

TEN WAYS TO STOP AN INTERMARRIAGE

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Children are a precious blessing. Tragically, however, too many of us realize just how precious they are only after it is too late - when they are lost to intermarriage, cults, and assimilation. But intermarriage CAN be prevented; it is the obligation of every concerned Jew to know what can be done. The following ten guidelines have been developed through four decades of experience, in our desperate struggle to reverse this disastrous trend. Study them. They may just help you save a Jewish child.

1) Take an active interest in your children. Maintain an ongoing dialogue with them, and express your genuine concern. Ask them what they are doing, what they think, how they feel... and share your own dreams and disappointments with them. Don't let your child become a stranger in your own home.

2) Don't permit dating non-Jews. Not even casually, "for the fun of it." It is an indisputable fact that our society condones and encourages promiscuity. We often delude ourselves into thinking that our children have enough awareness and self-control to avoid serious involvements with non-Jews. Today's frightening intermarriage statistics - in many places, as high as fifty percent - prove the fallacy of that attitude.

3) Encourage Jewish activities. Encourage your child, gently, to get involved in a Jewish youth group. A positive, stimulating Jewish environment can help establish a strong Jewish identity. But be selective. There are some activities or programs, in which certain Jewish centers, for example, also cater to large numbers of non Jews in their cultural, social and sports activities.

4) Do send your children to a school where there is a positive Jewish environment. For many Jewish families, the day a child goes away to college is the beginning of the end. Young men and women who are suddenly let loose in a multi-cultural "melting pot" rarely hold fast to their own ethnic identities. This is especially true on the college campus, where intellectual stimulation can fan the flames of undesirable social entanglements.

5) Keep your eye on the bookshelf. Make a point of knowing what kind of books and magazines your children are reading. Literature that is obviously missionary or cult-oriented are not the only things to watch for; even innocent-looking books

on non-Jewish philosophy, or eastern mysticism, or "alternative lifestyles" can be a warning signal. Behind such curiosity there often lies a budding relationship. But be careful not to be a fanatical censor. Be prepared to discuss your child's interests intelligently and openly, while expressing your concern in no uncertain terms.

6) Where there's smoke, there's fire. At the first sign of trouble, run for help. Turn to a rabbi, or a relative, or friends from the child's peer group who can have a positive influence. Don't put it off, don't wear blinders and imagine that "it can't happen here," and don't rely solely on your own strength as a parent. Difficult though this is to admit, you may be the LEAST effective person to convince your child he or she is making a mistake.

7) Don't accept the relationship as a fait accompli. Too many parents, when a child comes home with a non-Jewish fiancée, throw up their hands and give in to what they feel is an irreversible decision. It is never too late. Intermarriages have been broken off even after the engagement party, and even in families where the children long ago stopped giving credence to their parents' desires. It is not easy, but only when you give up is it impossible. Keep trying.

8) Avoid a fight. It is all too easy for a "rational" discussion about a proposed intermarriage to deteriorate into a screaming match. A pitched battle with emotions running amok is the worst thing that can happen. It often becomes just the excuse the child was looking for to reject his parents once and for all. You should not try to hide your feelings, but neither should you allow emotions to destroy your ability to communicate.

9) Don't feel obligated to attend the ceremony. Your refusal to participate in the wedding CAN be the strongest possible statement against your child's proposed intermarriage. It might be the key to awakening him or her to the seriousness of his actions. Be sure, however, to explain clearly, and if possible, calmly, why you have decided not to be there, and that this does not change the love for him or her.

10) Always leave an open door. When a parent makes categorical demands upon a child, the child often becomes more stubborn and inflexible. If you are to have any influence at all, you must consistently demonstrate your respect for the child's ability to make the right decisions. Words that come from the heart will penetrate into the heart. With G-d's help, you will succeed.