

THE FUTURE OF JUDAISM

The Children of Intermarriage



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72%

of non-Orthodox Jews who married since 2000 married someone from a different faith background



51%

of young Jewish adults have one Jewish parent

Since the Pew Report more than two years ago, it has been clear that the non-Orthodox Jewish community is increasingly an intermarried community. Seventy-two percent of non-Orthodox Jews who married since 2000 married someone from a different faith background. Half of young Jewish adults have one Jewish parent.

Anyone who wants to see Jewish traditions thrive into the future must recognize that it will not happen unless we seize the opportunity to engage interfaith families in Jewish life and communities.

Positive news on this front emerged in October 2015 with an important new study by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis, *Millennial Children of Inter marriage*, funded by the Alan B. Slifka Foundation. The main focus of the study is to show the positive impact of participation in Jewish activities during college (Birthright, Hillel, etc.) on millennial children of intermarriage.

But the study has important implications for Jewish experiences in childhood too. It reports that, for the most part, **the fact that their parents are intermarried does not have direct impact on the current behaviors and attitudes of young adults, but Jewish experiences in childhood do. If their parents expose them to**

Jewish experiences in childhood, then they are much more comparable to the children of inmarriage.

The study includes the important policy implication that “reaching more intermarried families with formal and informal educational opportunities for their children should be a priority. Such experiences launch children on a pathway to Jewish involvement in college and beyond.”

I believe that the goal of having children of intermarried families exposed to Jewish education is best served by a process that involves “trusted advisors.” These advisors would:

- Build relationships with interfaith couples.
- Offer assistance for interfaith couples (if needed) to find Jewish clergy officiants for their life cycle events.
- Make opportunities for new couples and new parents to talk with each other and skilled professionals about how to make decisions about religious traditions.
- Provide engaging resources and low-barrier educational programs for parents on raising young children with Judaism in interfaith families.

Furthermore, trusted advisors who are rabbis are in a unique position to overcome any negative experiences interfaith couples may have had, and make recommendations that couples connect with synagogues and

other Jewish groups. If this process works, by the time children of interfaith families are ready for formal and informal education, their parents will be much more likely to choose Jewish education for them.

For many years we have surveyed people in interfaith relationships about what attracts them to Jewish life and communities. In order of importance, thousands have replied that they are attracted by explicit statements that interfaith families are welcome, inclusive policies on participation by interfaith families, invitations to learn about Judaism as compared to invitations to convert, the presence of other interfaith families, the offering of programming and groups specifically for interfaith couples, and officiation by rabbis at weddings of interfaith couples. Our surveys, and surveys by other Jewish organizations of which we are aware, show that interfaith couples still report experiences of negative attitudes and disinviting behaviors as barriers to their expanded connection to Jewish life. These findings provide a roadmap for what Jewish communities can do to increase engagement by local interfaith families.

For reasons not clear to us, the *Millennial Children of Inter marriage* study questions whether it is possible to dramatically alter the status quo regarding the childhood religious socialization of children of intermarriage. I believe that it is.

EDMUND CASE is the founder of **InterfaithFamily**, a Jewish non-profit focused exclusively on interfaith families. **InterfaithFamily's** award-winning website, **WWW.INTERFAITHFAMILY.COM**, and **IFF's Your Community** model now operate in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. **InterfaithFamily** builds relationships and provides resources, services, and programs designed to engage interfaith families in Jewish life.