



Reaching Families Right from the Start

PJ Library now partners with professional mohels, introducing young Jewish families to the gift of beautiful Jewish books.

BY NAAMA KRAUZ, ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

When Leandra and Adam Kol first met via a Facebook group for single vegans, they had no idea they would soon find themselves happily married, about to purchase a new house, and snuggled up with their infant son Josh as they navigated the newness of Jewish parenting.

Leandra converted to Judaism after being drawn to it for years and has joyfully leaned on Adam's family to help envision their son's Jewish upbringing. Their first step? Hiring a mohel to perform a bris, the ritual circumcision traditionally done when a baby boy is 8 days old. When Mohelet Elise Leonard, M.D., arrived at the Kols' Hollywood, Florida, home last October, she brought a surprise — a PJ Library swag bag stuffed with board books, a PJ Library lunch bag, baby items, and sign-up information for the family.

Mohels, doctors, rabbis, and doulas can all help families bring Judaism into their homes.

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KATIE SLATER

"Receiving the PJ Library bag was such a nice gift we weren't expecting," recalls Leandra. "Having the bag there as a reminder to sign Josh up for PJ Library during the chaos of the first few weeks after having a newborn was fantastic."

PJ Library is constantly seeking out new ways to reach young families. That's why the organization has embarked on a new initiative: engaging mohels, rabbis, and pediatricians across the US and Canada to become PJ Library ambassadors. Through these strategic partnerships, PJ Library can reach families from the birth of their child and welcome them into the PJ Library community with a uniquely personal touch.

The goal? To help more families get an early start building a strong Jewish identity for their children with the help of PJ Library stories and resources.

“What else can I do to help clients raising Jewish families? It can’t get better than PJ Library.”

—Mohel Michael Blum, D.O.

“One of the first ways families can start their Jewish journeys begins with a mohel,” says Sara Kibel, director of community engagement for PJ Library in the UK, who conceived of the partnership. “If that mohel can gift families a book and subscription information, it will enable the family to have a monthly dose of Judaism right from the start.”

In 2019, Kibel began handing out PJ Library books to mohels, hoping they would gift them to families welcoming baby boys with a bris. Mohels soon started contacting Kibel to request more books as they ran out. UK mohels handed out 250 books in 2023 and are on track to surpass that number in 2024.

Following the success of the UK program, the US initiative launched in 2022. PJ Library has so far partnered with more than 100 mohels and sent nearly 1,700 gift bags to be distributed to families in the US and Canada. The team hopes to expand its reach through relationships with professional organizations including the National Organization of American Mohalim/Mohalot (NOAM, a program of the Union for Reform Judaism), Brit Kodesh (a program of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism), and a network of Orthodox mohels.

“Mohels support families during the milestone of welcoming a new child,” says PJ Library outreach officer Kayla Reisman, who spearheads the mohel project in the US and Canada. “Through our partnership, they can bring families the gift that keeps on giving: an ongoing subscription to PJ Library.”

It’s not only baby boys who benefit. PJ Library also reaches families welcoming infant girls by partnering with doulas, doctors, and rabbis who help spread the word at appointments and baby-naming ceremonies. Alison Goldberg, engagement lead for PJ Library in New York, is proud of the 20 mohels and doulas who share the gift of PJ Library with new parents they meet in the greater New York region. One of them shared, “I am honored to be a *shaliach* (emissary) for PJ Library. It is a great cause.”

Mohels say that no matter how connected their clients are to their local Jewish community, they are eager to seek meaningful Jewish resources once a new baby arrives.

Mohelet Sarah Grope, M.D., says she has worked with interfaith families in Denver, Colorado, who are excited to learn about PJ Library. “One family said to me, ‘This has been amazing! I didn’t know about all the Shabbat symbols, but then we got this Shabbat board book, and now I know. I got to learn with my child without feeling embarrassed that I didn’t know these things,’” Grope shares.

In Toronto, Ontario, Mohel Aubie Diamond, M.D., has handed out over 150 PJ Library bags to families. “Giving families the gift of PJ Library at the beginning of their parenting journey means they are going to start reading Jewish concepts about family and values,” he says. “It gives the family a chance to learn from the children — from the bottom up instead of the top down.”

As a member of partner organization NOAM, Dallas, Texas, mohel and pediatrician Michael Blum, D.O., appreciates the opportunity to spread the word about PJ Library — especially to grandparents. As a grandfather himself, he knows children eagerly snuggle into their grandparents’ laps for storytime, creating crucial moments of connection for Jewish families. “As a mohel, this is a wonderful way to help these families bring Judaism into their homes,” Blum says. “As a pediatrician, promoting Jewish literacy is an extension of my ability to help young Jewish families.”

For the Kol family, PJ Library books offer a dual benefit: They allow Adam to reconnect with the Jewish joy of his youth and provide a gateway for Leandra to continue her own Jewish growth.

“Consistency is very important to us,” says Leandra. “Josh will be raised with Jewish values, so having a nightly tradition of reinforcing our Judaism allows us to continue our own Jewish learning while bonding with our son. Even now more than before, given what’s going on in the world, we’re looking forward to giving Josh a strong Jewish foundation.”

Families who discover PJ Library through their mohel are some of the nearly 4,000 families who sign their children up every month. Make a gift today to welcome the newest members of the Jewish community and keep PJ Library free for families. Visit pjlibrary.org/proofgift.