

Tips for Interfaith Families: How to Make a Seder Inclusive

By InterfaithFamily.com

Unlike most Jewish holidays, Passover is observed primarily in the home. And the Passover seder, or ritual meal that marks the start of the festival, is the Jewish holiday with the highest participation rates. The second annual Passover and Easter Survey, conducted by InterfaithFamily.com, an independent non-profit publisher and advocacy membership association, found that Passover is an important holiday for interfaith families, with 99 percent of respondents saying they plan to celebrate Passover this year-- up from 92 percent last year.

An important Jewish value is to invite strangers to the seder, which celebrates freedom. The following tips are designed to make non-Jews feel more comfortable with the holiday, rituals and traditions.

This document is also available in an easy-to-distribute PDF format.

1. Prepare your partner, children, and non-Jewish guests. As more and more non-Jewish partners and non-Jewish stepchildren attend seders, letting them know what to expect will be helpful. Whether you are hosting or attending a seder, explain what will happen, who will be there, what will be eaten and when, and what they will be asked to do during the meal. Tell everyone that welcoming non-Jews to the seder makes it a special and more valuable occasion and that the purpose of the seder is not to proselytize anyone, but to celebrate freedom.

2. Select the right hagaddah, the book that contains the order, blessings, narrative and songs for the seder. There are hagaddahs to reflect different approaches and needs, from traditional to liberal, from recovering alcoholics to feminists to vegetarians and more. Consider selecting a hagaddah that:

- Uses Hebrew with aligned translation and transliteration, so that people unfamiliar with Hebrew are better able to follow along.
- Is inclusive and reflects gender equality.
- Provides background and explanations for the rituals.

3. In advance of the seder, rephrase parts of it to be more welcoming to the people who will be coming to it. Doing this with your partner's and/or children's help, might enable them to feel more a part of things and can unite the family.

4. A writer for InterfaithFamily.com wrote some wonderful blessings to add to the seder that specifically welcome non-Jews. Check out the article Five Interfaith Passover Readings You Can Add to Your Haggadah by Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael. You can include some or all of these in your own seder, or write your own blessings, with your family.

5. Assign everyone passages from the hagaddah to read aloud during the seder.

Participating in this way can give your partner, children and friends a better opportunity to experience the seder. Review the hagaddah before the seder to identify appropriate sections for them.

6. Connect the story of the Passover liberation story to other freedom stories, past or present, political and/or psychological (such as freedom from negative patterns).

If there are particular struggles that people attending your seder would relate to (such as the struggle for independence in India if an Indian woman will attend), be sure to mention them. Or discuss ten "plagues" that we face today. This discussion may engage your partner, children and friends.

7. Have fun. Seders can be relaxed and informal. According to Ron Wolfson, a leading Jewish educator and the author of *Passover: The Family Guide to Spiritual Celebration* (Jewish Lights Publishing), some families add favorite songs that children learn in religious school, such as "Go Down, Moses," "One Day When Pharaoh Awoke in His Bed," and others. A favorite parody is *Only Nine Chairs* by Deborah Uchill Miller (Kar-Ben Copies), a hilarious account of a family seder. For more tips on having fun at your seder, read Ron Wolfson's Ten Tips to Enliven the Seder: Ways to Delay That Fifth Question.

8. Don't forget the children. Traditional seders may have only three highlights for children: the Four Questions, the Ten Plagues, and the search for the afikomen. Non-Jewish children attending seders may only pay attention to the last two. Some families have created a "Pat the Bunny"-type hagaddah for young children, using coloring sheets and cotton balls on pictures of sheep, sandpaper on pictures of bricks of the pyramids, grape scratch-and-sniff stickers on pictures of the kiddush cups. Some even give children "goody bags" filled with Passover symbols, frog stickers, even moist towelettes for the inevitable spills of wine.

9. After the seder, talk with your family about the ways in which they felt comfortable and uncomfortable. Find ways to diminish any discomfort for the coming year's seder.