

**MARCH 2026: SINGLES**

# **BELONGING** BEGINS WITH **US**





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*soon by you*

In 2017 I was interviewed for a popular online Jewish magazine on the topic of being single in the Jewish community. The blog documented my, usually absurd, experiences navigating Jewish communal life unmarried. The article exploded. It was one of the most read - if not the most read - article of the magazine at that time. It had incredibly high levels of engagement on an international level. In 2024, although by then married, I was asked to recount my experiences again for a podcast which exclusively focused on being single in the Jewish community.

Why was my story read so widely? Why did people care to listen to it? Interestingly, and I'm going to say, unfortunately, it wasn't because it was unique. It was because it was so relatable.

Being single in the Jewish community is not easy, for a whole host of reasons. And yet, for all we talk about belonging, about community, about showing up for one another - this is a group that has too often been made to feel invisible, or worse, like a problem to be solved.

We've dedicated this edition of Belonging Begins with Us to the topic of being single, in the lead-up to Pesach - a festival that, more than almost any other, centres on the image of the family gathered around the table. The Seder is deeply beautiful, and for many, deeply lonely.

While this edition is one of our longer newsletters, we have surely not covered all there is to discuss on this topic - and I have no doubt we will revisit it again.

Here you'll find insights into how people who are single feel in the community, what one single member is doing about it, how one can become a matchmaker, what one organisation is doing for people going through divorce, a new guide on how to support friends going through divorce, and more.

Wishing you a meaningful Pesach.

Warmly,  
Daniella

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**Rebbetzen  
Jacqueline Feldman**  
Rebbetzen of Bushey  
United Synagogue

## It's All or Nothing

As I've been preparing for Pesach this year, I keep coming back to one of the great negotiations between Moshe and Pharaoh. Pharaoh tries to limit the redemption. Let the men go, he says. Leave the children. Leave the rest behind.

And Moshe's response is absolute:

בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך בבנינו ובבנותנו בצאננו ובבקרנו נלך כי חג־ה' לנו

With our young ones, with our elders we will go, with our sons and with our daughters, with our sheep and with our oxen we will go—  
for it is festival of Hashem for us.

Moshe understood something fundamental - redemption is not real if it is partial. It is not a חג לָנוּ unless it is lanu, unless it belongs to all of us. No one could be left behind in Egypt. Every segment of the people, journeyed out together. That insistence on total belonging shaped us before we were even a free nation.

For me, that message feels especially urgent this month in preparation for Pesach, all of our Chag, as we focus on belonging - particularly for single people and single-parent families in our community. I know that for some, Yom Tov can magnify feelings of loneliness. Even when surrounded by others, it is possible to feel unseen. And that is something we simply cannot ignore.

I feel deeply passionate about this - not only as a representative of our community, but as a fellow member of it. Across all our communities, this is what being Jewish means: we look out for one another. We notice. We reach out. We make space.

If you are worried about where you will be for Seder, please know you are not alone. Whether it's a communal Seder or a place at someone's table, we will make sure you have somewhere warm and welcoming to be. I know it can be difficult to ask - but belonging sometimes begins with that courage, and with our willingness to respond. And if you are fortunate enough to be with loved ones on Pesach, maybe extend an invitation to someone who may otherwise be on their own or lonely.

Pesach is about leaving together. It was never meant to be a private celebration. It is only truly a חג לָנוּ when we experience it as lanu - all of us, side by side.

# Voices of Belonging



In 2023, the US invited community members who are Single and aged 35+ to take part in a short survey. We asked participants to share their thoughts on the current provision for Singles across the Jewish community, as well as how these experiences have shaped their sense of belonging.

Below is a selection of the responses they shared with us.

"I feel there isn't much effort made to match divorced men and women in the US. This should be a key priority. We need to have monthly events and the Rabbinic teams need to promote too. Events should be promoted in press and social media."

"Too many things are only for families."

"The Jewish religion is family orientated but a lonely place when you have no or little family."

"Singles, particularly older singles are neglected by the Jewish community. There is nothing available to attend, no events once you are over 35."

"Jewish communal activity is, traditionally, for families - as it should be. But I don't think consideration is given to the fact that this, paradoxically, sidelines single people—and particularly single people like myself who have always braved attending weddings and bar mitzvah's and kiddushim and Shabbat dinners solo, but have got tired of enduring feeling like a spare part and have now opted out."

"Friday nights - It would be lovely to be invited to someone's home. Also for Festivals and after community events where everyone goes to a family dinner and forget to ask those who don't have any family. Going to a community meal at the synagogue can be very impersonal and brings home the fact that I don't have any family."



**Anonymous**  
Member of South  
Hampstead Synagogue

## Single-iSH

JewiSH, SingleiSH and want to MingleiSH

When Sasha\* first walked into South Hampstead United Synagogue, she was not looking to launch a project. She was looking for a friendly community to feel part of as a single woman. Since her late thirties, she found that the majority of Jewish social events focused on 'Professionals aged 21 to 35'.

Sasha explained that the High Holy days can be quite challenging for single people. Nobody really enjoys walking home from a solemn Kol Nidre service on their own in the dark on a winter's night.

Then a friend suggested she might enjoy South Hampstead Shul. On her first Shabbat, a member immediately spotted Sasha was new, invited her to sit next to her and helped her find the place in the service. She really appreciated that and as a result, Sasha started attending South Hampstead regularly on most Shabbats and festivals. It demonstrates the importance of new people being welcomed in our shuls.

She was aware of a significant sector of the community, in their 40's to 60's who were single and keen to meet like-minded people in a similar situation, for friendship and potentially romance. She discussed it with the Rabbinic team and, with their help and enthusiasm, Single-iSH was created, offering regular social events for people in this age group. The goal was to offer enjoyable, relaxed activities that help people meet and form new friendships. Walks on the Heath, Israeli wine tastings, canal boat outings and other events have all been oversubscribed, showing how many people in our community have been waiting for something like this. The project has even helped to bring new members into the community.

Sasha feels it is so important that other shuls join in. "Every community should be supporting this initiative and we should be doing it together," she said. She would love to see each community appoint someone who can link up with Single-iSH at South Hampstead, so that events can be shared, promoted widely and open to everyone who would benefit from them.

South Hampstead's Single-iSh group is clearly something we want to encourage all members of our community to be aware of and invite others to join. For more information about Single-iSH events, please contact: [office@southhampstead.org](mailto:office@southhampstead.org)

\*Name has been changed for anonymity

Office of The  
CHIEF RABBI

Media Partner

THE JEWISH  
CHRONICLE  
Yours, since 1841

# AN EVENING WITH ALEEZA BEN SHALOM



## LIVE IN LONDON

### MARCH 15, 2026

The Office of the Chief Rabbi, together with World Mizrachi, the Jewish Matchmaking Movement and exclusive media partner, the Jewish Chronicle, is delighted to be staging an evening with Aleeza Ben Shalom, Relationship Coach and star of Netflix show Jewish Matchmaking.

This unique live experience will showcase the story of how Aleeza became a matchmaker, how her skills became the focus of a Netflix series and will also feature live matchmaking in action. This is an event not to be missed for aspiring amateur matchmakers, for singles looking for guidance and for anyone interested in Jewish matchmaking! Tickets can be purchased at <https://bit.ly/aleeza-in-london-newsletter>

Tickets can be purchased at  
<https://bit.ly/aleeza-in-london-newsletter>  
or via this QR code





**Ari Shainfeld**

Co-Founder, Our Kids First



We spoke with Ari Shainfeld, Co-founder of Our Kids First, about his work supporting Jewish families through divorce.

## **DN: Tell us about how Our Kids First began.**

Ari: Our Kids First began from necessity. A few of us had gotten divorced and there was no support available at the time. We started as a WhatsApp group of five guys, and that group still exists with over 100 members. Between us we had skills and experience across different areas of what's needed during a divorce: practical needs, emotional needs, therapeutic support, navigating the legal and beit din processes. What we quickly realised is that the real victims of divorce are not the parents. They are the children. Children aren't victims of divorce; they're victims of their parents fighting. And that's why we exist.

## **DN: What does the support you offer actually look like?**

Ari: We have two family mediators, two divorce coaches, and a welfare support officer, all in male-female pairs. Our call to action is 'call us first.' Before your parents, before your solicitor. Well-meaning family will say "go get them", and that's often what you want to hear. But it escalates things. Solicitors are there to get the best legal outcome,

which isn't always the best holistic outcome for the family.

We triage: Are you sure you want to get divorced? Do you need emergency support? Could mediation help? And then we walk alongside people through the whole process, including very practical things like help finding a flat, furnishing it, or physically moving.



### **Practical Support**

We also run a Separated Parenting Course, developed specifically for parents going through divorce, with a Jewish lens built in, including how to navigate Chagim practically as co-parents. We run it for men and women separately, but with a shared framework. If we can get both parents through that programme, we give them a common language and a cooperative mindset. That is one of the most powerful things we can do to protect their children.

# Organisation Spotlight

(continued)



We also run a programme called KIND, which stands for Kids in Mind, specifically for the children, without the parents. It's doubled in size over the past year. We take them out in groups with other children from single-parent homes, because in Jewish schools there's often only one or two per year group. It gives them a space where they're not the only one.

DN: Why is it so important to come to you before turning to family or a solicitor?

Ari: It sounds counterintuitive at first. Call this charity you've never heard of before you call

your mum. But think about it. When someone decides to separate, they're frightened and they don't know what to expect. The unknown is one of our biggest fears. Family, however loving, will rally to your side and that can inflame things very quickly. Solicitors

charge in six-minute increments, and their job is to secure the best legal outcome. That's not the same as the best outcome for your family.

We help people understand the process, manage their expectations and think clearly about what they actually want. Someone might come in saying they want to take the kids away from their ex. We'll ask: are you sure that's what you want? Because if they contest it, you're going to court. Is that really going to serve your children? That kind of thinking is what we bring before anyone else gets involved.

A lot of our referrals come via rabbis, and that makes sense. Rabbis often

hear about difficulties early. The role of the rabbi is to listen, to care, and offer a Shabbos meal, and then to refer on to us for what actually needs to happen practically.

**DN: What can the wider community do to support people going through divorce?**

Ari: The most important thing is just to be a friend. You're not an expert, and even if you've been through your own divorce, no two situations are the same. Just be present and you'll figure out what they need. Loneliness can be a killer, especially around the

Chagim when there are long stretches without the children. And if you want to invite someone, don't say "come whenever you want", because nobody comes. Most people going through divorce are in some degree of depression, and they hibernate. Be specific: "Are you free this Shabbos? We'd love to have you." It's also worth framing

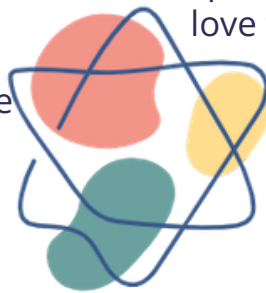
an invitation as something you want rather than something they need. Not "do you need a meal?" but "we would love to have you."

I'll be honest, I speak from personal experience here too.

When I had my first Yom Tov without my children, my first Sukkot after my own divorce, I had a window into what depression feels like. I'd never experienced it before. Even for someone who considers themselves mentally strong, the isolation of those moments is real. So please, if you know someone who is going through this, reach out. You don't need to have answers. You just need to show up.



Legal Support



Gett Support

# Organisation Spotlight

(continued)



We've been running a "Check In, Reach Out, Invite" initiative for the past six to seven months. We have a group of hosts who post when they have space at their Shabbos table, and we match them with people in our community who are alone. Coming up to Pesach, we always put out a reminder, and the response has been incredible. Don't think only Seder night, either. Think day two, day three. There's a whole Yom Tov.

## **DN: Divorce is often seen as carrying a stigma. How do you think about that?**

Ari: In my experience, and at this point that experience spans hundreds of cases, people don't choose divorce as an easy way out. Most people try almost everything before they get



Emotional Support

there. If your friend has gotten divorced, they've been through a rough ride. They deserve empathy, not judgement. Psychologically, divorce ranks alongside bereavement, bankruptcy, and homelessness as among the most difficult experiences a person can go through, often all at once, because that is literally what is happening. Two homes, legal costs, losing your closest confidant, and in many cases no longer being able to tuck your children in every night.

People don't exclude others intentionally. It often just happens through drift, because many friendships were shared couple friendships. Having sensitivity and awareness, trying not to take sides, can make an enormous difference. You don't need to have answers. You just need to show up.

*Our Kids First supports over 100 of the approximately 200–250 Jewish divorce applications in the UK each year. For referrals or more information, contact the organisation directly.*



**300+**

families supported



**3,000+**

meals distributed



**94%**

report improved mental health



**82%**

say caseworker support helped them through the journey



**6,000+**

hours of coaching



**1200+**

attendances at parent and children's events



**65%**

of cases involve high-conflict or safeguarding complexity



**95%**

mediation success rate (keeping families out of court)

# CHECK IN. REACH OUT. INVITE.

Think about a friend you haven't seen in a while, someone who might be going through a difficult time, someone who may not have plans for Pesach. Give them a *call*, send a *message*, and if you have space at your table, *invite* them to join you.



# לצדך

## HOW TO **SUPPORT**

## SOMEONE GOING **THROUGH DIVORCE**

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**Guidance** for offering compassionate,  
**steady support** during a **vulnerable**  
and **life-changing** transition.

# לצדך

## BY YOUR SIDE

### **BE A STEADY PRESENCE**

- You don't need perfect words. Showing up with text, a cup of tea, or a walk, can mean everything.
- Let them know you're around, even if they don't always reply.

### **LISTEN WITHOUT FIXING**

- Let them vent, cry, or talk in circles without jumping in with advice or solutions.
- A simple "That sounds really hard, I'm here" goes a long way.

### **STAY NEUTRAL AND NON-JUDGEMENTAL**

- Avoid taking sides or sharing your opinions.
- Divorce is rarely simple, and they may already feel judged –offer compassion, not commentary.

### **RESPECT THEIR PACE**

- Some want to talk a lot; others don't. Let them lead.
- Don't push them to "move on" or "look on the bright side" before they're ready.
- On court or hearing days, be aware they may not be fully present. Be patient and flexible.

## **OFFER PRACTICAL HELP (WITHOUT PRESSURE)**

Instead of saying "Let me know if you need anything," try offering something specific:

- "Can I bring dinner one night this week?"
- "Want me to watch the kids for an hour?"
- "Fancy a distraction movie night?"

Some people may struggle with self-care during this period – gentle, specific offers help.

## **MAKE SPACE FOR ALL THEIR FEELINGS**

- Grief, relief, hope, anger - sometimes all in the same day. Let them feel what they feel without trying to cheer them up or minimise their experience.

## **PROTECT THEIR PRIVACY**

- Don't share their story with others unless they've asked – trust is everything right now.

## **KEEP INVITING THEM IN**

- Even if they say no a few times, keep extending invitations (coffee, walks, group chats, Shabbat meals, Saturday nights out).
- Divorce can be isolating; knowing they're wanted makes a difference.

## **AVOID GIVING ADVICE (UNLESS ASKED)**

- They may simply want to be heard, not "fixed."
- Don't ask "why." You don't need the details to be supportive.

## **SUPPORT THE CHILDREN**

- Avoid asking questions or comment about the divorce in front of them. Focus on being a calm, comforting adult presence.

## **STAY OUT OF THE CONFLICT**

- Avoid passing messages or updates between them and their ex.
- Don't share news about the ex, even if you've heard something. Your friend may be trying to create space and peace and hearing updates can reopen wounds.

## **REFLECT THEIR STRENGTH — WITHOUT PLATITUDES**

- Gently notice the resilience you see: "I'm proud of how you're showing up for yourself."
- Avoid platitudes like "Everything happens for a reason" or comparisons to other divorces.

## **BE THERE FOR THE LONG HAUL**

- Support often floods in at the beginning and then fades. Keep checking in even months later.
- Difficult days - birthdays, anniversaries, court dates - may need extra care. Check in, acknowledge, or spend time together.

## **KEEP NORMAL LIFE IN THE MIX**

- It's okay to talk about other things. Sometimes, a bit of normality - a funny story, a shared memory, a walk in the park - is exactly what's needed.

## **REMEMBER THE BIGGER PICTURE**

- Divorce is one chapter. Your friend is still the same person - with strengths, dreams, and possibilities ahead.

## ENCOURAGE PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED

- If they're struggling, gently suggest speaking to:  
A therapist, coach, local rabbinic team, or a support organisation such as **Jewish Family Centre** or **Our Kids First**
- You're not expected to carry everything - you're one part of their support network.

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

### **The United Synagogue:**

- 🌐 [theus.org.uk](https://theus.org.uk)
- ✉️ [dneifeld@theus.org.uk](mailto:dneifeld@theus.org.uk)

### **Our Kids First:**

- 🌐 [ourkidsfirst.co.uk](https://ourkidsfirst.co.uk)
- ✉️ [info@ourkidsfirst.co.uk](mailto:info@ourkidsfirst.co.uk)

### **Jewish Family Centre:**

- 🌐 [jewishfamilycentre.org.uk](https://jewishfamilycentre.org.uk)
- ✉️ [info@jewishfamilycentre.org.uk](mailto:info@jewishfamilycentre.org.uk)

# Kiddush Conversations



## ASK EACH OTHER

If you could redesign one shul habit to make it more comfortable for people who come alone, what would you change?

What helps you form meaningful connections across differences - age, lifestyle, family structure, background?

What's one thing you wish more people understood about the experience of single adults in Jewish communal life?

## ASK THE CHILDREN

What makes someone part of a community?

What might be challenging about coming to events alone? What might be enjoyable?

How can we be a good friend to someone whose family is going through changes?

## Resources



### Our Kids First

Our Kids First provides free expert support to any family going through divorce or separation.



### Jewish Family Centre

JFC is the Jewish community's one-stop hub for families, parents and children. We offer a wide range of services for families, parents and children navigating the challenges of everyday life – both ordinary and extraordinary.



### OU's Kol Echad

Kol Echad is the division in the OU that focuses on creating environments of belonging for Singles in their communities.



### Jewish Matchmaking Movement

Jewish Matchmaking Movement offers personalized Jewish dating coaching, curated matchmaking, and relationship-building courses, while also training and supporting a global network of matchmakers to help singles find lasting, values-based connections.

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Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition of Belonging Begins with US