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**CHILD CARE  
IN JEWISH  
FAMILY POLICY**

Ruth Pinkenson Feldman



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## FOREWORD

The 1987 statement of the American Jewish Committee Task Force on Family Policy observed

Research indicates that Jewish day care has a positive impact on the identification and the affiliation of other family members. There is also evidence that single Jewish parents and lower income families are most likely to make use of day care. Thus if the Jewish community meets the demands for high quality day care by providing models characterized by parental involvement that include religious education and the development of a positive Jewish identity for young children it may also enhance the Jewish identity of parents and their affiliation with the Jewish community.

As a follow up to that statement the American Jewish Committee commissioned Dr. Ruth Pinkenson Feldman to develop a policy analysis on the need for quality child care under Jewish auspices. When child care institutions involve families in overall planning they may serve as gateway institutions bringing Jews into more general contact with the organized Jewish community.

The problem of quality child care however is more complex than the question of availability alone. Affordability is one issue particularly in terms of single parents whose earnings are frequently exhausted by the high cost of child care. More generally debate continues as to whether nonparental care of children under the age of three is truly conducive to their emotional and psychological development. Conversely most experts agree that early learning programs for children over the age of three benefit the child's development as well as facilitate the working arrangements of parents.

Jewish parents as a result require a variety of child care alternatives including but not limited to full time day care. Communal policy should be geared toward facilitating parental choice enabling parents to choose whatever form of surrogate care best approximates the values of the home. Some for example will prefer in home care by workers acting as surrogate grandparents. A recent study in Pittsburgh demonstrated that over half of Jewish mothers with children under six stayed at home rather than enter the work force. Yet 83 percent of preschool Jewish children were in outside programs signaling that Jewish parents whether working or nonworking value the independence training such programs provide.

Work and family issues are not limited to child care. Workplace policies should be designed

to enable employees to be both parents and workers Jewish communal organizations as primary employers within the Jewish community have an opportunity to pioneer in flexible hours job sharing and part time employment Sadly however few such opportunities exist at present and where they do exist often carry with them poor levels of compensation and few career benefits

In this regard the AJC Task Force on Family Policy identified balancing work and family as the critical family policy issue for the 1990s Dr Feldman s policy analysis is the first of a series of policy papers designed to address family and work issues within the Jewish community

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## CHILD CARE IN JEWISH FAMILY POLICY

The new traditional family is the working family. The challenge to America in the 1990s is to balance work and family. The particular challenge to the Jewish community is to determine how it can best insert itself into that delicate equation.

We need to recognize a growing reversal in the relationship between families and the Jewish community. Whereas in the past Jewish values and learning acquired in the family sustained the Jewish community, today Jewish communal institutions are being asked to preserve the family and to educate its members.

The former traditional family — one male wage earner, one mother/homemaker taking care of two or three children — now represents less than one fourth of all families. While two parent families are certainly prevalent within the Jewish community, the roles and functions of these parents are changing along with the trends in the general population. Today most Jewish mothers with young children work outside of the home for pay, employed in either full time or part time positions. While increasing numbers of single parents are now raising children in the Jewish community, they are not all divorced or widowed women, but include an increasing number of single mothers by choice as well as divorced or widowed fathers with custody of their children. Jewish parents, like other American parents across the nation, are seeking help in raising their children.

The United States is the only industrialized nation without a national child-care policy. Therefore, parents are frequently being forced to choose between their children and their careers. Many American parents in the work force are being deprived of their *right* to parent in the first weeks and months of their children's lives, or denied the time to care for sick children or other family members. The concern over who will raise the children is at a critical level, and even affluent, intact (Jewish) families are not immune from the crisis.

The concern for child care and related family issues is now being raised on the floor of Congress and in boardrooms all across this country. The surge in interest is due to several factors. Recent research by Ellen Galinsky at the Bank Street College of Education indicates that the productivity of the current work force is negatively affected by concerns over child care. The effects on parents of inadequate child care include lower productivity, higher absenteeism, higher levels of stress, and more stress-related health problems. A second reason, according to Galinsky, is the growing labor shortage. In her study for *Fortune* magazine, six out of ten companies indicated labor shortages, and 86 percent of the companies surveyed indicated they planned to develop child care.

or other work/family initiatives in order to attract and retain employees

It should not surprise us that the economic cost of inadequate child care has impelled corporate America to become involved in family issues. However, the reluctance of government to become involved in family issues may have more to do with a deeply held bias in favor of the self-sufficiency of the American family.

In the Jewish community we operate from a particular moral imperative of mutual responsibility. *Kol Yisrael aravim zeh lazeh*. We are responsible for each other. The commitment to this basic tenet, coupled with the belief in the sanctity of the family, should translate into a major effort of the Jewish community to provide support systems to strengthen the family and its individual members. As the Jewish community confronts the challenge of meeting the needs of its members, it will resume its rightful position as an integral component of Jewish family life.

It is the thesis of this policy analysis that if the Jewish community embraces a strategy of caring for the very real needs and conflicts in the lives of today's Jewish families by providing a range of services designed to support the family itself, these same families will in turn become sources of strength to the Jewish community.

The establishment and expansion of programs for children and their families, if viewed as a function of a community's educational agenda, provides an excellent opportunity to attract families to the Jewish community. Recent research has shown that as young children are enrolled in child care programs sponsored by the Jewish community, the level of the parents' Jewish identity is enhanced as well. If these programs are designed to support the emerging variety of work/family patterns, they would serve not only those families already part of the Jewish community but would be excellent instruments of outreach to the unaffiliated and marginally affiliated who are also seeking help in raising their children and balancing work and family priorities.

We believe the Jewish community should take a proactive role in the establishment of child care arrangements in the general community and take responsibility and leadership in the creation of programs in the Jewish community for younger and older children, regardless of their economic status.

In the following pages we will explore the issue of child care in the Jewish community from a tripartite perspective:

- (1) The Jewish community as funder and provider of child care services
- (2) The Jewish community as employer
- (3) The Jewish community in the public policy debate

#### *The Jewish Community as Provider of Programs for Children and Families*

As a provider of programs, we need to ensure that excellence in educational opportunity exists for all children across the spectrum of agencies without regard for the socioeconomic status or work patterns of their parents.

Our goal ought to be the provision of a diversified delivery system of child care within each Jewish community. Needs are as different as families, and there are enough children in need of care that programs should see each other as alternatives within a system rather than as competitors.

Instead of seeing child care as one more need vying for already scant communal financial resources we must incorporate it into our already existing network of educational and social agencies and programs. Communal lay and professional leaders need to help communities to see that child-care programs are to be educationally oriented and to have the same high standards for excellence in faculty leadership and curriculum as our most successful programs in day schools, synagogues, and community centers.

In the Jewish community the greatest recent demand for child-care services has come from middle and upper income families. It is also true that there are significant numbers of Jewish parents from lower income levels who desperately need subsidized child care within the Jewish community. The women who return to work during their children's earliest years are frequently those with higher educations who are committed to professional careers. Many Jewish women with higher educations who have postponed marriage and childbearing, fall into this category. While many women and some men certainly are opting to stay home with their young children, decisions change even within the same families. Parents who may have chosen to stay home with their first child are returning to work when their third child is born. In other families parents who chose to remain in their careers when their first child was born have chosen to work part time with the birth of subsequent children, to leave the work force completely, or to return when their children are older.

In a study of professional Jewish women, Dr. Rela Monson found the demand for child-care centers and services increased with the younger women in the study. Child care as an option for affluent working women is becoming increasingly desirable and acceptable.

Within the Jewish community it has been suggested that child care is a nonproblem because of the high proportion of affluent dual career families. Inability to pay for these services is not the barrier. Programs providing options from full time care to part time care are simply not available. The development of family centers that provide for the needs of children and parents is one way of attracting and retaining families in the Jewish community. Provision of in-home care, particularly for families with infants, is an area that also needs to be explored in addition to center based care.

We must recognize that because of major demographic changes—such as the isolation of the family and the preponderance of mothers in the work force—those mothers and fathers who have opted to stay at home to raise young children are also highly stressed and in need of communal support and socialization. The integrity of our neighborhoods will be strengthened by friendship networks that develop between families while their children are young.

What is actually happening in some communities has resulted in an illusion about actual child care needs. The rate of enrollment in half day synagogue schools has skyrocketed, leading many people to think that mothers are still at home taking their children to these half day programs just as they always did. However, in many instances both parents are working and are affluent enough to afford a full time housekeeper as well as nursery school tuition. It is the housekeeper who brings the child to the nursery school. Other working families in the same community may enroll their children in full time child care centers in an adjacent area. While the cost of full time day care is very high, it is less than the combined cost of a full time nanny or housekeeper plus nursery school tuition. In this and similar scenarios we are in danger of developing a two tier system in the delivery of early-childhood services in the Jewish community. Those who are able to afford both full time help plus tuition are able to enroll in nursery programs which are in fact less expensive per hour than the full time licensed day-care programs.

Licensed day care, with its many legal requirements and high staff/child ratios, may cost parents more per hour than the synagogue nursery school, but may pay lower hourly rates to staff.

than many synagogue and community nursery programs. Therefore some synagogue and community nursery schools may be attracting a higher level of teacher and providing a more enriched program than the local day-care center. JCCs and synagogues may be underwriting such expenses as rent and administrative costs whereas independent day-care programs may be trying to subsist on tuition alone. As a community we must make the necessary financial and administrative decisions to ensure equally high educational standards in all our programs.

The provision of child-care services under Jewish auspices takes many forms. Some are Jewish in name only, staffed by non-Jews and open on Jewish holidays. However, given the opportunity to have a positive impact on children and their families, we should offer programs staffed by well-trained Jewish educators that offer a developmentally appropriate curriculum providing a rich introduction to the rituals, customs, and values of Jewish life.

Research has shown that child-care programs that include a developmentally appropriate Jewish curriculum will have a positive impact on the Jewish identity of the parents as well.

When a family must reach beyond its immediate members for help, a religious community may represent the next step in the widening circle of relationships. A parent trusts that the values a child will be taught in a child-care center under Jewish auspices will be similar to those the parents would teach if they were at home full time with their children. Furthermore, the Jewish community can provide an opportunity to develop relationships with other families in the same stage of life and together these families can substitute for the extended family so many are missing.

Why should the Jewish community provide Jewish child-care options?

A Jewish child-care center can build on the basic trust, attachment, and closeness of a family by providing an environment similar in values and orientation.

- \* A Jewish child-care center can provide role models for the parents through a professional staff who are themselves combining career, family life, and a rich Jewish life style.

A Jewish child-care center, by providing excellence in developmentally based educational programming for young children, can attract families without regard to their level of affiliation with the Jewish community.

A Jewish child-care center can provide an unproblematic approach to *kashrut* and holiday observances for traditionally oriented families.

Jewish child-care provides an excellent opportunity for outreach. It can attract and retain children and their families who will be attracted primarily because the Jewish community will be meeting one of its most crucial family needs.

- \* A Jewish child-care facility provides an excellent opportunity for children and their families to develop and maintain a friendship network with other families in the Jewish community who are at a similar stage in the life cycle. Friendships such as these frequently can provide the core *havurah* style groups with whom families can connect and begin to celebrate Jewish holidays and personal life-cycle events.

As providers we must look at our long-range planning needs. A critical need is for quality staff to administer and teach in these family education programs. Therefore the Jewish community should establish the position of Jewish family educator/early childhood professional and provide for the training of people for this role.

Institutions of higher learning in the Jewish community should expand to establish programs in early-childhood Jewish education from one year certificate programs on the undergraduate level to master's level programs for teachers and administrators. Doctoral level research in Jewish early childhood education and related fields should be encouraged.

The concerns of working parents do not end when their children reach school age. When parents are working full time, children come home to an empty house. This is in many ways as big a problem and a harder one to solve than finding a babysitter for a three-year-old. When youngsters are left alone for a prolonged time they may develop feelings of alienation as well as isolation. The Jewish community, recognizing the number of adolescents able to do productive community work, should enlist their energies. We could establish volunteer or paid jobs in child-care after school and senior programs. While such "youth corps" have been suggested before, reintroducing the concept as part of a reexamination of the role of community supports to families is an important strategy. Adolescents need to hear that *they* are part of the community and that other parts of the community need *them* very much—as role models, counselors, etc. These participants could themselves be part of peer support groups with a staff person to discuss what *they* are observing and experiencing.

Studies have shown that children in single parent families are least likely to receive formal Jewish education. We need to determine if this is because the parent cannot afford the fee or cannot transport the child to the program. We need to ask how accessible after school Hebrew classes are for children whose parents are working. Let us explore whether vans purchased for senior programs could be utilized in the late afternoon for schools. We should explore whether Hebrew schools that currently offer classes two afternoons a week could expand their programs to four or five afternoons in order to provide after school care for these children. We should encourage JCCs wherever appropriate to provide programs (recreational/social/after school) for a consortium of area synagogues.

If synagogues were able to respond to the problems parents face in providing for their school aged children, the children and their parents would develop an even stronger allegiance to their synagogue and community.

Implicit in this report is the suggestion that we, as a community, rethink our definition of child care in the following ways:

1. Children of all ages should be assured of high-quality educational programming without regard to their parents' work schedules or financial status. The concept of child care should be destigmatized rather than perceived as a welfare program; it is a critical service for families all across the socioeconomic spectrum.
2. There is no such thing as custodial care of children. Children learn all the time, and programs designed for them need to concentrate on their ongoing needs for learning and nurturance. Child-care programs, even when they include social services, belong on a community's educational agenda.

### *Policy Recommendations*

View child care initiatives within the Jewish community as part of the community's educational agenda. View early childhood educational programming as an entry point to the Jewish community for both the child and the family.

Promote programs by emphasizing excellence in a child-centered, developmentally appropriate educational (and Jewish) curriculum.

- \* Explore the possibility of training and placing nannies within Jewish homes and maintaining a communal support network for them
- \* Develop national and local registers of child-care services administered under Jewish auspices. This informational and referral network would be helpful to families relocating and in need of immediate child care. All information and referral networks should include information for parent-child centers and programs designed to support parents who have made a decision to stay at home with their young children.

Create federation task forces within local communities to examine existing programs to see where efforts are needed to make such programs more accessible to families where both parents are working outside of the home and to determine how accessible the program offerings are to single parent and lower income families.

Encourage day schools to institute before and after school care hours as well as vacation care schedules and to explore opening early-childhood/child-care programs so that a child's day school education might begin as early as two years of age.

- \* Encourage Jewish community centers and synagogue afternoon Hebrew schools to cooperate in the exchange of programs and staff to accommodate to the need for after school care of elementary school age children. Consider cooperative arrangements for transportation.

Encourage the board of rabbis or chaplain service to work with unaffiliated and marginally affiliated families who become involved with child care under Jewish auspices. Many of these families are in the process of making decisions concerning adoption, conversion and circumcision as well as deciding whether to join a synagogue. The availability of a rabbi who is reaching out to these families would be very valuable.

Connect Jewish child-care programs to other Jewish agencies such as synagogues, schools and senior centers to give a broader sense of affiliation with the larger community.

### *Summary*

In looking at the changing needs of families and their evolving relationship to the Jewish community we need to both reexamine our existing institutions and establish new structures where needed. Some suggestions can be implemented immediately, others will be realized only as a result of long range planning. The implementation of some of our suggestions will be quite expensive while others call for a reallocation of funds commensurate with a realignment of responsibilities and services.

This is the challenge before the community. Creative solutions will take place only if we set aside turf issues and cooperatively share personnel, ideas, programming and physical space. Additional funding should be allocated to agencies to expand their services to meet the changing needs of families.

### *The Jewish Community as an Employer*

In examining the issue of child care and the Jewish community it is critical that the Jewish community explore its position as an employer. The Jewish community has an unprecedented opportunity to actualize its commitment to family values by providing family benefit plans to its

many employees

The Jewish community needs to look at itself not only as an organization being asked to provide services to working families but also as the employer of many of those families. The scarcity of people to fill positions in the Jewish community is not limited to qualified preschool teachers. There is an urgent need for fund raisers as well as communal policy planners. There is a scarcity of youth group leaders and Hebrew school teachers. People who might like to work for the Jewish community simply cannot afford to because of the low salaries and lack of adequate benefits in the newly emerging field of benefit option plans. Not only is the Jewish community competing against the world of private business, government, and public agencies with unions and higher salaries, but there are instances when the Jewish community is competing against itself for its scarce resources.

We now have a situation in which master's level teachers who might prefer to work with young children are choosing to work with older children in the day schools because by doing so they will not only receive higher salaries but their own children will receive tuition subsidies. Tuition remission for the children of faculty at day schools is an excellent recruitment device and in fact should be expanded.

It is suggested that a *financial mechanism be created* so that benefits (e.g. child care as well as tuition remission, camp tuition, JCC membership, etc.) could be offered throughout the constituent Jewish agencies as part of a package of benefits. Family members employed by federation agencies could be afforded a percentage benefit for family members equivalent in some way to their salary/seniority. With the creative forces of lay leaders and communal planners, such a mechanism could produce a cafeteria of benefits to be available on a reciprocal basis among agencies. Given the high cost of Jewish living, increasingly beyond the means of many Jewish communal and educational professionals, coupled with the severe recruitment problem, this should be actively explored as a way to attract and retain professionals throughout the Jewish community.

Communities should establish personnel policies guaranteeing that employees may return to work at their same salary and without losing seniority rights for up to one year after the birth or adoption of a child. They should also allow extended leave to care for an ailing family member. Personnel policies should be reviewed to guarantee that an employee's sick leave could be used to care for a child or older family member. Opportunities for flexible work hours, job sharing, and child care benefits should be offered throughout Jewish communal agencies. As a benefit option, the use of pretaxed income for child care should be explored.

Family members need each other in different ways at different times in the life cycle. The option of flexible work schedules should be an open policy. It is important that the community realize that part time and flexible work schedules benefit not only the individual worker and his/her family. The Jewish community itself has evolved because of the volunteer efforts of many individuals. Parents who choose to work part time are not only available to their own families but can then also be available to fill voluntary positions in the schools and neighborhoods and to participate in communal organizational activity. Volunteer organizations must themselves adapt some of their policies and program schedules to accommodate the changing roles and functions of today's families.

It is not only the Jewish community as a subset of the American population which is finding that it must adapt and change itself because of the changing composition of the American labor force. Corporate America is also beginning to make significant changes.

Recent studies have shown that there is a decline in productivity at around 3:00 p.m. when

children come home from school. Parents begin worrying about them and calling home to check. There is a high absentee rate and lower productivity related to difficulty in finding and keeping child-care arrangements. One of the highest stress factors for working parents is worry over the child-care arrangements they make for their children.

In addition, corporations have realized that the provision of child-care services, either directly by the company itself or through a series of child-related/family-oriented benefit plans, has become a necessity in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel at all levels. Benefits ranging from parental leave options to child-care expenditures from employees' pretaxed income are offered as well as a wide variety of flexible work schedules including part-time and shared positions.

### *Policy Recommendations*

Establish personnel practices within the Jewish community that reflect its highest moral code and beliefs about the ways families are established and maintained.

Provide child-care benefits to communal employees including

1. Priority consideration for children entering child-care programs sponsored by Jewish agencies
2. Child-care discount

Explore the establishment of a financial mechanism to grant benefits between agencies to employees of the Jewish community.

### *Summary*

The Jewish community should provide leadership in establishing family benefit plans for Jewish and non-Jewish employees of our synagogues and constituent agencies of Jewish federations across the country. Our commitment to families should *force* the Jewish community to ensure that the provision of such benefits as parental leaves and part- or flex-time employment become part of every contract.

### *The Jewish Community in the Public Policy Debate*

The Jewish community should, through its national organizations and prominent individuals, be in the vanguard of citizens and groups working toward the establishment of a national child-care policy that would benefit all of America's children and enable parents to balance economic and familial responsibilities.

The quality of care provided today's young children will directly affect the character, values, and educational level they will attain as adults. It is well known that children learn what they live. To take a negative example, we know that many abusive parents were themselves abused as children. Conversely, parents who are nurturing, patient, and supportive learned many of those behaviors from their own parents.

In a society where families are breaking down, and even in functioning intact families where parents must work out of the home from soon after a child's birth, we must ask who is filling the parenting gaps left in these children's lives. Thus far, the U.S. government has been reluctant to become involved in what many have considered the private domain of the family.

However, the government is now on the brink of involvement. The increase in the number

of child-care bills pending in Congress the creation of the Select Committee on Children and the expressed concern of the Bush administration are but a few promising signs

It has never been more important for groups and individuals who truly care about the quality of family life and the quality of early educational opportunity to become actively involved in public policy

Cross-cultural studies of child rearing and early-childhood education show a strong correlation between the values of the adult society and the values and practices in the education of that society's youngest members

As a minority population the Jewish community in America ought to become involved in formulating the child care and educational policies that are being developed If we want our children and grandchildren to live in an open literate and caring society we must strive to ensure that all of America's children have access to safe nurturing and intellectually stimulating environments

The lack of a national child care policy has led both public and private enterprises dealing with children to operate many programs without guidelines and standards Even without a national child care policy the child-care industry in the United States now exceeds \$20 billion annually Thus far the delivery of services across the country is decentralized and inadequate The argument has changed from should the government get involved in child care to how the government will be involved State and local communities have begun to get involved and will become increasingly active Public and private industry are being forced into the child care crisis because of its affect on a growing majority of the work force

The range of child-care providers includes nonprofit agencies for profit chains and private enterprises Child care includes babysitters and in home housekeepers fully trained certified nannies as well as illegal aliens non English speaking and undertrained individuals who are caring for children in their own homes and in the children's homes

The Jewish community is popularly perceived as an affluent minority made up of largely intact families who hold educational attainment and family values in high regard Therefore the involvement of the organized Jewish community through its various organizations would help to destigmatize the child care issues We need to turn national attention away from a deficit model of child care as a symptom of family demise to a possible cure where day care might be a part of a support network which enables families to function well and which offers positive educational experiences for children

Lobbying from a position of career and educational empowerment Jewish parents in particular can help to achieve the primary goals of (1) parental leave (2) sick time to care for children (3) flexible work schedules for adults and most important (4) excellent quality care arrangements for children Accessible child care in every community available to children on a full or part time basis according to each family's ability to pay should be our primary goal

#### *Policy Recommendations*

- \* Join national lobbying efforts in Washington in favor of passing child care legislation (e.g. A.B.C.) and family benefits programs (e.g. parental leave flexible work schedule) as well as tax benefits
- \* At national state and local levels join forces with such organizations as NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) for specific policy

recommendations for educational guidelines for early-childhood programs and practices

Encourage local chapters to galvanize parents to make changes in local laws and establish programs to benefit children and promote healthy nurturing families. It is suggested that we endorse a new grass roots organization Parent Action established by Dr T Berry Brazelton a longtime advocate on the national scene for the health and well being of all children

Encourage prominent Jewish individuals who sit on governing boards of corporations hospitals etc. and those who own businesses to become actively supportive in promoting benefit plans which encourage parental leave and related family benefits

### *Conclusions*

As the structure and function of today's families change the Jewish community can step in as a stabilizing force. As families have become more isolated the Jewish community can through its family centers become the much needed extended family. By reaching out to families while they are in their formative stages the Jewish community can provide Jewish educational child-care services and thus help instill a Jewish way of life just as a family is beginning to function as a unit

The issue of child care and the Jewish community is no longer as simplistic as building a day care center in each neighborhood (If it were that easy all we would need is money!)

The issue has become far more complex. We now realize that we must rethink all of our existing programs and agencies to see how accessible they are and will be in the future as an ever increasing number of families try to balance work and family priorities

While the most critical concern now is widespread improvement in the delivery of a diversified system of education/care for young children as a community we know we must plan for programs for school age and older children and young teens whose parents are also working. We must rethink the relationship between family and community resources and responsibilities

We must also examine the issue of child care in the Jewish community from the perspective of the community as an employer of vast numbers of Jewish (and non Jewish) employees and work to ensure that we provide each one with a contract that allows each to meet the financial and emotional priorities involved with balancing work and family issues

Finally we must as an organized Jewish community and as individuals work forcefully on national state and local levels to secure optimal early-childhood educational opportunities for all young children and to lobby aggressively for policies which secure the rights of families to function and nurture each other together in their times of greatest need

It is our hope that the Jewish community will respond to the needs of today's families. We hope our efforts will result in new models of community supports that will "Turn the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to their parents (Malachi 4:6)

**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**  
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