

“What does PJ Library offer intermarried families?”

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I get asked this question a lot. The people asking often share that they are concerned about what intermarriage will mean for the future, whether for their own families or for the broader Jewish community.

Our approach at PJ Library is simple: Offer high-quality Jewish children’s books, music, and activities that any family would like, regardless of familiarity with Jewish tradition. We look for engaging stories and captivating illustrations. We provide books that showcase the joys of Jewish life, holiday celebration, tradition, and values in an engaging way. We include reading guides on the flaps of each book to explain concepts, define Hebrew terms, and help with pronunciations, so everything is accessible.

We consider every Jewish family to be our target audience. If a PJ Library book or activity isn’t enjoyable for a parent with a deep Jewish background as well as for a parent with no Jewish background, then we haven’t met our mark.

Back in 2016, PJ Library engaged a strategic learning firm to conduct a large-scale study of its subscriber families. We were looking to determine not only subscriber satisfaction but also whether PJ Library had influenced a family’s decision to connect with Jewish life in a way they weren’t doing previously. More than 6,400 of the families responding to the survey identified themselves as being an intermarried household – defined in the study as a household where one parent identifies as Jewish and one does not (what many refer to as “interfaith”). We asked the evaluator to analyze those 6,400 responses more closely. How do intermarried families rate PJ Library as compared to in-married families? Do the books and materials resonate?

We’ve got good news.

Intermarried and in-married families give equally high marks to PJ Library. Nearly all intermarried and in-married families (97% and 95% respectively) report overall satisfaction with the books and resources they receive in their home, and nearly all are likely to recommend the program to others. The two cohorts also interact with the other PJ Library resources, such as the book flaps and social media channels, at statistically similar rates.

Not only that, but PJ Library books and materials provide a snapshot of Jewish life that interests readers and influences many to delve deeper.

Survey respondents told us that PJ Library is even more likely to influence intermarried families than in-married families in two areas: their family’s decision to celebrate Jewish holidays (64% vs. 41%) and their family’s decision to learn more about Judaism (89% vs. 67%).

Our next step is to help interested families find the inroads to the Jewish community that many are lacking. We learned that PJ Library’s intermarried families are less likely than in-married families to have participated in Jewish community programs and activities. In interviews some mentioned feeling uncomfortable attending Jewish programs and events, and others mention living in areas with little or no access to Jewish programs. Yet intermarried families tell us they are just as interested in getting more connected to their local Jewish organizations, activities and people (77%) as in-married families (74%). In interviews and survey comments, intermarried families mentioned wanting more support in learning how to get involved in their communities, finding a temple or synagogue, and finding events and meeting other Jewish families.

We will continue to do all we can to provide the very best books, music, and activities to families in their homes, because great content is the key to PJ Library’s popularity. At the same time, we are developing ways to support all PJ Library families looking to connect to each other and the larger Jewish community. As intermarriage rates continue to grow and as PJ Library continues to expand its program, we can expect to serve an increasing number of intermarried families and provide resources to meet their evolving interest in and relationship to Jewish life. The books are just the starting point to a more connected and engaged Jewish community comprised of all types of families.

