



What to do When the Baby Arrives: Tips for Inclusive Naming Ceremonies

The birth of a child opens up a whole array of religious decisions to be made. Will you have a religious ceremony to mark the occasion? If so, where, when, and what will it look like?

Even interfaith couples who had agreed on religious issues before may find the situation more complicated with the arrival of their baby...when decisions made in the abstract suddenly become real. Sometimes a partner, who felt that religion didn't really matter and that he would be okay raising his child with no religion, suddenly very much wants his son to have a brit, a ritual circumcision, as he himself did. Often times, parents have to contend with and navigate the opinions, beliefs and feelings of extended family members. For many, the naming ceremony is the first event that demonstrates to one partner's family that the child will be raised outside their religion.

Here are some tips from InterfaithFamily.com (www.interfaithfamily.com), an independent non-profit publisher and advocacy membership association, on how to hold inclusive baby naming ceremonies.

1. Naming can be a significant issue. What will you name the child? Will it be named after a living or non-living relative? What if the father is a Jr. and wants his son to be the third, and his wife is Jewish and believes strongly against naming a child after a living relative? These are very important things to consider. For example, choosing a name that cultivates and conveys the child's religious identity while respecting both parents' ancestries can be a profound responsibility.
2. The most helpful way to approach this discussion is for couples to share religious memories, articulate what it is about those memories that are most important, and see how they can offer their child that most important experience.
3. Non-denominational naming or welcoming ceremonies can be meaningful without invoking or excluding either family's religious tradition. Writing for InterfaithFamily.com, author Anita Diamant said, "These can be virtually secular or they may invoke inclusive religious values and language by using readings from Song of Songs or Psalms, for example. It's a good idea to be clear about metaphors and symbols. Water rituals, in particular, can be confusing. For Christians, baptismal water is a sign of identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus and a symbol of welcome to the Christian community. Jewish baby ceremonies that use water (sometimes the baby's hands and/or feet are washed, an echo of biblical scenes of welcome) signify the child's entry into the Jewish covenant (brit) with God."
4. If you decide to have a ceremony that is either Christian or Jewish, be sensitive to your extended family's feelings. In planning any naming ceremony, parents should explain the significance of the event, and consider including grandparents or other close family members in a baptism ceremony or non-Jewish family members in the celebration, if not in the ceremony itself. There are many ways to include non-Jewish family members in a brit. Typically, both parents do readings about the choice

of the child's name. Both sets of grandparents can be given ceremonial honors, such as carrying the baby into the room, and/or reading a poem or non-denominational prayer for the child. At the same time, remember that non-Jewish grandparents may not feel comfortable at a brit. So you can offer them a role, but don't insist.

5. If you're planning on a brit for your son, ask the mohel, a Jew ordained to do circumcision, if he or she can integrate the needs of an interfaith couple. Can the mohel help plan roles for non-Jews in the ceremony?
6. Couples should thank one another for the sacrifices and compromises made in terms of religion and should make every effort to ensure that both partners are comfortable with and feel a part of the religious experiences they share. That sense of comfort may also have to take into account extended family. For example, one couple who had agreed to raise Christian children decided not to have godparents, even though it was a family tradition. They wanted to respect each other but also wanted to prevent Jewish family members, who could not be godparents, from feeling left out.
7. Regardless of which religion they choose, couples should begin to actively observe rituals and traditions before the child is born if they hope to raise the child according to those traditions. For example, couples often say, "When the baby comes, we'll start lighting Shabbat candles." But if they start now, couples can establish a routine and it will be easier to continue despite the stress and busyness of having a newborn at home.
8. According to S. Courtney Nathan, a clinical social worker specializing in work with interfaith families, "whatever your situation, remember that you are entering into a beautiful stage of life, becoming a true family. You will have enormous responsibility and opportunity and must take it very seriously. While making religious decisions at this time is not easy, it will pave the way for an easier future for everyone."

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