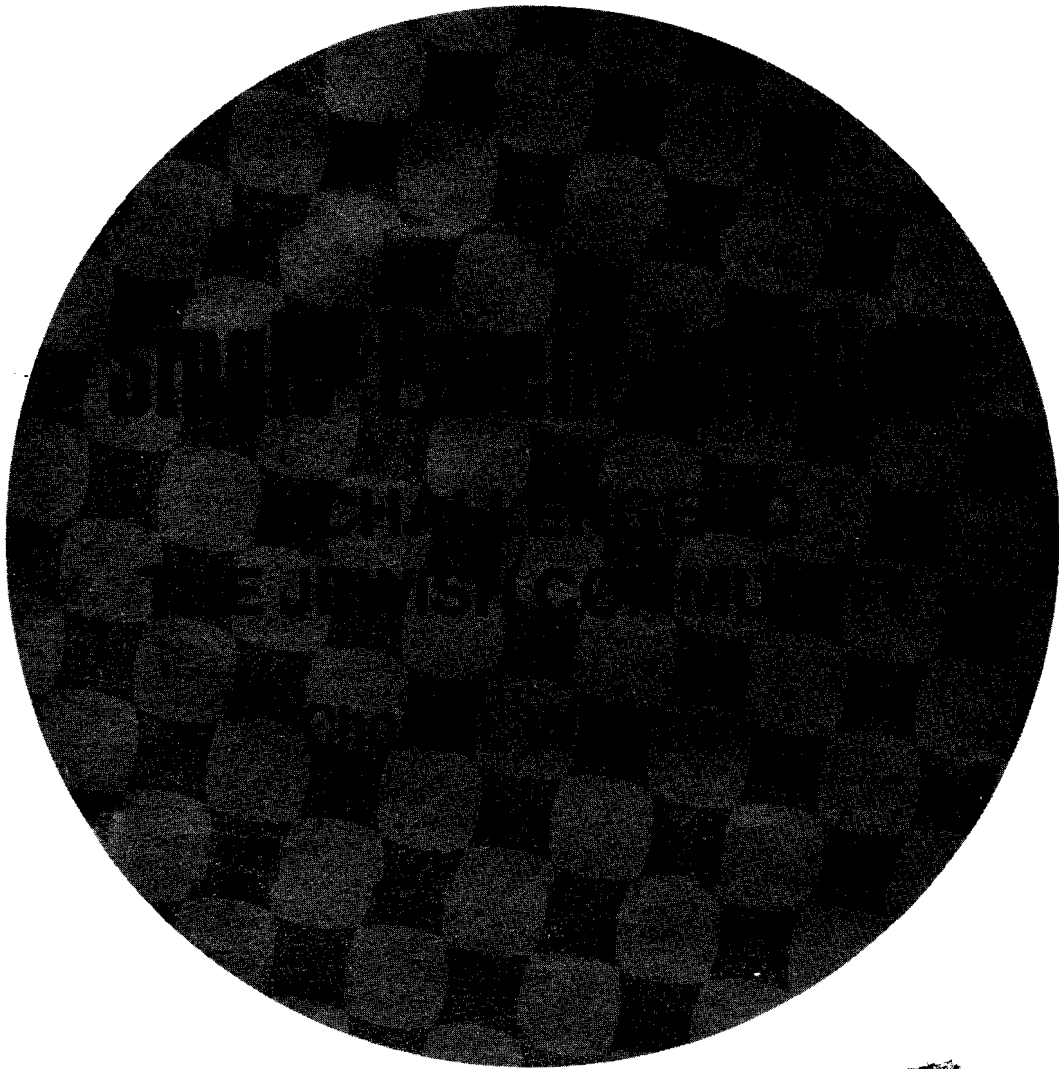




# THE NATIONAL JEWISH FAMILY CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE



Among the much-debated changes in American family patterns today, one of the most perplexing is the fast-growing number of families in which only one parent is present, as a result of divorce, unwed parenthood, or less frequently, death. In the overwhelming majority of such families, the mother is the remaining parent.

Between 1960 and 1970, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1974), families headed by women increased by 56.7 percent. From 1970 to 1975, the number of children living with only their mothers rose by 45 percent (Beck, 1976, p.11), and in 1975, 20 percent of all children in the U.S. were living with only one parent or with persons other than their parents (*ibid.*). It has been predicted that a full 45 percent of American infants born in 1978 are destined to live part of their lives before age 18 with only one parent (Glick and Norton, 1977).

The growth in the single-parent phenomenon is, of course, directly connected with the rapidly rising divorce rate. Just between 1970 and 1975, the ratio of divorcees among women aged 25 to 54 who were or had ever been married increased by 46 percent (Beck, 1976). But apart from this, there are more and more instances where children remain with a divorced parent, rather than being handed over to grandparents, other persons or institutions. Among divorced women, the proportion of those who continued in their role as parents rose from 46.2 percent to 50.6 percent between 1970 and 1974 (Bernard, 1975, p. 585). Or, to cite figures over a longer term: In 1940, only about 44 percent of mothers alone for any reason (divorce, separation or widowhood) headed families; in 1970, nearly 80 percent did (Bane, 1976, p. 13).

### The Larger Picture

Both the rise of the single-parent family and the cataclysmic change in family pattern which it reflects are very differently assessed by different observers. Thus, Urie Bronfenbrenner, the noted child development specialist, declares that "the family is falling apart" (Byrne, 1977), and points to data showing that, with more and more working mothers and single-parent families, there are fewer and fewer adults to look after children at home. As he sees it, the result is alienation, with "rising rates... of youthful runaways, drug abuse, suicide, delinquency, vandalism and violence" (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p.29).

Others are much less pessimistic. Mary Jo Bane (1976) argues that we have allowed false notions about the American family in days past to alarm us unduly. For example, we deplore the



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disappearance of the extended family, in which grandparents uncles, aunts and cousins lived cooperatively and affectionately together, and its replacement by the geographically and emotionally isolated nuclear family, as if these were recent developments. In fact, as Bane impressively demonstrates, urban American families have been predominantly nuclear for well over a century--probably even longer.

The more optimistic observers do not, by and large, deny that American family life has changed. Rather, they argue that change is normal and ongoing and does not necessarily spell disaster. Society, they say, needs to develop social policies that will ease the stress of change.

#### Remarriage--How Significant?

Bane (op. cit.) and others (e.g., Sussman, 1978) note that the remarriage rate has risen along with the divorce rate: More than 50 percent of all divorced women remarry within five years, and growing numbers of widows also remarry. On these grounds, it is argued that the problems and struggles of single-parent families tend to be shortlived and are usually less significant than they seem.

Soothing as these arguments sound, there are strong reasons for taking a much less benign view. First, as noted earlier, growing numbers of children spend some or all of their formative years with only one parent despite a rising remarriage rate; and, second, the rise in the remarriage rate is not keeping up with that in the divorce rate, especially where children are present (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p.7). In any case, there are so many single-parent families at any given time that their existence is bound to affect the attitudes and expectations of all couples concerning the durability of marriage.

## II. IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Although family patterns in the American Jewish community differ in certain ways from those in the society at large,<sup>1</sup> Jews, too, have become seriously concerned about changes in family life. Indeed, the implications for the future are, if anything, even more ominous for them. As has been discussed elsewhere (Waxman, 1979a), the family is the central institution for defining and transmitting the identity and identification without which the Jewish ethnoreligious community could not continue to exist. Thus, even if the optimists are right about the future of the American family in general, it does not follow that the Jewish community has reason to be optimistic.

### "The Most Critical Issue"

A national Task Force on Jewish Family Policy (American Jewish Committee, 1979) has found that community after community considers the single-parent family and its integration into communal life the most critical of current issues.

Do the patterns and the incidence of single parenthood in the American Jewish community parallel those in American society as a whole? There are some grounds for suspecting that they do not. For example, the divorce rate for American Jews, though increasing, remains lower than that for white non-Jews (Goldstein and Goldscheider, 1968; Kobrin and Goldscheider, 1978). Furthermore, in the nation as a whole, "single-parent families are more likely to occur and increase over time in the lower income brackets" (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p.9), and this is a bracket in which Jews are markedly underrepresented. Thus one may expect to find relatively fewer Jewish single-parent families. Even so, their rising numbers are troubling enough.

### Some Sobering Statistics

In 1971, the National Jewish Population Study found that among heads of households aged 25 to 29, approximately 15 percent were separated or divorced. Three years later, a National Conference on Single Parent Families (National Jewish Welfare Board, 1974) estimated that single parents accounted for 20 to 40 percent of the nationwide membership of Jewish community centers.

The number of single-parent families seeking help and services from the Jewish community has also risen sharply. In New York City, the Jewish Family Service reported that the percentage of divorced or separated families in its case load had grown from 5 percent in 1955 to 23 percent in 1976 (Hofstein,

1978, pp. 230f.). In the clientele of the Camping Division of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of Greater New York, the number of children of divorced parents increased by 151 percent between 1970 and 1976; among families served by Y's and centers affiliated with the Federation, the ratio of single-parent families increased from 12.0 percent in 1975 to 15.7 percent in 1976; and among new cases at the Federation--Jewish Community Council Service Center of the Rockaways during the 12 months ended June 30, 1977, 39 percent involved single-parent families (ibid.). Even highly Orthodox communities reportedly showed the same trend (Kranzler, 1978, p. 29).

Similar patterns are reported outside New York. The Atlanta Jewish Community Center estimates that more than 20 percent of the Jewish children enrolled in its day camp are from single-parent families. Miami's Jewish Family and Children's Service states that "25 percent of its caseload consists of single-parent families, with the overwhelming majority...headed by divorced women" (Greater Miami Jewish Federation, 1978).

Such figures suggest, even if they do not conclusively prove, that single-parent Jewish families are numerous and getting more so--especially since the Jewish social service agencies have until now made little effort to reach out to them.

### III. THE PROBLEMS OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

In what follows, we shall examine some of the social-psychological and economic needs and difficulties faced by members of single-parent families. For the most part, we will address the problems of parents--especially mothers, since they head a large majority of such families. Later, we will recommend specific approaches the community might take in response.

#### On Her Own

The end of a marriage, always traumatic, is doubly so for the former spouse who is left with the children. Besides feeling lonely and isolated, the new single parent suddenly faces doubled duties and responsibilities with sharply reduced emotional and material supports. Rhea Karlin has poignantly described some of her experiences as a young widow with three teen-age children:

In addition to working, there is shopping, cooking, cleaning, school activities, doctor, dentist and orthodontist appointments; and the big one--car pools. A single parent has to be mother, father, provider, chauffeur, teacher, counselor, and the source of moral and emotional support. The strains are real. We have to be able to absorb everybody's emotional needs, in addition to our own, and being able to deal with them in an equitable way is often an impossibility. Besides running things single-handedly, we, single parents, do have other things on our minds that intact families don't have--our needs for love--our sexual needs--and often they come in conflict with the needs of our children (1978, p. 3).

If life is complicated and full of struggles for widowed parents, it is even more so for those who are divorced. The former can at least count on the traditional compassion for widows and orphans; the latter bear a stigma, albeit a less demeaning one than in days past.

Divorced persons are still viewed as having deliberately destroyed their marriage bonds and are subtly blamed for acting irresponsibly. This attitude has, up to now, been reinforced by the legal format of divorce, which was always an adversary proceeding by one of the spouses against the other. (Not until 1969 did California introduce the first non-adversary or "no-fault" divorce law.) In addition, divorced persons are widely perceived, by both men and women, as willing sexual targets, and are likely to be avoided by former friends and neighbors, who fear an adverse effect upon their own marriages.

## Poverty

Though American Jewry as a whole ranks high on the socio-economic scale, the fact is that 20 percent of Jews in urban areas are poor or near-poor (Waxman, 1979b). If we assume that poverty is highly correlated with single-parent status among Jews, as we know it to be in the nation as a whole (see above), single-parent families probably are the second largest group among these poor Jews.<sup>2</sup> (The elderly poor account for about one half the total.)

The relationship of poverty and single-parent status among Jews may or may not be the same as among non-Jews. In the nation as a whole, divorce and out-of-wedlock parenthood occur more often among people who are poor in the first place than among the better-off; but, as Bronfenbrenner points out, "the causal chain could also run the other way. The breakup of the family could result in a lower income for the new single-parent head, who, in the overwhelming majority of cases, is, of course, the mother" (1976, p. 11). This is probably the explanation for most instances involving Jewish single-parent families, since relatively few Jews are poor in the first place.

Bane notes that, after divorce, family income is not divided according to need. If it were, "the mother and children would receive at least 60 percent"; but since fathers earn most of the income, and both they and the courts persist in the view that income belongs to whoever earns it, child support awards are usually small if made at all. And when, as frequently happens, the father fails to pay, the mother has great difficulty collecting even these small amounts (1976, p. 132).<sup>3</sup> Inflation makes additional inroads: Fixed amounts of child support, even if initially generous and duly paid, become less and less adequate. Similarly, where the father has died, originally ample life insurance benefits become insufficient.

## The Need for Day Care

Many financially hard-pressed single parents have to make day-care arrangements for their children, so that they can go to work. Of course, this need affects others besides single parents. The number of working mothers, single or otherwise, has risen dramatically: In 1950, an estimated 12 percent of mothers with children less than six years old were employed; by 1974, the figure had risen to 40 percent, and today it probably is even higher. Still, to the single parent the need for day-care facilities is especially acute.

Good day care can do more than enable mothers to hold jobs. Especially during the first year or so, divorced (and widowed) persons are likely to be in a stressful state, which often hurts

the relationship between parent and child. A good day-care facility can provide important emotional support. Unfortunately, such facilities are still few and far between.

### Divorced Fatherhood

When we speak of single parents, we almost always mean mothers, because overwhelmingly they have custody of the children. But though few single-parent families are headed by fathers, the number is growing;<sup>4</sup> and even the divorced father who does not have custody is still a single parent, usually with substantial problems, struggles and unmet needs of his own.

The absent father carries little responsibility for direct child care and the burdens of day-to-day family life; but he probably finds living alone strange and lonely. In addition, the role of "father by appointment" can be maddening, and the often conflicting advice of relatives and friends is seldom much help (Atkin and Rubin, 1976, pp. 15-24). Therefore he, too, needs to be sought out, offered help and given a chance to integrate into the community.



#### IV. A CHALLENGE TO THE COMMUNITY

If Jewish single-parent families are here to stay, it behooves the Jewish community to address their problems and struggles. Indeed, communal help is particularly needed, because single parents are often forced by working schedules and other circumstances to shift family responsibilities to synagogues, Y's and similar institutions.

Yet--for understandable, though not acceptable, reasons--the community so far has been slow in taking action on this front. Such casework programs and policies as do exist have been painfully slow in coming; and even discussion of the issue remains in a tentative stage.

##### Consultation to Date

During recent years, several conferences, symposia and task forces have examined the problems of American Jewish single-parent families and submitted recommendations to national or regional Jewish organizations. Prominent among such documents have been the proceedings of the JWB's Consultation on Single-Parent Families (National Jewish Welfare Board, 1974) and a preliminary draft report by a Task Force on the Jewish Single Parent Family sponsored by the Miami Federation's Planning and Budgeting Department (Greater Miami Jewish Federation, 1978).

The Welfare Board consultation concerned itself mainly with Jewish community centers and Y's and presented a host of worthwhile recommendations on how these agencies might assist Jewish single-parent families. The impression left was that community centers and Y's were at the forefront of whatever the organized community was doing, whereas synagogues, if they addressed the matter at all, did so only on a random or individual basis where a rabbi was sensitive to the issue. Somewhat along the same lines, a recent issue of the National Jewish Monthly quotes a woman as observing: "Everything the synagogues do is for husband and wife. Members of my singles unit have gone to rabbis and said, 'Could you have special activities for our people, or could you include single people in the activities you have?' And the rabbis say, 'Fine!' But they don't take action" (Neff, May 1979, p. 20).

The Greater Miami task force systematically evaluated the extent to which communal organizations were meeting the needs of Jewish single-parent families and found many unmet needs. Its numerous recommendations included: training volunteers as role models and discussion leaders for single-parent groups; broaden-

ing and updating the vocational skills of single parents; expanding synagogue activities for and with single-parent families; assigning a professional to coordinate communal programs for single-parent families; and encouraging agencies to evaluate their own priorities vis-a-vis such families, both to insure that programs addressed to them are widely publicized, and to give accurate statistical data about the numbers of Jewish single parents and their families.

### Ambivalences--and Opportunities

Valuable as many of the recommendations from these and other sources are, a good number probably will not be acted upon--and not only because the list is so comprehensive. A deeper reason so little is as yet being done is that the Jewish community is ambivalent toward single-parent families.

Virtually all Jewish institutions have been designed around the traditional two-parent family, which has been considered both intrinsically valuable and central to Jewish continuity. All other forms of family and non-family life have been explicitly defined as deviant. Thus, without acknowledging it in so many words, the community has been afraid to adopt policies and programs for helping and integrating single-parent families, lest by doing so it help legitimize a previously disapproved form of family life.

Against these doubts and fears, it must be argued that Jews have an interest in not letting other Jews become estranged from the community. We have always taken this attitude toward widows and widowers, in keeping with the Biblical command "Any widow or orphan shall you not afflict" (Exodus XXII: 21). But most of us have failed to approach marriages terminated by divorce with the sensitivity and responsiveness we have accorded those ended by death, ignoring Rashi's comment that the Biblical injunction "applies to every person, but the Scripture speaks [of widows] because they are weak in power, and it is a frequent thing to afflict them."

The Jewish community needs to reach out to single-parent families in its midst--first, because they often need help, and second, because the stress and distress of their life style can deeply affect the Jewish identity and commitment of parents and children. Left to themselves, such families often drift outside the Jewish orbit. If the Jewish community were to show them interest and concern and to help meet some of their most pressing practical needs, they might be drawn back into communal life, or even drawn in for the first time. In the process, they might become a significant source of strength for American Jewry.

The challenge the community faces, then, is to find ways of aiding the single-parent family while upholding the superiority of the two-parent family. Attaining these somewhat contradictory objectives will require much greater emphasis on the positive values of family life, in whatever form, than has heretofore been evident in Jewish communal life. Some suggestions to this end have been made elsewhere (American Jewish Committee, 1978).

#### From Perplexity to Action

As a first step in moving from reluctance to aggressive joint action, the Jewish community must reexamine and reorganize its communal priorities. Concern with the single-parent family should be placed high on the agenda of national and local communal organizations and agencies as a topic for conferences, task forces and action committees. This is not to say that public relations alone will solve a problem so deeply rooted in the institutional structure of American Jewry. On the contrary, the problem will grow more serious unless there is some basic restructuring. But experience shows that, quite often, publicly acknowledging an unmet need goes far toward meeting it.

The task will require boldness in both matter and manner, and a willingness to abandon some present habits. The idea that groups faced with exceptional difficulties may need and deserve special measures goes back two thousand years or more in the Jewish tradition. Given the magnitude of its problems, the single-parent family clearly qualifies for such special consideration.

## V. A STRATEGY FOR ACTION

Outlined below are the elements of a possible action program, based for the most part on conversations with members of single-parent families, or with social workers--both professionals and students--speaking from their practice in the field.

Some of the recommendations have to do with institutional reappraisal. Others are "political" in the sense that they bear on the position of single-parent families in the decision-making structure. Still others are economic, having to do with the cost of services to the persons being served. The majority focus on particular programs or procedures designed to reach out to, and serve, either families as a whole, the parents or the children.

The strategy set forth here claims no finality or comprehensiveness, for the issues are so complex that no one individual could account for, let alone resolve, all their intricacies. Only a few of the many suggestions already made by others will be reconsidered--in keeping with the Talmudic adage: "If you grasp a lot, you cannot hold it; if you grasp a little, you can hold it" (Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 4b).

The steps advocated should accomplish two things: They should highlight the great variety of needs (including the differential needs of different family segments), and they should spark an initial attack on the most pressing needs (which may, in turn, generate momentum for a broader attack).

### Institutional Self-examination

Many of the operating procedures of Jewish communal institutions today seem to persist simply from force of habit. Followed unquestioningly for a long time, they have come to be taken for granted, even after changed circumstances may have made them inappropriate. Each Jewish communal institution, organization and agency should appoint an internal review board to evaluate current policies, programs and procedures and recommend changes in those practices that hurt, or fail to help, single-parent families--for example, unsatisfactory scheduling (see below).

### Client Representation in Decision Making

Synagogues, schools and other communal institutions have not been sufficiently aware of the distinctive needs, perspectives and sensitivities of the single-parent family. If they are to serve such families (as well as dual-career families)

effectively, they must see to it that the intended clients are represented on their advisory and policy-making boards.

Without such representation, programs tend to be planned paternalistically, with no input from those to be served. If single parents had a hand in decision making, they probably could suggest programs that would integrate them instead of possibly isolating them further.

### Access to Services

Like others in need of assistance, single parents often fail to make use of available services, either because it does not occur to them that such services exist or because they do not know how to find out about them. A local referral mechanism, possibly in the form of one or several neighborhood storefront centers, and a "hot line" for quick action, would help.

Besides serving as transmission belts to formal Jewish social service agencies, these referral offices could provide informally for some kinds of services. (For example, the hot line office might maintain a list of reliable baby-sitters available at short notice.) In addition, they could function as outreach centers for persons not yet looking for a specific service, and as cultural centers, providing information on existing Jewish activities in the area and helping organize new ones as needed. Offices might even include a lending library on Jewish subjects--a service that might be welcomed not only by single parents, but by many others among the unaffiliated 50 percent of American Jewry.

Jewish family agencies can play a major role in outreach, because they have the most frequent contacts with single-parent families. Although the old, complicated question, "How Jewish should a Jewish family service be?" is still unresolved, such agencies are in a unique position to provide information about the Jewish community. They can do so without compromising their professional standards by what might be deemed "missionizing" if they will simply leave clients free to act on the information or not.

### Dues and Other Charges

Active membership in the American Jewish community is expensive. The synagogue, the Jewish school and just about every other institution asks for annual dues, tuition, contributions, admissions and so on. These demands are probably heavy enough to frighten away some two-parent families; they certainly are too heavy for single-parent families in their frequently straitened circumstances.

Communal institutions would do well to reorganize their dues and rate structures accordingly. In some cases, they might offer special half-price memberships; or, as some synagogues do, they might provide two-for-one memberships covering both the head of a single-parent family and the other parent, just as a regular membership covers both parents of an intact family.

Educational institutions, especially day schools, might consider free tuition for single-parent family members. Recent studies suggest that Jewish education, if intensive enough, is second only to the family in forming Jewish identity (Cohen, 1974; Himmelfarb, 1974, 1975; Lazerwitz, 1973)--which has prompted Hertzberg (1980) to propose that Jewish education be made tuition-free for all. No doubt Hertzberg's suggestion is too far-reaching for the Jewish community just now; but free tuition just for single-parent family members may not be too radical an idea.

### Money and Jobs

Jewish vocational service agencies should make particular efforts to reach single parents with financial and job counseling. Where no such agency exists, a special office should be set up for the purpose. Ideally, this office should be run by professionals, but where that is not immediately feasible, it can be staffed by well-informed nonprofessional volunteers. Such a service, offering an immediate response to a particularly pressing need, would be especially suited for keeping clients in contact with the Jewish community.

### The Logistics of Living

Some Jewish community centers and Y's have begun to reach out to working single parents (and dual-career parents) by providing day care for their children. Such efforts to help deal with the logistics of living should be expanded and diversified. Virtually every Jewish organization and institution could offer simple, inexpensive and potentially important aid in managing daily life--as well as in keeping up religious ties and marking special occasions.

For example, parents of children in Hebrew school can be offered participation in a car pool, so that the complications of bringing and fetching will not force the child to drop out. Synagogue members can approach single parents whose children are due for Bar or Bat Mitzvah, or are about to be married, and offer to help with the preparations. In particular, a single parent involved with the synagogue can effectively advise and counsel other separated or divorced parents who are uneasy about meeting their former spouses at occasions like these.

### Improved Scheduling

Many institutions habitually schedule all or most of their activities and functions--for example, parent-teacher conferences, counseling sessions, courses--for daytime hours on weekdays, as if every family still included a mother who stays home. The hardships this creates for working single parents (and parents in dual-career families) are overlooked, evidently because institutions have not stopped to determine how many families are thus affected. It would be in the agencies' own interest to make the needed adjustments, because that would enable more people to become involved in community activities.

### Combatting Loneliness

One besetting hardship of single parents is loneliness. In particular, weekends, like holidays, are often difficult times for them, especially if they do not have custody of their children. So far, however, the Jewish community has provided few or no settings in which to meet people and find companionship--with the result that predominantly or wholly Jewish groups of single parents often gather in churches or other non-Jewish premises. Community centers and Y's, as well as synagogues and other Jewish communal organizations, should make it their business to provide places and sponsorship for inexpensive, meaningful weekend activities in group settings.

A more fundamental way to minimize loneliness, as well as to meet other needs, might be to organize residential communes, on the havurah model. Although communal living clearly is not for everyone, quite a few single-parent families might welcome it, because of the opportunities it provides for mutual moral support and practical help. At the same time, a commune that is definitely Jewish in character would help preserve and sustain the participating families as Jewish families.

Since life styles and housing codes vary from city to city, each community would have to explore whether communal living centers would fill a local need, whether they would be feasible and what form they might take. The idea may or may not prove appropriate in a given locality; but even if it is not, discussing it may suggest more suitable solutions.

### Divorce Counseling

The community can help mitigate what is, at best, a painful and difficult situation by providing counseling for families in the throes of breaking up. Until now, only a few Jewish com-

munities have offered "divorce workshops" to help spouses and their children weather the unavoidable emotional conflicts. The service should be made more widely available, and the rabbinate could play an important role in doing so, because many Jewish couples facing divorce call on a rabbi, if only to obtain a get or religious divorce decree in addition to the civil one. (Reform rabbis differ on the need for a get, from both ideological and pragmatic perspectives, but in the Conservative and Orthodox denominations it is almost uniformly considered necessary.)

Rabbinic organizations should urge their member rabbis to involve social workers in divorce counseling. Programs could be set up with relative ease; the services of Jewish family agencies and those of the rabbinate (if not the synagogue) in this field would be wholly compatible, especially since many social workers have become increasingly attentive to their clients' religious needs and sensitivities, while many rabbis now value social-work skills and some of them even pursue graduate studies in the field. If divorce workshops became a standard part of rabbinical divorces, they would not only fill an important need for the persons served, but would also anchor them more firmly in the Jewish community.

### Sustaining the Children

To help children cope with anxieties inflicted by their parents' marital breakup, the Jewish community should arrange with some appropriate agency to provide in-school or after-school counseling sessions. Many of the children would benefit from group raps to explore and deal with their fear, guilt or loneliness; others, who may not yet be ready to reveal such feelings before a group, could be helped by individual sessions. Either procedure will help awaken or reinforce the children's Jewish identity and their identification with the Jewish community.

In addition to formal counseling, the Jewish Big Brothers-Big Sisters movement, so important at one time in Jewish social services, should perhaps be revived under professional auspices. There were reasons for the movement's decline, but the growth in single-parent families would seem to be giving it a new *raison d'être*.

### Remarriage

Though single parents have many problems in common, they are not a homogeneous group in certain important respects. For example, some are not at all interested in marrying again and probably would resent "matchmaking" efforts, while others might



welcome sensitively conducted activities through which they could enter new relationships. Though it may sound old-fashioned to some, the remarriage statistics prove that there always are many people on the lookout for new mates. Therefore, Jewish institutions should not be too quick to reject the function of matchmaker (shadchan). Enough single parents may be interested to restore the shadchan's role to its former respectability in the Jewish community.

#### A Matter of Credibility

To sum up: There is no simple or magical way of coping with the needs of single-parent families, nor with the contradictions their existence poses for us. We must overcome our own negativism, lest it keep us from responding constructively to them. We must prove to them--especially to those whose Jewish commitments are weak--that the Jewish community welcomes them and wants to help them. And we must remember that there is a symbolic as well as a pragmatic dimension to whatever we do, or do not do. By failing to reach out to single parents, we will convince them that we reject them as "deviants," and kindle their resentment against our neglect and indifference; by rendering tangible aid, we will give credibility to our compassion and concern.

VI. IN A LARGER CONTEXT

There remains the overriding problem of which the growth of single-parent families is just one symptom: the declining value placed on marriage and family life in the American Jewish community. To put it in traditional Jewish terms, marriage and the family have lost much of their sacred quality. The Hebrew word for marriage is kiddushin, derived from kodesh, which means "holy" or "sacred"; but one wouldn't know it from the condition of many Jewish marriages today.

Since the traditional two-parent family plays so central a role in Jewish socialization, it is hard to agree with those (such as Kaplan, 1977) who say the single-parent family should be recognized as an equally acceptable life style for Jews. In particular cases, marital separation and single parenthood may be the only option, or the least hurtful one, and then the parties and the community must make the best of it. But that does not mean this way of life should be, or ever will be, considered as good as the two-parent-family norm.

It follows that, besides aiding single-parent families, the Jewish community should act to hold down their number. Rather than just wait for marriages to break up and then help pick up the pieces, the community should seek to help strengthen and repair marriages that are in disarray. Where that fails, it should encourage remarriage. These were considered proper communal functions in times past, and there is no reason why they should not again become so--for the sake of the individuals directly concerned and the sake of the Jewish future.



FOOTNOTES

1. Unlike the general American family, which Bane shows to have been largely nuclear for a long time, the Jewish family until recently retained strong extended ties--as illustrated in Mitchell's (1978) fascinating book-length study of Jewish family clubs in New York during the first half of this century. On the unique relationship between extended family patterns and social mobility among American Jews, see Berman (1976).
2. Some evidence to support this argument is found in Louis Kriesberg's study of poor families in Syracuse, New York (1970). Concerning mothers husbandless due to separation or divorce, Kriesberg reports: "Whether or not they are poor is not related to their socioeconomic origins... the economic fortunes of a husbandless mother are largely determined by contemporary circumstances" (1.177).
3. On the basis of their analysis of data from the Michigan Survey Panel, Ross and Sawhill (1975) argue that level of income is a less significant variable in divorce than unemployment and uncertainty of income.
4. Gershenfeld (1974) attributes this growth to the women's movement and to changes in divorce and custody practices, and pleads that fathers who head single-parent families not be overlooked in communal and agency planning.

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