

Four Questions About Parenting Jewishly Today

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Parenting Through a Jewish Lens (PTJL) believes in meeting parents “where they’re at,” creating supportive, non-judgmental experiences that help families—both children and adults—make choices informed by Jewish teachings and traditions that feel authentic and meaningful to them. Here are four questions to help every parent on their journey.

Why does parenting today seem harder than in the past?

In the era of 24/7 social media, parents often feel confused and pressured by the deluge of parenting opinions and advice. How do I prevent and handle temper tantrums? What about sibling fights? How do I parent in the age of social media? How can I fortify my child to bounce back from pitfalls and setbacks? How do I raise my child to be a mensch?

Discipline may also confound parents; with yelling described as the new spanking, parents can feel confused and guilty. Talking about challenges with a friend or a group of supportive parents can help us realize that we are not alone in feeling unsure about our parenting decisions. Many of us find comfort in accepting that we don’t need to—and indeed cannot be—perfect, and aim instead for being “good enough” parents.

Why do kids ask such hard questions?

Young children challenge us with their amazing questions: Where is God? What happens when people die? Why do I have to die? Why don’t we celebrate the same way that my friends and cousins do? Or they may just keep asking, “Why?” Parents want advice on what to say, especially if they don’t consider themselves spiritual or religious. And in interfaith families, questions about practices and beliefs may feel particularly loaded. Honest conversations between parents about these tough queries can be hard to come by, even for parents who are affiliated with a congregation or a Jewish day school. Parents can benefit from processing their own concerns with other thoughtful adults. Having a chance to figure out their views and discern their values before the hard questions come up can be extremely valuable.

Does parenting get easier as your children get older?

It gets...different. Parents of tweens and teens need support too, just in a different way. According to a recent study, mothers of middle school-age students suffer from depression more than mothers of children of any other ages—even more than parents of newborns. With tweens and teens beginning the process of separation, parents struggle with how to respond; like their children, parents undergo their own identity shifts. In *Parenting Your Tween Through a Jewish Lens* we introduce the concept of tzimtzum, which literally means “contraction.” According to tradition, God contracted to make space for creation. We encourage parents to consider how to consciously “contract” in a way that works for them, and at the same time honors their tweens’ and teens’ growing independence.

How can Jewish tradition inform our parenting today?

The idea that Jewish tradition offers thousands of years of wisdom can comfort today’s parents, who are

relieved to be reminded that parenting challenges date back millennia. After all, Adam and Eve didn't have the easiest job with their kids.

In the first session of PTJL, we explore the “joys and oys” of parenthood—allowing parents to acknowledge their challenges while also exploring traditional Jewish teachings to bring joy into our parenting lives. For one father, the chaos of getting small children fed and out the door in the morning became the unlikely chance to pause and reflect on gratitude. One mother shared that participating in PTJL was like “hitting reset” on her day-to-day life; she created a “Blessing for the Home” that reflected her family’s unique needs and ideals, and helped them keep their core values more present in their home. For other parents, hearing how different families observed Jewish practices helped them be more confident in what they did—or didn’t do—for Shabbat.

Written by Erica Streit-Kaplan of Parenting Through a Jewish Lens at Hebrew College for JewishBoston, March 2019.