

A HOW-TO GUIDE

Single Mom by Choice

Pursuing parenthood through sperm donation



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Hello, Future Parents!

Embarking on the journey to parenthood as a single woman is an exciting and empowered decision. While this path can bring immense joy and fulfillment, considering the emotional implications and challenges you may face along the way is important in setting yourself up for a success. If you are a single woman pursuing parenthood through sperm donation, the following suggestions may be helpful as you navigate your path forward.



I've partnered with Seattle Sperm Bank to provide this guide for intended parents like yourself as a tool to prepare you for working with sperm donors.

Britta became a mother through egg donation and was drawn to working in this field through her own experience with fertility challenges.

Britta Dinsmore, Ph.D.

LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

Making the decision

The decision to become a single mother by choice through sperm donation is a significant one. In considering whether (or when) to pursue this path, it can be helpful to evaluate readiness in relation to various aspects of your life. For instance, it is important to consider the time and energy that will be involved in raising a child and whether, amidst existing personal and professional commitments, goals, and priorities, you can (and want to) dedicate the round-the-clock commitment that parenting involves.

Emotionally, it is important to reflect on your ability to handle the highs and the lows of parenting solo, including your ability to handle challenges independently and/or the practical and emotional support available to you. Your health, both physical and mental, is paramount, as parenthood takes stamina and can be one of the toughest (though ultimately rewarding) “jobs” you can sign up for!



You want to assess whether you're in a good space, physically and emotionally, to provide the care needed. Financial readiness is also crucial---raising a child entails expenses, from diapers to education. Consider the expenses involved, not only during pre-conception and pregnancy, but over the course of the lifetime of a child and create a solid plan.



Equally important is your support system---having a network of friends, families, or support groups can provide invaluable support and assistance along the way. Other steps that can be helpful include researching and understanding the legal and logistical aspects of sperm donation and single parenthood in your state and local area and engaging in candid conversations with trusted friends, family, or professionals to gain varied perspectives. While it's unrealistic to expect yourself to have all of the above areas in your life perfectly in place, but considering these different factors will help you make an informed decision that aligns with your aspirations, capabilities, and the kind of future you envision for yourself and your potential future child.

Acknowledge and Validate Your Feelings

It is completely normal to experience a wide range of emotions throughout the process (sometimes even within the span of a single day), including feelings of excitement, longing, grief, uncertainty, hope, and fear. Give yourself permission to experience whatever you feel without judgment.

It is important to remember that negative emotions are not a sign of weakness, nor do they mean that you shouldn't be doing this

It takes courage and strength to acknowledge and make space for uncomfortable feelings.

Journaling can provide an opportunity to explore and express your emotions. In addition, talking to a mental health therapist who specializes in reproductive issues can provide a safe space to process your feelings and develop coping strategies.



Grief and Loss

If you had anticipated having a child together with a significant other, the absence of a partner to share the joys and anxieties of the journey might evoke a sense of loss. You may mourn the loss of the concept of “family” you had held for yourself and the shared experience you had looked forward to, including the anticipation of a partner with whom to co-parent.

Grief might also surface when reflecting on the absence of a biological link between your future child and the envisioned partner who never materialized.

Acknowledging these losses and allowing yourself to grieve them is an important step in opening yourself up more fully to embracing the hope and promise of the path to parenthood that you are embarking on and “re-writing” the narrative of your family and your future.



Managing Expectations

Entering into the world of fertility treatment can bring with it a set of expectations that may not always align with reality. It’s crucial to keep in mind that the process might not go exactly as planned and that there might be challenges or setbacks along the way.

While it’s healthy to engage in planning and preparation and to think positively, flexibility and adaptability are equally important. Stay open to adjusting your expectations and remind yourself that every step you take is one step closer to fulfilling your dream of becoming a mother.

Building a Support Network

Building a strong support network can provide a lifeline during times of uncertainty and emotional upheaval. Reach out to friends and family members to ask about their availability for emotional and/or practical support.



Emotional Support

You may need to educate people about the realities of your experience, including the stresses and challenges. It's often helpful to be specific about what would be most helpful. For instance, it can be helpful to let people know if you'd appreciate them checking in with you occasionally or would prefer, they wait for you to let them know when you need to talk. While support from others can be invaluable, some people find it helpful to create a certain amount of space and privacy around specific details of treatment, such as when certain procedures will be undergone or when particular results will be known.





Practical Support

People are often glad to be tasked with something specific where they can be of help such as:

- A ride home from a procedure
- Delivering a meal
- Helping take care of your pet

Support Groups

Consider seeking out support groups and online forums specifically designed for prospective single mothers by choice can help alleviate feelings of isolation. Participating in groups specific to your local area can be a great way to build community and kinship and, in the future, to introduce your child to other families who look like theirs.

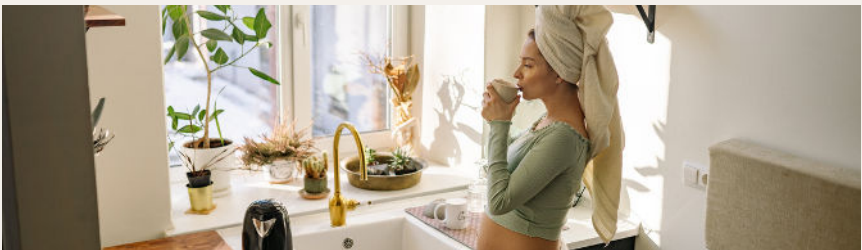


Supporting yourself during fertility treatment

Focusing on self-care is an important part of sustaining yourself through the ups and downs of this journey. Prioritize activities that bring you joy and relaxation, whether its practicing yoga, engaging in creative hobbies, spending time in nature, taking a bath, or listening to music. Mindfulness techniques (focused breathing, taking a mindfulness walk, focusing on a mantra, and guided imagery) as well as “mindfulness in daily living,” are helpful in building emotional resilience and supporting physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being.

People often worry that their stress will sabotage the success of the treatment. It is important to realize that some amount of stress is all but inevitable when undergoing fertility treatments. It is not realistic to expect that you will remain in a constant state of “zen” during your treatment cycle. That being said, it can be highly beneficial to your overall sense of emotional and physical well-being to:

- Practice good self-care and learn and utilize stress management practices
- Reduce other additional sources of stress in your life.
- Try to minimize taking on unnecessary new projects, responsibilities, or social commitments that don’t “nurture” you but feel like obligations.



Preparing for the Future

Preparing ahead of time for conversations with your future child about their origins can alleviate potential stress down the road. It's best to begin early (age four to seven), using honest and age-appropriate communication to discuss the concept of sperm donation with your child.

Emphasize the love and intention behind your decision to become a parent and that your child's "story" is something to be celebrated. Children's books can be helpful resources. If you do an online search for "children's books sperm donation" you will find there are many to choose from.



There may come a time when your child asks whether they have a father or asks why they don't have a father.

- This is an opportunity to explain that there are different ways to build a family and that families come in “all different shapes and sizes,” --but that regardless of the composition, it is love that makes and shapes a family.
- If there are extended family members or people who are part of your and your child's “chosen family,” you can remind your child that these people too are part of what makes up their family.
- Your child may ask whether the sperm donor is their father. You can explain that while the donor provided some of the genetic material (or one of the “building blocks”) to help create them---an important contribution to be sure---a donor is not the same thing as a parent. A parent is someone who nurtures, guides, and cares for a child as they grow.
- It is also important to consider the possibility that your future child may someday express a desire to connect with their sperm donor. While this prospect may raise questions and complicated emotions, it is essential to respond with thoughtfulness and sensitivity.

A child's curiosity about their genetic heritage is a natural part of their identity exploration. Creating a safe space for conversations about this and other aspects of their origins can foster understanding and help them understand their feelings. Helping facilitate potential contact in the future with the donor can be a way to honor your child's journey of self-discovery.



Planning for Unforeseen Events and Contingencies

While the desire for parenthood knows no bounds, for prospective single parents, it's especially critical to consider the implications of age, health, and life expectancy.

Though not always easy or comfortable to think about, conscientious contemplation of these factors can provide the foundation for establishing a solid framework for your child's future financial security as well as backup parenting or guardianship arrangements in the event of unforeseen health circumstances.

You want to feel confident that you can ensure a secure and nurturing environment for your child's growth, development, and future even in the face of the uncertainties we all face about our health and longevity.

Donor Selection

Another important decision is selecting a sperm donor. A primary consideration is whether to choose a directed or non-directed donor.

- **Directed Donor** – a donor already personally known to you, such as a friend or non-related family member
- **Non-Directed Donor** – a donor through a sperm bank

This is ultimately a personal decision, and there is no “one right answer,” as there can be advantages and disadvantages to each.



Some prospective parents prefer to choose a directed donor, because they feel more comfortable with the idea of their donor being someone they already know and trust and who will presumably be a part of their lives for the foreseeable future (and therefore available for the future child to meet, know, and ask questions of).

For other prospective parents, choosing a directed donor feels more emotionally complicated or “messy.” For instance, there may be concerns about boundaries or the donor overstepping his role. Or prospective parents may worry that it will feel awkward to them when with their child in the presence of the donor and/or other friends or family members who know the identity of the donor.



Seattle Sperm Bank Donors



GORAN (14288)



MALONE (12766)



FRANKLIN (12105)

There is no one right way to approach selecting a non-directed donor, or donor from a sperm bank like Seattle Sperm Bank. Before looking at a donor database, it can be helpful to consider what your priorities are, such as:

- Race/ethnicity
- Desired physical attributes, such as height, weight, hair/eye/complexion, facial features
- Desired aptitudes/abilities, such as-intelligence, academic achievement, athleticism, artistic/creative
- Personality traits (i.e. adventuresome, ambitious, playful, funny, spirited, easygoing, etc.)
- Health history, including medical and mental health (both personal and familial)
- Motivation for donating
- Attitudes toward openness for future contact with the resulting child
- Subjective factors (i.e. similar interests, hobbies, profession, or simply a subjective sense of being drawn to a particular donor)



It is important to remember that your child is not going to be a "clone" of the donor.

While genetics are important "building blocks," many traits, characteristics, and qualities are determined by a complex interplay between genetic and environmental factors. Also, when choosing a donor, one must choose "the whole package" so to speak---it is not possible to "pick and choose" only certain traits and qualities.

Inevitably, all donors are likely to have a few "less than perfect" aspects of personal or family history. That being said, it's important to generally feel positive about your selection, as you want to be able to convey your positivity about the donor you chose to your child someday when sharing with your child about his or her "origin story."

Directed Donors

Initial Considerations

Existing relationship dynamics: You may want to think twice about asking someone to be your donor with whom you have a history of challenging relationship dynamics, even if the person would otherwise be the “perfect” donor. This could result in unforeseen challenges down the road as you navigate roles and relationships in the future between yourselves, your child, and your donor.

Donor’s personality traits

Ideally you want your donor to be someone who is flexible and collaborative and who is able to prioritize the future child’s welfare and best interests as different decisions, requests, or circumstances present themselves in the future.

Donor’s conceptualization of his role

The donor should be clear that he will have no parental role in relation to the future child (i.e. no rights, responsibilities, or involvement in parenting decisions).



Direct, open, and respectful communication is key.

It is important to talk through preferences and expectations in advance of making a final decision about whether to proceed. A consultation with an experienced mental health professional specializing in family building through third party assistance can be helpful.

In accordance with the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) guidelines, some fertility clinics require such a consultation prior to fertility treatment with third party assistance, particularly in the case of directed donation.

Important topics to discuss and make sure both parties are in alignment with include:



- Any anticipated (or hoped for) changes in the nature of the relationship or frequency of contact between the two parties as a result of the donation
- The anticipated (or hoped for) role the donor will play in the resulting child's life (i.e. aunt/uncle-like figure, close family friend, mentor, etc.)
- Clarity around the donor not having any parental role (including rights, responsibilities, or parental decision-making) in relation to the child
- Disclosure to the child- will the child be informed about his/her donor conception and the identity of the donor (this is recommended); if so, how, when, and by whom?
- To mutual friends or family- the parties should agree upon with whom the information about the child's donor conception and the donor's identity be shared, as well as how, when, and by whom
- To others, including social media
- How many children the donor is comfortable with his sperm being used
- In the case of IVF, the possibility that more embryos may be created than you choose to use for your own family building and how decisions will be made about any remaining embryos



What to expect emotionally during fertility treatment

If your insemination plan includes working with a fertility clinic, you can expect to have an IUI or IVF procedure. An IUI involves introducing donor sperm directly into the uterus. Whereas IVF involves advanced laboratory procedures where an egg is introduced to the sperm outside of the body.

Both IUI and IVF cycles require a substantial investment in time, energy, and emotion. You can anticipate a variety of the following:

- dedicated effort to track the different phases of the treatment cycle
- take medications daily
- tolerate potential physical and emotional side effects
- attend frequent medical monitoring appointments
- endure periods of waiting and uncertainty
- absorb potential setbacks or delays when things don't go as planned

It's no wonder that along with feeling hopeful and optimistic, it is not uncommon for people to also feel somewhat anxious, stressed, or overwhelmed at different points in the journey.



Intrauterine Insemination (IUI)

Though typically less medically “involved” than IVF, IUI cycles can involve a lot of intense emotion within a short period of time.

Some patients have likened the IUI journey to an “emotional roller coaster,” with feelings of excitement, hope, and optimism in the weeks leading up to the insemination giving way to impatience and anxiety during the wait until the pregnancy test.



Of course, if the cycle is successful, the waiting stage is rewarded with the joy of success and the sweet anticipation of a baby on the way.

But, if the cycle is not successful, the patient is left with disappointment, frustration, sadness, and perhaps newfound worry about their likelihood of future success.

It is not uncommon for patients to have to undergo several IUI cycles before they are successful, meaning that for many people, the end of one cycle leads directly to the beginning of a next attempt and getting “back on” the emotional roller coaster.

In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)

IVF cycles are more medically involved, typically requiring multiple daily injections; medications often must be refrigerated, and injections must be administered at roughly the same time each day. Though the injections are not necessarily painful in and of themselves, some patients experience soreness at the site of the injection or a reaction to the medium in which the active ingredient of the medication is delivered. With IVF, the cycle itself takes longer than with an IUI, so more monitoring appointments and lab draws are involved.

For all of these reasons, some patients experience IVF cycles as more intrusive than IUI cycles, though the emotions may feel somewhat less intense due to the fact that the process occurs over a more extended period of time. Though it can be just as devastating when a first attempt isn't successful, there is usually more time taken between cycles and, therefore, individuals may have more time to process their feelings, regroup, and ready themselves for a next cycle with IVF than with IUI.



Legal Matters

Do I need an attorney?

Sometimes prospective parents using donor sperm worry about whether or not the donor will “change his mind” and try to assume a parental role in the resulting child’s life in the future.



When done properly, legal contracts serve to protect both the donor and the recipients. Not only will the donor not have any parental rights in relation to the resulting offspring, but he will also not have any parental responsibilities for the resulting offspring.

Important reminders:

- Be sure to read and understand the terms of your legal contract, whether it be between you and the sperm bank or you and your directed donor.
- For directed donors, it is wise to work with an attorney to create legal documentation prior to initiating treatment.
- Each party should be represented by separate legal counsel to avoid a conflict of interest.
- Different states have different laws pertaining to family building through third party assistance.
- Understand the laws in the state in which you live, the state in which you live (and presumably the state in which delivery will occur), as well as the state in which any embryos will be created.

This is the beginning of something good.

When it comes to family building through sperm donation, there is certainly a lot of information to digest and a lot to think about and process! Understandably, many individuals are eager to move forward as quickly as possible to make their dreams of parenthood a reality. But taking the time to think through these and other non-medical considerations involved in pursuing parenthood through sperm donation can help set you up for success and allow you to feel more prepared, confident, and at ease moving forward.

Continue reading for how to get started with **Seattle Sperm Bank**, and to learn more about supportive services offered through our author, Britta Dinsmore, Ph.D.



Next Steps

As you start your journey to parenthood, Seattle Sperm Bank is here to offer support, guidance, and advice through every step.

Step 1. All Access Pass

- Visit seattlespermbank.com to purchase an All-Access Pass for \$50 to view available donors.



Step 2. Browse Donors

- Browse our extensive donor database to find the best possible donor based on your personal needs and preferences.

Step 3. Purchase Your Donor

- Orders can be placed either online or over the phone with our team. We are here to assist you with the shipment or storage of your purchased samples.



Supportive Services:

- Donor Consultations
- Photo Matching
- Support for Directed Donors
- Genetic Counselors on staff to assist with genetic screening results
- Family Planning with sibling vial storage
- SSB Connects, our internal sibling registry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Britta Dinsmore graduated with a doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Oregon. She is a licensed psychologist in Oregon, Washington, and Montana and has 18 years' experience specializing in fertility challenges, reproductive assistance, and pregnancy loss.

Britta previously served as National Mental Health Advisor for the Parents Via Egg Donation organization. Britta is a member of the ASRM Mental Health Professionals Group, the Oregon Surrogacy Professionals Association, the Society for Ethics in Egg Donation and Surrogacy, and RESOLVE.

She lives in the Pacific Northwest and, in her spare time, enjoys hiking, backpacking, cross country skiing, gardening, travel, and spending time with her family including her dogs Maisy and Riley.



To learn more about services offered by the author, visit BrittaDinsmore.com