



Jewish Unity for Multiple Parenting

Campaigning for Improved Relationships Between Divorced Parents & Children in the Jewish Community

Press Release

For Immediate Distribution

29 December 2006

JUMP Launches Parenting Plans Booklet

Today, Jewish Unity for Multiple Parenting (JUMP) launches its Parenting Plans Booklet. This has been the culmination of over two years of work to develop a publication that aims to specifically assist Jewish parents in coping with the challenges of parenting after their relationship breakdown. It highlights the importance for parents to reach agreement on parenting time and other arrangements for their children.

JUMP has had much valued support, advice and encouragement for this Parenting Plans Booklet from a broad spectrum of the Jewish community, including Rabbis, legal and family experts. JUMP is also indebted to the Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks and the Chairman of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Henry Grunwald QC, who have both supported the work JUMP has done through discussion of parenting issues and by providing a foreword to this publication.

This Parenting Plans Booklet has been written to provide additional support specifically for Jewish parents to supplement that already provided in the [Department for Education and Skills \(DfES\) Parenting Plans](#)¹ published in February 2006, and is intended to be used jointly with this DfES document. For

¹ http://www.orderprocessor.co.uk/files/273033_NewParentBk.pdf



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the first time, Jewish parents considering turning to the Family Courts to resolve parenting difficulties, will have clear and supported Jewish parenting guidelines as to the issues they need to consider in sharing precious parenting time with their children. The aim is that this will help them avoid the significant pitfalls and difficulties many other Jewish parents have experienced in the past with making parenting time arrangements, particularly in emotionally charged times.

The addition of specific religious and cultural issues included in the JUMP Parenting Plans Booklet may also help other faiths and groups to prepare their own guidelines to address issues that are important to them that are not covered in the DfES publication.

This JUMP initiative has been borne out of the struggles that a number of its members have experienced trying to remain fully involved in their children's lives following the breakdown of the relationship with the other parent. We hope and pray that this publication will help and support many other parents and children in maintaining a positive and loving relationship together.

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Notes to Editor

About JUMP (Jewish Unity for Multiple Parenting)

JUMP is a voluntary Jewish support and lobby group that aims to improve parenting time arrangements for the non-resident parent to see their children following separation and divorce. JUMP strives to improve parent-child relationships from a religious, social and legal perspective for those parents who find themselves in this heartbreaking situation. Essentially, the aim is for both parents to be recognised as equal parents who are fully supported throughout all areas of the Jewish community. JUMP has developed relationships with a number of Rabbis and social, medical and legal representatives to obtain as much support and guidance for its initiatives.

In addition, an ongoing dialogue with the Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks, has shown that he is supportive of both parents maintaining a very positive role in their children's lives following separation and divorce as confirmed by his Office's written evidence submitted to the Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry in January 2005 (see Appendix 1).

JUMP has also built positive links with all the key UK national parent and grandparent organisations in this arena including Families Need Fathers (FNF), Fathers Direct, Equal Parenting Coalition (EPC), Mothers Apart from Their Children (MATCH) and Parent and Abducted Children Together (PACT). JUMP will continue to work with these organisations to lobby for legal change to achieve:

- A transformation in the culture of parenting for separated and divorced parents to meet the needs of 21st century family life



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- A legal presumption of co-parenting together with a recommendation for a minimum acceptable amount of parenting time for children to spend with both parents following separation/divorce and for children to spend time with grandparents and their extended family
- An effective early intervention programme prior to Court proceedings together with the use of parenting education and formalised parenting plans
- Greater sanctions for parents who do not abide by Court Orders relating to parenting time arrangements and who fabricate stories regarding the other parent to influence their children to turn away from the other parent

The aim is that with these fundamental changes a growing number of children in the UK will be able to maintain a loving, nurturing and meaningful relationship with **both** parents **and** their extended families. This will hopefully reduce the distress and tension faced by children in adjusting to the ending of their parents' relationship.

JUMP is well aware of recent Government initiatives and proposed new legislation to try to improve relationships between parents and children following separation and divorce and has provided responses to the following Government and Law Society documents and consultations:

- Government Green Paper on Parental Separation, July 2004²
- Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the UK Family Law System, January 2005

² Parental Separation: Children's Needs And Parents' Responsibilities – Next Steps
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/childrensneeds/docs/ParentalSeparation.pdf>



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- Draft Children (Contact) & Adoption Bill, February 2005³
- 2nd Edition of the Law Society's Family Law Protocol, February 05
- DfES Parenting Plans Document Review, April 2005
- House of Lords Review of the Children (Contact) & Adoption Bill, June - November 2005⁴
- CAF/CASS 'Every Day Matters' Consultation Paper, October 2005, - January 2006
- DCA Consultation on Improving Transparency & Privacy in Family Courts July - October 2006

³ Draft Children (Contact) and Adoption Bill (Volume I) 12 April 2005
<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/it200405/itselect/itchildcon/100/100.pdf>
Joint Committee on The Draft Children (Contact) and Adoption Bill [Written Evidence](#), Memorandum by Jewish Unity for Multiple Parenting <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/it200405/itselect/itchildcon/100/100we20.htm>

⁴ <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/ld199697/ldhansrd/pdvn/allbills.htm#>

office of the CHIEF RABBI

Office of the Chief Rabbi – Written Submission

Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry on Family Justice: The Family Courts.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Office of the Chief Rabbi (OCR) welcomes the opportunity to submit some brief comments to the inquiry of the Constitutional Affairs Committee.

1.2. The Office of the Chief Rabbi is the religious authority of the United Hebrew Congregation of Britain and the Commonwealth. In total, it is responsible for over 150 synagogue communities in the UK, including just under half in the United Synagogue, the largest synagogical membership body in the UK. The Chief Rabbi is also the head of his own Court of judges, whom deal with matters of Jewish law, including Jewish divorce. Jewish law insists that there needs to be a religious as well as civil divorce when a couple separate.

1.3. The OCR wishes to emphasise the importance of involving both parents in the raising of their children. Children deserve the chance to develop a relationship with both their natural parents.

1.4. Families are the building-block of society, and Jewish law and tradition highlights the centrality of the family to Jewish life. The Jewish tradition highlights the importance of family in the religious domain. The first commandment in the Bible is to have children. The survival of the Jews through thousands of years of dispersion was partly due to the strength of family life. However, the centrality of the nuclear family as an institution has been eroded. The breakdown of the family unit is an unfortunate feature of modern society, and in situations where this occurs, we must do everything possible to protect the interests of the children.

2. The role of both parents in the raising of children:

2.1. The Chief Rabbi has spoken publicly about the importance of children receiving support and attention from both parents, and since fatherhood is usually the neglected part of the equation in situations of breakdown, the uniqueness of fatherhood to the human species: "It's actually fatherhood that makes humanity different from most primate species. Usually it's the females who look after the young, while a few weeks after birth many males don't even recognise their own children. Motherhood is biological and almost always strong. Fatherhood is cultural and almost always in need of support. In fact I suspect that's why the Bible so often speaks of G-d as a father - not because G-d is male, nor in order to create a patriarchal society, but simply to moralise and dignify

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paternal responsibility. Like a good father G-d cares about his children. He protects them, listens to their hopes and fears, and when they turn to Him, He's there. Which is why we need to support both parents, even when they split apart. Children need time with both; and it's their needs that really count."

2.2. Each parent has something different to give to their children to contribute to their religious, educational, emotional, social and material needs, and it is important that both parents have the opportunity to give their children time.

2.3. When couples come to the Court of the Office of the Chief Rabbi for a divorce according to Jewish law, where appropriate they are encouraged to bear in mind the impact of separation on the children and the specific roles mothers and fathers have in their child's Jewish and general upbringing.

3. Jewish Tradition and Practice

3.1. In determining the rights of parental access to children, there are specific factors which stem from the beliefs and traditions of faith communities which need to be considered. The law refers to "meaningful contact", and this is given a particular context by the traditions and practices of faith communities.

3.2. The Jewish religion places a high premium on people spending time with their families and communities on specific occasions. These include the Sabbath (Shabbat) and festivals, where a child learns some of the most cherished practices, traditions and customs of the Jewish faith. In Judaism, there are certain commandments incumbent on men and certain incumbent on women, and therefore the child will only have a full Jewish experience, if he/ she witnesses both the mother and father practising the commandments.

For example on Simchat Torah, "the Rejoicing of the Law", which takes place at the end of Tabernacles in the autumn, children are encouraged to come to synagogue and celebrate the completion of the reading of the Torah. Another example relates to the festive meal eaten at Passover, where a child has a special role to ask questions relating to the Exodus from Egypt. Each week, the Sabbath has a very special place in the Jewish tradition and it can teach the child to appreciate the value of his/her heritage and provide the opportunity to spend time with family members and the community.

3.3. In Judaism, there are major restrictions concerning travel on Sabbaths (between sunset on Friday and nightfall on Saturday) and on major Jewish festivals, and these should be borne in mind when making access orders, particularly with regard to overnight stays.

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3.4. In addition to festivals and holy days, it is important for children to be able to experience life cycle events (both their own and those of relatives), and this will be facilitated by exposure to the families and social networks of both parents. Such life cycle events include weddings and Bar/ Bat Mitvahs (when a Jewish child comes of age and takes on the responsibilities of being an adult). It is therefore crucial that both parents are able to spend time with their children and share these experiences and occasions with them.

3.5. Looking at the cases of parental separation in the Jewish community, it is usually the mother that gains primary custody to the children, yet the father may be the main source of potential Jewish experiences to the child. In these situations, there is the prospect of the child being denied exposure to Jewish learning and education, which underscores the importance of both parents being involved in the child's upbringing.

3.6. Jewish tradition highlights the importance of family ties, and only by maintaining contact with both parents, will children be able to sustain relationships with both sets of grandparents and other relatives.

4. Closing remarks:

4.1. Of course, we are advocating the right of access to children for both parents on the basis that both parents are responsible, law-abiding citizens. Where this is not the case, the Courts will have to make a judgment on the safety of the children spending time with the relevant parent.

4.2. The Chief Rabbi's Office has received representations from the Jewish parents group, JUMP, who are seeking to maintain contact with their children following separation and divorce. We broadly support their aims and objectives.

4.3. Parenthood is a privilege but also a huge responsibility. Parents have a duty to children, as vulnerable members of society, to protect them and nurture them to adulthood. Hence it is the firm view of the OCR and the Chief Rabbi himself that both parents of the child, have a right to be involved in the child's upbringing (unless proven otherwise) and can make a contribution to their religious, educational, emotional, social and material welfare.