

Tips for Parents of Children Who Are Intermarrying

From the Staff of InterfaithFamily.com

When you first learn that your child is--or might be--marrying someone who's not Jewish, you may not feel like celebrating. This can be a difficult and stressful occasion instead of the joyous one you had hoped for. To help you, InterfaithFamily.com has compiled a series of tips from people whose own children have intermarried as well as outreach professionals and counselors. We'd like to thank the following contributors for many of these tips: S. Courtney Nathan, Ruth Nemzoff, Karen Kushner, Raquel Stabinski-Leib, Ed Olhava and Phoebe Lewitt, Marlene Beach, Phoebe F. Kerness, Paulette Mann, Jim Keen and Sam Osherson.

1. When your child first tells you about her engagement, congratulate her and express your love for her. First impressions are very powerful, and if you react coldly to the news, your child may remember your response for a long time.
2. As soon as you have an opportunity, congratulate your child's partner and express your love for him. This can be a powerful way to welcome your child's partner into your family.
3. Treat your child as an adult. If he feels that you are speaking to him as one adult to another, and not as an anxious parent to a child, he'll be more receptive of your opinions.
4. Assume that your child has good judgment. If you think she is ignoring something, don't tell her. *Ask her if she has thought of it.* You won't always agree, but knowing that she and her partner are thinking things through will help. Don't lecture or be judgmental.
5. Accept your child's partner for who he is. Pushing people to be different creates resistance to change. People are much more likely to change when they feel respected and accepted.
6. Remember that it's not your "fault." If your child chooses a partner of a different religion, it's not because you didn't give her a strong Jewish identity or because she's rejecting you. She's choosing a partner of a different religion because she fell in love with the partner, and the partner's religion--or your parenting--had very little to do with that decision.
7. Learn about your child's partner's religion and background. The more you know about where your child's partner came from, the better you will understand your child's and his partner's religious decisions. If you are knowledgeable about your child's partner's religion, it's more likely your child will listen to your perspective. Notice any and all similarities between their values and your Jewish values and discuss these similarities with your child's fiancé and her family.
8. Let your child know you want to be involved in her life. Ask what her plans are and ask to be included and informed. Be truthful about what you would like but understand that your wishes won't always be fulfilled.
9. Be honest about your feelings for Judaism and talk about them. Let your child and her partner hear how Judaism works in your life and why it has an important place for you. Before you discuss what Judaism

means to you, it may be helpful to make a list of those Jewish practices and values which are meaningful to you. Once you clarify for yourself where your commitments to the Jewish religion and the Jewish people lie, you are better able to communicate with your children on this important and sensitive subject. Also be honest about your doubts and complaints about Judaism.

10. Invite your child and his partner to share in your holiday observances and celebrations, and to accompany you to temple when you go. Invite them to help you prepare for these occasions, thus providing an opportunity to teach about the holidays, their rituals and symbolic foods. You can be an ambassador to Judaism.
11. Celebrate your child and her partner's efforts to participate in Jewish rituals. Don't criticize them for not observing the way you do.
12. If possible, invite your child's partner's family for a small gathering just before or just after the wedding. Both are good opportunities to share your mutual joy over your children's wedding.
13. If your child is having an interfaith wedding ceremony, offer to help with one of the interfaith aspects, like helping them find someone who will create an interfaith ketubah. This gesture of acceptance can create a lot of good will.
14. Don't bring up grandchildren immediately. Your child has enough to worry about with planning a wedding, and this may add to the stress level or touch on a sore subject between you and him. However, if your child and his partner have started talking about children, it is OK to offer your input about how you would like them raised. Our children do want to please us, and gently explaining your wishes can affect your child's decisions.

