it involves you (and possibly a partner or co-parent), the donor and the go-between. You are also relying on the word of someone you have never met with regards to safe sex practices and health risks. For this reason, most health care professionals would not recommend this method of using anonymous sperm.

Sperm bank

The second way to access an unknown donor is from a sperm bank through a family or fertility doctor. Some family doctors will arrange to have sperm from a bank delivered to them, and will do inseminations in their offices. More commonly people wanting to get pregnant get a referral from their family doctor to a fertility doctor whose practice is focused on assisting people to get pregnant, and can easily access sperm from the sperm bank you choose.

In Toronto there are three sperm banks to access. One is Canadian, the other two are American. Canadian regulations regarding the screening of sperm are more stringent than those in the U.S.A. If you plan to use an American sperm bank that delivers to Canada, you must choose a sperm donor that is "Canadian compliant."

Benefits of using an unknown sperm donor from a sperm bank:

- Total anonymity and the most secure legal protection if you do not want the sperm donor to be involved. No threat of custody dispute.
- Best chance of finding healthy sperm that is free of transmittable infection. The sperm donor is tested, the sperm is quarantined, and the donor is retested before it is released.
- Removes the need to interact with donor, and no chance of donor changing their mind.
- Can select sperm with particular characteristics that are important to you.
- Flexibility with regards to timing. Most fertility clinics are open 7 days a week.
- Availability of washed sperm for intrauterine insemination. Washing is a process which separates semen from ejaculate enabling doctors to inseminate directly through the cervix into the uterus. Results in higher rates of conception.
- Availability of cycle monitoring, a process involving blood tests and ultrasounds that very accurately predicts ovulation.
- Assistance with any fertility issues that may arise.
- Clinics and doctors are becoming more lesbian/bi/queer/trans positive.

Disadvantages of using an unknown sperm donor from a sperm bank:

- No access to identity of donor and no relationship possible between donor and child (unless an identity release donor is used - available through some sperm banks)
- Costs $500-1,000/month for two inseminations per cycle
- No access to more detailed medical information if required.
- Frozen sperm is less fertile than fresh sperm.
- Limited number of donors overall, often few or no donors from particular ethno-cultural groups.
- Entering the medical world of infertility - sometimes people feel pressured to use fertility treatments.
- Clinic environments are primarily focused on heterosexual infertility. Lesbian/bi/queer/trans people sometimes feel alienated.

Choosing between a known or unknown (anonymous) sperm donor is a complex decision. It can be helpful to gather as much information as possible, talk to friends, relatives and other parents, and take the time necessary to come to a decision that is right for you.

It is also important to remember that while you may put a lot of thought and energy into making this decision, sometimes you may not be able to access the specific donor, or kind of donor, you prefer. Nothing is predictable in the world of fertility and baby-making, and you may find that circumstances require flexibility. Again, it can be important to get as clear as possible about what is important to you, and about where there is room for change.

RESOURCES

LGBT Parenting Network
Sherbourne Health Centre,
416-324 4100, ext. 5219 www.sherbourne.on.ca

Queer Parenting Programmes
The 519 Church St. Community Centre
416-392-6878, ext. 109 www.the519.org

Family Service Associaton of Toronto
www.fsatoronto.com (LGBT Parents)

T.O. Parent: Ontario LGBT Parent Matchmaker
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/to-parent/

Brill, S. (2006) The New Essential Guide to Lesbian Conception, Pregnancy and Birth. Alyson Books: L.A./N.Y.

Sperm Banks

Repromed 416-233-1212; Toll Free 1-877-249-4282
www.repromedltd.com

Xytex Corporation
(905) 967-0852; Toll Free 1-866-785-4709
www.xytex.com

Can-Am Cryo Services
905-524-3342; Toll Free 1-888-245-3471
www.canamcryo.com

Toronto Fertility Clinics

CREATE 416-323-7727 www.createivf.com

LIFEQUEST 416-506-0804 ; 1-866-543-3046
http://lifequestivf.com

Toronto West Fertility Associates 416-231-4100
www.torontofertility.com

For Health Canada's list of Canadian Physicians and Establishments that Process, Distribute, and/or Import Semen for Assisted Conception go to Health Canada's website: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ and do a search for this document.

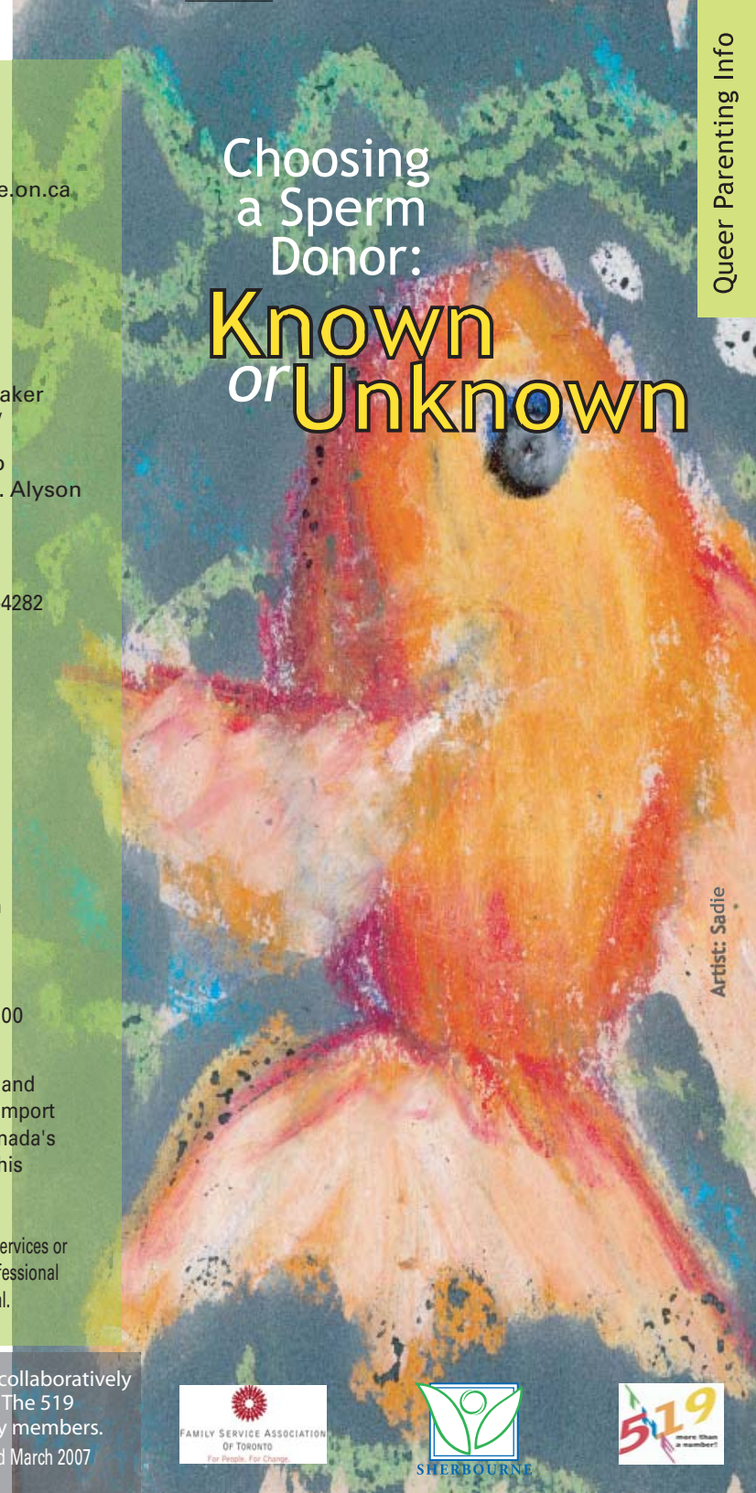
We cannot recommend or endorse specific organizations, services or websites, and this brochure is not intended to replace professional medical care or attention by a qualified professional.

design: www.orangehabitat.com

Queer Parenting Info Brochure Series developed collaboratively by FSA Toronto, Sherbourne Health Centre, The 519 Church St. Community Centre and community members.
Updated March 2007

Queer Parenting Info

Choosing a Sperm Donor: Known or Unknown



Artist: Sadie

Family Service Association of Toronto — For People. For Change.

Sherbourne

519 — more than a number!

A person who wants to get pregnant and does not have regular access to sperm through a sexual connection is faced with many decisions. One of the most significant is whether to use a known or an unknown (anonymous) sperm donor. Making this decision is a very personal process that involves exploring thoughts and feelings about biological connections, family, parenthood, and gender. It is important to take the time you need to allow yourself (and your partner and/or others you will be parenting with) to get clear about what is important to you.

Below is a summary of some of the issues involved:

Using a known sperm donor:

Finding a donor

People find potential donors by putting the word out to co-workers, friends and relatives. Some put personal ads in local queer magazines or newspapers; others seek donors through queer parenting support groups, workshops or classes. Some choose a relative of their partner (eg. brother or cousin) as a donor; others approach their own non-biological relatives.

Discussions with potential sperm donors

When you have found a potential donor there are some important issues to discuss before beginning insemination. A donor agreement, created collectively and/or with the help of a lawyer, can help outline expectations and roles. A donor agreement, like a co-parenting agreement, is not legally binding. However, taking the time to talk about and clearly outline each person's roles and expectations can be invaluable. In this process you may discover that you actually want different things. Perhaps it becomes clear that the donor wants to be more involved with the child than the parent(s) want; or perhaps the parent(s) want more involvement than the donor is prepared to offer. It is better to find these things out before a child has been conceived. Although your desire to find a sperm donor and get pregnant may be strong, it is critical that you pay close attention to what is important to you - how do you envision the relationships in your family-to-be? Who do you want to be primarily parenting your child? How do you see the sperm donor being/or not being involved? How will they be named to the child?

Some important issues to discuss with a potential donor:

- Health screening for HIV, Hepatitis, Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Cytomegalovirus (CMV), Blood group (RH status) and other medical conditions which could affect the chances of pregnancy or health of the child.
- Semen analysis (sperm count).
- Safer sexual practices during the insemination period.
- Preference for the donor to abstain from sex for 48 hours before insemination.
- Availability of the donor when you need to inseminate and the likelihood that this will be at short notice.
- Time commitment - i.e. over how many months is he prepared to be available as a donor?
- If donor has a partner, any issues he/she may have with the partner being a donor.
- Clarify who will be named on the birth certificate and who will be legal parents to the child. Currently in Ontario two women can register their names on the birth certificate if they have used an anonymous sperm donor. If you use a known donor, the donor must relinquish their parental rights as part of a second parent adoption process in order for the non-birth mom to be legally recognized as a parent. As the result of a 2007 Ontario case known as AA/BB/CC it is possible in some cases for more than two parents to be legally recognized. (See www.fsatoronto.com - LGBT Parents for more info).
- Level of donor's involvement in the child's life.
- Your intention to cover all expenses related to testing, insemination, etc.
- Your assurance that donor will not be asked or required to pay child support or other expenses related to the child's needs.
- Assurance that the donor will not make parental claims on the child beyond that which you both agree to before conception.

Benefits of using a known donor:

- Awareness and choice of personal and physical characteristics of donor.
- Child has access to identity of donor, knowledge of biological origins and possibility of relationship with donor.
- More control of the insemination process, which can take place outside of the medical system.
- Minimal cost.
- Fresh sperm is more fertile than frozen sperm.
- A complete family medical history is more readily available if required.
- If your donor is gay or bisexual, you don't have to get the special approval that Health Canada requires to use donations from men who have sex with men.

Disadvantages of using a known donor:

- Potential for the donor to change their mind - anywhere in the process they may decide they do not want to be a donor; once the child is born the donor may feel more attached than anticipated and desire more of a parenting role than originally negotiated.
- Potential relationship complications when a friend, relative, co-worker or acquaintance becomes a sperm donor.
- Risk of infection since testing of the donor cannot detect sexually transmitted diseases that have been recently acquired, such as recent HIV infection.
- Logistics can be difficult if donor lives far away or out of town, travels a lot or is frequently busy. Access is important as sperm should be used quickly and kept relatively warm.
- If you seek medical interventions due to difficulties conceiving, clinics and doctors require special approval to use a known donor who is not your sexual partner.

Using an unknown sperm donor:

A third party or go-between

One is to use a third party or go-between to negotiate with a donor on your behalf. The go-between is usually a trusted friend or relative who will know the identities of the person trying to get pregnant and of the donor, but is entrusted to keep this information confidential.

Advantages of using a go-between are that you have access to fresh sperm, there are few or no costs, and there is more often more flexibility in regards to the donor's willingness to be identified at some point later in the child's life. Disadvantages include the risk of you or the donor figuring out each other's identity and your reliance on the confidentiality of the go-between. Scheduling can be complicated when