

## **“The Birds and the Bees...and the Syringe?”**

Participating in a Mothers of Multiples group, where twins are the norm not the exception, helps us to connect with other families dealing with the same parenting challenges. Because multiples were the result of our pregnancies, there is also a large group of us whose road to parenthood was paved with doctor visits, “procedures” and Clomid! Of course we all *consider* our twins and triplets to be miracles because we love them, but some of our children truly are miracles! Since many of us underwent fertility treatments of varying intensity, we face an exceptional challenge answering the inevitable question, “Mommy, where did I come from?” It is the question that has brought blushes to the cheeks of many a mother and father. Talking to young children about private body parts and sexual intercourse can be really uncomfortable for adults, but discussing eggs, sperm samples and frozen embryos is quite a bit worse. The following guidelines are designed to help us prepare for the much anticipated “How did we get in your belly?”

Be comfortable. In order to convey the right message, parents need to be at ease with the topic. Since many infertility treatments are stressful and wracked with difficult decisions, it would be easy to allow those feelings of uncertainty, disappointment, loss and apprehension to cloud the story of your multiples’ successful conception. Deal with those painful adult issues with supportive friends and family in order to make way for the positive aspects of your miraculous story.

Realize that telling isn’t a one time event. It is best not to save all the information for one very important sit down discussion with your older children. The story of their conception should be revealed little by little as each child asks and is ready to understand. Use your children’s developmental capacity for discretion to guide what and when you disclose. For toddlers, focus on the excitement of birth since children under three are egocentric and do not have an understanding of time before they were born. For preschoolers, a simple seed and plant analogy is helpful to tell the conception story without the medical terminology. For grade school children, books are a great way to continue the story. There are many children’s books that offer stories of diversity in conception, adoption, donor eggs or sperm and family structure. The preteen phase, before adolescent conflicts and identity issues occur, is your opportunity for having more in-depth discussions about biology, genetics and infertility.

Have a cover story. While your children are still too young for the details, have some phrases ready that are truthful to your situation, but not too complicated. Sidestep the specifics and say, “doctors helped”, “it was a special miracle” or “lots of prayer.”

Recognize that it’s private because it’s personal, not because it’s bad. In order to avoid the family secret blues that often come with very private family business, explain to your children that their conception is not a secret. Tell them about the family members and friends who do know the situation. Although your infertility and special circumstances are not a secret, they are private and should only be discussed with those people who already know. This will be especially helpful to the preteens who have all the details but may not want to discuss “Daddy’s sperm not being able to swim” with their mom.

Reassure your children that they are just like everyone else. When told about special circumstances and medical treatments, children can feel weird or different. Have a running dialog with your multiples that reassures them that “all babies are made with sperm and egg and grow in the woman’s uterus.”

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