, “I would be willing to use an open identity donor. The cryobank we used did not have that option 10 years ago.”

Your parent may have chosen to use an anonymous donor for one of these reasons or there might have been other reasons that caused her or him to use an anonymous donor. You do not have to agree with your parent’s decision. Even if you understand why an anonymous donor was chosen, that does not mean you have to be okay with having one. However, it might help you to talk with your parents about why they chose an anonymous donor so you can better understand your origins.

Talking with your parents about your anonymous donor

Before speaking with your parents about your donor, you may want to think about your own feelings about your donor. As mentioned in the previous section, it can also help to know why your parents chose an anonymous donor. Asking questions about your parents’ decision to use an anonymous donor is a good way to start a conversation about your donor. Be clear that you are just curious because you want to know more about your origins. Once you have built this understanding it is easier to ask questions about your donor like

Parents must make many decisions about what kind donor they want and think about how different donors will impact the lives of their children.

Before speaking with your parents about your donor, you may want to evaluate your own feelings about your donor.

what information your parent has about your donor, or even if she will help you try to locate your donor. Do not feel as though you need to tell your parents that their decision was the right one for you, but try not to judge their decision.

In other words, it is okay to hear your parents' reasoning and still disagree with their decision. Talking with your parents may help, but it might not take away your feelings of loss or anger about not being able to meet your donor. To help with the process of talking about your anonymous donor with your parents, you may want to talk through the situation with a friend before and/or after you bring the topic up with your parents.

Below is a list of goals you might want to set out for yourself before you start a conversation with you parents. See which of these goals you want to shoot for, but remember you do not have to have the goal about feeling the same way as your parents about your donor.

For additional help, there is an information sheet at the back of this guide for parents on how to talk to their children about their donor. You may want to read this guide and see if it would be helpful for your parents to read it before you have a conversation about your donor. (See page 59 for the guide for parents on how to talk with their children about their donor)

Goals For Talking with Your Parents about Your Anonymous Donor

- **To gain more information about my donor:** Your parents may have informational materials about your donor, information sheets he has filled out or letters he has written. They also might be able to tell you the characteristics your donor had that made them choose him.
- **To understand why my parents chose an anonymous donor:** Understanding your parents reasoning for selecting an anonymous donor can provide you with more information about your origins and help you build understanding with your parents.
- **To share my feelings about my donor:** Often it can feel good to express your feelings to a person you trust.
- **To make the topic of my donor a more comfortable one for my family:** It is not up to you to make this a comfortable topic, your parents should help you by talking about your donor, but if you still believe this is an awkward topic, bringing it up for discussion can make it feel less awkward.
- **To express my interest in trying to locate your donor:** While it is often not possible to locate your donor, you may want to try, and talking with your parents about this interest can be a good first step.

For People with an Open Identity Donor

Even though your parents made the conscious decision to use a donor who you have the possibility of locating when you turn 18, it still can be awkward to talk with them about your donor. Most parents are very open about their child's donor and welcome questions about him. Indeed, many parents who choose open identity donors are passionate about their children having the option of meeting their donor. "Choosing an identity release donor was incredibly important to us. We wanted our daughter to be able to learn more about the donor from him when she turns 18." Still it can be a hard topic to bring up, especially when it comes to talking about a donor you will have the option to one day contact. Often, because you are meeting your biological parent, there can be feelings of guilt because you do not want to make your parents feel they are not enough for you. "It can be uncomfortable to talk with my parents about my open identity donor," explains a 14 year-old DI COLAGER from Connecticut. "I just feel a little guilty whenever I do talk to them about [my donor], because I don't want them to think I'm not happy with them as my parents or anything like that," she adds.

Many parents who chose open identity donors are enthusiastic about their children meeting his or her donor. But even if your parents do not feel this way, remember that it is okay to disagree with them about meeting your donor. Your parents are still going to love and accept you even if you choose to meet your donor.

"I just feel a little guilty whenever I do talk to them about [my donor], because I don't want them to think I'm not happy with them as my parents or anything like that."

Talking with your parents about possibly meeting your donor

For those people with open identity donors who have decided they definitely want to meet their donor, talking about this desire with your parents can be challenging. Often people are scared because they do not want to hurt their parents' feelings by deciding to meet their donor. A college student from Massachusetts says that she was concerned that when she told her parents she wanted to meet her donor they would think it was because she was not happy with her family. "I wanted to make sure they did not get offended and think that there was something missing in my relationship to them," she says. Having your parents' support can be important when going through the process of meeting your donor. "I would feel uncomfortable being curious about my donor and searching him out if my mother had not been supportive of such an idea," says a 16-year-old DI COLAGER from Colorado. It is natural to have these feelings of curiosity and having such emotions in no way means you have a poor relationship with your parents. Additionally, if you are able, it might be a

good idea to express to your parents why you want to contact your donor, but it is okay if you are not able to state why you want to meet this person. This can be a difficult process at first, but many DI COLAGERs say that after talking with their parents several times the topic gets easier. “My moms have been very supportive about me finding out the identity of my donor and meeting him. It is a delicate topic but as time goes on it gets more and more comfortable,” states a DI COLAGER with an open identity donor.

“My moms have been very supportive about me finding out the identity of my donor and meeting him. It is a delicate topic but as time goes on it gets more and more comfortable.”

As you go through the process of talking with your parents about meeting your donor, it is good to get an idea about concerns they might have about meeting him. However, when deciding whether or not to contact your donor, remember that it is not your responsibility to protect your parents. If you are set on meeting your donor, you can talk with your parents about their concerns, but their potential negative feelings do not mean you are doing the wrong thing by trying

to contact your donor. Most parents are supportive of their children meeting their donor, but parents who took the survey did mention several fears about having their child meet their donor.

As some DI COLAGERs fear, there are parents who are concerned that when their child meets their donor, their child will see their donor as a parent and reject one or more of their same sex parents. Parents also mention that they are concerned their children may be displeased with being raised by LGBTQ parents and look to their donor to function as a “normal” heterosexual parent. The last main concern many parents expressed was a fear that their child’s donor would not be LGBTQ friendly. “I do worry that the donor won’t be accepting of our

family,” says a parent from New York. Another parent adds, “I hope he (the donor) is okay with our family when/if our child contacts him...for her (our daughter’s) sake.”

You should not feel pressure to have to reassure people around you that you know exactly how meeting your donor is going to go.

Again, different parents are going to have varying feelings about their child meeting his or her donor. When talking with your parents, do not feel as though you must have all the answers. You may not know what kind of relationship you want with this person or exactly why you want to meet this person. You also may share some of your parents’ fears that your donor may not be LGBTQ friendly. This is

okay, and you should not be pressured into reassuring people around you that you know exactly how meeting your donor is going to go.

Despite the challenges, many families have had very positive experiences with meeting an open identity donor. In fact, parents often build relationships with their child’s donors. “My mom is very close with both my biological father and his partner. She has always been accepting of my interest and loves that we have made contact with my donor,” says a DI COLAGER from Colorado. Another DI COLAGER says that the entire experience of being raised in an LGBTQ family and then later having the opportunity to meet her donor and donor siblings has been fantastic. “I have had a really positive experience growing up in my family and getting to meet my donor and my half sisters!” she states.

Introducing your donor to your siblings

When you are going through the process of meeting your donor and introducing this person to your family, it is important to remember that any siblings you might have will also be affected by bringing someone new into their lives. For most DI COLAGERs, expanding their family through meeting their donor is a positive experience, but it is good to keep in mind emotions your siblings might be feeling about you contacting your donor. Sometimes when you are able to locate your donor and donor siblings, siblings you are raised with can feel displaced. One DI COLAGER from Massachusetts had this experience and explains, “My sister, who I was raised with and who I share a bio-mom with, has a different donor and my process of meeting my donor and my two new sisters has been hard for her.” “She is OF COURSE included in everything and she is one of my best friends, but we’ve had to talk about it a lot and she is still uncomfortable calling my ‘new family’ her family,” she adds.

As you prepare to meet your donor, it is a good idea to check in with your siblings about how they are feeling about you meeting this person, especially if they were born through DI and are unable to meet their donor. You may also have feelings about getting the chance to meet your donor when your sibling does not have this same opportunity. “I sometimes feel guilty about having been able to meet [my donor] since my brother’s donor died before my brother got to meet him,” states a DI COLAGER from California. If you are facing a similar situation, and you feel comfortable doing so, you may want to discuss these emotions with your sibling.

it is good to keep in mind emotions your siblings might be feeling about you contacting your donor.

For People with Known Donors

If you have a known donor, your interactions with your parents about your donor most likely center around getting their help to create the kind of relationship you want with your donor. When you are younger this can be harder to do because your parents most likely arranged with your donor what kind of relationship he was expected to have with you. As you grow older and come to understand what you want from a relationship with your donor, you will most likely want to communicate with your parents and get their support to alter or better understand the relationship.

Just as people with anonymous donors have curiosities about why their parents chose a donor they could not later meet, people with known donors have curiosities about the arrangement their parents made with their donor. If you have a known donor, you may want to know how much your parents wanted your donor involved in your life. One adult DI COLAGER says that she was confused about what role her donor was supposed to play in her life and

this misunderstanding caused her pain growing up. If you are facing a similar situation, ask your parents to be clear about the role they see your donor playing in your life, especially if you are not currently happy with the relationship you have with your donor.

It is also important to remember that your parents can also be your ally if you want to change the relationship you have with your donor. Depending on your age, your parents can help you talk through what you want to say with your donor or help you directly communicate with your donor. If you know the relationship you want with your donor, make sure to express this to your parents. It is completely normal and okay to speak up about the kind of relationship you want with your donor.

Dealing with issues of separation between your parents and your donor

For a variety of reasons, your donor may no longer be on good terms with your parents or may not be in contact with your family at all. Often when a separation occurs between your parents and your donor it is because your donor and your parents had a disagreement. If this is the case, it can be challenging to talk with your parents about your donor because your parents may still have negative feelings about him. If you cannot contact your donor, you may have feelings of curiosity you want express to your parents. If this is your situation, try reading the anonymous donor section in this chapter, which discusses how to talk with parents about a donor you do not know.

In other situations, you may still be able to spend time with your donor, but your parents may no longer approve of the two of you having a relationship.

“My mother has many resentments against my father, so she is wary of

me attempting to have a closer relationship to him and getting disappointed,” says a DI COLAGEr from Los Angeles. As is the case with this person, it is good to acknowledge that in many of these situations your parents are attempting to protect you. But it is also important to not let your parents’ negative relationship with your donor ruin any potential relationship you may want with him. One DI COLAGEr from California says that her parents have had a “bad relationship” with her donor and because of this have “always talked about him in a negative way.” If this kind of conflict is occurring, remember that you are not to blame for your parent’s negative relationship with your donor. Also, even if your parents are saying

negative things about someone who is biologically related to you, that does not mean they feel this way about you. You may want to talk with your parents about why they do not have a good relationship with your donor, but make sure you are able to make your own evaluation of your donor. In a situation like this, it might also help you to reach out to a close friend or other family member to get perspective from someone you trust who is not involved with the disagreement between your parent and your donor.

You may want to talk with your parents about why do not have a good relationship with your donor, but make sure you are able to make your own evaluation of your donor.

Donor Siblings

Beyond having curiosity about their donor, many DI COLAGERs also have curiosities about donor siblings. The term “donor sibling” is used to describe a person who has the same donor as you but who could have been raised in a different family. People may want to meet their donor siblings and build friendships with them. In fact, sometimes people can be more curious about donor siblings than they are about their donor. “I’m really curious about half-siblings. I might like more information about my donor, but I don’t want a relationship with them,” says a DI COLAGER from Chicago. “I think it would be super cool to know that I have [donor siblings]/talk to them/meet them etc. ESPECIALLY if they were [a COLAGER]. Because [COLAGERs] have a really high rate of being AWESOME,” she adds. DI COLAGERs often express that they want to meet their donor siblings to build relationships with new people and also discover what traits they share with these people in order to learn more about their genetic origins.

Ways to locate donor siblings

If you are interested in meeting any donor siblings you may have, there are several ways to go about looking for them. First, some sperm banks will give you the contact information of other families who used your same donor, even if that donor was anonymous. Different banks have varying policies when it comes to releasing donor sibling information; some will not release donor sibling contact information to minors (people under the age of 18). Not all sperm banks release the contact information of donor siblings, but it is good to start by contacting your sperm bank to see what information they can give you.

Sperm banks keep track of donors by giving them a number. If you know your donor’s number, there are ways you can search for other people with the same donor. The Donor Sibling Registry (www.donorsiblingregistry.com) is an organization that maintains a website with list of donor numbers. For a fee, people can log on to this site and see if other people have posted the same donor number. Using the Donor Sibling Registry is the most common way people find donor siblings. If you have an open identity donor, and you decide to meet your donor, this person may also be able to put you in touch with donor siblings.

DI COLAGERs often express that they want to meet their donor siblings to build relationships with new people and also discover what traits they share with these people in order to learn more about their genetic origins.

Will these people be part of my family?

When you go through the process of trying to locate donor siblings, it is good to think about what kind of relationship you want with your donor siblings. Different people have come up with a variety of ways to view

“I’d be curious to see if I have any half siblings, but they wouldn’t be my sisters or brothers, they’d just be someone else with the same biological father as me.”

these relationships. For some people, these new people in their lives are thought of as acquaintances, while for others they are considered new members of their family. “I’d be curious to see if I have any half siblings, but they wouldn’t be my sisters or brothers, they’d just be someone else with the same biological father as me,” says a DI COLAGEr from Connecticut. Another DI COLAGEr, who is about to meet his donor siblings, sees his donor siblings as “cousins.” No matter what kind of relationship you are looking for, be clear about your expectations with your donor siblings.

Ongoing relationships people have with their donor siblings

Many DI COLAGErs who have met donor siblings have had extremely positive experiences bringing these new people into their lives and in some cases expanding their families. Donor siblings can play different roles in people’s lives. For some people, meeting their donor siblings is about finding a new friend they can keep in touch with over the internet. “The two families we met were very kind and they were supportive of my parents LGBTQ status. It was a wonderful experience to meet my half-sibling and I am still in touch with them today through email, letters and Facebook,” writes a 14 year-old DI COLAGEr. Other times, donor siblings can become additions to your family. “I only regret not being able to meet my sisters sooner,” says one college student. “With siblings I don’t believe there is pressure to bond, and I would have loved to know them sooner because they are both amazing people who I am very close with now,” she adds.

YOU MUST HAVE A DAD!

Talking About Insemination with Your Peers
Talking about Insemination at Different Ages
Explaining Your Family to People
Getting Support When Talking about Insemination

Talking about Insemination with Your Peers

If you are a DI COLAGEr who has struggled to explain insemination to a friend, you are not alone. For many people, the hardest part about being a DI COLAGEr is talking about insemination and explaining their family to their peers. Nearly every DI COLAGEr who took the survey said they had some discomfort talking about insemination at some point in their lives. Since a detailed description of insemination involves using sex and reproduction words, many people are embarrassed to attempt to describe the process, especially at a young age. Adding to this difficulty is the fact that these descriptions of sexual terms—such as sperm—involve your parents. People can be teased by their peers when they discuss insemination. Occasionally authority figures, such as teachers, believe such descriptions are inappropriate.

One DI COLAGEr summarizes the difficulty by stating, “Well, the word sperm is almost always met with a resounding ‘Eww!’ especially in elementary school.” Indeed, talking about sperm being placed inside your mother can be hard to discuss, especially when the people you are speaking with are not comfortable

with the medical terms you are using. A DI COLAGEr from Oregon says the hardest part about discussing insemination for her is, “people often immediately begin imagining the physical components of insemination. It can trigger ‘weird sexual thing’ responses from people, even if they are too polite to explicitly state that reaction.” When facing these kind of situations, you do not have to always use precise medical terms, or terms that you find embarrassing. Remember that you have the freedom to explain your genetic origins in a way that makes you feel safe.

DI COLAGErs also stress that it is important for people to understand and accept their families. Once, at a COLAGE event, a volunteer was asked by a group of youth to describe insemination.

She explained the process and the youth started saying things such as “Eww” and “That’s gross.” The volunteer responded by saying, “That’s not gross, that’s my family.” Unfortunately, these kinds of stories are not uncommon. As one DI COLAGEr puts it, “People feel uncomfortable discussing my family sometimes, which has been hurtful to me my entire life.” Caroline, a DI COLAGEr from Boston, says while she struggled to talk about insemination, it was still important for people to understand her family. “I think it was really hard for me in elementary school and middle school to talk about my [insemination] without using sexualized words, which I was very uncomfortable with through about 6th or 7th grade,” she says. “But I DID want people to understand and validate my family,” she adds.

“People often immediately begin imagining the physical components of insemination. It can trigger ‘weird sexual thing’ responses from people, even if they are too polite to explicitly state that reaction.”

When facing these kinds of difficult situations, remember that the COLAGE community exists and can be easily accessed. As these stories demonstrate, many people have gone through similar situations and are open to talking with you. (For more information on how to connect with other DI COLAGERS see the This Is Only the Beginning Chapter on page 49)

As DI COLAGERS work to explain their families, it is important to understand the historical reasons why using sexualized words, such as “sperm,” is sometimes seen as inappropriate. COLAGE takes a “sex-positive” approach when talking about sex with youth. This means that COLAGE generally views sex as a healthy thing that people should learn about. The more open people are about sex, the more youth can learn about how to be safe when they decide they want to be sexually active. Unfortunately, many people do not feel this way. They see sex as something that should not be talked about because this in their opinion, might invite people to have sex before they are ready.

Due to this, words such as “penis”, “vagina” and “sperm” are seen as inappropriate, even though they are medically correct terms. DI COLAGERS have noticed this lack of comfort with talking about sex. “Unfortunately I think that there’s been a swing towards a more sex-negative general attitude in this country, corresponding to a decrease in the level of sex ed that children have been receiving for the past 5-10 years, so I worry that people bring a certain immaturity and discomfort to the table when talking about anything related to sex, let alone something that is less common like donor insemination,” says one DI COLAGER from California. Another person says it is hard to talk about insemination, “because people think talking about sex with younger kids or in most public contexts is inappropriate.”

Another challenge for DI COLAGERS is the fact that common social situations can force DI COLAGERS to talk about how they were born through donor insemination. Seemingly harmless interactions with a person you are meeting for the first time can lead to questions about your “dad.” Often the question “What does your dad do for a living?” can be a tricky one to answer for DI COLAGERS. “It has always been difficult in situations when people ask me what my dad does, or teachers ask my dad’s name for contact information at school,” explains one person from Illinois. Often DI COLAGERS must evaluate different situations to decide if they are comfortable talking about insemination. “Imagine being scared to tell the truth everytime someone asked a ‘simple’ question like what your parents do for a living. I hate lying about my family, but there are times when I just can’t tell the truth,” writes a 20-year-old DI COLAGER. This person adds a hopeful ending, writing, “Of course, things have changed since I was a kid and maybe soon children with families like mine will be able to answer those questions honestly without feeling afraid.”

“It has always been difficult in situations when people ask me what my dad does, or teachers ask my dad’s name for contact information at school.”

Talking about Insemination at Different Ages

Since the difficulty of talking about insemination has much to do with the maturity of the person you are talking with, a person's age can make a big difference in how you choose to explain insemination. Depending on the age and maturity of your peers, you may have decided to not talk about donor insemination during certain parts of your life. This is a common experience for youth, especially in middle school.

In elementary school, some people say they were very open about insemination, while others describe not being able to talk about it because their peers lacked education about reproduction. "I used the term 'artificial insemination' and explained it matter of factly when I was in 3rd grade," says a 24-year-old from Oakland, California. "Some kids did not get it, but because I knew how it worked and knew that I was a human who was born, I was able to explain it," he writes. Another person says, "I was really honest, super blunt. I just said it straight out, my parents are gay and I was artificially inseminated. I told my peers exactly what it was. I remember wanting to tell them [as soon as possible], so they would know off the bat who I was. I got made fun of sometimes and some people thought I was weird." Other people say they tried to explain insemination but were less successful. One

DI COLAGER, who is now 22, says she would tell people she was "artificially inseminated," but explains that "no one understood" what she was talking about.

Even if they were out about discussing insemination in elementary school, many people say that middle school was the hardest time to talk about how they were conceived. Most people describe how increasing social pressures to fit in caused them to avoid the topic. "I was out [about being a DI COLAGER] in elementary school and it was no problem since my peers were too young to understand or to be intolerant. In middle school and high school the students were very intolerant and I was closeted about my mom and by association, DI," explains a DI COLAGER living in Florida.

Often people find ways to avoid the topic in middle school by not disclosing that they have an LGBTQ parent. "I would often omit information [about my family] (if someone thought one mom was an aunt I wouldn't correct them)," writes a DI COLAGER. Another person says that she did not talk about insemination at first. But, once it became known that she was born through donor insemination, it wasn't as big of a deal as she thought it would be. "At school I avoided the subject like the plague. I let people believe that my parents had divorced, didn't mention the two mothers thing except to really close friends, and I spent the whole time feeling nervous that it would come up," she says. "I

"I was really honest, super blunt. I just said it straight out, my parents are gay and I was artificially inseminated. I told my peers exactly what it was."

told one very close friend about my mums, who told the entire school, and after that just saying, ‘My mum wanted a baby so my dad who is her friend gave her sperm’ didn’t seem like a particularly big deal,” she goes on to explain.

In high school, DI COLAGERS generally find talking about insemination can get easier. Your friends are older and in some cases have gotten to know you better. “By 12th grade, I had a solid friend group and was finally comfortable telling people I had two moms and explaining about my donor and my sister’s donor,” states a DI COLAGER living in Pennsylvania. Another person says that when she reached high school she trusted that more people would be mature enough to handle the topic. “I was more open and honest about the process, the legal concerns my parents faced, the complexities of being one of the first families using DI in their community, the process of locating a donor, and sometimes my experience within it. I disclosed more and trusted those I shared to engage intelligently/maturely,” she says. While talking about insemination can get easier for some, challenges still remain. One DI COLAGER, now a senior in college, says that when she was in high school, mentioning “sperm [was] finally not so inflammatory,” but admits that she has “never been very successful at talking about” insemination.

How people have persevered

DI COLAGERS have learned to persevere in talking about insemination, despite challenges they have faced. From these experiences, many have learned not to listen to people who cannot accept their families.

“There have always been people who did not accept me because of it, and there have always been rumors going around school, but I figure that if they have a problem with my parents and their decision, they do not deserve to be my friend anyway,” says Lucas, 16, from Illinois. He adds that it has been important to rely on the people who would accept his family. “There have always been people that have supported [me]...my best friend in fifth grade stood up for me one time when I was being made fun of by a couple of kids regarding it,” he writes.

Another DI COLAGER, who says she has become more comfortable talking about insemination, also explains that she has learned she does not have to change her background for other people. “I am now more comfortable with sharing my story if I feel the situation is right. But I have also realized that even if the people are not ready to accept me and my family for what we are then they are probably not the people I should be trying to relate to. I should not have to change my background and therefore myself for others.”

Finally, a DI COLAGER from Kentucky advises DI COLAGERS to be proud of and stand up for their families. “How you were born is part of your identity, but it doesn’t define you. Never be afraid to stand up for your parents and family, even if you are in the minority, because they are what truly make you who you are,” she writes.

“I am now more comfortable with sharing my story if I feel the situation is right. But I have also realized that even if the people are not ready to accept me and my family for what we are then they are probably not the people I should be trying to relate to.”

Explaining your family

Beyond talking about insemination, many DI COLAGERS face the challenge of having to explain family situations that some people have not encountered. This can be hard for a number of reasons. First, just as with insemination, sometimes people are not comfortable talking about homosexuality or people being transgender. Second, DI COLAGERS are often faced with explaining how it is possible that they do not have a “dad.” Finally, for people who know their donor, explaining how their biological father is not necessarily their “dad” can be a challenge.

For many DI COLAGERS, the basic challenge when explaining their families is getting people to understand that families come in different forms and can be defined in different ways. Pamela, a DI COLAGER from Washington, D.C.

says the hardest part about talking about her family is facing people “who question and challenge my assertion that family are simply the people who love you.” Other people have had similar experiences and say that has been hard to face people who cannot understand their families. “I am teased about my family makeup because it’s ‘different,’” says a DI COLAGER from New York. Another person says the hardest part for him is other people not comprehending how “families different from their own could actually function and be a good family.”

Other DI COLAGERS find it awkward socially to out themselves as people with an LGBTQ parent. “I felt awkward having my two moms come up on senior night for the football team,” says a person from Southern California, but adds, “friends supported me and I did it anyways.” Another DI COLAGER, referring to discussing his family, says, “It was less about feeling ashamed and more out of avoidance of having to deal with the awkwardness. This was especially difficult when connected to (potential) romantic relationships.” “[I] worried specifically, that boys I dated would find out my mother was a lesbian and lose interest in me,” adds another DI COLAGER. Despite these fears about romantic interests, one person says he came to the conclusion that “the people I liked most were the people who accepted my family.”

“It was less about feeling ashamed and more out of avoidance of having to deal with the awkwardness. This was especially difficult when connected to [potential] romantic relationships.”

For people with anonymous or open identity donors

DI COLAGERS, especially those who are young, are often faced with questions about not having a “dad.” “In third grade, many of my peers were unable to understand insemination and told me repeatedly that having two moms was not possible, so I really did not discuss it until I got older and they could understand it,” writes a person from Illinois. Another person shares a similar story about

people not believing he has no dad. “I have trouble explaining when other kids ask, ‘How come you don’t have a dad?’ or tell me that I have to have one, and he must have left me when I was little, or died or something else that isn’t true. I get frustrated when people won’t understand,” he explains. Many people have experienced similar situations to ones described above and some go as far as to say facing these kinds of questions is the hardest part about being a DI COLAGER. One person with an anonymous donor advises her fellow DI COLAGERS to “remember that [you] can define [your] family by whatever criteria [you] choose and that [you] need not accept others’ definitions of who [your] family is.”

“Remember that [you] can define [your] family by whatever criteria [you] choose and that [you] need not accept others’ definitions of who [your] family is.”

For people who know their donor

People who know their donor often struggle with figuring out how to describe to people that they have a “donor” rather than a dad. Often the role of a donor is hard for people to understand so people assume that your donor is your “real parent.” Some people, especially when they are young, do not attempt to explain the donor relationship and just answer questions about their donor as if he is a dad. “By 3rd grade I do remember answering questions about what my dad did for a living by just saying he was a teacher because he was a known donor and that was his profession. This was sort of lying by omission of fact,” writes a person from Pennsylvania. “I simply call [my donor] my ‘Dad’ so I don’t raise an awkward moment,” adds another person with a known donor.

As people work to explain the relationship they have with their donors, they often encounter people who assume their biological parents are their “real parents.” “Mostly what’s hard to explain is that I have a biological father who is a good friend of the family, but whom I don’t consider a dad at all,” says a person living in Washington, D.C. A DI COLAGER from Maine says she has had similar experiences and explains that she is careful about the language she uses. “I always use the word donor when I tell people about my dad because otherwise, people tend to say that he and my bio mom are my ‘real parents.’ I try to tell people that my moms are my ‘real parents.’ My donor has always been a strong presence in my life, but my moms are really my parents,” she writes. One DI COLAGER tells the story about how staff at her school did not recognize that her

Sample Language People Use to Describe Their Families and Insemination⁵

- “Everyone has a biological dad, but not everyone has a dad in their family. My biological dad donated his sperm so my mom(s) could have me, but we’ve never met him.”
- “Every baby grows from a sperm and an egg, but the sperm that made me came from a man outside my family.”
- “My parents got sperm from a sperm bank to start me growing as a baby.”

“Once I was even told I couldn’t leave an extracurricular activity when my grandfather died because he was not my ‘real’ grandfather. To me, there is nothing more hurtful than having someone say that my donor is more of my parent than the mom who has raised me,”

non-biologically related mother was one of her parents. “Because I know my donor and because he went to school events, people sometimes referred to him and my bio mom as my ‘parents’. Once I was even told I couldn’t leave an extracurricular activity when my grandfather died because he was not my ‘real’ grandfather. To me, there is nothing more hurtful than having someone say that my donor is more of my parent than the mom who has raised me,” she explains. (For help working with teachers and school administrators, see the resource for schools on page 62.)

While it can be hard to explain your family in certain situations some DI COLAGErs have found successful ways of describing their families to their peers. One 22 year-old DI COLAGEr says that she was able to explain her donor situation by discussing what makes a family. “Usually, I would just tell people I have two moms because they are the ones who my peers would see around me. But when people asked about my dad I would describe him as a ‘donor/dad who is more of a close uncle.’ I would also tell them that I have other men in my life who I think of as my dads and that I don’t believe genetics is what makes a family,” she says.

DI COLAGErs raised in a co-parenting situation, where there were more than two parents, can face further struggles. The idea of having more than two parents can be surprising to people. “I start out by explaining that I have two moms and two dads. This often blows their minds,” writes a 16 year-old DI COLAGEr who was raised by his two lesbian moms and two gay dads. Another person with a similar situation says she struggled “with whom to put down for primary parents (on forms) - since there were generally only spaces for two people.”

Getting support when talking about insemination

When facing the sometimes-difficult situation of discussing insemination or your family, it is important to remember that there are people who can help you with this process. Getting this support can be especially important when you are in a social setting where people might not understand the process of insemination and LGBTQ families. Parents, teachers and other allies can work to make sure people around you are informed about your family and origins so it is not up to you to explain everything.

Obviously, you will not be able to get this kind of support in every social situation you face, but in classroom settings and other regular social gatherings it can be helpful. One DI COLAGEr from Iowa says she needed this kind of

help from adults. “One of the biggest issues for me growing up was my inability to fully articulate how I came to exist. Though my parents had given me the proper vocabulary and told me the whole sperm coming from California story, my classmates (as early as preschool) were curious yet lacked the reproductive vocabulary to understand the story I was trying to tell. ...Really I needed someone to teach my classmates about reproduction and different families because I, for many years, was left to do it myself and it was not easy for my 5-year-old self,” she says.

If you are facing a similar situation, ask your parents to help you talk with your teachers. When approaching your parents, it is good to be clear about whether or not you want your teacher to talk about your family specifically. Many DI COLAGERS have said they do not like to be outed by their parents at school. In other words, sometimes it can be uncomfortable when your parents or teachers tell all your classmates you have an LGBTQ parent and were born through donor insemination.

Often DI COLAGERS want to have control over who they tell about their families. It can be hard to tell this to your parents because you do not want them to feel as though you are not proud of them or do not love them. Many DI COLAGERS have felt this way, and you should not feel ashamed about wanting to have control over who knows about your family. If this is your situation, explain to your parents that you would like help talking with your teachers about teaching a lesson on diverse family structures, but that you do not want to be singled out in that lesson.

You can explain that you want to be the one who tells people you have LGBTQ parents and that you would prefer they not have the teacher talk about your family directly. Most parents have been through school and understand the social pressures youth can face. In the back of this guide there is a resource you can give to schools to help them understand situations DI COLAGERS encounter. You may want to read through this resource with a parent and then have your parents give it to a teacher or administrator at your school. The school resource can be found on page 62 of this guide.

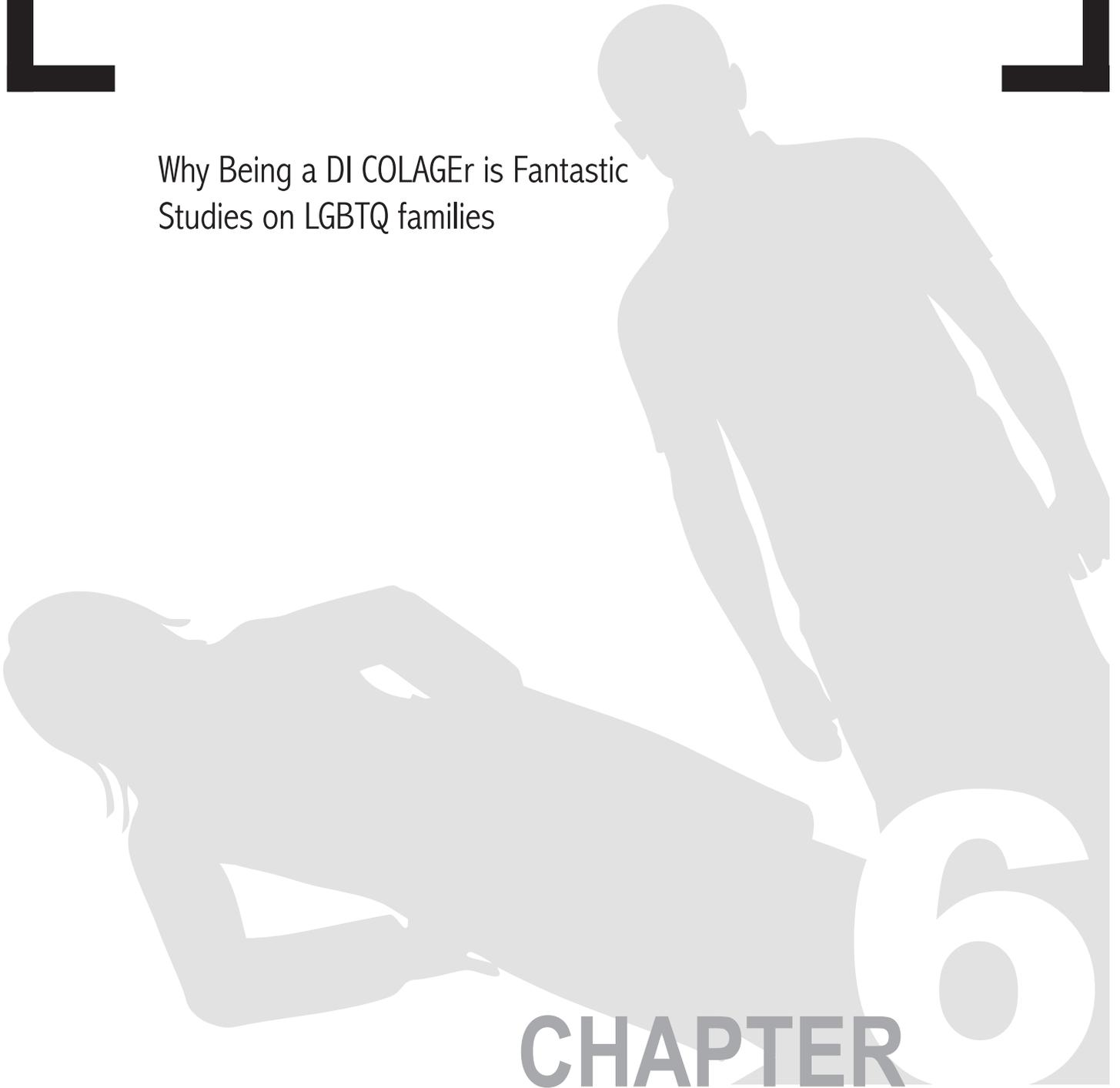
DI COLAGERS want to have control over who they tell about their families for a number of reasons.

“I LOVE MY LIFE!”

Why Being a DI COLAGER is Fantastic
Studies on LGBTQ families

CHAPTER

6



Why Being a DI COLAGER is Fantastic

Many DI COLAGERS have come to realize that their difference is their strength. Indeed, the many unique aspects to being a DI COLAGER allow one to experience family in interesting and fun ways. Lots of us got to brag that we had TWO moms in those early days of school when MOM meant cookies and hugs! Additionally, many DI COLAGERS say their family experiences allow them to view the world in a way that differs from their peers.

“I love having a non-traditional family. It has also taught me that biology is not the only thing that makes a family.”

Not surprisingly, when asked to share positive stories about their lives and donor insemination, DI COLAGERS often respond by talking about how happy they are that someone decided to create them.

“Well, I got life out of it,” jokes one DI COLAGER when asked to share positive experiences about being born through donor insemination. While most parents work hard to bring their children into the world, DI COLAGERS often say they feel special because of the extra process involved in creating them. “The parents who raised you went to a great deal of trouble to have you. Revel in that,” advises a 32 year-old DI COLAGER living in Los Angeles. Another person agrees, and says, “Someone worked hard to make me, which is pretty cool.”

DI COLAGERS come from all kinds of families, and while their family structures can be hard to explain, many say they enjoy their families. “I think it is kinda cool having two moms. I feel special,” says a 12 year-old from North Carolina.

Often DI COLAGERS do not see family as just people who are genetically related to them, allowing them to have more expansive families. “I have a bio-mom and a non-bio mom who are separated. I have a stepmother that I consider to be a mother, as well as a gaggle of other ‘parents’ who raised me,” explains a DI COLAGER living in Chicago. Sometimes the families of DI COLAGERS can be extremely large. One person describes her family by saying, “Two mothers (one bio, one non-bio - together 30+ years) and an extended queer family of love - aunts, uncles etc. I also have a donor who happens to be my godfather. He has never been a father figure and is in fact, less involved in my life than other LGBTQ adults that are non-biologically part of my family. I have two half-siblings via my godfather that I am very connected to and are also my mothers’ godchildren. We have been raised as family and claim each other with both biological connection and that of created family.”

People enjoy being able to connect with a wide range of people and bring them into their family. “It’s great to have a massive extended family and know people! I have it, and it ROCKS,” writes a 16 year-old from Massachusetts. Another DI COLAGER agrees and stresses that is a good thing to see family as more than the people to whom you are genetically related. “I love having a non-traditional family. It has also taught me that biology is not the only thing that

makes a family,” she says. Many people are proud of how their parents defined family. “Part of the reason I exist is because my parents were wildly creative and invented a model of family that was all their own,” adds a person from Wisconsin.

In addition, DI COLAGERs say they are happy to be raised in families that teach them to be open-minded. “There are many gifts I received from my unique family situation such as open mindedness and compassion for the differences between people,” writes a DI COLAGER who was raised in California. Another person says she is happy to open other people’s minds and show them that negative perceptions they have of LGBTQ families are incorrect. “I’m proud to be different and to be living proof that the stereotypes surrounding families like mine are just totally wrong,” explains a DI COLAGER from Los Angeles.

People have also said they embrace their difference because it allows them to discover traits about themselves in unique ways. People who were raised by two same-sex parents and get the chance to later meet their donor express how they enjoy discovering which of their traits were given to them genetically and which were a result of how they were raised. “It adds richness to your life,” says one DI COLAGER, referring to how you get to discover new things about yourself as you go through the process of meeting your donor.

“There are many gifts I received from my unique family situation such as open mindedness and compassion for the differences between people.”

Studies on LGBTQ Families

Research has shown that people raised in LGBTQ families grow up to be generally well-rounded, compassionate people. In her book *Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children*, a comprehensive study of current research on LGBTQ families, Abbie Goldberg writes, “children and adolescents with sexual minority parents develop normally.”⁶

As a DI COLAGER, you know that LGBTQ parents are usually good parents, despite the claims of people who are against our families. One of the common arguments made by opponents of LGBTQ rights is that LGBTQ parents will raise children who are confused about their gender or sexual identity. Studies that compare children with LGBTQ parents and children with heterosexual parents show that COLAGERs are no more likely to have issues related to their gender identities. “Research has not detected any significant differences in the gender identities of children raised by lesbian and gay parents compared with children raised by heterosexual parents,”⁷ Goldberg writes.

In fact, research has shown that COLAGERs do not stick to traditional gender roles, a phenomenon which has been linked to positive personal development. “Because same-sex couples

“Research has not detected any significant differences in the gender identities of children raised by lesbian and gay parents compared with children raised by heterosexual parents.”

cannot divide up household chores and responsibilities according to gender (difference),” Goldberg states, “they inevitably model gender nonconformity and challenge traditional gendered roles.”⁸

There can be benefits to being raised in a family environment that encourages you to challenge traditional roles. “Men who possess an androgynous or gender-balanced orientation often enjoy better mental health and adjustment, score higher on tests of emotional intelligence, and are more involved fathers,” writes Goldberg.⁹ Additionally, studies have demonstrated that people raised in LGBTQ households are no more likely to be LGBTQ themselves.¹⁰

Finally, COLAGERs are just as likely as people with straight parents to be sociable and have healthy peer relationships. Goldberg cites a study of children with lesbian parents and children with heterosexual parents that found that “the two groups did not differ in the quality of their peer relationships.”¹¹

There can be benefits to being raised in a family environment that encourages you to challenge traditional roles.

THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

More Ways to Get Involved with COLAGE
Further Resources



CHAPTER

More Ways to Get Involved with COLAGE

Reading this guide is just one step you can take in involving yourself with the DI COLAGEr community and learning about the experiences of DI COLAGERs. This guide is only the first resource in what will be a series of publications, workshops and information sheets for donor conceived people with LGBTQ parents.

Please be in touch with COLAGE and give your feedback on this book so our resources can grow and be enriched by the experiences of our members. Building community is important. As one DI COLAGER puts it, “I ... am in contact with many other children conceived by donor insemination and this has been very helpful in making me feel less alone in my situation.” The following is a list of resources that will help you access the COLAGE community as well as learn about the experiences of other DI COLAGERs.

Connecting with COLAGE

- **The COLAGE office:** The national office is located in San Francisco, California. Its office hours are 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The office number is 415-861-5437.
- **National and Regional Events:** COLAGE staff and volunteers put on a number of workshops and conferences around the country each year. These events include trainings for COLAGERs who want to be advocates for their families, workshops for youth on topics such as dealing with issues at school and youth panels that work to inform people about being a COLAGER. For more information about specific COLAGE events happening in your area of the country, call the national office or log onto the COLAGE website (www.colage.org).
- **Family Weeks:** COLAGE puts on two Family Weeks: one in Saugatuck, Michigan and one in Provincetown, Massachusetts. These events are opportunities for COLAGERs and their families to come together for a week to celebrate LGBTQ families. At both family weeks COLAGE provides youth programming provided by staff who all have one or more LGBTQ parents.
- **Chapters:** COLAGE has close to 40 chapters across the county. A list of these chapters can be found on our website. If a chapter does not currently exist in your area, COLAGE also can provide information and resources to start a chapter.

- **The COLAGE Speak OUT Program:** For those COLAGERS who are interested in being out about their families and sharing their stories, there is the COLAGE Speak OUT Program. This program brings COLAGERS together through weekend-long camps, national conference calls, and local media trainings to help COLAGERS learn to be effective advocates for themselves and their families.
- **www.colage.org:** The COLAGE website is a great place to discover the different ways to connect with the organization. In addition to a news blog that keeps COLAGERS up to date about information that is important to our families, the website also lists upcoming events.
- **Online Communities:** COLAGE has different online communities people can sign up for to be connected with other COLAGERS. In spring 2010, COLAGE will be starting an online community just for DI COLAGERS. The COLAGE website has information on how to sign up for these communities.

Further Resources

Books for older youth and adults

- **Everything Conceivable: How Assisted Reproduction is Changing Men, Women, and the World.**
Summary: An account of how assisted reproduction is helping to create different kinds of families. Is not exclusively about LGBTQ families, but includes a chapter on the start of the LGBTQ parenting movement.
Liza Mundy. Alfred A. Knopf. 2007.
- **The Baby Business: How Money, Science, and Politics Drive the Commerce of Conception.**
Summary: A study of the economic and ethical implications in advances in assisted reproductive technologies.
Debora L. Spar. Harvard Business School Press. 2006.
- **And Baby Makes More: Known Donor, Queer Parents, and Our Unexpected Families**
Summary: A collection of stories of people in LGBTQ families with known donors.
Edited by Susan Goldberg and Chloe Brushwood Rose. Insomniac Press 2009.
- **Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell it Like it is**
Summary: A now classic text describing the experiences of adult COLAGERS through their own testimonials.
Abigail Garner. Harper Collins Publishers. 2004
- **She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood**
Summary: The personal true story of a lesbian mother raising a child to which she is not biologically related.
Amie Klemphauer Miller. Beacon Press. 2010.
- **Who's Your Daddy? And other Writings on Queer Parenting**
Summary: A collection of short personal stories written by COLAGERS and their family members. Several stories are written by DI COLAGERS.
Edited by Rachel Epstein. Sumach Press. 2009.

Children's books

- **And Baby Makes 4**
Summary: The story of a young girl with lesbian parents going through the process of waiting for, and then meeting her new baby sister who is born through DI.
Judith Benjamin. Motek Press. 2009
- **Where Did I Really Come From?**
Summary: An Australian book that describes how different families are created. The book includes descriptions of sexual intercourse, donor insemination, in Vitro Fertilization, pregnancy, birth, surrogacy and adoption. Note: Some illustrations and descriptions in this book may not be appropriate for young children.
Narelle Wickham. Learn to Include. 2008.
- **Heather Has Two Mommies**
Summary: A book about a child, who was born through DI, interacting with her parents and learning about how all families are different. Note: The original version released in 1989 has a complete description of Heather's parents falling in love and going to the doctor to be inseminated, while the updated version, released in 2009, leaves out this part of the story.
Leslea Newman. Alyson Wonderland. 1989.

Films

- **In My Shoes**
Summary: A COLAGE produced film telling the real life stories of different COLAGERS and their families, one of which is a DI COLAGER.
- **Our House**
Summary: A documentary that follows several LGBTQ headed families, including one family that has two daughters born through donor insemination.

Online Resources

- **The Donor Sibling Registry (www.donorsiblingregistry.com)**
Stated purpose: "To assist individuals conceived as a result of sperm, egg or embryo donation who are seeking to make mutually desired contact with others with whom they share genetic ties."
- **Rainbow Rumpus (www.rainbowrumpus.org)**
Stated purpose: "Rainbow Rumpus is the world's only online literary magazine for children and youth with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parents. We provide a safe, fun, and empowering place for young people to create and enjoy art, break through isolation, build community, and take action to make the world a better place."

Pop Culture Productions Featuring DI COLAGERS

- **MTV's True Life: I have gay parents (Season 8, Episode 7)**
Summary: The show chronicles the teens with LGBTQ parents, one of which is searching for his open identity donor.
- **The Kids Are All Right**
Summary: A feature length movie set to be released in the summer of 2010. The film tells the story of two DI COLAGERS searching for and meeting their donor. Note: This film is rated R and should only be viewed by older youth.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What We Think: Advice for Prospective Parents

I Want to Talk about My Donor: Advice for Current Parents

Not Another Father's Day Party: A Resource for Teachers

Actually I Have a Donor: Tips for Medical Professionals

"What Are My Rights?": A Legal Resource for DI COLAGERs

“What We Think”

Advice for Prospective Parents

Often DI COLAGers are approached by new or prospective LGBTQ parents wanting to know the answers to a range of questions. This resource is designed to answer some of the most common questions these parents ask by sharing the first-person accounts of DI COLAGers. Many parents wonder what kind of donor is best for a child, how to properly discuss insemination with their children and if their children will desire male role models. No two people are the same, thus, people in this constituency often disagree on a range of issues about their upbringing. Yet, as described below, there is general agreement among DI COLAGers on several key issues.

“Do it, do it, do it! My parents worried that I would be teased or feel out of place or be embarrassed, but I have not really experienced this and absolutely love my family and wouldn’t change it for the world.”

When asked what advice they would give to prospective parents, many DI COLAGers enthusiastically encourage people to start a family through DI. “Go for it! If you’re thinking about it, you should go for it! If you are unsure, then wait, but in my opinion, you should just go for it (as I said multiple times above),” writes a 12 year-old from Los Angeles.

Indeed, many DI COLAGers are excited about their families and say that, despite prospective parents’ possible fears about starting a family that can be seen as outside the norm, they should have a child. “Do it, do it, do it! My parents worried that I would be teased or feel out of place or be embarrassed, but I have not really experienced this and absolutely love my family and wouldn’t change it for the world. LGBTQ parents are some of the best I’ve ever met (I think I have the best parents in the world) and hope that one day, this will not be weird or misunderstood at all,” advises another DI COLAGer from Kentucky.

What kind of donor should I use?

For parents considering starting a family through donor insemination, one of the first questions is usually what kind of donor to use. Many factors will most likely impact your decision about the donor, but it is imperative you keep in mind the impact this choice will have on your future child. The feelings DI COLAGers have about their donor vary dramatically. Some have extreme curiosity about their anonymous donor while others are satisfied with not knowing this person. Despite this range of feelings, a vast majority of DI COLAGers with diverse family situations agree that, if possible, it is important to at least give a child the choice of meeting his or her donor later in life.

If you have already chosen an anonymous donor, do not fret. Many DI COLAGers understand the difficult decisions that parents must make, even if an open identity or known donor is the preferred option. “Although I do not think it hurts a child to have an anonymous donor, I have greatly benefited from

the relationship I was able to have with my father,” writes an 18 year-old from Massachusetts. One person who was raised without knowledge of his donor says that while knowing his donor may have benefited him in some ways, he likes the person he has become. “I grew up with an anonymous donor and made what I think is a healthy and vibrant identity out of not knowing much about his identity. Had I known my entire life I may have been able to avoid some uncertainty as a child, and perhaps some moments of pain, but I think I would also be a different person and I have to say that I like who I am now,” he states.

While DI COLAGERS with different kinds of donor relationships say they enjoy their families, the idea of choice in discovering their genetic origins is important to them. “By using an unknown donor, parents are making a major life decision - knowing one biological parent - for their unborn child, whom they cannot consult,” writes a DI COLAGER, urging parents to let their child make the decision about meeting their donor.

In fact, a majority of DI COLAGERS who took the survey that informed the creation of the DI Guide recommended parents use an open identity donor. One DI COLAGER writes, “As a child of an anonymous donor I recommend choosing open identity donation so that your kid can have the choice of establishing a relationship with the donor.” One person from Minnesota says that even though she does not have an interest in meeting her donor, she advises parents to use an “open identity donor” so their future children “can decide maturely if they want to know [their donor].”

Many DI COLAGERS see the option of an open identity donor as a middle ground between an anonymous donor and a known donor. People in this constituency often state that the option of an open identity donor protects parents from custody disputes with a donor and allows children to be more mature when they meet their donor. “I think that you shouldn’t use an anonymous donor because then no matter what your kid(s) want to know they won’t be able to ever have a chance of knowing. I don’t think you should use a known donor because then when the child is a little older ... the relationship between the child and the donor may be awkward,” advises a DI COLAGER from New York. Another person agrees and writes, “I believe what was best for me was having an open identity donor. I was able to contact and meet him when I was emotionally prepared for the relationship... With meeting the donor earlier I think I would have felt more pressure to include him in my daily life and establish a father/daughter relationship. Now we can develop our relationship at our own pace and without pressure.” Finally, a third person with an open identity donor says much the same thing: “I would recommend selecting an open identity donor. It’s only fair that your child should have the option of one day trying to locate him. Although, I think it’s good for people to be 18 or older before meeting their donor so that they can be emotionally mature enough for the intense, and often overwhelming situation.”

For other DI COLAGERS the distinction between an open identity and a known donor is less important than having the option to know a donor. “As a kid who has limited information about my donor and went through a horrible situation

“By using an unknown donor, parents are making a major life decision - knowing one biological parent - for their unborn child, whom they cannot consult.”

involving a known donor I still say use a known donor because the little that I do know has helped me figure out who I am as a person and who I am in the world,” writes a 30 year-old DI COLAGER from New York. Other people say they enjoy having the chance to know their donor and understand that their donors wanted to help create a family. “I have heard some children of anonymous donors say that they wondered if their dad/mom even wanted to make a life or if they just wanted the money that went along with it. As the daughter of a known donor I have never doubted that my donor wanted to help my moms make a family,” states a DI COLAGER.

Important to be open

No matter what kind of donor you choose, it is important you are open with your child, not only about why you chose the donor

that you did, but also about the biological process that created him/her and the family structure in which you are raising him/her.

The most common advice DI COLAGERS have for prospective parents is “be open.” This generally means that DI COLAGERS are curious about how they came to be and would like to know as much as they can about decisions their parents made that affect their life. Thus, it is important for parents to create a safe, non-judgmental space where they can engage with their children about topics related to their genetic origins. When you start these conversations, it is important to remember not to assume you know what life is like for your children and to keep bringing up the topic so your children can feel comfortable discussing their donor.

First of all, DI COLAGERS like to know why their parents selected their donor. Often people ask this question not to make parents feel guilty or to question their parents’ decision, but to honestly understand more about themselves. “Whatever decision you make [about a donor], it is one you will need to be able to explain to your child, and one they will need to be able to explain to other people,”

writes a DI COLAGER. Indeed, many people have said that while they would have preferred a different kind of donor, they understood why their parents chose their donor and were not upset. This can be a hard subject for a child to bring up, so make sure you are initiating these kinds of conversations. Also, as mentioned above, remember that children’s thoughts about their genetic origins will evolve as they grow older. This means that talking about your children’s genetic origins should be an ongoing conversation. As one DI COLAGER advises, “If you do decide to have a child through donor insemination, as your child grows older make sure to stay open about it with them. My parents have always done that with me, and because of it it’s very easy for me to comfortably talk with them about my donor and ask them questions that I’m curious about.”

It is also good to be open with your child about the process of insemination so he or she can explain it to peers and so the process can be seen as normal. Talk to your child about how he or she was born. “Some parents may choose not to talk about donors or insemination because they think it emphasizes

“If you do decide to have a child through donor insemination, as your child grows older make sure to stay open about it with them. My parents have always done that with me, and because of it it’s very easy for me to comfortably talk with them about my donor and ask them questions that I’m curious about.”

biological donors over parents, but I think it's important for children to know how their families came to be," advises a DI COLAGEr living in Chicago. Another DI COLAGEr stresses that it is important to teach children about DI so they can talk to other people about how they were conceived. "If you can, always be open with your kids about DI and your process of becoming pregnant and choosing to have children. And, if you are able, teach your children the vocabulary that we need in order to explain our families. One of the harder things growing up was trying to explain my family, which I was ALWAYS proud of, without knowing what to say," explains a person from Massachusetts. Make sure your child does not view insemination as something that is abnormal. As one person writes, "Sometimes other children can be rude to children with donors so it's good to explain to the child that the way they were conceived is not unusual."

"Sometimes other children can be rude to children with donors so it's good to explain to the child that the way they were conceived is not unusual."

DI COLAGErs also say that it is important to be open with your child about their donor, even if you have little information about the donor. DI COLAGErs stress that the desire to know about their donor stems from their motivations to gain self-awareness. It does not come from feeling that their families are inadequate. "From when I learned to talk, I was constantly asking where I came from and who my father was. It's not so much that a child needs a father- my donor isn't really a father to me, more a friend- but that many children will want to at least know about the half of them which isn't their mother. It's an important part of getting to know yourself," writes a 17-year-old DI COLAGEr.

Another person says that it was easy for him to understand his genetic origins because his parents were clear about where he came from. "Be up-front about it and supportive if your child wants to know who the donor is," he advises. "I knew from the time I was very little that I had a 'seed dad' and I think it would have been weird if my parents had ignored this," he continues.

Finally, DI COLAGErs say it is imperative to be clear about the family structures in which you are raising them. While many DI COLAGErs have expressed joy about being raised in large extended families, others have mentioned how they were hurt when they did not know who to view as a parent. These kinds of situations can arise when multiple people are involved with raising a child but it is not made clear who the child should rely on as a "parent."

As one DI COLAGEr advises, "Do your best to create a stable definition of family for your children, whatever that may mean for your particular situation. I think it's important that children know who their family is, but that there may also be a nice and varied extended network of people that they can turn to for additional role models."

The male role model question

As one DI parent asks, "Do children with two moms feel that they missed out in some way by not having a dad?" This is a common question for DI parents. A second related question is, "Do children with same sex parents miss having role models of each gender?" While DI COLAGErs say it is important to have role models that represent both genders, they adamantly state

that they do not miss having a “father figure.” One DI COLAGEr who was raised by two lesbians says, “In my case my mom used a friend as a donor, but I have never considered him a father figure and I have never felt the lack of a father figure.” However, as another DI COLAGEr states, a person can feel they have a complete family and still want additional role models. “If your donor will not be a part of the child’s life, make sure to have other male influences in the child’s life and work to keep those men involved with the child’s life. It is important to have examples of caring men in your life, and while lesbian moms can give you as much love as heterosexual parents, they can’t give you this example of a caring male figure without some help,” she says. Another adult DI COLAGEr agrees that while it might not be important to have a relationship with both biological parents, it is crucial to build friendships with people of both genders. “I think it is important for children to have positive role models, both male and female. I wish I had had more of a positive male figure in my life. I think it would have helped me down the road with self-esteem toward the opposite sex. I think whether or not a child knows their biological father is not important, however I do believe that having role models and strong relationships with adults of both sexes will benefit the later development of a child more than if a child grows up isolated with only one sex,” she writes.

Tips for Talking with Your Child About Insemination¹²

Young children can be curious and have questions about different types of families. It is very helpful to them to have names for a variety of family structures, including lesbian and gay headed families, adoptive families, foster families, grandparent-headed families, single parent families, recombined families and so on.

Adults should be responsible for helping children to describe their families so that they are not alone in trying to explain these differences to their peers.

To older children who may have questions about conception, one explanation is:

- “When two women want to have a baby, they either adopt a baby, or they get help from a man so that one of them can get pregnant. A man gives the woman his sperm, and she puts it inside her vagina, where it travels to meet the egg and make a baby.”

Sample explanations of different families for younger youth:

- “When a man and a woman love each other and have children, those children have a mom and a dad.”
- “When two women love each other and have children, those children have two moms; those moms are called lesbian or gay.”
- “When two men love each other, they’re called gay, and when they have children, those children have two dads.”
- “When a woman or a man don’t have a partner but have children, those children have either a mom or a dad.”
- “When a child’s parent needs help to care for the child, that child may live with a grandparent or aunt or uncle.”

“I Want to Talk About My Donor”

A resource for DI parents on how to have a dialogue with their children about their donor

Talking about a donor can be challenging for both parents and children.

Parents can feel as though acknowledging or discussing the donor will lead to their children wanting to meet their donor and form a relationship with this person, which could supplant their role as parents. Additionally, parents can view their children’s questions about a donor as a sign that their children are unhappy with their family. This can be especially true in LGBTQ families where negative societal pressure is placed on parents and can make them feel as though their parenting is inadequate. If this is your situation, make sure you have resources that can help you address and overcome these feelings. Finally, a child’s questions about why a parent chose a particular kind of donor can be seen by a parent as a sign the child is unhappy.

From a youth’s perspective, broaching the subject of his or her donor can also be hard. Children who are generally happy with their families are very conscious of their parent’s feelings and do not want to hurt them by bringing up the subject of their donor. In addition, if parents do not discuss their child’s donor openly, a child can feel as though the subject of the donor is off limits, finding it awkward to bring up.

This guide is meant to build understanding and demonstrate that DI COLAGERS want to talk about their donor, not as a way to add a parent to their family, but as a means of better understanding themselves. As a DI parent from Sacramento, California describes, “Coming to terms with your child’s questions can be hard, but once you understand your child’s perspective the topic is an easy one to discuss. When I was trying to get pregnant, and when the kids were too little to ask questions, I was a bit afraid of questions -- worried that curiosity about the donor would indicate a perceived lack in their lives, and defensive about the adequacy of a single-parent family. Once it became real, that anxiety dissolved. When I affirm the legitimacy of their wonderings and longings, and am non-defensive, it turns out not to be a big deal,” she explains. If you are having these kinds of fears, it is key that you acknowledge these emotions. Being open about feeling this way will make it easier for your child to honestly express his or her feelings to you.

While parents’ fears are legitimate, they often turn out to be based on a false sense of their children’s motivations. As DI COLAGERS stress over and over, their desire to meet their donor is driven by a motivation to discover more about

“I know that the little that I know about my donor has helped me so much in terms of figuring out who I am as a person.”

their genetic origins, not to find an additional parent. “I know that the little that I know about my donor has helped me so much in terms of figuring out who I am as a person. Biology has nothing to do with what constitutes a family but in the individual search for self, biology plays a part and I’m grateful for the little that I do know,” writes a DI COLAGER.

People born through DI also stress that their curiosity about their donor does not mean they are displeased with their families. “Although I am curious about the donor that my parents used, I don’t feel as if my life is incomplete and unhappy because I don’t have more information about him or a relationship with him,” explains a DI COLAGER.

“I love my family more than anything else, but I still want to know what the donor looks like, if my brother and I look like him, if we have any of the same mannerisms, or anything like that.”

Another person adds, “I love my family more than anything else, but I still want to know what the donor looks like, if my brother and I look like him, if we have any of the same mannerisms, or anything like that.”

Many DI COLAGERS have trouble bringing up the subject of their donor because they do not want it to appear as though they are unhappy with their parents or family situation. A 14 year-old DI COLAGER from Connecticut says that it can be “uncomfortable” bringing up the topic of her donor. She adds, “I just feel a little guilty whenever I do talk to them about it, because I don’t want them to think I’m not happy with them as my parents or anything like that.”

DI COLAGERS who have the option to meet their donors have similar feelings of guilt related to talking about meeting their donor, but say their parents’ support in the process is extremely important. People who have gone through the process of meeting their donor advise parents to not view their child’s desire to meet their donor as negative. “Don’t be offended when they want to meet the biological parent. It’s not a reflection on your parental legitimacy, the love they have for their family, etc. - it’s just natural curiosity about biological origin, which you would have in their position too,” explains a DI COLAGER.

“Don’t be offended when they want to meet the biological parent. It’s not a reflection on your parental legitimacy, the love they have for their family, etc. - it’s just natural curiosity about biological origin.”

Another DI COLAGER who has met her donor agrees. “Don’t see it as an insult to you if the kid wants to get to know their donor. It’s a completely different kind of relationship, and doesn’t mean that you are lacking in any way,” she writes. Several COLAGERS expressed fear that their parents might not support their decision to meet their donor, and cited the importance of having parental support while going through the process. “I would feel uncomfortable being curious about my donor and searching him out if my mother had not been supportive of such an idea,” writes a person from Colorado.

Often DI COLAGERS also want parents to emotionally support them when they meet their donor. “I met my donor with my parents present. It was not something I could have done alone. I also had my half-sister with me, we had met beforehand. It was emotional for myself and my parents and their presence was important to me,” says a DI COLAGER.

**Ten
Important
Things to
Remember:
When Talking
with Your
Child About
His/Her
Donor:**

1. **Bring up the topic:** Children may feel that the topic of their donor is off limits or think it is an awkward subject to bring up. If you offer to share information about a donor, your child is more likely to open up about his or her curiosities. Additionally, remember that discussing your child's donor should be an ongoing conversation as your child grows and matures.
2. **Listen to your child's curiosities about their donor:** Often curiosities about a donor are driven by a desire to know more about oneself. Hearing your child discuss his or her curiosities can help build understanding and make you feel more comfortable with the topic. However, remember that it is not your child's responsibility to make you feel comfortable about his or her donor. If you would prefer to avoid the topic of the donor it is best to address these feelings so you can overcome them.
3. **Offer to share all information you have about a donor:** For a donor-conceived person, every detail about their donor can matter. Some parents believe that since they only have very limited information about their child's donor (height or eye color), it is not worth sharing. Most DI COLAGERS would disagree. If you have a donor information sheet or other materials, make them available to your child.
4. **Talk about why you chose your child's donor:** Your motivations for having a child and selecting your child's donor are part of your child's origin story. If a child is frustrated with their donor situation, it may also be beneficial to share why you thought selecting the donor that you did made sense at the time. Children are often able to understand a parent's perspective on this issue and accept their parent's decision.
5. **Do not say negative things about a known donor in front of your child:** If children hear negative things being said about their donor they can believe you have those same negative feelings about them. Thus, it is important not to say outwardly negative things about a known donor who may have become estranged from your family.
6. **Take care of yourself:** Make sure you are able to address any of your own insecurities about being an LGBTQ parent who is raising a donor-conceived child. It should not be your child's responsibility to reassure you.
7. **Create a safe space for your children to talk about their donor:** Make sure to listen to your children when they want to talk about their genetic origins. Validate their questions with positive feedback.
8. **Create a positive narrative:** Rather than being negative about your children's origins, create a positive narrative for them. For example, rather than talking about how you had limited options to conceive because you are a lesbian, talk about how much your child was wanted and how special you think he/she is.
9. **Remind your kids that you will be okay:** Reassure your children that you will be okay no matter what feelings they have about their donor. This is especially true for parents who chose an open identity donor. Often children will try to protect parents and have hesitations about meeting their donor because they do not want to upset their parents.
10. **Practice talking to your children:** Bringing up the topic of a donor with your children can be difficult. Do not be afraid to role-play this conversation with a friend or fellow parents.

“Not Another Father’s Day Party”

A resource for teachers and school administrators

For donor conceived people with an LGBTQ parent, school can be a challenging environment. Not only must these youth face questions about their family structure, but they must also talk about their genetic origins and insemination—a challenge for a person of any age. While teachers and school administrators cannot always help solve every situation for people in this constituency, there are several things teachers can do to make their classrooms feel safe and friendly for donor-conceived people with an LGBTQ parent (referred to as “DI COLAGers” in this resource). The following is a list of negative situations commonly faced by DI COLAGers at school along with advice on how authority figures in schools can try to prevent such situations never occur.

- **“Mother’s Day/Fathers Day” events:** Many schools celebrate Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. These celebrations, when not handled correctly, can be hurtful to DI COLAGers. One lesbian parent said that when her daughter’s school celebrated Mother’s Day she was “stuffed in as an afterthought” because she was the “other mother.” To avoid these kinds of situations, keep in mind the following recommendations. It is a good idea to clarify to all of the students that all families are different and not everyone has a mom and a dad. If teachers have events to celebrate these holidays, it is also important not to make it mandatory for students to have their mother or father attend the event. Often DI COLAGers are uncomfortable explaining why they are bringing two moms to the Mother’s Day event or no one to the Father’s Day event. An alternative to having two separate celebrations is having one Parent’s Day where all different kinds of families can be celebrated.
- **Family tree projects:** Many DI COLAGers say that at some point when they were in elementary or middle school they were asked to complete a project that traced their family tree. This seemingly benign activity can be a challenge for DI COLAGers. Many DI COLAGers have an anonymous donor, meaning they know little or nothing about one half of their genetic background. Sometimes children with anonymous donors are unhappy with not being able to know more about their genetic background and these kinds of activities can highlight these negative feelings. Some DI COLAGers know their donor, but do not view this person as a parent. For these people, family tree projects can be confusing or challenging because they don’t feel as though their genetic background is linked to their “parents.” Other DI

COLAGERs who know their donor may see their donor as a parent along with their two same-sex parents and not understand why there should be only two branches on their family tree. If you choose to have family history projects in your classroom, remind children that your family is not necessarily people to whom you are genetically related. Also, mention that people's family trees will look different depending on who is in their family structure. Try to be conscious not to use language that might make children with LGBTQ parents feel excluded.

- Using language to describe insemination:** One of the most challenging things for DI COLAGERs is explaining their genetic origins to their peers. Often youth do not understand what “donor insemination” means and ask for an explanation. Answering this kind of question often means using words like “sperm” and other sexual terms. While DI COLAGERs often use medically correct terminology to describe insemination, they can still be misunderstood by teachers and get in trouble for discussing inappropriate subjects. “I was really honest, super blunt. I just said it straight out, my parents are gay and I was artificially inseminated. I told my peers exactly what it was,” says one DI COLAGER, adding, “The school didn’t really know how to deal with it.” In these situations it is important to be aware of DI COLAGERs in your class and be aware of when these kinds of conversations might arise. Also, it is a good idea to be clear in the classroom that all kinds of families should be respected. This way the student can feel safe about telling a teacher if he or she is having trouble explaining insemination.
- Family education:** It is important for DI COLAGERs to have their family structures normalized in school environments. “I am teased about my family makeup because it’s ‘different.’ The kids in my school are afraid of different people so they act mean about it,” says a middle school aged DI COLAGER from New York. A lesson on how all families are created differently and come in all kinds of shapes and sizes can go a long way toward making DI COLAGERs feel more accepted in the school community. These kinds of lessons can take all different forms, but the most important thing to emphasize is that there is no “normal” family and that everyone comes from different kinds of families and backgrounds. For ideas on workshops and other curriculum for classrooms, contact the COLAGE offices at colage@colage.org or 415-861-5437 or visit the COLAGE website (www.colage.org).
- Understanding DI COLAGERs’ families:** DI COLAGERs can have families that can be seen as outside the norm. On some occasions this means that a child’s “parents” are not recognized as such, leading to confusing or hurtful situations. There are three general kinds of donors: an anonymous donor, an open identity donor (a donor whose identity becomes known when the child turns 18), and a known donor. Within these three general categories, there can be an endless number of family situations. It is important to communicate with a DI COLAGER and his or her family to know who the child

views as parents. This is especially true for people who have a known donor. In some instances a known donor can be present in a child's life but not be seen as a parent. In these family situations school staff can be confused about who is a child's legal guardian. "Now that I am in charge of my own medical appointments, finances, job applications etc. it would be really helpful if doctors, school faculty and such knew more about donors. It's sometimes hard to convince people that I have two moms and still happen to know my dad, even though he's not my guardian," explains a DI COLAGER. "Because I know my donor and because he went to school events, people sometimes referred to him and my bio mom as my "parents". Once I was even told I couldn't leave an extracurricular activity when my grandfather died because he was not my 'real' grandfather. To me, there is nothing more hurtful than having someone say that my donor is more of my parent than the mom who has raised me," adds another person. To avoid these kinds of situations, make sure you are aware of exactly who a child's parents are and do not assume that a child's donor is considered a parent.

- **Protecting DI COLAGERS' anonymity:** While DI COLAGERS generally benefit when families like theirs are discussed in the classroom, they do not always like being singled out as "the kid with gay parents." One DI COLAGER from California said that she felt "tokenized" in school settings because she was always used in teaching settings to show how all people can be different. Many DI COLAGERS are not "out" about their families and choose only tell close friends about their families and genetic origins. Being outed by a teacher can be hard for a person who wants to have control over who knows about his or her family. If you are teaching a lesson on families make sure to make general statements about families rather than personally identifying people. This will avoid embarrassing the student or creating an awkward situation for him/her.
- **Forms matter:** When creating forms for your classroom or school, remember that having a space for a "mother" and a space for a "father" is often not representative of all families. "I cannot express how sick I am of filling out forms looking for a father/mother. This continued into forms for colleges. If people could make the change of parent/parent it would make my life easier. It would also make other children who do not know or live with both parents feel less isolated," explains a DI COLAGER. This may seem like a small change, but, as described above, having to change forms can make a person feel outside the norm. Having all forms simply say "parent" is a small step that can make a big difference. Sample forms and tips for making your school more inclusive can be found at www.includemedori.com.

“Actually, I Have a Donor, Not a Father”

Tips for medical service providers

In the United States alone, there are millions of people with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) parent(s), a significant and growing percentage of which were born through donor insemination. While research shows that there are no significant developmental differences or negative effects on children of LGBTQ parents, these youth report facing significantly more prejudice and discrimination because of societal homophobia and transphobia.

LGBTQ families, particularly families that include one or more nonbiological parent, face a range of systemic impediments to the care and custody of children, including exclusion from a spouse’s health insurance coverage and hostility in school systems and health care settings.

Based on a Kaiser Permanente national survey of nursing students, 8-12 percent “despised” lesbian, gay and bisexual people, 5-12 percent found lesbian, gay and bisexual people “disgusting” and 40-43 percent thought lesbian, gay and bisexual people should keep their sexuality private. Homophobia and transphobia in health care fields impacts the ability of youth with LGBTQ parents and their families to access care.

The Williams Institute published research in October 2006 that shows 20 percent of same-sex couples are uninsured, compared with only 10 percent of married people and 15 percent of the overall population. This means that a higher number of LGBTQ couples as well as their children do not have health coverage. LGBTQ people who are unable to access adequate health care are less able to care for children. Although some LGBTQ parents are able to access health coverage through domestic partner benefits, the majority of employers don’t offer domestic-partner benefits. Even among those that do, some people may not feel comfortable taking advantage of these benefits, especially if they are not able to be “out” at work.

Medical professionals are the first responders when it comes to making sure people are treated equally, regardless of their differences—like sexual orientation, gender identity or family status. Patients should feel safe and confident when they are in hospitals, clinics, or even on the operating table.

There are simple ways to make a medical practice environment safe and welcoming for children of LGBTQ parent(s) and their families.

Simple changes in everything from patient forms to office décor can have a significant impact on the comfort level and interactivity of a donor conceived

child of LGBTQ parent(s) of any age. Open communications between medical professional and patient not only make the relationship easier, but it can also save lives.

Know About the Donor Relationship

As one person states, “Now that I am in charge of my own medical appointments, finances, job applications, etc., it would be really helpful if doctors, school faculty and such knew more about donors. It’s sometimes hard to convince people that I have two moms and still happen to know my dad, even though he’s not my guardian.” Getting to know your patient’s relationship to his or her donor is important. Not only will it allow you to better understand their medical history, but discussing the topic will make people more comfortable with discussing their families. Different people can have different relationships with their donor. There are three general categories of donors: anonymous, open identity (a donor who becomes known when the child turns 18) and known donors. People with anonymous and open identity donors (who are not yet 18) probably have very little information about their donor and do not know his medical history. Known donor relationships can take all different forms, but, as mentioned above, it is important not to assume a donor is the patient’s “dad.”

Enter a Conversation with an Open Mind

It is best to withhold judgement when entering conversations with children of LGBTQ families. Language can be quite stigmatizing. What does the child call their parents? Use accurate pronouns and language when talking about family or people. Practice how you’ll treat a trans-family interaction and be open to critique and feedback.

Show Your Respect for Families

Show “signs” that LGBTQ families are welcome; even the subtlest hint of acceptance will be felt. Signs could include a poster, rainbow sticker, visually inclusive brochures or even the posting of a non-discrimination policy. An actual physical sign could be the creation and posting of a unisex bathroom.

Change Patient Intake Forms

Nothing can make children of LGBTQ parents more uncomfortable than intake forms. Whether it is a school release form, college application or a medical history sheet, the assumption that all people have a mother and father that they can give information on is sometimes daunting and off-putting. Changing forms to be more general and open to multiple parents may give more information than needed, but it conveys a sense of acceptance to the patient.

Re-evaluate Policies and Procedures

Visitation rules are probably the most mentioned form of discrimination among kids of LGBTQ parents. Policies are created to limit the number of people and protect children from exposure; however, these policies can also be hurtful. Imagine a child getting his/her tonsils taken out can only be visited by their

biological mother or father. Not all LGBTQ families can afford powers of attorney to override access to loved ones. Redefining “family” to stretch beyond bloodlines can only aid in patient care.

Know the Ins and Outs of Outness

Kids of LGBTQ parents are at different levels of outness when it comes to their families and even their own acceptance. Just because the parents are open doesn’t mean the kids are. Gauge the level of openness through conversation. Ask questions.

Avoid Assumptions in All Aspects of Work

One of the first questions children of LGBTQ parents are asked is “Are you gay?” Usually the answer is no—studies have shown that children with LGBTQ are no more likely to be LGBTQ themselves than children of heterosexual parents. People also assume that because the child’s parents are “defined” by sex that the child is all-knowing of sex and the gay community.

Teach Yourself and Teach Others

Bring in workplace training on LGBTQ families, or bring in specialists in areas of trans-families or families expanded through donor insemination. Seek out LGBTQ medical associations and organizations and be an ambassador to others, like patients and co-workers. Medical professionals have a powerful link to the community and can create a significant difference in discrimination and stigma-reduction. One good resource is the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (www.glma.org).

What You Should Know About Donor Conceived Children with a LGBTQ Parent

- We are very aware of discrimination against our families and we may be facing discrimination that our parents are not aware of.
- We have a donor.
- A “bothie” is a child who has both a lesbian mother and gay father for parents.
- We come from all types of families.
- We face great pressures from family and society to be or at least appear “straight,” “normal” or “perfect,” in addition to all the other pressure we and our peers face through life.
- This pressure also makes it difficult for us and our families to admit when there are challenges such as abuse in our families.
- We often like to protect our families and not tell when we face or hear discrimination.
- We do not always know our biological medical history.

“What Are My Rights?”

A Legal Resource for COLAGeRs Conceived Through Donor Insemination

THIS RESOURCE TO
BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
COLAGE &
NATIONAL CENTER
FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

As one DI COLAGeR said at a COLAGE gathering, “The system is just not set up for us!” DI COLAGeRs are often raised in families that are not fully recognized by current laws. Below are some common questions asked by DI COLAGeRs. Because the legal system is always evolving, especially in areas of the law that affect our families, the answers to most of these questions often depend on where you live.

Who is legally considered my parent?

This depends on your situation and where you live. First, anyone who has adopted you or has a court order saying he or she is your parent is a legally-recognized parent.

If your non-biological parent does not have an adoption or court order, it depends on where you live. Some states recognize that non-biological and non-adoptive parents can have rights if they have played a parental role, but many states do not. Your non-biological parent may also have rights if your parents are married, in a civil union, or in a comprehensive domestic partnership¹ and you live in a state that recognizes your parents’ relationship. However, even if the state you live in now recognizes your parents, other states might not. Only an adoption or other court order will require all states to recognize your parents – so it is very important for your non-biological parent to adopt you or get a parentage judgment if possible.

An important thing to know is that looking at your birth certificate may not answer the question of who your legally-recognized parents are. You may have a legal parent who is not listed on your birth certificate, or your birth certificate might list someone who is not treated as your parent under the law. What matters is what the law says about who your parents are.

Unfortunately, the law does not always recognize our families. If you are your parents are unsure about your legal rights, you should talk to a lawyer who is experienced in LGBT family law.

Is my donor legally recognized as a parent?

In some families, a sperm donor is intended to be a parent, and in some they are not. The law may or may not reflect the reality of your family. Whether your donor is a legal parent depends on what your state law says about sperm donors, whether your other parent(s) intended the sperm donor to be a parent, whether the sperm donor has played a parental role in your life, and whether your parent(s) were able to follow that law when you were conceived.

In states where there isn’t a law about sperm donors, or if the law doesn’t apply to your family, a known donor may be a legal parent unless his rights have been terminated by a court. In these situations, your donor may be a legal parent even if your parents did

NCLR

NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

1. A comprehensive domestic partnership means a domestic partnership that has all the rights and responsibilities of marriage under state law.

not intend for him to be a parent and even if they had a written agreement that he would not be treated as a parent. What matters is what the law in your state says about sperm donors.

If my parents are separated, do both my parents have visitation rights? Anyone who is legally recognized as a parent can seek visitation or custody of their child. Some states also allow someone who has functioned as a parent to seek visitation or custody under certain circumstances.

Who should I list as my parents on government forms?

Generally, if an official government form asks who your parents are, you should list anyone who is legally recognized as your parent in the state where you live. If the form says “mother” and “father,” put one of your legally-recognized parents in each box, even if you have two mothers or two fathers. For private forms, like emergency contact information and school forms, you should list everyone you consider to be your parent.

Many people have questions about how to fill out college financial aid forms, like the FAFSA. There is no clear answer on how people with same-sex parents should fill out the FAFSA. According to a letter posted by the Department of Education², if a student has same-sex parents, he or she should only include information on the FAFSA about the parent who has provided more financial support over the past year. The letter says that married same-sex couples should not say that they are married on the FAFSA because under the Defense of Marriage Act, only different-sex married couples are recognized by the federal government. We encourage you to contact the financial aid office at your college for information about how you should fill out the FAFSA and other financial aid forms.

Can I find out who my anonymous donor is?

Many anonymous donors have agreed that their identity may be released after the child turns 18. If you have an “identity release” donor and you want to know his identity, you can contact the sperm bank after you turn 18. If you need medical information about your donor, the sperm bank may be able to provide you with some information about your donor’s medical history, even if they can’t release his identity.

If you or your parents are considering contacting your donor while you are a minor, there are important legal issues to think about first. An anonymous donor may be legally recognized as a parent in some states, even if he had an agreement with the sperm bank that says he will not be a parent. If your donor could be a legal parent in the state where you live and you are a minor, getting in contact with him could end up causing custody issues for your family. You and your family should contact a lawyer to discuss this before you try to contact your donor. Of course, choosing to contact your donor for the first time is a very important decision, and you should discuss the legal, emotional, and practical impact it may have on your family.

**To learn about legal rights
in your state or for help
finding an LGBT-friendly
lawyer, contact: National
Center for Lesbian Rights
www.nclrights.org/gethelp
800.528.6257**

² Information for Financial Aid Professionals Dear Colleague letter, Oct. 27, 2005, available at <http://www.ifap.ed.gov/dp-letters/GEN0516.html>

This project would never have started or been possible without COLAGE

Founded in 1990, COLAGE is the only national youth-driven network of people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer parents (LGBTQ). COLAGE grew out of the of civil rights, feminist, and LGBT liberation movements in the United States. The founders of COLAGE – who were teenagers and young adults in the group’s first years – had grown up in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when there were few networks or resources for LGBT families – and fewer still for the children in these families. Most had experiences feeling that there were no other children like them, no other families like theirs.

In 1990, a small group of young people with gay and lesbian parents came together while their parents were attending an annual Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International conference. Recognizing that they had much to share with one another and the larger world about growing up in LGBTQ families, they soon began putting out a newsletter and running local chapters. Within two years they had formed a steering committee, drafted a mission statement, and set long-term goals for the newly created organization, and in 1995 opened a volunteer-run national office in San Francisco. In 1996, COLAGE explicitly added work with children of transgender parents to its mission and within three years it had become its own independent organization.

Today, as COLAGE celebrates its 20th anniversary, the organization has over 40 chapters and nearly 20,000 active supporters across the country. The organization connects with these supporters through a number of ways, including its publications, chapters, national workshops, and its two family weeks. COLAGE’s publications include Just For Us, a twice yearly newsletter focusing on topics important to COLAGE families such as religion and reproductive justice. Throughout the year, COLAGE staff and volunteers lead workshops around the country for youth age eight to eighteen. In 2009 alone, COLAGE staff were in Iowa, Minnesota, Georgia, California, New Jersey, Massachusetts and New York facilitating workshops for youth on topics such as schools and activism. Finally, COLAGE organizes semi-annual family weeks in Saugatuck, Michigan and Provincetown, Massachusetts. These weeks are opportunities for youth with LGBT parents to come together to build community through workshops, games and other family activities. Through these efforts, COLAGE helps children of LGBTQ families gain the rights, recognition and respects that every family deserves.

The ART Project

This DI guide, along with the fellowship that made the project possible, are part of the COLAGE ART Project. In the fall of 2009, COLAGE launched the ART Project to highlight the experiences of youth born to LGBTQ parents through assisted reproductive technologies. Over the past 30 years the number of people born through these technologies has steadily grown, yet little, if any, work has been done to bring this community together or address the experiences of these youth and adults.

The first major effort of the ART Project has been the publication of this guide along with the research that allowed for its creation. In the coming years, COLAGE looks forward to expanding the ART Project and its programs to include workshops and resources for COLAGE youth born through other assisted reproductive technologies, including surrogacy. For updates on the ART Project and its programs, visit www.colage.org/programs/art.