

Come on Mr. Blair, tell us! Or should he?

This is an exercise in assessing arguments. You will look at two opposing arguments, and try to evaluate them.

The boxes below show extracts from two newspaper articles. Each extract contains an argument. The first writer takes one side of the debate, the second writer takes the other side. Read both extracts carefully then answer the questions below.

Argument one

"The Blairs at one moment teach their ambassadorial infant to lisp "happy birthday" to visiting statesmen, and at the next become damagingly tight-lipped about whether, faced with the common dilemma over MMR, they took the risk which the government asks the rest of us to take. Privacy is not an issue here: he's too small to care.

Meanwhile it must be said as gently as possible that while it is not our business if Leo Blair has had the vaccination, it most definitely is our business if he hasn't.

Like it or not, public perception is that the Prime Minister has good sources of information. If the Ministry of Defence supplies notes for a teenager's coursework, we are entitled to assume that the Blairs' personal decision about vaccination was equally well-informed. The question must be annoying, but because of the deep universal bond between all who share the feelings of personhood, it has to be asked."

(The Times 7th January 2002)

Argument two

"It has been argued that since the government supports the use of MMR, the Prime Minister and other ministers should inform the public whether their own children have been vaccinated. This is entirely wrong. The privacy of the Blair family must be respected.

The Prime Minister is right to argue that if he yields to pressure to reveal whether his son has been vaccinated it would be impossible to resist pressure to answer inquiries about compliance with other public health campaigns, including those against smoking and in favour of safe sex.

Since children with certain serious diseases, including untreated cancer, should not be given the MMR vaccine, a minister might find his or her family forced to publish details of serious illness."

(The Times 24th December 2001)

- 1 Which writer do you agree with?
- 2 What is that writer arguing for?
- 3 What are that writer's reasons for saying what he says?
- 4 What is the other writer arguing for?
- 5 What are that writer's reasons for saying what he is saying?
- 6 Do you think it is odd that both writers are writing for the same newspaper given that they disagree with each other?