

Counseling Donor Family Members: A Guide For Mental Health Professionals

Donor conception is becoming substantially more common with the exponential advancements being made in the field of reproductive medicine, and with the wider acceptance in recent decades of LGBTQ families, single-parent families, and women in later reproductive years utilizing donor gametes. The accessibility of commercial DNA testing is also helping to expand these families as many people are finding out by surprise that they are part of a sometimes quite large donor family. Given the greatly increased probability of encountering a client connected to a donor family in their practices across settings, clinicians must be well-informed about all perspectives in order to best serve people in the donor family constellation.

Families formed and connected via donor gametes are unique in many ways, yet they also share the same joys, disappointments, adventures, concerns, stressors, and love that most families do. It's not uncommon for individuals in donor families to feel a sense of confusion or discomfort about their stories or with their own or their family's boundaries when it comes to using donor gametes or donating them, or to have issues surrounding disclosure or learning about their own donor conception story. It can sometimes be anxiety-provoking to reach out to one's own or their child's new genetic relatives. Grappling with the depth and breadth, and the timing and speed with which they explore their own or their child's origins and expanding families can be challenging, and also deeply profound and rewarding.

Clinicians will explore in this talk the unique issues that can present for egg and sperm donors, parents of donor-conceived children, and donor-conceived people. They will better understand the reasons donor family members may or may not desire to connect with their own or their child's close genetic relatives. They will be better prepared for many of the issues that donor family members might present with regarding their families of origin and with their new donor family relationships. Regardless of the presenting issues for treatment, for these individuals, the challenges of forming and redefining identity and family as they explore their own or their child's new biological connections can seem overwhelming and are therefore very likely to surface as a topic of discussion.

Counseling Donor Family Members: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals is a first-of-its-kind training/guide intended to be a resource for mental health and medical professionals in any setting, especially for those who are unfamiliar with donor conception. It's a presentation of evolving ideas, recommendations, and talking points that can be used when counseling anyone in the donor family. Because each stakeholder is deeply connected to the others, understanding all viewpoints is important for a successful counseling experience with any parent, egg and sperm donor, or donor-conceived person.