



Human  
Fertilisation &  
Embryology  
Authority

# Preparing to exchange contact details with your donor-conceived genetic siblings

---

This leaflet has been produced by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) for adult donor-conceived people who are thinking about joining our Donor Sibling Link (DSL) service.

DSL is a voluntary contact register for adults conceived through fertility treatment involving donated eggs, sperm or embryos (where treatment took place at a HFEA-licensed clinic). It is for people who:

- were conceived after 1 August 1991
- are aged 18 or above, and
- want to exchange contact details with others conceived with the use of the same donor (donor-conceived genetic siblings).

By joining DSL you will be agreeing to us sharing your first name, surname and agreed contact details with any other people conceived with the same donor already on DSL and/or who join in the future. You will also be agreeing to receive their name and contact details.

---

**Accessing information about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) can raise unexpected feelings, so before you decide whether to go ahead it's important to think about what effect this could have on you and your family.**

---

Accessing information about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) can raise unexpected feelings, so before you decide whether to go ahead with your application it's important to think about what effect this could have on you and your family. This leaflet outlines some of the things you might want to consider before going ahead.

We strongly encourage you to take advantage of our confidential support service which gives you the chance to talk things through with a donor conception support worker in a way and at a time to suit you – this could be by phone, email or in a face to face meeting.

The support worker can also act as an intermediary if you decide you'd like to make

contact with your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s).

For most people this service is free – contact details to access this service are at the end of the leaflet under 'find out more'.

---

## Some things to think about

If you decide to go ahead and join DSL, you're likely to go through many different emotions: anxiety, curiosity and excitement may all play a part.

Your feelings may change and perhaps become more intense after you have received the information about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s), in deciding whether to make contact with them and if you go on to actually meet them.

You may change your mind about what to do more than once, or go so far and then stop and maybe return to it in the future. This is understandable and quite normal.

## Have you applied to us to find out non-identifying information about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s)?

By law clinics must submit information to us when they carry out fertility treatment involving donor sperm, eggs or embryos. This includes information about the patient (your birth mother), the donor, and any children born as a result of treatment. All of this information is stored on a database called the HFEA Register.

From the age of 16, you can apply to us to find out the number, sex and year of birth of any donor-conceived genetic siblings (as well as information about your donor). This process is known as 'Opening the Register'.

If you haven't applied to us for this information, we strongly recommend you do this before you decide whether to join DSL. Up to 10 different sets

of parents can use the same donor and each can use the same donor for more than one child.

So it's possible you may have more than 20 other donor-conceived genetic siblings. However, it's also possible that there are none and you would therefore not be eligible to join DSL.

---

It's possible you may have more than 20 other donor-conceived genetic siblings. However, it's also possible that there are none.

---

### **Is this a good time in your life to get information about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) or make contact with them?**

Where you are in your life at the moment may affect how well you can cope with the possible ups and downs of this process, especially if you have recently been through a major life event such as a relationship breakdown, birth, or death.

What else is going on for you? What are your reasons for wanting to join DSL at this particular time?

### **Who do you have to support you?**

Who else knows that you are considering joining DSL and how supportive are they?

### **Are any of your siblings also donor-conceived?**

If so:

- Do you share the same donor?
- Are any of them too young to join DSL themselves; will you share information with them?
- If you've told them, how do they feel about you joining DSL?

- What impact could this have on them and on your relationships with them and with your family as a whole?

Including your family in this process and being as open and honest as possible may help them and you feel more at ease. However, some family members may prefer you not to go ahead.

Will this make a difference to your decision? How will you handle it either way?

Joining DSL does not guarantee that you will be able to find other people conceived with the same donor. They may not be aware that they were conceived this way, may not wish to join DSL, or may not be ready to exchange contact details.

### **What are your expectations about joining DSL and what are your hopes and fears?**

There are many possible outcomes. Your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) may not live up to your expectations or they may exceed them.

How will you feel if none have joined? What if they have joined but not kept their contact information up to date? What are your best/worst case scenarios in the short and longer term?

### **How might contact with your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) impact on them and their family?**

Your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) may not have informed their family that they joined DSL. They may not respond or wish to meet you; they might want limited contact or much more contact than you want.

You should bear in mind that they do not have any legal obligation to meet you. It's also possible that you might discover they have died or are in poor health.

---

## What is the importance to you of ‘nature versus nurture’?

You may each have inherited some characteristics from your donor – is this genetic connection important to you?

The significance of what we inherit from our genetic parents is different for everyone, which means your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) may view it differently to you, as might your family members.

## What if they want to meet your family and vice versa?

Meeting your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) could change relationships within their family and yours, and both families may need time to adjust.

## What if they are totally different to you?

You may not have anticipated your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s)’s lifestyle and circumstances and they may not have anticipated yours.

For example, you may not have considered each other’s sexual orientation or family set up (eg, single parent or divorced/separated family). You may not share the same social/educational/cultural background, you could have very different life experiences and lifestyles and your first language may not be the same.

Your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) may know the identity, and may be in touch with, your donor or one or more of your other donor-conceived genetic siblings.

They may/may not be willing to share this information, or let you know anything about them, in the same way you might be in contact with donor-conceived genetic siblings who do not want their identity shared.

## How might you feel about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) and vice versa?

There is the potential for intense physical and emotional feelings on both sides following any face-to-face contact.

This can sometimes include sexual feelings or what is known as genetic sexual attraction. If this happens to you, it’s important to be aware of such feelings and remember the roles and boundaries of any relationship with them.

## Sharing information on social media

Think carefully before sharing any information about this process or details about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) with people on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter - once shared it’s out of your control.

---

## Find out more

You can find out how to apply for information about your donor-conceived genetic sibling(s) and/or donor on our website – [www.hfea.gov.uk/113.html](http://www.hfea.gov.uk/113.html) – or by calling us on 020 7291 8200.

More information about how to join DSL is available at [www.hfea.gov.uk/donor-sibling-link.html](http://www.hfea.gov.uk/donor-sibling-link.html) or by calling us on the same number.

---

## Accessing support

We strongly recommend you talk about the implications of accessing information and joining DSL with a professional.

If you would like to do this, please contact us at [openingtheregister@hfea.gov.uk](mailto:openingtheregister@hfea.gov.uk) or on 020 7291 8200 for details on how to access our independent and confidential specialist support service.

Alternatively, your GP might be able to refer you to a counsellor or you could check the following

organisations for counsellors specialising in donor conception in your area:

- British Infertility Counselling Association – a professional association for infertility counselling: [www.bica.org](http://www.bica.org).
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy – a directory of registered counsellors: [www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk](http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk).
- Counselling Directory – a database of UK counsellors and psychotherapists: [www.counselling-directory.org.uk](http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk).

---

## If you decide to join DSL

If you decide to join DSL, we will assign you a PIN code after processing your application and inform you if any of your donor-conceived genetic siblings are also on DSL. If any join after you then we will contact you, using your preferred method, to ask you to get in touch with us.

Whether contact is eventually made and whether this happens with or without the help of an intermediary, it's important to go slowly, especially when the rush of emotions may be greater than you expect and the desire might be to hurry ahead. This will give you, and others around you, time to adjust to the new information and prepare for what lies ahead.

---

## Other useful contacts

### Donor Conception Network

An organisation supporting donor conception families: [www.dcnetwork.org](http://www.dcnetwork.org).

---

10 Spring Gardens  
London  
SW1A 2BU

T 020 7291 8200

E [enquiristeam@hfea.gov.uk](mailto:enquiristeam@hfea.gov.uk)

---

Version 2

Originally published in April 2015, revised  
September 2016

Review date: September 2017

Did you find this leaflet useful? Could it be improved? Please let us know by emailing [enquiristeam@hfea.gov.uk](mailto:enquiristeam@hfea.gov.uk). You can also email us if you'd like to know more about our evidence sources.