
Discussion Of Whether It Is Ethical For Parents To Create Saviour Siblings

Saviour siblings are children who are created to provide Human leukocyte antigen (HLA) compatible body parts in order to save the life of an older sibling. This is typically umbilical cord blood to be used for the older child's bone marrow transplant. These children are created using IVF so that embryos can be screened in order to find and implant one that is an identical match with the ill sibling's deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Some diseases, such as certain leukaemias and anaemias require a bone marrow transplant as part of treatment. However, bone marrow donating requires a donor who is an immunological match for the receiver. Typically the most common match is a family member, usually a sibling, as there is a one in four chance of matching each other's genes due to inheritance of the same HLA from their parents.

The first recorded saviour sibling was born in the United States in the year 2000. The parents Lisa and Jack Nash created their son Jack Nash to cure his sister Molly's severely rare type of Fanconi anaemia, a rare genetic disease resulting in impaired response to DNA damage. Although a very rare disorder, studies of this have severely improved the knowledge of scientists about other bone marrow functions, and the development of cancer. While some good resulted from Jack's birth both for the individual family and for the advance in medical knowledge, his birth raises thorny moral issues.

The first successful saviour sibling in the UK was in 2003, for Megan Mathews a nine-year-old from Norfolk. Megan also had Fanconi anaemia which means her body could not make blood which caused her to get transfusions every couple of weeks, she was unable to fight infections. Megan's parents always planned to have another child but natural conception was only a 1 in 4 chance of the genes to identically match Megan's genes

Can it ever be morally correct for parents to have a child if the only reason for that child's existence is to save a brother or sister who is dying? Is the donor child really wanted for themselves or is he/she merely a means to an end? How will the donor child feel once he/she is of an age to understand why they were born?

Some parents aim to play a role in considering whether it is ethically correct to create saviour siblings. If the parents didn't plan on having another child and if they are having another child to save their first one then this is ethically incorrect and he fears of using the saviour sibling as means to an end.

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Saviour siblings are mostly due to desperation. The parents are desperate for their firstborn to stay alive, as any parents would be, this is a decision that was made instantly without any thought put into it because they want it so bad. Even with the small 5% success rate parents as an act of desperation can function as relief from partial future guilt because they have gone to full extent to say that they tried everything. The desperation needed to create a saviour sibling is a morally incorrect thing to do if the parent had to wanted another child prior to the older sibling becoming ill. This may lead to in later years the younger sibling will feel second best and wanted for the wrong reasons. On the other hand, the younger sibling might feel superior to the elder as they essentially kept the family together and think they should be valued more.

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