

6 Tips for Interfaith Families Facing the High Holidays

Created by InterfaithFamily

1. Since family meals are universal, inviting in-laws and their families to join in the holiday meals can serve to focus on the commonalities of your traditions. Overtime, these gatherings become part of the year's cycle of the extended family. They become familiar. Try to cook traditional foods eaten on that holiday. If you don't have recipes, you can find them on the Internet. Or you can invite close friends, both Jewish and/or non-Jewish.
2. Try to involve each member of your family in the holiday. On Rosh Hashanah, you can begin new family traditions by discussing as a family how to make the year a better one, how you as a family want to grow. Come up with three or four ways you can attain your goals. On Yom Kippur, you can talk about how you as a family have "missed the mark" and what you can do to repair any wounds.
3. If your spouse doesn't like to attend temple with you, try to create a group for others in your situation. Set up a certain area in the synagogue where you can all sit together. The seating area could also welcome widowed, divorced or single members of the temple. Another option is to join a "havurah" (informal study and worship group) that will sit together.
4. If your spouse would go to temple but doesn't understand how the service is put together, why certain prayers are said, and what the Hebrew means, ask your rabbi to hold a special learning service for people in that situation (which could also include Jewish members). At that special service, the rabbi can explain the different elements in the service, the Hebrew, and the overall goal of the service, and also answer questions.
5. If you are the Jewish partner, remember that your spouse may be feeling uncomfortable with the traditions, the synagogue and all your family members. So, pay attention to your partner, explain as much as possible to him/her, and appreciate your spouse's willingness to participate.
6. If you don't usually attend synagogue and your partner can't understand why you want to now, you can explain that for many Jews in this country, attending High Holiday services (particularly the first evening service of Yom Kippur) is a way of affirming that we still are part of the Jewish people. We still care about being Jewish – even if we're not very religious and are not sure how we feel about the content of those services. For many American Jews, Jewish identity is primarily ethnic, cultural or communal, as opposed to religious.

For additional resources on High Holidays, visit <http://www.interfaithfamily.com/highholidays>.