

Baby decisions - adding to the world's woes?

How responsible is it to have children in a world whose **environmental** health is already under stress? That's the question Joanna Benn **poses** this week in the Green Room. Will a couple more **hungry** mouths make much difference? I came out of my house last week and got caught up in a fleet of mothers and prams. They were wearing a middle class yummy mummy uniform combining comfort and fashion - skinny jeans, UGG boots, black tops, and large sunglasses. The prams were all **state-of-the-art** three wheeled, **balanced**, air-bagged mini cars that can **fold** to the size of a postage stamp and **carry** the weekly shopping. The urban mother tribe looked chic, proud, and collectively cool. It got me thinking. I love kids, I love babies. I love the idea of the Brady Bunch, of close-knit large families and a stream of brothers and sisters of different heights with crazy hair. However, perhaps it's my age; suddenly everyone I know has children and it is **confusing** me. I don't even know when it all happened. I remember conversations about university, jobs, flats, boyfriends, and partners, but I seem to have **missed** the pre-baby musings. One minute people were childless - or child-free, **depending** on your **viewpoint**. The next it was instant family, complete with a new people-carrier in the drive and, more often than not, a house extension. Two weeks ago, a single childless friend confessed she'd been **looking into** freezing her eggs. That apparently is not a taboo subject. Nor are conversations about contraception, fertility patterns, mastitis, post-partum depression, sex, child behaviour problems, sleepless nights, credit crunch worries, or redundancy. However, dare ask how green it is to have kids in a world of dwindling **resources**, vast global **inequality**, terrifying climate change **scenarios** and dying **empty** seas... then people get **uncomfortable** and usually defensive.

I have asked the question a few times: "Why did you want children?" The answers have **usually** been - "It seemed the next thing to do, we wanted to, it felt right, I couldn't imagine not..." Push again - "Have you thought about what kind of world you are bringing them into? Some climate change scenarios give us a 10 to 15-year window before things get very ugly and scary indeed." Resounding **silence**. Being an environmentalist is, quite frankly, an **awkward** thing. When I see babies, not only do I see the beauty, joy and miracle of life, I also see nappies, landfill waste, vast **amounts** of food and money needed, and a very shaky, **unpredictable** future. According to United Nations **projections**, the world population will nearly **stabilise** at just above 10 billion people after 2200. That's a lot of people on one small planet. When we talk about the environment and **available** natural resources, we throw around statistics; yet none of it seems to be about me or you or that any other man, or woman, on the street.

Mood swings

Ask any environmental organisation what it thinks about birth control; it'll **avoid** the issue, and say it's not their place to comment. If a commentator says there are too many people on the planet, their words suggest authoritarian dictatorships, human rights violations, and eugenics. However, the reality is that every time we eat, **switch on** a light, get in a car, drink a beer, go on holiday or buy something to wear or use, we are **adding** to our environmental footprint. **Toddlers require** almost **unlimited** nappies, a fair amount of food, and **apparently** a loungeful of loud, battery-powered plastic toys. I am not saying we shouldn't have kids. They may well be the leaders of tomorrow, steering humanity into a just, equitable, **fair**, and healthy future. The new generation may indeed **succeed** where all others have failed, and learn the lessons of the past. Perhaps it's just my **mood**. Or perhaps it's the media's fault that some of us feel as if humanity is sliding from one patch of melting ice to another in a murky sea of financial, environmental, and social woes. I am **curious** to know if I am the only 30-something woman who has these dilemmas, worrying about the planet's future and what we could and should do. Am I worrying needlessly? Because in the grand scheme of things, one or two more children in the world really make no difference, do they? And as for the future - **rising** sea **levels**, bare former forests, desertification, empty seas, and a few non-biodegradable nappies floating in the wind - well that'll all take care of itself. Won't it?