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Adventures in Parenting



December 16, 2013, 2:29 pm [Comment](#)

Emailing a Sperm Donor: 'You May Want to Sit Down'

By [WENDY KRAMER](#) and [NAOMI CAHN](#)



Lance,

Where to begin? My name is Ryan Kramer. I'm 15 years old, and I live in Nederland, Colorado. Fifteen years ago, my mother was impregnated with a sperm donation from California Cryobank Donor 1058. You may want to sit down for this next part.

Ryan was 15 when he first contacted his donor. He wrote an email explaining what he was looking for, and more important, what he wasn't looking for: a dad, money or help paying for college. Ryan told Lance he would respect his needs and privacy.

Ryan wanted Lance to have the opportunity to know him, and he wanted the opportunity to know his father – as long as his father was O.K. with that too. After giving information about himself (that he was a sophomore studying aerospace engineering at the University of Colorado and loved mountain biking), Ryan asked a few simple questions about Lance's interests, hobbies, what type of work he did, where he went to school and whether he was married. He signed off diplomatically. Anything you are comfortable telling me about yourself would be more than I know now. With that, I leave the ball in your court.

Ryan's mother, Wendy, was proud of her son's letter, but also concerned about his new position of vulnerability. While waiting for Lance's reply, she had a mantra: Please let him be kind, please let him be kind.

Two nights later, Ryan woke her up yelling, "Mom, he wrote me back!"

"Was he kind?" Wendy asked.

With tears streaming down his face, Ryan nodded his head. "Yes!"

If you plan to contact your child's donor, we suggest following Ryan's lead: be honest and be yourself. Consider telling the donor your child's age, interests, activities, family composition and physical attributes. To put the donor at ease, explain your child's curiosity and let him or her know what your intentions are. Although you may be incredibly curious, try not to pry or ask questions that require overtly emotional answers.

Next, clearly state that you will respect the donor's personal and familial boundaries. You may even confront any potential ambivalence directly by writing: "I know this letter may make you feel awkward and uncomfortable. Please write whenever you feel ready to do this. Even if you do not wish to have contact, it would be helpful for me to hear that. I am content to wait but really need to know your wishes. I will respect whatever level of privacy that you desire."

It's normal to feel concerned about whether the donor will welcome your contact. Keep in mind that many anonymous donors had to be anonymous as a requirement of their cryobank. Although it's not universally true, many anonymous donors are in fact delighted to be found by their genetic offspring. For proof, consider that more than 2,000 donors have registered on the [Donor Sibling Registry](#), indicating that they are open to mutual consent contact. If your donor has not registered there, then the least intrusive way of contacting him or her is through email or a letter since each gives the donor private time to react rather than requiring an immediate response.

If you don't get the excited response you had hoped for, or if you receive no response at all, then you must respect the donor's wish for privacy. Many things go into building a relationship – most important, time. So try to be patient. Sometimes the donor just needs an extended beat to process your email and get used to knowing about your child's existence. Many donors who at first are hesitant do ultimately end up reaching out to their offspring. When breaking the barrier of silence with your child's donor, be sincere and stay hopeful.

Wendy Kramer and Naomi Cahn are the authors of ["Finding Our Families: A First of Its Kind Book for Donor-Concieved People and Their Families."](#)

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Raising healthy, happy, well-adjusted kids isn't easy. At Motherlode, we cover it all — homework, sex, child care, eating habits, sports, technology, the work-family balance and much more. [KJ Dell'Antonia](#), the editor and lead blogger for Motherlode, has been writing about the personal, cultural and political aspects of family life for a decade now. She is also a former corporate lawyer and prosecutor and a New York City exile, who is now raising four kids, two dogs and a cat in rural New Hampshire. Come join her in a conversation about the parents we are and the parents we want to be.

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