

Designer babies

Discussion

Imagine that before you were born your parents had 'designed' you. If you had been them, what would you have changed? Think about these questions:

Which one aspect of your appearance would you change?

Which one aspect of your character/personality would you change?

How do you think your life might have been different?

Are you pleased your parents did not design you or do you wish they had?

Compare your answers in pairs or small groups.

Reading

Read through the article and answer this question:

Why do the Jones want a baby girl?

NEW LAWS MAY ALLOW CHOICE OF BABY'S SEX

Jim and Debbie Jones (not their real names), whose daughter was killed in a tragic domestic accident last year, plan to use the new British human rights laws to win the legal right to choose the sex of their baby.

The Jones, who have four sons, say that the 'female dimension' has disappeared from their family since the death of Jasmine. "Words cannot describe what it feels like to lose the little girl we had wanted for so long. We know another girl won't replace Jasmine, but we want the chance to try," said Jim Jones. "What we're hoping to do with the use of technology is create the female dimension again. We have psychologists' reports and doctors' reports which confirm that our

reasons for wanting a girl go beyond just wanting to replace her. Our family doesn't feel complete any more. I adore our sons but we would like another girl."

Gender selection is only possible in Britain for medical rather than social, psychological or physical reasons. Pro-life campaigners say that if the Jones are allowed to choose the sex of their baby, it could lead to babies becoming consumer items. A spokesman said: "We are totally opposed to engineering the numbers and genders of people in society. That leads only to disaster."

The Jones' lawyers will be basing their arguments on new human rights legislation. Article six guarantees everyone a 'fair hearing' from public authorities and Article eight protects the right of everyone to 'respect for family life'.

Read the article again. Mark the following sentences true (T) or false (F):

1. The Jones feel they need a baby girl to make their family complete again.
2. At the moment in Britain it is not possible to choose the sex of your baby.
3. New laws on human rights may allow the Jones to choose the sex of their baby.

Discussion

Discuss this question in pairs or small groups:

Do you think the Jones should be allowed to choose to have a baby girl? Why? Why not?

Language

Look at these sentences from the article. Notice the expressions with *right*:

Jim and Debbie Jones plan to *win the legal right* to choose the sex of their baby. Article eight *protects the right* of everyone to 'respect for family life'.

Cross out the word in *italics* which does not collocate with *right*:

1. You can *have, win, protect, demand, build, defend, challenge* the right to choose.
2. It's a(n) *legal, moral, straight, automatic, basic* right.

Look at the sentences below. Mark them in the following way:

- ✓ if you agree
- x if you disagree
- ? if you partly agree and partly disagree

1. An unborn child has rights. Those rights must be protected.
2. We don't have the right to interfere with a child's future personality and appearance.
3. Deciding the sex of your child will be a basic right in fifty years' time.
4. We should have the automatic right to choose particular genes for our own babies.

Compare your answers in pairs or small groups.

Discussion

Work in pairs or small groups. In each of the following situations someone is explaining what genetic selection they want to make and why. Decide whether you think they should be allowed to do what they want.

1. There is a history of red hair in my family. I have red hair and I was badly teased at school. I would like to make sure my child does not have red hair.
2. My four-year-old daughter, my only child, has a fatal blood disease. She will die before she is 12 unless we can find a match for a bone marrow transplant. I want to make sure my next baby is a suitable match for my daughter.
3. In my family there is a history of a fatal disease that affects the nervous system. I want to make sure that my baby is not likely to get this disease.
4. I'm a university professor and my husband is a doctor. We'd like to make sure our baby is intelligent.
5. The male members of my family often suffer from a rare and unpleasant bone disease. I would therefore like to make sure I have a baby girl.
6. I feel there is too much violence and aggression in the world. I would like to make sure my child is a calm and gentle person.
7. I would like to have a very musical or artistic daughter. She should have blonde hair, blue eyes and be about medium height when she grows up.
8. I suffer from a genetic disease which I inherited from my mother. My children have a one in five chance of having the same gene. Before I start a family, I want to have treatment to make sure I do not pass on this gene.

"We will still have sex for pleasure, of course, but we will view our children as too damn important to leave it to a random meeting of sperm and egg."

Greg Stock, UCLA professor of procreation

Are you fascinated or horrified by this topic?