

Am I Eligible for The Mothers Circle?

Do I qualify to attend The Mothers Circle course or join the online listserve?

Read over the FAQ and guidelines below and contact National Coordinator Pippi Kessler at 212-760-1440 or PKessler@JOL.org if you have any questions.

FAQ and Guidelines:

What does it mean to be “women of other religious backgrounds?”

A person qualifies for The Mothers Circle if she was raised in any religious background other than Judaism and is raising Jewish children. Exceptions will be made for people with at least one Jewish parent who were actively raised in another religion.

Why can't a person who was raised Jewish join The Mothers Circle?

The Mothers Circle was created for a very particular group, women born in other religious backgrounds, because this population was being especially ostracized and rejected by the Jewish community and did not yet have a space that was just for them. Because of the special emphasis Jewish tradition places on family line and the requirement in Conservative and Orthodox communities that a child's mother must be Jewish (or converted to Judaism) for a child to be Jewish, women for whom neither parent was Jewish face additional barriers, regardless of their level of knowledge or childrearing decisions. While many Jewish communities have programs for Jews who are engaging with Judaism for the first time, The Mothers Circle was created to carve out a safe space for a population that rarely had other options in the Jewish community.

I'm Jewish but I was never educated about Judaism and I need support raising my children Jewish. Can I join The Mothers Circle?

You're not alone! There are thousands of people who have one or two Jewish parents but who were not raised Jewish or have no prior Jewish instruction. If you fit this description and are trying to raise your children Jewish, you might often feel excluded from the Jewish community in many of the same ways as those without Jewish heritage. Parenting isn't "easy" in general, but it can be a special challenge to approach Jewish parenting when Judaism wasn't part of your own childhood and it can often take courage to begin. While The Mothers Circle program was created just for women without Jewish heritage, you also deserve a space where you can feel safe to learn, ask questions, and find support.

Luckily, more and more programs are being created to help you connect to the Jewish community. **If you are looking for resources, here are some places to start:**

- MyJewishLearning.com is a website with lots of easy-to-use info about holidays, culture, history, and more

- The JOI website, [JOI.org](http://joi.org), has info about Jewish holidays and also has an extensive bibliography with books about Jewish parenting
- <http://www.interfaithfamily.com/> is another great site with lots of articles and useful information
- If you're looking for local resources, call a synagogue, Jewish Community Center (JCC), or Jewish Federation in your area and ask if they can help you find beginners' classes or parenting support. If there is more than one Jewish organization in your area it might take some time to figure out which one is the best match for your needs, but if you'd like to see some recommendations for synagogues that ascribe to a welcoming philosophy, visit the directory of members of JOI's Big Tent Judaism Coalition of welcoming organizations at <http://joi.org/bigtent/?sec=find&page=directory>.

I converted to Judaism. Am I eligible for The Mothers Circle?

As a Jew-by-choice, you are fully Jewish and are not eligible for The Mothers Circle but we invite you to join the Empowering Ruth listserve, an educational course and online forum for women who have chosen Judaism. The Empowering Ruth Listserve allows women new to Judaism to share ideas, experiences, and challenges with other women across the country who have also chosen Judaism. It serves as a supportive and open environment to exchange questions, insights, joys, and sorrows. If you would like to subscribe to Empowering Ruth, you can either email Empowering Ruth coordinator Liz Marcovitz (lmarcovitz@joi.org) or you can sign up online at www.empoweringruth.org. We would be happy to have you join us!

What does it mean to “raise a Jewish child?”

Any family that self-identifies that Judaism is the primary or dominant religion and identification for their child is “raising a Jewish child.” Because Judaism is multi-faceted, this might mean something different for each family. It might mean to you that:

- You want your child to self-identify as “Jewish.”
- You want some degree of Jewish ritual, ethics, culture, history, or language to be primary elements of child-rearing.

What is a “Mother?”

A woman who is raising children, pregnant, or is hoping to become pregnant in the immediate future is eligible to join. A woman who is a primary caregiver for a child (foster mother, step-mother, grandmother, or other non-traditional caretaker roles) is also eligible.

Who is a Jew?

Different movements have different definitions of what makes a person Jewish, which can be very confusing for interfaith or intercultural parents trying to understand the status of their family within the Jewish community. If you'd like to learn more about how this range of definitions emerged, MyJewishLearning.com has an interesting section devoted to this topic (http://www.myjewishlearning.com/beliefs/Theology/Who_is_a_Jew.shtml).

For JOI and The Mothers Circle, our definition is simple: We consider Jewish anyone who self-identifies as Jewish.

I've joined The Mothers Circle listserv. Are there any listserv posts that the moderator won't allow?

The Mothers Circle listserv was created to be a safe space for questions, discussion, and personal sharing. To maintain the safety and warmth of the group, there are some posts that we don't allow on the listserv. If you write a post that the moderator withholds, she'll email you to explain in detail why it was withheld.

The following posts will be withheld from the list:

- Personal attacks
- Harsh or judgmental claims about someone else's personal choices on the list
- Anti-Semitism or hatred toward any members' religion or religious practice
- Self-promotion or commercial promotion of a service, event, or product
- Pressure on other list members to convert to a particular religion.

All of the staff at the Jewish Outreach Institute is happy to do what we can to help you find resources that will meet your needs! If you have any questions or are unsure if you are eligible for The Mothers Circle, please contact National Coordinator Pippi Kessler at 212-760-1440 or PKessler@JOI.org.