DONOR BACKGROUND

Information for those who were conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments

SIMPUKKA HELMINAUHA

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Thanks to the donor conceived adults and parents development teams for their help in writing this guide!
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The layout and printing of this guide have been supported by Gedeon Richter Nordics AB.

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FOREWORD

It is estimated that there are approximately 15,000 donor conceived people in Finland. The number of donor-assisted fertility treatments has been on the rise for some time, and each year they help bring a growing number of children into the world. Donor conceived people are persons who have been conceived by using donated gametes: eggs, sperm, or a donated embryo.

Everyone conceived by donated gametes has the right to include their donor history in their own narrative in their own way. The experience of one's own background can vary depending on life circumstances, age, and social situations, and it can give rise to a wide range of emotions, including feelings of conflict. What is important is that every donor conceived person should be able to define for themselves what that background means to them, how it fits into their own identity and narrative, and whether they feel the need to discover the identity of the gamete donor.

This guide is intended for individuals who were conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments. This guide provides a concise overview of topics related to donor-related matters and can serve as a resource for processing thoughts and feelings related to being a person who was conceived through donated gametes.

The guide explains who donor conceived people are, what donor-assisted fertility treatments entail, and who the donors of gametes are. This guide explores the reasons why people conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments want to discover the donor’s identity, why this is important to some donor conceived individuals, and what emotional responses a donor conceived background may generate.

The content of this guide was developed in collaboration with the development teams of Simpukka ry’s Helminauha project (2022–2024). The teams included donor conceived people as well as parents with donor conceived children. This guide makes use of research on the experiences of those conceived through the use of donated gametes, as well as related reference literature

Tampere, 2026
The Helminauha Initiative
Simpukka ry, Association for Childless People

PERSONS CONCEIVED THROUGH DONATED GAMETES

It is estimated that there are approximately 15,000 donor conceived people in Finland. Statistical tracking of cases resulting from donor-assisted fertility treatments began in 1993. At present, more than 800 children are born each year as a result of donor-assisted fertility treatments (THL).

PEOPLE OF ALL AGES

- In Finland, assisted fertility treatments have been performed using donor sperm since the 1940s, and the use of donor eggs and donor embryos began in the early 1990s.
- The number of donor-assisted fertility treatments began to rise in 2020, when these treatments also became available through publicly funded fertility clinics.

IN MANY TYPES OF FAMILIES

- In families with donor conceived children, there may be one, two or more parents.
- Families can consist of heterosexual couples, same-sex couples, or single parents.
- In families with multiple children, all or only some of the children may have a donor conceived background. Siblings may have the same or different donors.

AROUND THE WORLD

- Worldwide, there are millions of donor conceived people.
- Donor-assisted fertility treatments are performed in numerous countries. Healthcare practices and the laws governing them vary from country to country.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THEIR BACKGROUND AT DIFFERENT TIMES

- Those who have always known about their donor conceived background have been able to develop an understanding of their background.
- For those who learned of their donor conceived background later in life, the details may have been revealed by a parent or close relative, through a parent's documents, or via a commercial DNA test.

THE DIFFERENT RIGHTS AND BACKGROUNDS OF DONOR CONCEIVED PEOPLE

Donor conceived people living in Finland differ from one another in terms of their rights to discover the donor's identity, the information they have about their own background, and the number of families in which children may have been born using the same donor's gametes. The following describes the various backgrounds of donor conceived people.

People conceived through donated gametes prior to the Assisted Fertility TreatmentAct

The personal data of all gamete donors has been recorded in Luoteri, the donor registry of the Finnish National Supervisory Agency (Lupa- ja valvontavirasto), since 1 September 2007. The registry also contains the personal data of donors who gave their consent before the enactment of the law.

Donor conceived people who were conceived before the Assisted Fertility TreatmentAct came into effect (1 September 2007) can only find out the donor's identity through Luoteri if the donor consented to having their personal data stored in the registry.

For some donor conceived individuals conceived prior to the law taking effect, it may be possible to determine the donor's identity through the fertility clinic where the donor-assisted fertility treatments were performed. This can be determined by contacting the clinic.

Commercial DNA tests allow some donor conceived people to determine the donor's identity. A DNA test can also help determine the identities of people born to other families using gametes from the same donor. A DNA test does not automatically guarantee that the donor's identity will be established. In some cases, it may take a long time to establish a person's identity. A DNA test can not be conducted on behalf of an individual without their consent; for example, a parent can not submit a DNA test on behalf of their child.

Those conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments during the Assisted Fertility Treatment Act

In Finland, fertility treatments are regulated by the Assisted Fertility TreatmentAct, which took effect on 1 September 2007. Under the law, individuals conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments have the right to learn the identity of the gamete donor once they reach the age of 18. This right to information is enshrined in the Act as follows:

> On reaching the age of 18, a person who may have been conceived through a donated gamete or embryo has the right, notwithstanding confidentiality provisions, to obtain a copy of the consent form and the donor's identification number listed therein from the service provider. By providing the donor's identification number to the donor registry, the donor conceived person has the right to receive the donor's personal details.
>
> - Assisted Fertility Treatments Act, Chapter 4, Section 23 §

Individuals who were conceived in Finland through assisted fertility treatments after 1 September 2007, i.e., during the period when the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments has been in force, can find out the donor's identity through Luoteri, the donor registry maintained by the Finnish National Supervisory Agency.

Luoteri is a registry of gamete and embryo donation activities maintained by the Finnish National Supervisory Agency in accordance with the Assisted Fertility Treatments Act. Luoteri contains the gametes donors' identification numbers and personal details.

A person conceived through donated gametes who wishes to verify the donor's identity should contact the clinic that performed the donor-assisted fertility treatment. The clinic will provide an identification number that can be used to request the donor's personal information from Luoteri. The process for requesting the donor's personal details is described in more detail on page 20.

Those conceived using donated gametes from Finnish gamete banks

During the period covered by the Assisted Fertility Treatments Act, treatments using gametes (eggs, sperms or embryos) from Finnish clinics' own gamete banks were limited to a maximum of five families per donor. There is no limit on the number of childrenbeing born through the donated gametes.
This is enshrined in the Assisted Fertility TreatmentsAct as follows:

> Once the donor's gametes have resulted in children for five recipients of donor-assisted fertility treatment, that donor's gametes can no longer be used for further donor-assisted fertility treatments for others.
> - Assisted Fertility TreatmentsAct, Chapter 1, Section 4 §

The personal information of individuals conceived using gametes from the same donor is not recorded in Luoteri. Their personal information may only be determined either through a commercial DNA test or, in some cases, through the gamete donor.
Finnish fertility clinics also treat patients coming from abroad to undergo assisted fertility treatment here in Finland. Children conceived using gametes from the same donor may have been born not only to Finnish families but also to parents from other countries.

Those conceived using gametes from foreign gamete banks

In Finland, fertility treatments are also performed using gametes (eggs, sperm and embryos) purchased for a fertility clinic from a foreign gamete bank. The majority of foreign gametes are acquired from gamete banks in Denmark. In these situations also, gametes from the same donor may be used in Finland for only five recipient families, but gametes from the same donor may be used for multiple families in the country of origin. The gamete bank may also have sold gametes to other countries. As a result, people conceived using gametes from the same donor may come from more than five families and live in different countries.

Those who received information about their donor conceived background at different ages

Some donor conceived people have been able to learn about their origins from childhood, allowing them to process this information growing up at different stages of their lives and integrate it into their own identity. Those who have always known about their donor conceived background usually see it as a natural part of their life story.

In the 2000s in particular, parents have been encouraged to talk to their children about their donor conceived background from an early age, and they have received professional support and guidance on this matter. A child's right to know their biological background is enshrined in the Assisted Fertility Treatments Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Knowing one's genetic origins is also an obligatory requirement under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Although it is now clear that those who have been conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments should always know about their background, for a long time there was a culture of secrecy surrounding the use of donor-assisted fertility treatments in Finland and around the world. Parents may even have been advised to not tell their child that they were conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments. In the past, people might have thought that this information would be harmful to children and assumed that children would not be able to obtain this information regarding their biological background from anywhere else.

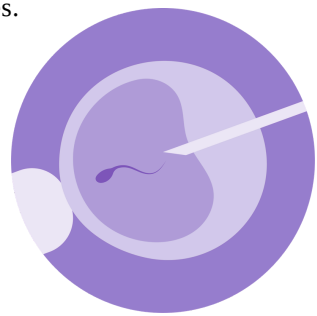
Learning about one's own donor conceived background as an adult understandably raises many unresolved questions, causing confusion and a range of conflicting and complex emotions, e.g.grief,anger and disappointment. Keeping one’s donor conceived origin a secret is understandably hurtful and can lead to a loss of trust between the parent and the child. It can be upsetting to discover that one’s own parents, the people one should be able to trust most in life, have kept such significant information about the donor conceived person’s identity and heritage a secret.

It is important to be able to process information with the help of one's parents, peers, and possibly even a professional. Under no circumstances should information about the child’s donor conceived background be withheld from the child. By withholding the information, the parents would be considered to have acted improperly.

DONOR-ASSISTED FERTILITY TREATMENTS

Donor-assisted fertility treatments are fertility treatments that involve the use of gametes from a gamete donor, either in part or in full. The donated gametes used in fertility treatments can be eggs, sperm, or embryos. Both types of gametes can also be donated.

In Finland, donor-assisted fertility treatments are regulated by the Assisted Fertility Treatments Act, which took effect on 1 September 2007. Among other provisions, the law establishes a child's right to learn the identity of the gamete donor, as well as a restriction limiting the use of gametes from the same donor to a maximum of five recipient families.



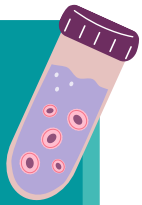
Donor-assisted fertility treatments are needed when pregnancy is not possible using one's own gametes for medical or social reasons. Most people who require donor-assisted fertility treatments have experienced involuntary childlessness , which is recognised as one of the most severe crises one can experience in adulthood.

In Finland, donor-assisted fertility treatments are available to heterosexual couples, same-sex couples, single individuals (persons with a uterus), as well as their partners in co-parenthood. The treatments are provided at private and public fertility clinics.

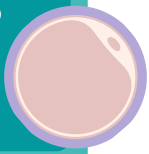
Donor-assisted fertility treatments are always tailored to each specific case, and conception is supported with medication. In Finland, the treatment process includes a legally required consultation with a psychologist or other professional, during which topics such as the child's right to know about their donor conceived background are discussed, and the implications of starting a family through donor-assisted fertility treatments are considered from the perspectives of both the parent and the child. During the consultation with the prospective parent or parents, genetic discontinuity is also discussed, along with the implications of the fact that some or all of the child's genes come from the gamete donor or donors.

In artificial insemination, washed donor sperm is injected into the woman's uterine cavity at the time of ovulation. Conception is supported with medication.

In in vitro fertilisation (IVF/ICSI) treatment, the egg is fertilised in a laboratory. A fertilised egg develops into an embryo, which is incubated in laboratory conditions and then transferred to the uterus to grow. Embryo implantation is supported with medication.



FET (frozen embryo transfer) is a procedure in which an embryo developed during IVF/ICSI treatment is frozen and, after thawing, transferred to the uterus. The embryo may be a donated embryo, or it may have been created using both donated gametes and those of the couple hoping to have a child.



History of donor-assisted fertility treatments

The first child conceived using donated sperm cells was born in the United States in 1884. Donor-assisted fertility treatments using sperm cells have been performed in Finland since the 1940s. These treatments became more common in Finland and around the world from the 1970s onwards.

The first child conceived using a donor egg was born in Australia in 1983 and in Finland in 1991.

The first child conceived using a donated embryo was born in Australia in 1984 and in Finland in 1995.

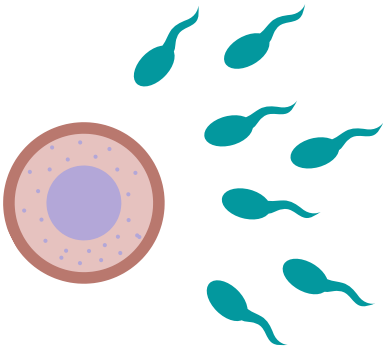
Statistics on egg donation treatments have been compiled since 1993, and statistics on embryo and sperm donation treatments have been compiled since 2001 (THL).

GAMETE DONORS

It has been possible to donate gametes (eggs, sperm and embryos) in Finland both before and after the Assisted Fertility Treatments Act came into effect (1 September 2007). The Assisted Fertility Treatments Act stipulates that anyone wishing to become a gamete donor must consent to storing their personal data in Luoteri, the donor registry maintained by the Finnish National Supervisory Agency (Lupa- ja valvontavirasto).

After reaching the age of 18, a person conceived using a donated gamete has the right to obtain the donor's personal information from Luoteri. Only the person conceived using the donated gametes has the right to obtain the donor's personal information, so for example the donor conceived person’s parents are not allowed to request and obtain the donor’s personal information.

During the Assisted Fertility Treatments Act, individuals who donate their gametes in Finland receive counselling at the fertility clinic during the donation process. Among other things, the counselling service explains the donor conceived person’s right to find out the donor’s identity and that the donor has no rights or obligations toward the child conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments.



It has been possible to donate gametes in Finland both before and after the Assisted Fertility Treatments Act came into effect (1 September 2007). The Assisted Fertility Treatments Act stipulates that anyone wishing to become a gamete donor must consent to the storage of their personal data in Luoteri, the donor registry maintained by the Finnish National Supervisory Agency. Even before the Act came into force, gamete donors could consent to the registration of their personal data in Luoteri. After reaching the age of 18, a person conceived using a donated gamete has the right to obtain the donor's personal information from Luoteri.

Only the person conceived using the donated gametes has the right to obtain the donor's personal information, not their parents. Donors are advised to inform their spouse, if any, and their children about the donation, so that they too have the opportunity to consider what it means for them. Notwithstanding this, not all donors inform their immediate family about their donation.

Individuals who donated their gametes prior to the Act may not have received information and counselling during the donation process.

Individuals conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments prior to the law taking effect may be able to identify their gamete donor through a DNA test. It is possible to identify the donor even if the donor has not personally taken a DNA test. The only requirement is that one of his relatives has taken the test and is willing to find out if there is anyone in the family who has donated gametes. It is possible to request information about individuals who donated their gametes prior to the law taking effect from fertility clinics.

Who can donate their gametes?

In Finland, healthy individuals with no known history of serious hereditary diseases in their family can donate their gametes (eggs or sperm). Gametes can be donated at private fertility clinics or at the five university hospitals in Helsinki, Kuopio, Oulu, Tampere, and Turku.
Individuals who smoke or use other nicotine products cannot donate their gametes. Women between the ages of 20 and 35 who are in good general health may be accepted as egg donors, and men between the ages of 20 and 45 who are in good general health may be accepted as sperm donors. The most important factor is that the donor's motivation is a desire to help those who need donated gametes.
Couples who have undergone fertility treatment using their own gametes, have had the number of children they wanted, and have frozen embryos left over may donate the embryos. Embryos can usually be donated if the woman was 36 years or younger and the man was 46 years or younger at the time the embryos were created.
The Assisted Fertility Treatments Act stipulates that no reward payment may be made for the donation of gametes in Finland. The donor may be provided with reasonable compensation for expenses incurred in connection with the donation, loss of income, and other inconvenience. In addition, egg donors receive separate compensation for inconvenience.

The motivations of gamete donors

The most common reason for donating gametes is a genuine desire to help those who are in need of donated gametes to start a family. A large proportion of gamete donors have acquired an understanding of involuntary childlessness either through their own experience or that of people close to them. This understanding supports the decision to help people hoping to have a child through donor-assisted fertility treatments.
For some gamete donors, it is important that they also receive information about their own fertility. In some countries, gamete donors may receive a reward payment, which can be a motivating factor for some.

Donors' interest towards the person conceived through their donated gametes

Donors' interest towards those conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments and their desire to meet them varies from person to person. Some donors are open to contact and meeting the donor conceived person. As a general rule, donors understand that it is up to the donor conceived person to decide whether they will be in contact in any way or whether they will meet each other.
A donor's personal circumstances can have an impact on how they feel about being contacted regarding their donation and how they go about working through the process. It may have been more than 20 years since the donation, and this delay may affect the donor's reaction to being contacted by the donor conceived person.

Gamete donors may benefit from discussions with a therapist specialising in infertility issues, where they can address the questions and emotions raised by contact with the donor conceived person, receiving information and support in the process. It is understandable that this situation may cause the donor some emotional turmoil, and the donor may wonder how they should respond to contact from a person conceived through their donated cells, what it means to them, and how it might affect their life.

Not all donors are willing to stay in touch with the person conceived through their donated gametes, meet them, or show interest in them, due to their own life circumstances or other personal matters. This situation may also change as time passes and the opportunity to process the matter arises, along with access to reliable information and support for doing so.

Gamete donors who are interested in the people conceived through their donation are often curious to know what those individuals look like, what kind of lives they have led, what kind of families they grew up in, and what they are like in general. Gamete donors are known to hope that their donation has resulted in the birth of a child or children and that the child conceived through gamete donation has gotten off to a good start in life.

INTEREST IN THE DONOR AMONG PEOPLE WITH A DONOR CONCEIVED BACKGROUND

The level of curiosity and interest in the donor among those conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments varies from person to person. Interest may be influenced by one's personal circumstances, age, or even concerns about one's own health, for which one hopes to receive further information from the donor. It is essential that every person with a donor conceived background be able to decide for themselves whether they are interested in the donor or in any individuals born to other families using the same donor's gametes, and how they will act on that interest.

Some people with a history of receiving donated gametes are not at all interested in the donor or in any children conceived using gametes from the same donor. Siblings from the same family may have different interests, and these differences should be respected. It may also be the case that their interest only develops at a later stage in life.

Many people who are donor conceived want to find out the donor's identity as soon as possible. Some of them also want to find out if children have been born to other families using the same donor's gametes, and who those children are.

How quickly the donor's genetic background becomes apparent and what kind of relationship develops between the gamete donor and any potential genetic siblings varies from person to person.

According to studies, it is more common for individuals with a donor conceived background to form some kind of relationship with people born to other families using the same donor's gametes than with the donor themselves. This is due to the fact that they are seen as peers, as they are likely to be the same age and have similar backgrounds. The key point here is that you are at liberty to define the relationship and its boundaries yourself. Not all donor conceived people are interested in meeting people conceived using gametes from the same donor, nor do they wish to have anything to do with them—and everyone has the right to feel this way.

The purpose of donor registration is to identify the donor

Donor conceived people who want to find out the donor's identity are, in a way, curious about their own background. They are not looking for a parent in the donor; rather, it is hoped that establishing the donor's identity will provide more insight into who they are and why they are the way they are.

1. A desire to learn more about one's own genetic makeup, the donor, and others conceived using gametes from the same donor.

2. Interest in the donor's medical history, any genetically inherited conditions, and factors affecting their own genetic makeup.

3. To prevent a romantic relationship with a genetic relative.

4. To have a complete picture of themselves and to fill in the gaps in their life story.

5. To understand where certain personality traits, characteristics, tendencies, and abilities come from.

6. To be able to contact the donor, individuals conceived using the donor's gametes, or the donor's relatives.

7. To gain insight into the donor's motives.

8. To ensure their right to access information. Knowledge of one's own genetic background is regarded as a fundamental human right.

VERIFYING THE DONOR'S IDENTITY

When a donor conceived person is considering finding out the donor's identity and perhaps meeting them, it is a good idea to prepare for the situation in advance. This can be discussed with their own parents, any siblings, or others with a similar background, and with the support of a professional if needed.

Since there are no established social practices for determining the donor's identity or arranging a potential meeting, the situation lacks what is known as a social script.

The process can involve a wide range of emotions that are difficult to anticipate. The situation can be highly charged, almost a rollercoaster of emotions whose course is hard to predict.

If you have just found out that you have a donor conceived background, it's a good idea to take a moment to consider whether you want to find out the donor's identity right away. If you want to, you should be prepared to handle two major issues at the same time.

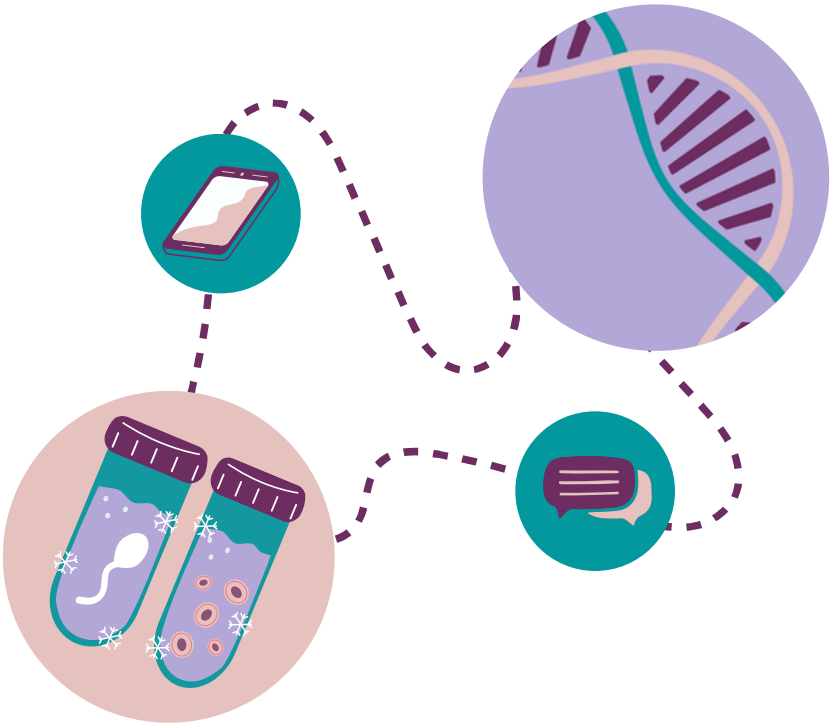
Things to consider in advance:

- When is the right time to find out the donor's identity?
- What are my hopes and expectations in terms of identifying the donor?
- What information would I like to know about the donor?
- The situation might stir up unexpected feelings for both parties.
- What if something unpleasant comes to light, something I wouldn't want to find out?
- What are my own boundaries in this matter?
- Identifying the donor could have an impact on other people in my inner circle as well.
- Who can I discuss this matter with?
- What do I do with this information, and how do I proceed going forward?

Contacting the donor

When it comes to making contact, each donor conceived person will proceed in the manner they consider best for themselves. Even if you have identified the donor, you are not under any obligation to contact them; instead, you should take your time to carefully consider the best moment to reach out.

It is also a good idea to consider the most appropriate way to make contact in advance. For some people, making a phone call feels natural, but it's important to remember that you can't be sure what kind of situation the donor will be in when they answer the phone. For some people, the best way to get in touch is via social media, by phone, or by email. The good thing about a message is that you can take your time to consider its content, and the recipient also has a moment to process the message and choose a time that works for them to reply.



Meeting the donor

Before meeting the donor, it's a good idea to agree on how to proceed and what boundaries to set for the meeting together. Given that both parties are unfamiliar with the situation, it's only natural that the encounter might feel awkward. Many people wonder in advance what the meeting might be like, whether they should shake hands or give each other a hug, and what they'll talk about. These are things that can be agreed in advance. In some cases, the first meeting is conducted with a professional specialising in infertility issues, such as a counsellor. Preparing for the meeting increases a sense of security for both parties.

Before the meeting, you can agree on matters such as the following:

Venue and duration of the meeting	What kind of venue enhances the sense of safety? 'Will you meet somewhere in a public place, like a coffee shop? The duration of the meeting can also be agreed in advance.
The people present	Will it just be the two of you, or will there be others there as well? Who else could be present?
Use of social media	How do you use social media in a way that works for both of you? Do you follow each other on social media? Do you post a photo of the two of you together?
Professional and other support during or after the situation	It's a good idea to consider whether you need professional help or peer support before the meeting. In this case, you can make an appointment with a professional in advance. Talking with peers helps you realise that others think about very similar issues when it comes to contacting donors.
Moving forward after the situation	Both parties have the opportunity to express how they would like to proceed after the meeting. It is a good idea to recognise if you need extra time to process any thoughts and feelings you may have that are triggered by the meeting.
Maintaining contact going forward	You can take your time to consider whether to continue contact and to process any feelings created by the meeting. You always have the right to request more time to process the situation before continuing the conversation.

VERIFYING THE IDENTITY OF A GAMETE DONOR USING LUOTERI

THE DONOR CONCEIVED PERSON CONTACTS THE CLINIC THAT PERFORMED THE PROCEDURE

Documents required:

- your own identity document (ID)
- parental consent for fertility treatment care at the clinic (if available)
- a certificate of personal and family relations or an official certificate containing a family tree

THE FERTILITY CLINIC ISSUES A DONOR IDENTIFICATION NUMBER

At the clinic, the donor conceived person's identity is verified, and they are linked to the correct treatment consent form.
The donor conceived person is given a copy of the archived version of the treatment consent form, which includes the donor's identification number.

THE DONOR CONCEIVED PERSON SUBMITS A REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Requests for information must be submitted using the form available on the Finnish National Supervisory Agency (Lupa- ja valvontavirasto), to which the following documents are attached electronically:

- consent form or other document containing the donor's identification number
- a certificate of personal and family relations or an official certificate containing a family tree
- proof of identity (if you cannot use the Finnish electronic bank identification)

DISCLOSURE OF THE DONOR'S PERSONAL DETAILS

The Finnish National Supervisory Agency verifies the information provided on the consent form.

The donor identification is used to link the donor of gametes to the donor conceived person.

The donor's personal information will be sent to the applicant via a Suomi.fi message or by certified mail.

Further information, detailed instructions, and a link to the form can be found on the website of the Finnish National Supervisory Agency's website at: lvv.fi.

Information available from the donor registry

FINNISH GAMETE DONOR

- First names
- Surname
- Date of birth
- Nationality

FOREIGN GAMETE DONOR

- First names
- Surname
- Date of birth
- Nationality
- The company from which the gametes were purchased
- Passport details

Based on the first name and surname of the gamete donor, a donor conceived person can request the donor's address information from the Digital and Population Data Services Agency's (DVV) address service. A person's age, date of birth, and current or former municipality of residence can be used as additional search criteria. More detailed instructions can be found on the Digital and Population Data Services Agency's website: dvv.fi.
It is important to note that the information in Luoteri is not updated at all, even if there are changes to the donor's personal information. Information regarding a donor's possible death is not updated in the registry; instead, that information can be obtained from the Digital and Population Data Services Agency.

Disclosure of a gamete donor's personal identification number in special case

If the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV) returns multiple search results for a gamete donor's first name, surname and date of birth, the intended recipient may request the gamete donor's personal identification number from the Finnish National Supervisory Agency. To do this, a document from the DVV is required, confirming that the address cannot be disclosed due to multiple search results.

REFLECTIONS ON ONE'S OWN SITUATION BY PEOPLE WITH A DONOR CONCEIVED BACKGROUND

Attitudes toward one's donor conceived background and the meanings attributed to it vary from person to person. At different stages of life, thoughts about one's background can vary and change. Attitudes are also influenced by whether a person has acquired knowledge throughout their life or only as an adult.

The most important thing is that everyone with a donor conceived background should be able to define for themselves what that background means to them, and that meaning may change over the course of their lives.

Discussing donor conceived background with the parent

Every person with a donor conceived background has the right to receive all available information from their parent or parents regarding their donor conceived background, as well as support, if needed, in processing the thoughts and feelings associated with that information.

The donor conceived person is entitled to information about their background

Having access to information means that the donor conceived person can decide what to do with that information and at what pace to proceed. A person with a donor conceived background is also free to decide how they define their background, the donor, and the significance to them of any other individuals conceived using that donor’s gametes.

Terms associated with having a donor conceived background

A donor conceived person has the right to decide which terms to use when referring to the donor, to individuals born to other families using the same donor’s gametes, and to other individuals associated with the donor. The terms may vary depending on the situation, and the person with the donor conceived background may define its meaning themselves.

Genetic uncertainty and identity confusion

Donor conceived people experience the significance of their genes in their own unique way, and their views on the matter may change over the course of their lives. Some donor conceived people experience genetic confusion at some point in their lives. This means that it is challenging to comprehend what a genetic connection to the donor actually means and what impact genes and social heritage have on who a person is and what type of person they are. When it comes to genetic heritage, many people may also wonder how the donor's genes affect their own appearance and qualities, as well as what hereditary diseases they may develop.

Some people consider how their donor conceived background affects their identity and their sense of who they are. Discussing one's background with loved ones, peers or a professional, and obtaining reliable information, can be helpful when reflecting on one's identity. Information about the donor and genetic donor conceived siblings can help to complete one's self-image.

Genetic concerns may also arise in the form of questions about the impact of the donors' genes on a potential future generation—that is, how the donor conceived person's genetic background might affect any children they may have.

Unanswered questions surrounding genes are particularly relevant for those who are unable to determine the identity of their gamete donor and are therefore unable to obtain further information about their genetic origins.

Am I the only one with a donor conceived background, and what do others think about their own backgrounds?

Donor conceived people described their desire to hear about the experiences of others from a donor conceived background and their need to talk with others from a donor conceived background. Especially when there are no other people with a similar background, there may be feelings of loneliness regarding one's background. Sharing experiences with others helps people realise that they are not alone in their experiences and feelings. Others are also considering very similar issues and experiencing very similar feelings about their own backgrounds.

Talking about gamete donation with people outside the family can feel awkward, because they may not understand what gamete donation is all about.

GENETIC DONOR CONCEIVED SIBLINGS

There is no single, established term for individuals born to other families using gametes from the same donor; in this context, the term "genetic donor conceived siblings" is used to refer to them. Every person with a donor conceived background can decide for themselves which term feels right to them, and the terms may also vary depending on the situation.

Every person conceived through donor gametes has the right to decide for themselves whether they wish to find out if any other children have been born to other families using gametes from the same donor. Practically speaking, it is only possible to find them through commercial DNA tests. In some cases, genetic donor conceived siblings can be identified through the donor.

The interest among people with a donor conceived background in these genetically related donor conceived siblings varies. Some donor conceived people are not at all interested in others who were born from the same donor's gametes. Some people may maintain some contact with them or meet them only once, for example. For some, these people become very important in their lives, and they consider themselves to be siblings. They stay in close contact, meet regularly, and may even celebrate holidays together.

Donor conceived people are free to define for themselves what their genetic donor conceived siblings mean to them, how they wish to interact with them, and what kind of relationship they might wish to establish. It is difficult to know in advance how many genetically related siblings there will be. If there are dozens of half-siblings, this can understandably lead to genetic confusion and make it difficult to understand what is going on and what they mean to you. It is a good idea to consider your own boundaries with them in such cases. It is perfectly natural that you will not have the same kind of relationship with all your genetic donor conceived siblings, just as you cannot interact with all of them in the same way. Feelings towards genetic donor conceived siblings may also change at different stages of life.

EMOTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH A DONOR CONCEIVED BACKGROUND

Donor conceived people have reported that their experience is marked by a variety of emotions; these emotions are illustrated in the word cloud below. Feelings can vary, for example, depending on one's own life circumstances and social situations. Various life events can trigger emotions related to a person's donor conceived background. Whether an individual feels able to process their feelings about their donor conceived background freely and safely can also play a role.

There may be different stages in dealing with one's donor conceived background and issues related to the donor, for instance. You may feel confused and find it difficult to put your own feelings, thoughts, hopes and expectations into words. The most important point is that all feelings related to one's donor conceived background are valid.

Emotions associated with a donor conceived background:

Processing one's donor conceived background may proceed according to the stages of crisis, which are:

1. Shock phase
2. Reaction phase
3. Processing phase
4. Realigning in light of new information

Learning about one's donor conceived background may trigger these stages of crisis especially if the information is only revealed during adolescence or adulthood. Donor conceived people have described that gaining this knowledge as adults has felt like being somewhat lost in terms of who they are, and their own reflection in the mirror may initially seem unfamiliar. In this situation, it is also normal for a person to question many other aspects of their family history.

Having a donor conceived background has also been described as enabling the free development of one's own self and identity, given that some or all of one's genes come from a gamete donor. Some people born from donated gametes experience genetic confusion because they are unaware of part of their genetic makeup and find it difficult to determine what their genetic connection to the donor, or to others conceived from the same donor's gametes, means to them.

A genetic disconnect with a parent can evoke a wide range of emotions. Some people experience sadness or other difficult emotions when there is no genetic connection to a parent. For some people, this may come as a relief, for example, if they have had concerns about hereditary diseases.

The fact that a person was conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments may mean that their parents had longed for a child, and there may have been an underlying experience of involuntary childlessness. This can give rise to feelings of empathy toward one's own parents and gratitude for their own existence.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? HOW TO MOVE FORWARD FROM HERE?

Don't do it alone! Don’t be left alone!

There are thousands of people of various ages in Finland and millions worldwide who were conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments. Every person conceived through donated gametes has a unique experience. Talking with peers about your donor conceived background and the feelings it evokes can help you recognise that others face very similar issues when dealing with their own backgrounds. Talking with peers also helps you work out the most appropriate way for you to move forward in dealing with your donor conceived background and what meaning you want to give it in your own life.

Peer support is available

You can find other people who were conceived through donor-assisted fertility treatments in the private Facebook group called "Lahjasolutaustaiset" (Donor conceived people). Simpukka ry, the Association for Involuntarily Childless People, is responsible for its safety and maintenance. Peers can also be found in international Facebook groups, such as the Donor Sibling Registry and the Donor Conceived Discussion Group. Further information on peer support is available on the Helminauha website at: helminauha.info.

Peers are not a substitute for professional support

Peers are fellow travelers who have been through the same experiences, with each of them bringing their own personal and family history along with their own experiences to the process. Some people with a donor conceived background need professional help in dealing with issues related to their background. If your personal background brings up difficult emotions, if you’re not making progress in dealing with it, or if you feel that the support of your loved ones and peers isn’t enough or isn’t right for you, you should turn to professionals for support.
Contact information for therapists who specialise in involuntary childlessness and starting a family through assisted fertility treatments can be found on the Simpukka ry website: simpukkary.fi.

GLOSSARY

Embryo

An embryo is formed when a sperm cell and an egg cell fuse, or when the sperm fertilises the egg. The embryo is referred to as a foetus eight weeks after fertilisation.

DNA test

Commercial DNA tests make it possible to establish genetic relationships. The test is often carried out using a sample from the oral mucosa or a blood sample.

Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV)

The Digital and Population Data Services Agency maintains personal data in the Population Information System. A person who has received a gamete donation can request the donor's address information from the Digital and Population Data Services Agency's address service.

Genes and DNA

A gene is a strand of DNA that contains four different bases: adenine (A), thymine (T), cytosine (C), and guanine (G). The sequence of these bases contains genetic information.

Genetic donor sibling

A person conceived from the gametes of the same donor. The term may vary depending on the personal preferences of the person conceived through donated gametes. The personal information of genetically related siblings cannot be obtained from Luoteri, the donor registry maintained by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health.

Assisted Reproduction Act

On 1 September 2007, the Assisted Reproduction Act came into force in Finland, guaranteeing the right of a person conceived through donor-assisted reproduction in Finland to discover the identity of the gamete donor. The Act also regulates how and what types of assisted reproduction treatments are provided in Finland.

Fertility Clinic

A public or private healthcare provider specialising in fertility treatment. At fertility clinics, fertility treatments are performed using both the patient's own gametes and donated gametes.

Gamete bank

Organisations operating in conjunction with fertility clinics that specialise in the collection, storage, and use of gametes. They may work in either the public or private sector.

Recipient

A person conceived through fertility treatments using donated gametes.

Luoteri Donor Registry

The personal data of gamete donors has been recorded in Luoteri, the donor registry maintained by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, since 1 September 2007. At the age of 18, a person conceived through donated gametes has the right to request the donor's personal information from Luoteri using the donor's identification number. The donor identification number can be obtained from the clinic where the gamete donation took place.

National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (LVV)

The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (LVV) is a national, multidisciplinary central government agency that performs authorisation, supervision, registration, enforcement, and guidance tasks across multiple sectors. The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health maintains Luoteri, the donor registry. Website: lvv.fi.

Egg cell

A reproductive cell that develops in the ovary.

Sperm

A reproductive cell that develops in the testes.

Donor/supplier of gametes

Donors are individuals who donate their own reproductive cells: sperm, eggs, or embryos. The donor has no rights or obligations toward the child conceived through the donation of gametes.

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Donorconceived, you are not alone!

For more information and support, visit www.helminauha.info

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The layout and printing of this guide have
been supported by
Gedeon Richter Nordics AB.

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