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Co-Founder and Director of the Donor Sibling Registry

Donor Families Connecting: Love or Fear?

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I think that many of the choices we're faced with in life offer us opportunities to choose between love and fear. After running the Donor Sibling Registry for 15 years, and facilitating tens of thousands of half sibling and/or donor connections, I see these choices very clearly. We've been able to watch so many first-degree genetic relatives, who are essentially strangers to each other, decide whether to connect, and then maneuver through defining this newfound family.

Brittan and her parents along with egg donor JoLana and her two daughters, with Katie Couric



Getting to spend time with Brittan and her parents Janet and Jim before, and after the Katie show was inspiring. Because Jim has a genetic connection to his daughter, I was more focused on Janet, Brittan's mom, as many non-genetic parents in donor families seem to struggle much more with the idea of their children connecting with donor relatives. When we watched Janet, we saw a confident and strong parent. Did she have fears and hesitations? Yes, most certainly. Did she realize that the benefits for her child would largely outweigh any concerns she might have had? It sure appears so.

We watched Janet be empowered as a parent, and witnessed her confidence, love, and support. She had the grace to not only meet, but to completely embrace her egg donor JoLana (on national television no less!) We felt her sense of gratitude, and wonder, as she looked into the eyes and held the hand of the woman who made it possible for her to have her beautiful daughter. There was not a dry eye in the house.

While some donor offspring and their parents are overjoyed to connect with their half sibling and/or donor families, some parents seem to struggle much more with the idea of their children connecting with donor relatives. Decisions about donor conception, including the ones about connecting to unknown relatives, can be complicated, but I suggest we can simplify these decisions down to just two choices, love or fear.

Fears might include complicating your life, or opening your family up to a situation that might be out of your control. The truth is that as your child grows up and heads into the world, these concerns, as well as a plethora of others, are realized regularly, in our everyday lives of raising children. So we can keep our kids safe, at all cost, or give them opportunities to expand themselves in the world, and learn about their own power, strength, and their ability to open themselves up to love.



Certainly, when faced with opening our lives to unknown genetic relatives, parents might feel fear, confusion or worry. We can make choices solely based on these feelings. We can let our feelings of insecurity as parents hold us back. What if my child doesn't like them? What if they don't get along or have much in common? What if my child likes them better? How will the dynamics of our family be changed? What if my child realizes that I haven't been a "perfect" parent? None of us have been "perfect" parents- and meeting the donor isn't going to "out" this fact (those with teenagers can count on them to do this!).

We have the opportunity in these situations, to make our choices coming instead, from a place of love. We can choose to see the opportunities in reaching out and connecting, cautiously and carefully, expanding our child's, and our own sense of family. We can be open to this new idea of family and see how it actually might strengthen our relationship with our child, not threaten it in any way. As parents, we can be confident and strong.

Will we have some fears and hesitations? Yes, most certainly. But we can realize that the benefits for our children can largely outweigh any concerns we might have. There are no guarantees of perfect family bonding, just as in *any* family, not everyone bonds or connects. But these connections do have the ability to empower us as parents and give us another platform in which to show our children confidence, love, and support when meeting and embracing this new family. Honoring our children's right to explore these new half sibling and/or donor relationships can only strengthen our own bonds with our children. And when meeting donors, having our children witness our sense of gratitude, can be a profound and life changing experience for all.

Parents can, and should put the needs and desires of their children to seek out and connect with half siblings and/or donors, above their own fears. This is the ultimate sacrifice that parents make for their children. It is also the greatest gift we can give to our children, and to ourselves.

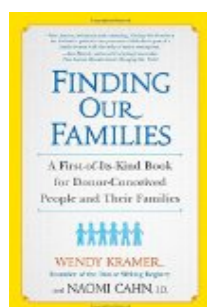
There are two basic motivating forces: fear and love. When we are afraid, we pull back from life. When we are in love, we open to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance. We need to learn to love ourselves first, in all our glory and our imperfections. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others or our potential to create. Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life. ~ John Lennon

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