

# Executive Summary

This report explores the experiences, aspirations, and challenges faced by Jewish families with young children in the United States. Amid shifting social, economic, and cultural landscapes, these families navigate diverse identities and circumstances, often striving to balance Jewish values with inclusive practices that reflect their multifaceted lives. Commissioned by Crown Family Philanthropies, the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, and the Jim Joseph Foundation, this study was conducted by Rosov Consulting to provide insights into the needs and aspirations of contemporary Jewish families and the roles Jewish institutions currently play and might play in supporting their Jewish lives.

The study aimed to understand the experiences of Jewish families with diverse backgrounds, identities, and structures, alongside those that align more closely with traditional Jewish family norms. It also prioritized the inclusion of less-engaged Jewish families—those that are not already deeply involved in Jewish communities or Jewish institutions. (This is why Orthodox families were typically not included in the study since they have often made significant, structured commitments to Jewish life.) The findings draw from data generated, first, in 40 focus groups and then in 40 one-on-one interviews with a subsample of focus group participants. All participants were raising children younger than eight years old and providing them with Jewish experiences.

## Key Findings

The study reveals that Jewish families today are shaped by several social trends, including increased cultural diversity, economic precarity,

geographic mobility, and political polarization. In response, parents articulate several core aspirations for their children: building a strong sense of Jewish identity, cultivating empathy and respect for diverse backgrounds, and fostering positive engagement with the broader world.

We summarize these findings in terms of five features of Jewish families today. Families are:

- ➔ **Diverse** – with multiple, overlapping identities in the same families
- ➔ **Divided** – in their commitment to multiple, often competing, aspirations for their children
- ➔ **Dispersed** – often because of economic challenges that have resulted in migrating from centers of Jewish life
- ➔ **DIYers** – with help from the internet, while hungry for guidance
- ➔ **Desperate** for community – that is, sites and networks where their children see themselves connected to something larger than themselves or their immediate families

This report organizes these findings within the following major sections:

## Parental Priorities and Aspirations

Jewish parents today share several core priorities and aspirations in raising their children. They seek to build strong, inclusive Jewish identities while fostering empathy and

respect for diversity. For most, raising children with a strong sense of self, compassion, and moral responsibility is essential, often expressed through the lens of Jewish values like *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and *tzedakah* (charity or justice). Parents view community as a critical component in their children's Jewish identity and aim to instill a connection to something larger than the self. The search for community seems, in fact, to be of special importance to parents with young children who often find themselves far removed from extended family networks. Many parents emphasize cultivating homes that are not only culturally rich and Jewishly meaningful but also tolerant and inclusive of multiple heritages, faiths, and ethnicities, reflecting the diversity within their families and communities. In this vein, more of them believe that “exposure”—ensuring their children see or hear things designed to broaden their cultural horizons (including their Jewish horizons)—will help achieve their parenting goals, rather than more structured educational efforts which involve high levels of opportunity cost in terms of time expended.

### **Bumps, Obstacles, and Difficult Contexts**

Many Jewish families face significant barriers that limit their ability to engage fully in Jewish life. Financial costs, such as synagogue memberships and Jewish school tuition, present a substantial burden, particularly amid rising living expenses. Geographic distance from Jewish centers or family networks also hinders participation, especially for those in less urban or rural areas. Political polarization, both within Jewish communities and the broader public, adds another layer of complexity. Families with marginalized identities—whether interfaith, LGBTQ+, or multiracial—often feel sidelined within traditional Jewish institutions, encountering subtle or overt exclusion. As a

result, some families choose to disengage from formal Jewish spaces, focusing instead on cultivating Jewish practices and connections at home.

### **How Families Make It Work**

In the face of these challenges, Jewish families exhibit resilience and resourcefulness in fostering Jewish life. Their parenting practices can be characterized as seeking to **repair**, **replicate**, or **innovate** their own childhood Jewish experiences: correct what were recalled as unpleasant experiences, reproduce positive ones, or create new ones if they had not been raised Jewish.

Parents use online resources to support their children's Jewish education and find creative ways to celebrate Jewish traditions at home. Many parents find digital tools essential, particularly those in areas without access to Jewish infrastructure. For some, informal peer networks and small, grassroots, community-led gatherings provide the supportive environment they seek but cannot always find in formal institutions. Parents also tailor Jewish practices to meet their family's unique cultural mix, blending traditions and finding meaning in practices that reinforce both Jewish values and a broad sense of inclusion. This adaptable approach helps families maintain Jewish continuity while embracing diverse backgrounds and identities. In describing their approach to maintaining multiple traditions within their homes, many parents made a distinction between “religion” and “culture.” According to this logic, “religion” is the domain of religious institutions only, with their respective dogmas and competing truth claims; “culture,” on the other hand, designates more neutral practices (for example, having a Christmas tree in their home, many suggested) that can more readily coexist within the lives of individuals, families, or communities.

## Israel: Ever More Complicated

The topic of Israel, particularly following recent global events, has grown more complicated for many Jewish families. While many parents want their children to appreciate Israel's historical and cultural significance, they often feel caught between polarized viewpoints in Jewish and general communities. Parents desire a balanced approach to Israel, allowing for nuance and critical thought, but worry about their children encountering polarized discourse that reduces a complex reality to stark oppositions. The need for spaces that permit questioning and open discussion is strongly felt, as families seek environments where they can explore Israel's role in Jewish identity without feeling pressured into a particular stance. This topic, more than ever, influences where families choose to engage and reflects broader challenges in maintaining community cohesion.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the resilience and creativity of Jewish families as they strive to build meaningful Jewish lives amid diverse identities, economic challenges, and societal pressures. These families are not rejecting Jewish institutions; synagogues and Jewish preschool still have great appeal. Rather, these parents are searching for inclusive, accessible, and welcoming communities that respect their varied experiences. By addressing these barriers and enhancing inclusive programming, Jewish institutions can better meet the needs of today's families, supporting them in cultivating vibrant Jewish lives and fostering strong, interconnected communities.

## Recommendations

Informed by these findings, a team of advisors that accompanied this study from design stage to conclusion generated the following

recommendations (and more) for funders and practitioners.

### Aspirations: Building Community

1. **Practitioners:** Foster a welcoming atmosphere by hosting new-family events and supporting affinity groups (e.g., interfaith, LGBTQ+ families).
2. **Funders:** Facilitate regional connections for diverse families through convenings and organized trips, such as family weekends, to foster lasting relationships and a sense of belonging.

### Identity: Supporting Jewish Parenting

3. **Practitioners:** Offer “Jewish Parenting 101” classes modeled on conversion courses, creating accessible, judgment-free spaces for learning.
4. **Funders:** Develop an online platform with step-by-step guides for Jewish rituals and life, ensuring easy access to educational resources.

### Overcoming Obstacles

5. **Geography:** Create intergenerational programs pairing Jewish elders with young families and host “pop-up” Jewish spaces in underserved areas.
6. **Cost:** Lower financial barriers by offering advanced planning for high-cost events, accessible financial aid, and subsidized childcare programs.
7. **Digital Access:** Invest in virtual tools and hybrid programming to connect families in remote locations and provide resources for Jewish engagement at home.

## Enhancing Inclusivity

8. **Practitioners:** Show diversity through representation, define terms to reduce barriers to participation, and provide childcare during events. Support community culture shifts through adult education on intersectional identities and partnerships with non-Jewish institutions.

## Innovation and Best Practices

9. **Funders:** Launch microgrant programs to empower families to create unique Jewish home experiences or to curate resources for them. Explore family-friendly program formats inspired by other sectors, integrating inclusive pricing, design, and marketing strategies.