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Children's need for parents should come first

Why deny children the chance of a loving family in an age when that is ever rarer?

Sir, My partner and I became parents of our children together. Our donor was chosen to match my partner's physical characteristics, and my partner attended every fertility and antenatal appointment with me, and cut our children's umbilical cords when they were born. She is, and has always been, their mother and it is simply ludicrous to suggest otherwise.

But the law, in its current form, does not give her any recognition as a parent. Had she been a man, she could have been named on the birth certificate even with no biological relationship with the children. Instead, to acquire parental status we had to go through the lengthy and difficult process of jointly adopting our own children.

The proposed change to the law (widely publicised as removing the need of a child for a father) in fact merely tidies up this inconsistency, ensuring that same-sex couples are treated in the same way as heterosexual couples conceiving with donor sperm. This will give practical and legal protection to children born into families like ours, ensuring that two parents are legally responsible for their care.

No one denies that fathers are crucially important to millions of children. But that does not mean that alternative family structures are not equally valid.

Children need committed parents above all else, and in an age when many are lamenting the lack of parental responsibility, we should embrace parents who want to provide their children with a stable loving home.

It is naive to say that these children have no male role models. Lesbian parents live in the real world, not in a social vacuum where men do not exist. Their children, like all others, benefit from relationships with grandfathers, uncles and friends.

Natalie Gamble
Bournemouth

Sir, The crucial parental role is one of emotional nurture and educational support to enable children to mature emotionally, intellectually, sexually and spiritually, as they live alongside a couple whose relationship is committed and stable.

The institution of marriage is not going to collapse simply because responsible gay people put themselves forward as responsible life stewards, often with children who have been endlessly moved from birth family to heterosexual adoptive families for a temporary periods, often based more on expediency than the wishes of these vulnerable children. I urge the Government to listen to the experience of children, especially to those who have been, or are being, raised by same-sex partners.

The Rev Nigel Rogers Hartley
Workington, Cumbria

Sir, Recognising alternative close relationships is one thing, redefining parenthood another. Can our legislators, even at this late stage, be persuaded not to add further institutionalised deception to our law in this area?

I think that the time has come when the right of a child to both a father and a mother should be recognised, and that we should no longer close off access to a biological parent legally and practically by providing misleading birth certificates for those born by donor-assisted fertility treatment.

But it seems that the intention is that these will continue to be designed either to deceive or, in the case of same-sex couples, to create a legal absurdity by giving full parental recognition and rights to an unrelated person of the same sex as the mother.

Professor Brenda Almond
Lewes, E Sussex