

Beckhams a 'bad example' for families

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

role model
inhumane

procreation
notorious

birth control
degradation

taboo
sustainable

draconian
overjoyed

- If you are _____, you are extremely happy.
- A _____ is someone whose behaviour is considered to be a good example for other people to follow.
- A _____ is something that people do not talk about because it is considered offensive or shocking.
- If a law or a policy is described as _____, it is extremely strict and severe.
- _____ is the process of producing babies.
- If something is described as _____, it uses methods that do not damage the environment.
- _____ treatment is very cruel.
- If something is described as _____, it is famous for something bad.
- _____ is the practice of avoiding becoming pregnant or the methods used for this.
- Environmental _____ is the process through which the condition of the environment becomes worse.

2 Find the information

Decide whether these statements are true (T) or false (F). Then check your answers by reading the text.

- David and Victoria Beckham now have five children.
- The world's population today is around seven billion.
- In 1930, the world's population was just one billion.
- By 2050, the world's population will be 14 billion.
- England has the fastest-growing population in Europe.
- China has a one-child policy.

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Tracy McVeigh
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- 1 David and Victoria Beckham may have been overjoyed to welcome their new daughter, Harper Seven, but, according to a growing group of campaigners, the birth of their fourth child make the couple bad role models and environmentally irresponsible. As the world's population is due to hit seven billion, there is an increasing call for the UK to open a public debate about how many children people have.
- 2 Now the Green Party MP, Caroline Lucas, has joined other leading environmentalists in calling for the smashing of what TV zoologist Sir David Attenborough has called the "absurd taboo" in discussing family size in the UK. Lucas said: "We need to have a far greater public debate about population, whether it focuses on improving family planning or reducing global inequality – and looking again at how we address the strain on our natural resources. The absence of an open and honest discussion about this issue means most people don't give much thought to the scale of global population growth in recent years. In 1930, just one or two generations ago, the world's population stood at around two billion. Today it is around seven billion, and by 2050 it is projected to rise by a third to nine billion."
- 3 "We live as if we have three planets instead of just one. It is interesting that public figures, environmental groups and NGOs in general have tended to steer away from population to the extent that it's become a taboo issue. The horrific consequences of China's one-child policy and of other draconian efforts to regulate procreation have, for many, rendered discussion of the subject completely unpalatable. Yet as long as an issue remains a taboo subject where no one talks about it, then there's very little chance of finding the solutions we need."
- 4 It is a view that is being pushed by the UK-based Optimum Population Trust, whose Chief Executive, Simon Ross, is calling for the government to tackle the UK's high rates of accidental pregnancy and to give child benefits and tax credits only for the first two children. "That would send a clear signal that the government will support sustainable families, but after that you are on your own," he said. "There is a big issue there. Family planning is cheap, yet many people don't use it properly and accidental pregnancy rates are very high. We need to change the incentives to make the environmental case that one or two children are fine but three or four are just being selfish."
- 5 "The Beckhams, and others like London mayor Boris Johnson, are very bad role models with their large families. There's no point in people trying to reduce their carbon emissions and then increasing them 100% by having another child," he said. "England is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and the fastest-growing in population terms in Europe. In 15 years we'll have an extra ten million people here."
- 6 Attenborough has attacked the last two UN climate summits in Cancún and Copenhagen for ducking the population issue. Giving the President's Lecture at the Royal Society of Arts in March, he made a passionate speech about how the world's baby-making was damaging the planet and called for every country to have a population policy. "The sooner we stabilize our numbers the sooner we stop running up the down escalator," he said. "Fifty years ago there were about three billion people on Earth. Now there are almost seven billion – almost double – and every one of them needing space. There cannot be more people on this Earth than can be fed."
- 7 The population debate has often been overshadowed by what is seen as the disastrous and often inhumane experiment by China, with its notorious one-child policy, and with sensitivity about being seen to criticize birth rates in underdeveloped countries. But campaigners point to the fact that it is the populations of the

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developed world who use the vast majority of the world's resources.

- 8 Lucas said the Green Party was not afraid to raise the subject because it was "fundamental" to wellbeing. "The lesson to be learned from China is surely that efforts to curb population growth in a way that restricts individual liberty are dangerous and come at huge human cost," she said. "Policies that focus on increasing access to birth control for all who want it, reducing poverty and inequality, improving food security and tackling environmental degradation are where we should be focusing our attention."
- 9 "At its heart, this is a debate about poverty and inequality, as well as about sustainability – and

we believe that strong policies to reduce the yawning gulf between rich and poor should underpin every effort to address it," she said. "I don't believe that government incentives or laws to that effect are what we need. As a richer country, we face different challenges when it comes to population from those in the developing world, where high birth rates are linked to dire poverty and inequality. It's an equally important issue for both richer and poorer nations – this is a global debate which affects us all."

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- Why is family size described as an "absurd taboo"?
 - because it is too shocking to talk about
 - because people find it amusing to talk about it
 - because it is ridiculous that the topic is not discussed
- Why is it unlikely that a solution to the problems of overpopulation will be found easily?
 - because the question of overpopulation is not being discussed
 - because people are living as if they have three planets instead of one
 - because there is no point in people trying to reduce their carbon emissions and then increasing them by having another child
- What approach to population control is supported by the Green Party?
 - introducing a one-child policy like the one in China
 - increasing access to birth control, and reducing poverty and inequality
 - introducing government incentives and laws
- Why are the Beckhams described as "bad role models"?
 - because they have a large family
 - because it is irresponsible to have children
 - because they come from a rich country

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4 Find the word

Find the following words and expressions in the text.

1. a three-word phrasal verb meaning *avoid discussing a particular issue* (para 3)
2. an adjective meaning *unpleasant to think about or accept* (para 3)
3. a verb meaning *avoid something such as a difficult question, issue or duty* (para 6)
4. a five-word expression meaning *making no progress* (para 6)
5. a verb normally used in the passive meaning *be a negative feature or influence that spoils something* (para 7)
6. a verb meaning *limit or control something that is harmful* (para 8)
7. a two-word expression meaning *a very big gap* (para 9)
8. a verb meaning *be an important part of something, allowing it to succeed* (para 9)

5 Two-word expressions

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. carbon | a. resources |
| 2. family | b. growth |
| 3. population | c. poverty |
| 4. taboo | d. emissions |
| 5. natural | e. subject |
| 6. dire | f. planning |

6 Word-building

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

1. The Beckhams have been described as environmentally _____. [RESPONSIBLE]
2. The UK Green Party wants to reduce global _____. [EQUAL]
3. A _____ family is one with two children. [SUSTAIN]
4. China's one-child policy has been described as _____. [DISASTER]
5. England is one of the most _____ populated countries in the world. [DENSE]
6. The UK has very high rates of _____ pregnancy. [ACCIDENT]

7 Discussion

Why is the world's increasing population such a big problem? What, in your opinion, are the best ways of solving this problem?

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KEY

1 Key words

1. overjoyed
2. role model
3. taboo
4. draconian
5. procreation
6. sustainable
7. inhumane
8. notorious
9. birth control
10. degradation

2 Find the information

1. F
2. T
3. F
4. F
5. T
6. T

3 Comprehension check

1. c
2. a
3. b
4. a

4 Find the word

1. steer away from
2. unpalatable
3. duck
4. running up the down escalator
5. overshadow
6. curb
7. yawning gulf
8. underpin

5 Two-word expressions

1. d
2. f
3. b
4. e
5. a
6. c

6 Word-building

1. irresponsible
2. inequality
3. sustainable
4. disastrous
5. densely
6. accidental