



# Let's Talk



## Stem Cells

### The Story

Even as a young girl, Julie had always known that she wanted to have children. Not long after she and David got married they decided to try to have a baby, but after 3 years of trying Julie was still not pregnant. Feeling quite frightened and worried they went to see Dr Maxwell, their GP. After lots of hospital visits and many disappointments, Julie and David decided to try in vitro fertilisation (IVF). They did not find it easy to make the decision to try IVF - David, who was a Catholic, felt worried about some of the issues surrounding what they were doing but he knew how much having a child meant to Julie. Tough times followed but they were lucky and eventually had 2 healthy children, Andrew and Marie. Both Julie and David were very happy with their family and felt very fortunate.

Julie was keen to try to have more children and although David did feel that perhaps two children was enough he agreed to go back to the fertility clinic. This time they saw a Doctor James who said that it would be possible to try IVF one more time. They all agreed that this would be the last time to try to increase their family. Julie and David still had some of their frozen fertilised embryos at the clinic and so they made plans for Julie to have one of these embryos implanted in her womb. Doctor James mentioned that there would probably still be some embryos left over and wondered if they would be willing to donate them to a new stem cell programme which the clinic had started up.

As soon as they started to talk things through they felt even more unsure about what was the right way forward. In many ways, the stem cell programme sounded as if it would bring great hope for people suffering from incurable diseases. Dr James said that they would be making a very valuable contribution to society.

Julie felt that if they were not going to use the embryos themselves, perhaps this would be a positive thing to do, rather than the embryos ending up being destroyed. She felt that they had been helped to have children by medical research so this might be a way of giving something back. David felt very mixed up; he started to think that if the embryos were still viable maybe they could give the embryos to another infertile couple who could not produce their own embryos. They agreed to leave it for a while and talk to some other people.

David went to talk to his priest, Father Daniel, and he explained that the Catholic Church was very much against any research being done on embryos. Julie worked in a legal office and she asked one of her colleagues, Ian Brodie, about the legal position of the embryos and what would happen if David and Julie could not agree on a course of action.