

Should Parents Be Licensed?

By [Austin Cline](#), About.com



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Procreation is a natural part of being human; indeed, it's a natural part of life in general. It may not be one of those things that "simply happens," but it does happen without always a great deal of forethought and preparation. There are some who argue, though, that it should — not simply preparation in the sense of planning on the part of the couple, but also on the part of the state. There are some who argue that parents should be licensed.

Summary

Title: Should Parents Be Licensed? Debating the Issues

Author: Peg Tittle

Publisher: Prometheus Books

ISBN: 1591020948

Pro:

- A lot of interesting essays you won't easily find elsewhere

Con:

- Very controversial and touchy subject

Description:

- Collection of articles on whether the state should control procreation
- Many provide arguments for why parenthood shouldn't be a right
- Offers interesting perspectives that should be considered.

Book Review

Because parenthood is regarded as one of the most natural things in the world, most people will react very negatively to any suggestion that a license should be required before being allowed to procreate. That would be like forcing people to have a license in

order to breathe or walk — being a parent is a right rather than a privilege such as driving. But should it be?

We must keep in mind that there is a lot at stake for the children themselves. When a two people become parents, there is suddenly at least one more individual whose interests must be taken into consideration: the child. Shouldn't children only be born into homes where they are wanted? Shouldn't children only be born into homes where the parents know what they are doing, know how to raise kids, and can provide the children with a psychologically and emotionally healthy atmosphere? Of course — no one can deny that this would be ideal. The question is, should the state do anything to legally enforce it?

This is the central theme in Peg Tittle's book *Should Parents Be Licensed? Debating the Issues*. This is not a subject that is debated very much, which would explain why this is one of the only books available right now that addresses it. It's a very emotional issue because, as I noted above, so many people treat procreation as a right that shouldn't be closely regulated by the government. Even a suggestion that there be licensing and regulation can be met with aggressive attacks.

Although such a reaction may be understandable, there are fair reasons for at least raising the matter. As I also noted above, we can't ignore the fact that once people become parents, there are automatically other interests involved. The government doesn't have any outside rights to protect that would justify regulating people's sexual activity, but there are outside rights to protect that could affect whether people go so far as to have children.

We have to face the fact that there are people out there who are parents and who probably shouldn't be. They may lack the intellectual, the emotional, or the psychological resources to raise children properly. Being a parent isn't easy — it's not for everyone, even though there are social pressures in society for everyone to have kids. Thus, the question isn't so much whether some people should refrain from having kids or even should be encouraged to refrain from having kids. Instead, the question is whether the state should step in enforce such an ideal.

The first hurdle to a licensing scheme would be coming up with a means that would prevent people from having unapproved children, a hurdle which may not be as tough as it first appears. In one article, Roger McIntire describes a fictional scenario in which a drug can permanently prevent conception until an antidote is created. Such a product would be incredibly popular, but it would raise the question of control. The state could, for example, restrict access to the antidote. It wouldn't take many steps to force everyone to take the contraceptive and keep the antidote out of the hands of any but those who passed a test.

Here, though, we come up against the larger hurdles that would inhibit the creation of a licensing system: what sorts of skills get tested, what sorts of standards will be enforced, and what sorts of tests will exist? This sounds at first like insurmountable hurdles until you remember that they already exist and are already enforced. People already accept the

role of the state in deciding who does and does not deserve to be a parent when it comes to custody cases, foster care, and adoption. Roger McIntyre writes:

“Can you imagine the public outcry that would occur if adoption agencies offered their children on a first-come-first-served basis, with no screening process for applicants? Imagine some drunk stumbling up and saying, ‘I’ll take that cute little blond-haired girl over there.’”

We could also describe a similar scenario in the context of cloning human beings. Someday this will be possible, but do you really think that it will happen without state regulation? On the contrary, there will be all kinds of regulations. Those doing the cloning will have to ensure that they don’t create human beings who are sick or will be suffering from chronic pain. Cloners will have to provide good reasons for what they are doing — they won’t be allowed to create their own armies, for example, or clone for the sake of personal gratification.

In other words, we don’t permit irresponsible adoption and we wouldn’t permit the irresponsible creation of human life via cloning. Nevertheless, we do permit irresponsible parenthood and creation of life through natural means. Isn’t there a bit of a contradiction there? If people don’t have a right to adopt and don’t have a right to create life via cloning, why do we think that they have a right to create life via sexual reproduction? What is it about the creation of life that would qualify as a “right” in the first place? Surely it can’t be a “right” merely because it is a natural activity.

Even if it is a right, though, no right is absolute. Is there a right to have children who would suffer from serious, painful, and debilitating diseases? Is there a right to have children that is completely decoupled from your responsibility to properly and adequately raise it? These are all very good and interesting questions — questions that are addressed, even if not completely answered, by authors represented in the book.

The Bottom Line

The subject of licensing parents is more likely to attract outrage and derision than serious reflection or debate. This is understandable, but it’s also unfortunate. People have been procreating for millennia without government interference, so why should we start now? The age of a practice is not, however, an argument on behalf of its validity. Perhaps we can do better than our ancestors. Perhaps the arguments in favor of some licensing scheme are better than those against — but you’ll have to seriously listen to and reflect upon them first before you can reach that conclusion.

Should prospective parents have to apply for parental licences? In this post, I want to review the philosophical debate about parental licensing. I start by looking at Hugh LaFollette's now-classic argument in favour of parental licences. This argument was originally published in 1980 in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. *Should Parents Be Licensed?: Debating the Issues*. Prometheus 2004. Would-be teachers are generally required to study fulltime for at least eight months before the state will allow them the responsibility of educating children for six hours a day. "Should Parents be Licensed? Debating the Issues" is a thought-provoking collection of articles by a range of experts in such diverse disciplines as psychiatry, law, health and anthropology. Using a well-balanced approach to the topic, the book focuses on the arguments both for and against licensing and includes some actual proposals for licensing parents. Furthermore, it also explores implications of genetic engineering. *Should Parents Be Licensed?* book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. Would-be teachers are generally required to study fulltime for... Start your review of *Should Parents Be Licensed?: Debating the Issues*. Write a review. Oct 18, 2007 Lauren rated it it was amazing.