

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

I have a widowed mother who has a variety of health issues and requires my assistance in getting to doctors, shopping, etc. Her health problems are increasing and I find myself feeling burned-out. In addition to my mother, I have a father-in-law who is in poor health and lives in my house with my wife and children.

I have a sister who lives in the area, but she and my mom hardly speak. My mother is unwilling to approach my sister to ask for help because she has been rebuffed and hurt by her.

What can I do because I am feeling overwhelmed?

Burned-Out Son

A. Dear Burned-Out Son,

There are two levels on which to consider your problem.

First, don't expect your mother to approach your sister. She has told you that she won't and the process is painful for her.

You need to talk with your sister and let her know how difficult it is for you to be the sole caregiver. You and your sister should try to figure out some ways in which your sister can help you by helping your mother. She may be able to help with transportation or shopping, or provide some financial assistance to purchase those services.

The second level for you to consider are the services available in the community for some of the care giving. Easing your responsibilities would be helpful. Call an agency like Jewish Family Services to explore your options with a staff person.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

We are the parents of two junior high

school children. They are typical 13-14-year-olds and would prefer to spend their leisure time on the computer.

Although we follow the suggested ways of trying to keep them safe, we would prefer that they pursue other kinds of activities which are at the same time more physically healthy for them and not connected to the computer.

We are working parents and the time we have to supervise our children's activities is limited.

Do you have any suggestions how we can get the kids motivated to do other things and start habits for health that will continue throughout their lives?

Parents of Computer Addicts

A. Dear Parents,

This is a big problem in our country both from health and safety perspectives. There are a couple of things to consider. You need to motivate by leading and find kid friendly activities that hold their interest. You also need to negotiate computer usage in general and not legislate after the fact.

There are dance groups for teens including Israeli dance groups. There is new craze, D.D.R. (dance dance revolution), so take advantage of it. Some of the fitness centers have started groups for young teens.

Organize some family outings as seasons of the year permit.

Most importantly, your role modeling for physical fitness and family time will go into adulthood with your children.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail jfsneny@banet.net or call 518-482-8856.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

Our family went through a divorce during the past year. My two children, ages 11 and 13, will be with their mother for the Passover seders. Needless to say, I am having difficulty in thinking about the holiday without a family seder.

Do you have any suggestions about what I might do to have some celebration with my children? Also, I have been invited to a seder with my extended family, but I am not anxious to go because I do not want to have to discuss my divorce. What should I do?

Sad For Passover

A. Dear Sad For Passover,

Your feelings are understandable. I would like to suggest that you try to find time during the Passover holiday to get together with your children and start your own tradition of celebrating holidays together. This type of situation may arise many times in the future as you and your ex-wife juggle holiday celebrations.

The important message for your children is that you want to be with them for celebrations even if it requires some creativity. Don't mourn what you don't have; celebrate what you do have.

In terms of your own celebration of Passover on the seder nights, don't feel obligated to go to family if you think it will be unpleasant or painful. However, don't be alone. Join a friend's seder celebration or sign up for a community seder. Passover is a community holiday, and even though you are divorced, you are still part of a community.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

Our daughter is away at school and is

coming home for Passover with a "friend."

We suspect that this friend may be non-Jewish and we don't want to give approval to the relationship by having this person at our seder. If we don't extend an invitation, we are afraid of alienating her and maybe pushing her more into the relationship.

What should we do?

Uncomfortable Parents

A. Dear Uncomfortable Parents,

Many parents have been surprised at the seder table by "friends" and found themselves in a position of judging this person by his/her behavior in what is often an alien setting. This is definitely not a good start to getting to know someone.

Ask your daughter to come home early enough for all of you to go out and have coffee. A setting away from your home should help everyone to relax.

Influencing our children's choices of partners is not laid out in a "how to" manual. The major impact you had on your children was during their years in your home growing up. What is important for you now is to behave in a way that models what you taught them.

This includes meeting your children's friends and getting to know them without prior judgments. You need to respect your children as adults and foster dialogues.

Think carefully before you say things that can't be taken back or put you into a position of not being able to negotiate.

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