



# How To Explain Surrogacy To Kids

*Experts share the best ways for parents to talk to their children about traditional and gestational surrogacy.*

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From Gabrielle Union to Anderson Cooper, an increasing number of celebrities have been growing their families via surrogacy and opening up about this path to parenthood.

Although the specifics can vary, surrogacy is, at its core, an arrangement in which someone agrees to carry a baby in their uterus for an intended parent or parents. Whether you're welcoming a baby with the help of a surrogate or are simply curious about the process, a question that tends to arise is, "How do you explain surrogacy to a child who was born via surrogate — or to any child?"

Below, parents and experts break down the best practices for approaching conversations about surrogacy with children.

## Start the conversation early.

"I always recommend to parents that they begin telling their child about their birth story as young as possible," said [Kim Kluger-Bell](#), a licensed marriage and family therapist who specializes in reproductive psychotherapy. "Most kids start to become aware of pregnant women and know that 'babies grow in a mommy's tummy' around 3 or 4 years old, which is an ideal time to begin talking about the special way that they came into the world."

Although these topics may feel daunting, delaying the conversation will simply make it a much bigger deal than it needs to be. Consider referencing the special circumstances of their birth even before you think they can fully understand it.

"Right from day one is the time to start telling them their story," said Kim Bergman, a psychologist and owner and senior partner of [Growing Generations](#), a surrogacy and egg donation agency. "This way it becomes the fabric and foundation for who they are and is never a surprise or news that is 'broken to them.' Of course the story is told in age appropriate bits and layers of fact and details are added as the child grows older."

The sooner you talk about the surrogacy experience, the more natural it will feel to everyone, including older siblings. Open conversations go a long way in normalizing nontraditional paths to parenthood.

“As a mother to two sets of twins born via surrogacy from two different gestational carriers, we followed the same advice we received when we adopted our first son,” said meditation and mindfulness coach [Josephine Atluri](#). “Our adoption agency and the many books we read on adoption recommended we speak about the way our child came into our lives right from the beginning, no matter how young. The idea is that it is a part of their birth story and there is nothing to hide.”

### **Use age-appropriate language.**

With young children, it’s best to use simple, age-appropriate language to explain the concept of surrogacy. Again, they might have learned that babies “grow in a Mommy’s tummy,” so use that as a jumping-off point.

“In the case of heterosexual couples, parents might explain that ‘Mommy’s tummy couldn’t carry a baby so we found a very nice and generous lady to help her babysit you until you were born,’” Kluger-Bell said. “The concept of babysitting is usually familiar to a young child and easy to grasp. Of course in the case of parents who don’t have the physical capacity to carry a baby to term, you alter the language slightly – ‘Daddy and Poppa didn’t have the kind of tummy you need to carry a baby so we had to find a wonderful person who wanted to help!’”



FLY VIEW PRODUCTIONS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Your child should know about the special way they came into the world from an early age, in developmentally appropriate terms.

There are two main types of surrogacy: Traditional, in which the surrogate who carries the baby provides their own eggs and thus has a genetic link to the resulting child, and gestational, in which the surrogate is a “gestational carrier” and carries a baby formed from the egg and sperm of the intended parents, donors or a combination, and thus has no genetic link to the child.

“Traditional surrogacy is pretty rare these days but it does sometimes happen that a sister will be a traditional surrogate for her sister,” Kluger-Bell said. “But it’s not that different from situations where parents use both a gestational carrier and an egg donor. Again, I recommend beginning to talk with kids about the various ‘helpers,’ who were kind and generous enough to help their parents bring them into the world.”

Share how grateful you are to the doctors, egg donor and carrier who did such a great job keeping the child safe and healthy until they were big enough to come home with their parents. Emphasize that there are lots of different ways to make a family as well.

### **Offer more details as they get older.**

As kids get older, they can understand more details about the mechanics of their birth and the medical process involved.

“Slightly older kids will understand that they grew in their surrogate’s uterus and will have more questions, and perhaps a little uneasiness or embarrassment about it,” Kluger-Bell said. “It’s helpful if the surrogate is someone they have met and not some anonymous, unknown person. Many couples invite their surrogates to at least some of their child’s birthdays, and this can be a nice thing for kids and will demystify the process.”

**“In all instances, honesty and transparency are essential. Even if it seems your child is too young to understand fully, they will be able to retain the basic concepts. This will contribute to their sense of identity as they grow.”**

**- STACI SWIDERSKI, CEO AND OWNER OF FAMILY SOURCE CONSULTANTS**

Even if the surrogate isn’t present in your child’s life as they grow up, there are other ways to make them feel less mysterious. Kluger-Bell recommended showing your children photos from the day they were born, especially if you have photos of your surrogate with the baby as well.

“Many parents also document the pregnancy with photos of themselves with their surrogate at doctor’s appointments and ultrasounds, and they tell their kids about

doing things like talking to them when they were in the surrogate's uterus and having her play recordings of their voices," she added.

Older kids may also ask why the surrogate volunteered for this important job and whether she wanted to take them home when they were born. Be straightforward in your responses.

"The fact that most surrogates are paid for their services does not mean that it is simply a business arrangement: most surrogates are strongly motivated to help others and to give them the most important gift of their lives," Kluger-Bell noted.

## **Answer their questions honestly.**

Children will inevitably ask questions about surrogacy, and those questions will get more specific as they get older. Remember to be open and age-appropriate with their story.

"In all instances, honesty and transparency are essential," said Staci Swiderski, CEO and owner of the surrogacy and egg donation agency [Family Source Consultants](#). "Even if it seems your child is too young to understand fully, they will be able to retain the basic concepts. This will contribute to their sense of identity as they grow."

She noted that kids' questions tend to be more centered around the identity of the surrogate and their relationship to the family and surrogacy process.

"How did you meet the surrogate? How did you pick the surrogate? How much did you pay the surrogate? Is she my real mom? Why did you decide to do this? Why couldn't you carry me like other moms carried their kids? Does this make me different from other kids or my siblings? Who is my surrogate and can I meet her? Will she come and take me back one day? These are all questions that my little boys have asked me over the years whenever the subject of their surrogacy story comes up," Atluri said.

She urged parents to pause and breathe for a few seconds after hearing these questions, as they may lead to a rush of emotions.

"Taking that moment will bring some clarity and awareness of what your child is feeling and what they are really looking to hear in that moment," Atluri explained. "While they may be curious to hear the facts, at the heart of it is some emotion such as fear, sadness, confusion or a need to feel understood, safe, or comforted."

Questions about who their "real" parents are may feel painful to hear, but try to understand that they come from a place of curiosity and wanting to understand their place in their family and the world. Focus on the importance of love and family connection over genetics or birth circumstances.

"It is also important to ask your kids what they know or have heard from others about surrogacy so that you can debunk myths and untrue statements," Atluri added.



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Parents can express their gratitude to the surrogate for her generosity in helping bring their child into the world.

### **Model a calm and positive attitude.**

“The main thing for parents to keep in mind is that kids take their cues from their parents,” Kluger-Bell said. “If you are relaxed, comfortable and positive about surrogacy, and grateful to your surrogate for making your dream come true, then your child will be too.”

Of course, surrogacy can bring up difficult emotions for parents, especially if the decision came after a long struggle or medical issue. On top of those strong feelings, they may feel a lot of pressure to get the conversation with their children just right.

“Parents want their children to feel happy with them and with themselves and often worry about this,” said Lisa Schuman, a licensed clinical social worker and director of [The Center for Family Building](#). “Therefore, it’s likely they will trip over their words as they share the story, and the child will probably not think, ‘My parents love me and that is why they are stumbling over their words.’ They are more likely to say, ‘If this is normal why are my parents acting so weird?’”

To avoid this situation, she recommended parents practice the discussion until they feel at ease with the subject.

“As they mold and craft the story, they can try on different narratives and find something that speaks to them,” Schuman explained. “As they practice it over and over, they can have their tears, trip over their words and work out the kinks so by the



time the child understands it, they have said it a million times and it rolls off their tongues.”

Think about the takeaway messages you want to emphasize in these conversations.

“When we discuss both adoption and surrogacy, we always make a point of telling our kids that no matter how they came into our family, the common bond between us all is that we were born and brought into our family out of love,” Atluri said.

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**- JOSEPHINE ATLURI, MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS COACH**

**Use books to inform the conversation.**

There are a number of children’s books about surrogacy and other nontraditional ways to build a family. Bergman wrote a book called [“You Began as a Wish”](#) to explain different types of assisted reproduction.

Kluger-Bell is the author of [“The Very Kind Koala: A Surrogacy Story,”](#) which is geared toward kids ages 3-5. She also recommends [“The Kangaroo Pouch: A story about surrogacy for young children”](#) by Sarah A. Phillips and [“Recipes of How Babies Are Made”](#) by Carmen Martinez Jover.

In 2022, attorney and surrogacy advocate Evie Jeang published a book called [“How Much We Love You”](#) based on her experience with her son. After doctors discovered a large tumor in her uterus, she decided to have her child via surrogacy.

“When he was 5, he asked me about his story, and I told him the truth,” Jeang told HuffPost. “I think it’s always better for the parents to tell kids information directly than for kids to find info somewhere else. I said, ‘Mommy really wanted you, but I had this big grapefruit-sized tumor in my stomach. Because Mommy’s body isn’t able to carry a baby, she needed help. This really nice lady heard Mommy’s prayers and carried you.’”

That conversation, which took place during a casual car ride, inspired the plot of “How Much We Love You” and laid the foundation for subsequent discussions about her son’s surrogacy story over the years.

“Now that he’s older, I can tell him more details,” Jeang said. “But at that time, he said, ‘You know what, Mommy, you’re right. I’m too big for your stomach!’ It was really cute.”

## Consider creating your own book.

In addition to reading published work about surrogacy, families may find it helpful to create their own book to capture their personal journey.

Many parents keep baby books to document their children's early development. Schuman created a product called ["My Lifebook"](#) – a "pre-baby book" geared toward parents who grew their families with the help of a third party.

"Children are just as much a part of the story as you are, and they will have questions about their entry into the world," Swiderski said. "Try to gather as much information as you can about how you chose your surrogate and how the journey unfolded."

She recommended recording your surrogacy journey by taking photos and videos of yourself and your surrogate, writing a blog or creating a scrapbook of memories.

"Be sure to include a contribution from your surrogate, too," Swiderski added.

As your child grows up, this book can serve as a helpful tool during conversations about the way they came into the world. It can also highlight the reality that Bergman emphasized: "Surrogacy is a beautiful partnership between a group of people all coming together for one goal: to help create or expand a family."