



THE FAMILY ISSUES HANDBOOK

*A guide on divorce-related issues
for those leaving the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community.*

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Table of Contents

<i>THANKS</i>	3
<i>FOREWORD</i>	5
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	6
<i>COPING TECHNIQUES</i>	7
<i>FINDING A LAWYER</i>	9
<i>THE DIVORCE PROCESS</i>	10
<i>LIFESTYLE CHOICES BEFORE AND DURING DIVORCE</i>	11
<i>FINANCES AND DOCUMENTS</i>	13
<i>CUSTODY AND VISITATION</i>	15
<i>CHILD SUPPORT</i>	17
<i>STAYING SAFE</i>	19
<i>BEIS DIN</i>	21
<i>RELIGION AND PURSUING CUSTODY</i>	23
<i>FAQ</i>	24
<i>FOUR STORIES</i>	25
<i>RESOURCES</i>	28

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Thank you for your hard work!

FOREWORD

Footsteps has compiled this handbook in response to the many inquiries we have received from our members as well as non-members regarding the complex issue of divorce amidst a religious transition. Because ultra-Orthodox Jews tend to marry young, women and men are often already married with children when they decide to leave the religious lifestyle. Simultaneously extricating oneself from both a marriage and lifestyle that are no longer satisfying can be challenging.

In our experience, we have seen a range of outcomes from the divorce process. For some people, the process went relatively smoothly. For others, the process resulted in financial ruin and/or the loss of custody and visitation rights. We have learned that having an understanding of the divorce process, setting clear goals, seeking the right assistance, and developing a clear plan often contribute to the increased likelihood of a successful outcome.

With this handbook, we aim to help people better understand the divorce process and its potential ramifications so that ultimately they can live lives according to the terms of their choosing. We do not tell people to get divorced or to leave a religious lifestyle; we assist people already considering these transitions. In addition, we never seek to break up families. Tension in a marriage around religious ideology does not always end in divorce: sometimes couples make a joint decision to leave ultra-Orthodoxy; other times couples negotiate and reach a compromise that enables them to stay together. In all cases, we guide individuals to prioritize what is in the best interests of the children.

It is our hope that this handbook will help you navigate the rocky terrain of divorce amid your religious transition. Inside you will find a discussion of the many emotional and practical issues associated with this dual process as well as tips and resources for charting an effective course of action. We hope this handbook will help you to outline your goals, define what you need to do to achieve them, and identify the compromises you will be willing to make as you work toward building the life you want. Please remember: This handbook is intended to provide information; it is not a substitute for professional legal, psychological, or financial assistance.

The process of divorcing and reestablishing yourself outside of your ultra-Orthodox community is likely to be both difficult and rewarding. Whether you are a member of Footsteps or not, please feel free to contact us with your questions and concerns. We offer an organization and a community ready to support you in this journey. And we wish you all the best.

Sincerely,



Lani Santo
Executive Director, Footsteps

INTRODUCTION

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." - *Eleanor Roosevelt*

This informational handbook is designed for married men and women who are considering divorce as part of their process of leaving the insular religious communities in which they were raised. Since a husband's or wife's decision to leave ultra-Orthodoxy¹ is likely to trigger irreconcilable marital discord, many individuals consider divorce as part of their effort to redefine themselves and rebuild their lives.

Divorce is typically a difficult process, but for those trying to navigate the transition from an ultra-Orthodox to a secular lifestyle the stakes can be enormous and the journey can be overwhelming. There are almost always risks involved for those taking this step, such as loss of custody or decreased contact with children, financial obligations, the stress of protracted legal proceedings, and general emotional difficulties. Understanding the risks can help people considering divorce make informed decisions and determine ways to ease the process.

This informational handbook aims to provide information to people considering a divorce or those who are in the process of divorce. **However, it provides general information and should not be used in lieu of personalized legal advice or professional counseling.** Additional information, including detailed information on the legal process, can be found through the resources at the end of this handbook or through Footsteps. **You do not need to be a member of Footsteps to access our assistance.**

The handbook is a product of interviews, surveys, and focus groups with formerly ultra-Orthodox individuals who have gone through divorce or are interested in doing so. New York-based lawyers and psychologists with relevant experience also contributed their expertise.

Legal Disclaimer

The information contained in this guide is not intended as legal advice. Each individual's situation is different and must be evaluated and handled based on its own facts. Before moving forward with any of the actions described in this guide, you should first consult with an attorney to gain a better understanding of your rights and options.

¹ In this handbook, the term "ultra-Orthodox" refers to all insular ultra-religious communities within the Jewish community, including the many Hasidic, Lithuanian-inspired, and conservative Sephardic sub-sects that are part of the ultra-religious Jewish spectrum.

COPING TECHNIQUES

Divorce is typically a deeply painful experience. If you choose to divorce, you will probably experience many powerful emotions. It may be helpful to find ways to process your emotions and cope with the stress. You may want to speak with a therapist (some therapists accept insurance and some clinics offer therapy on a sliding scale, where you pay what you can afford), join a support group, or confide in a trusted friend. Keeping a journal, meditating, exercising, and dancing are all samples of good stress reduction techniques.

Find a Mentor

Take the time to find someone you trust (through Footsteps or another resource) who has already gone through a divorce and can provide you with guidance and an understanding ear. A mentor can prepare you for the process, cheer you on, and help you deal with each stage of the process.

Stay Calm

Separation and divorce, especially when there are children involved, can be an intensely emotional process. It is important that you not allow swings in your feelings to get in the way of achieving your desired end result. Take care to keep your relationship with your ex-spouse as calm and pleasant as possible. Try hard to avoid unnecessary quarrels and do not interfere with his or her relationship with your children. Unless this is an abusive situation, allow your ex-spouse to see your children. Do not argue in front of your children or speak negatively to your children about your ex-spouse. In addition to helping to lower the tension level, the court will evaluate both parties' behavior to determine a custody arrangement that is in the best interest of the children.

Care for Yourself

Make sure you take care of yourself so that you can be strong throughout this journey. Get enough sleep, eat well, and tend to your basic needs. Create time away from the situation and away from your children (if they live with you) to nurture yourself. Taking time away can help you gain some distance from the situation so you can better process the experience. Visit with friends, go for walks, take long, hot showers, whatever helps you feel nurtured and cared for.

People who are going through a divorce often have physical symptoms of pain, insomnia, and/or discomfort. These can be important signs telling you to pay attention to your physical and emotional needs.

Therapy and Counseling

You are making major decisions and choices in your life and you may want or need support. A therapist can provide you with a safe place to regularly voice your anxieties, fears, and concerns. Therapists offer a listening ear while guiding you to make smart decisions with clarity.

Therapists can help you:

- Work through complex familial relationships.
- Come to terms with difficult episodes from your past.
- Change behaviors that are not serving you well.
- Make peace with the things in your life you cannot change.
- Figure out what you would like your life to be like and determine what it will take to fulfill your dreams.

If you have children, you may also wish to consider sending them to speak with a therapist. Children go through a great deal of emotional turmoil when their families break up and they stand to benefit from speaking with a trained, impartial professional.

Finding a match

When evaluating a therapist you will want to find someone who is a good fit for your personality. You want to feel comfortable with the person you are working with. The most important thing is that you feel like you can be completely honest and talk about whatever is on your mind, without being judged. This includes being able to talk about your personal feelings, your religious beliefs, your community, and your family. You should feel free to ask the therapist if he or she can remain open and neutral to your concerns.

There are several different professions that practice counseling, including: clinical social workers, psychologists, mental health counselors, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists. All of these professionals are licensed by the state. Psychiatrists are medical doctors and can prescribe medication. Many psychiatrists do not provide “talk therapy.”

Logistics to consider

Ask yourself: Do I need my therapist to be located near my home or work? Realistically, how much can I afford on a weekly/monthly basis? Keep in mind that if a therapist does not accept your health insurance, he or she may work with you to decide on a reasonable fee or assist you in finding a therapist you can afford.

Insurance coverage

If you have health insurance, you will want to speak with your insurance company to determine whether they cover mental health services. Call your insurance company when you are feeling relaxed and have some time. Tell them you are calling about mental health coverage or behavioral health coverage. Consider asking the following:

- When does my insurance year start?
- What is my deductible (i.e., How much do I pay before insurance pays anything)?
- What is my in-network coverage? (This is what is covered if you see a therapist that is in your insurance plan’s network of mental health service providers.)
- What is my out-of network coverage? (This is how much your insurance will cover if you see someone outside of your insurance company’s network of providers).
- Is there a limit on how many sessions (appointments) are covered each year?

Remember, therapy is about honesty. It may feel strange to be in a place where you can be completely honest. Take advantage of it. There may be a lot of pain in therapy, but there is also incredible potential for growth. Give it time and be patient with yourself and the process.

FINDING A LAWYER

Each party in a divorce proceeding may choose to represent him- or herself without an attorney, but this is not recommended. In addition to providing expertise in crafting a legal strategy, a lawyer can assure that documents are correctly filed in a timely manner, explain legal jargon, and provide guidance. Finding a good, trustworthy, committed, and capable lawyer can take a lot of time and effort, but the investment will pay off as you navigate the divorce process.

Before meeting with a lawyer, make a list of your questions and concerns. Take notes at the meetings. You may not get all of your questions answered at once, so prioritize.

Some Suggestions for Finding a Lawyer:

- Consult with the staff at Footsteps. Depending on available resources, we may be able to connect you with pro bono (free) or sliding scale legal assistance.
- Get recommendations from others who have gone through this process.
- The New York State Bar Association Lawyer Referral Services (1-800-342-3661) and the NYC Bar Association (212-626-7373) provide general referrals.
- Lawhelp.org can help low income individuals find pro bono lawyers.
- In New York City, the Collaborative Family Law Center (<http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/collablaw/>) helps low income individuals find lawyers who offer a collaborative law approach, which is typically less contentious, either pro bono or on a sliding scale based on an individual's income.
- Unchained At Last (<http://www.unchainedatlast.org>) is building up legal resources – contact them for the latest information.
- Some lawyers offer pro bono work or sliding scale fees to deserving individuals. Any lawyer can be approached and asked if they (or someone they know) would do this. If your spouse has significantly more financial resources than you do, the court may order your spouse to pay your lawyer's fees.

See additional legal resources in the resources section in the back of this handbook.

Consider a Lawyer Close to Home

When choosing a lawyer, you should consider their location. A locally based matrimonial lawyer may better understand the ultra-Orthodox community. And hiring a local lawyer may also be less expensive than hiring an out-of-town lawyer who may charge traveling fees. Local lawyers may also have good relationships with the judges and clerks at the court where your case will be heard. When considering a lawyer, do your research and ask pointed questions to make sure you are comfortable with him or her. If he or she is heavily involved in the religious community, you may want to consider whether there is a potential conflict.

THE DIVORCE PROCESS

Filing for Divorce

Your lawyer will be able to advise you on the best course of action, but there are some things that are helpful to know in advance.

The divorce process starts when one party “files” for divorce and “serves” the other party with divorce papers. There is generally no legal advantage to being the first to file. Once divorce papers are filed, the divorce process has started and can be difficult to stop if you have a change of heart.

Temporary Orders

The party that files for divorce can ask for temporary orders, or “pendente lite relief,” which requires one spouse to provide financial support to the other until the divorce process is finalized. The responding party can also ask for financial support. Additionally, one party can request a temporary child custody and/or child support order. Judges will generally issue temporary orders reflecting the status quo, that is, whatever arrangement you and your spouse have been living with up until the start of the divorce process. For example, if one spouse is the primary breadwinner, that person may be ordered to keep paying for the family's household expenses. So too, if one party is the children's primary caregiver, that is likely to factor into a temporary order of custody and visitation.

Temporary orders are generally issued only after the other party has had a chance to respond. However, one party may choose to ask for an emergency order “ex parte,” without the other party appearing in court. For example, a person can ask for an emergency order of protection if he or she has been the victim of abuse or harassment.

Other Issues Settled in Connection with Divorce Proceedings

In addition to granting the actual divorce, the judicial process is also used to resolve a number of related issues, which may include all or some of the following:

- Division of assets and liabilities (bank accounts, real estate, investments, credit card debt, household furniture, etc...)
- Maintenance (spousal support)
- Child Support
- Child custody and visitation

It is important to understand how each of these matters is decided in order to achieve the best possible outcome for all involved.

LIFESTYLE CHOICES BEFORE AND DURING DIVORCE

At Footsteps we believe that all individuals should have the freedom to choose the way they live their lives. This freedom reflects both our values as well as certain rights guaranteed by law. Of course, even rights and freedoms carry their own sets of limitations and consequences. As you work to build a life according to the terms of your choosing, you should consider and speak with professionals about the potential consequences of your actions.

Your Rights as Promoted by Footsteps

- You have the right to actively build a meaningful life that is consistent with your personal identity, needs, and beliefs.
- You have the right to live a lifestyle with as much or as little religion as you want.
- You have the right to a divorce if you no longer want to be married.
- You have the right to parent your children and remain in their lives, regardless of your religious status.
- You have the right to a fair judicial process.

Timing Your Choices

Be aware that the decisions you make about how to live your life will play a role in the divorce, particularly in child custody issues.

Once you have decided to change your level of religiosity, you may want to declare your new identity by changing your appearance or being open about your change in lifestyle. This would likely feel liberating and empowering. But a judge might view this unfavorably and rule to keep the children with your ex-spouse because the change would be too severe and abrupt for them.

Rather than do anything drastic, you may want to consider making some changes towards a more liberal lifestyle while maintaining an affiliation with a modern Orthodox or Conservative community. Such a move would appear less extreme and could help you and your children transition more gradually.

Another option is to remain within the religious community until your divorce is final, which would omit any question of religiosity from the divorce case. This may make your case easier and less contentious. However, be aware that your ex-spouse may reopen certain aspects of the case at a later date if he or she views your lifestyle choices as negatively affecting the children.

The choices you make in the early stages of your divorce process are crucial to your obtaining the outcome that you want. There will be benefits and drawbacks to consider. Think through your decisions and speak with other people who have gone through a divorce. Your lawyer can also assist you to make further determinations based on your particular circumstances.

Things to Be Aware Of

Be aware that all of your choices may be brought up in court by your ex-spouse.

If you want to keep your personal life private and prevent other people from using it against you in court, you may want to take measures to ensure your privacy. People can easily gain information about you through the Internet and private investigators. For example, a Facebook page or tags of you in other people's Facebook photographs can be found online and used by others. You may want to be careful about being photographed. Until the divorce is final, you may choose to lay low by not attending parties, spending time with members of the opposite sex, or

having romantic relationships. Although Footsteps makes every effort to protect the confidentiality of participants, you may choose not to attend Footsteps events because word can spread. Instead, you can request private, confidential help from Footsteps' staff.

Things to keep in mind:

- You may be followed, without your knowledge, by a private investigator.
- Your computer or phone may be hacked or traced. It is generally legal to record a conversation in New York State so long as one party is aware of the recording.
- Your family and friends may turn against you if they learn that you are leaving your religious lifestyle. Should this happen, they may reveal your private information to your ex-spouse.
- While there are resources available to people leaving the ultra-Orthodox world, it takes time and hard work to rebuild a community.
- Freedom can be exhilarating as well as frightening.
- Be aware of the tradeoffs of every decision you make and consider the consequences.
- By slowing down the process, you can gain some sense of control while still attaining your ultimate goals.

FINANCES AND DOCUMENTS

Cost of Divorce

Divorce can be expensive, particularly if the process is contentious and drawn out. A case that goes to court can sometimes cost many thousands of dollars. If you do not have the resources to fight a case successfully in court, there are options. Many people have successfully used out-of-court methods and low-key strategies to achieve their goals. For example, mediation or collaborative divorce can be used as an alternative to litigation. These options can take less time and be far less expensive. Ultimately, this could be an easier as well as healthier option for you and your family.

Remember that the ultra-Orthodox community may come together to hire expensive lawyers who can create legal delays or better manipulate the legal system. If this happens, you could wind up spending all of your resources and still not win the case. Ultimately, this could force you into an undesirable settlement.

You will want to be patient and consider all of your options before embarking on the divorce process. Doing so can help you build a powerful case and move things along more speedily and inexpensively. In addition, take stock of your financial resources so that you can determine the best, most cost-effective strategy for achieving your goals.

Finances

You may want to consider these actions before starting the divorce process:

- Set up a separate, individual* bank account for yourself, if you do not already have one.
- Consider protecting your assets that are in a joint account. You or your spouse can legally withdraw all of the money from a joint account at any time, without the other's knowledge or permission.
- Set up an individual* credit card in your own name. Consider saving this credit card to use only in case of an emergency.
- Save cash in a secure location where you know you will be able to access it.
- If you depend on your spouse for financial support, explore new options to support yourself. Although a judge may grant you alimony, knowing that you have an independent and steady source of income can help you financially and emotionally as you move through the divorce process.
- If your spouse has illegally maintained assets (for example, a job off the books) and few legal assets, your spouse could claim he or she is poorer than you, particularly if you have a job. In such a situation, you may get no maintenance (spousal support) or have to pay your spouse maintenance. Gather proof of illegal assets. For example, get a copy of a bank statement that shows deposits into an account or photograph a safe with money in it or document written references of an off-the-books job. Your lawyer may also help you consider whether to hire a private investigator or forensic accountant to track this money down. Keep in mind that your spouse may also take similar actions against you, if your spouse believes that you have illegally maintained assets.

*You can request to receive your statement online or to a PO Box, instead of at home.

Preparing Documents

You should obtain the following before beginning the divorce process. In the case of documents, originals are best but at the very least obtain copies.

- Your marriage license
- Your birth certificate
- Your Social Security card
- Your passport
- Your children's birth certificates
- Your children's Social Security cards
- Your children's passports
- A driver's license or non-drivers ID
- A credit card in your own name
- A bank account in your own name
- A reserve of cash
- Copies of tax returns and/or pay stubs

Keep these documents in a safe and private place, such as a friend's home or a safe deposit box at the bank.

In New York City, you can order most official documents online at www.NYC.gov.

CUSTODY AND VISITATION

Records

If child custody is not easily agreed upon between the couple and the case goes to court, the judge will try to determine which parenting arrangement is in the best interest of the children. Often, but not always, the judge will award physical custody to the parent who has served as the children's primary caregiver before the divorce.

To document that you are an involved parent (or primary caregiver), you may want to begin keeping records of your interactions with your children that you can use in court, including:

- A record of all the time you are with your children. Include the date, the amount of time you spent together, and the activities you did, even if seems insignificant like playing at home.
- An itemized listing of any money you spend on your children. Save receipts, brochures to places you visit, museum ticket stubs, and the like.
- Photographs of your children having fun with you or doing healthy daily activities together with you.
- An outline of any problems you have with your ex-spouse. Describe situations with the other parent that concern you.
- A listing of all the times your children return from your ex-spouse's care hungry, tired, hurt, unkempt, or unhappy.
- A document outlining the disagreements you have with your ex-spouse over visitation or if your children are returned to you late.
- A list of the daily things you do to keep your children healthy and happy.

This will take significant time and commitment, and it may be difficult to collect all of the small details, but the investment could pay off in terms of a swifter and more successful case.

While you are record-keeping, it is important not to let your notes skew your view of your spouse. Try not to let your beliefs about your ex-spouse's parenting skills get in the way of maintaining compassion and respect for him or her. Maintain a calm relationship throughout the process.

Create Allies

Build good relationships with as many relevant, trustworthy people as you can. Make sure they see you as a concerned, involved parent. This might include your children's teachers, babysitters, parents of your children's friends, doctors, neighbors, therapists, and rabbis. You can then ask these people to provide important testimony on your behalf. If you do not trust the people in your children's lives to support you, try to seek out new friends and connections outside of your community. For example, consider building a connection to a Modern Orthodox or non-Orthodox rabbi or enrolling your children in an after-school program staffed by more sympathetic professionals. Develop good relationships with work colleagues, neighbors, and anybody else who could be a resource in the future. In addition, consider developing friendships with people outside of the religious community. They may help you gain a broader perspective and provide invaluable support.

Build your parenting skills

As you prepare for divorce you may also want to read about child development and the impact of divorce on children. This will help you learn about the experience from a child's perspective and gain skills you can use to address any changes in behavior that you may witness. You can learn more by:

- Reading books about parenting. Go to the library to find books or read them at a bookstore. See the "Resources" section below for more information.
- Taking parenting classes. You can find these classes at many hospitals. Take infant CPR if you have small children. Keep records of the classes you take.
- Seeking counseling for yourself and your children. A therapist can help you and your children process the emotional aspects of divorce. Courts generally look favorably upon this and will not hold it against you in determining custody.

In addition, it is a good idea to document the steps you have taken to stay in top form as a healthy, active parent. Keep track of any classes you have taken, friendships you have made, and therapy you have pursued. Whether or not you and your lawyer decide to use these materials to advance your case, these records will help you build your confidence as you prepare for big life changes.

Kidnapping

Threats and incidents of children being kidnapped in contentious custodial disputes are not uncommon. If you are concerned that your spouse or a member of the ultra-Orthodox community may kidnap your children, you can file for custody and/or visitation in Family Court and ask for either a temporary order of custody or an order prohibiting your spouse from taking the children outside of the jurisdiction. You can also place your children on a national passport alert system, so if someone tries to take them out of the country, an alert will be raised, and (hopefully) the kidnapping will be prevented.

CHILD SUPPORT

Overview

Child support guidelines vary for each state in the U.S., but generally there is some form of child support obligation placed on each of the children's legal parents in cases of divorce or separation.

Child support amounts are generally determined by the income and financial resources of the parents. In New York State, the amounts are determined by the combined gross income of both parents and are applied proportionally based on their respective incomes.

The basic formulas, which determine the percentage of a parent's adjusted gross income that must be devoted to child support, are as follows:

Number of Children	% of Adjusted Gross Income
One Child	17.00%
Two Children	25.00%
Three Children	29.00%
Four Children	31.00%
Five + Children	no less than 35%

In practice, child support obligations are most often placed on the father, especially if the mother receives primary physical custody. For men leaving the ultra-Orthodox community with limited financial resources, this can be a huge burden. However, it is important to realize that child support is intended to serve the children's best interests, and judges take pains to determine that it is fairly administered.

Child support judgments are entirely separate from custody and visitation agreements. Even if you end up with limited (or no) contact with your children, you can still be ordered to pay child support. If you are not ordered to pay child support, you still have the right to maintain a relationship with your children.

In some cases, an ultra-Orthodox ex-spouse who is eager to limit contact between the children and their less- or non-religious parent will offer to release a non-custodial parent from their child support responsibilities so long as they agree to relinquish visitation rights. Be aware that once a child support case has been brought into court, the judge must sign off on any such arrangement unless it falls outside the basic support guidelines.

If you fail to comply with a child support order, the money you owe can be automatically "garnished," or withdrawn, from your paycheck. You can also be held in contempt of court and sent to jail. If your financial circumstances change after you reach a settlement, speak with a lawyer or the court about your options and consider filing for a downward modification. If you lose your job, you should immediately go to Family Court and file for a modification. In general, courts will not vacate arrears accrued before the filing of a downward modification, so it is important that you file as soon as your financial circumstances change.

For additional information:

<https://newyorkchildsupport.com/home.html>

http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/programs/child_support.shtml

https://www.childsupport.ny.gov/dcse/pdfs/cssa_2011.pdf

Emotional Dimensions of Child Support

Child support is supposed to benefit the children, but it can become an emotionally harrowing issue for both parents.

If you're the non-custodial parent, you may feel that the judgment is unfair and that your ex-spouse is using the money for him/herself rather than for the children. You may also feel that the ordered amounts are above your means. Being ordered to pay child support by a court can also feel deeply insulting, especially if you've done your best to support your family in the past.

If you're the custodial parent, you may feel that your ex-spouse is trying to weasel out of his/her financial obligations to his/her children. You may feel that the child support payments are inadequate for your financial situation.

Although the court bases its rulings on the parent's financial circumstances, the formula provided by the Child Support Standards Act, and what they feel is in the children's best interest, a judgment can often feel unfair. Regardless of how it impacts you emotionally, your only choice beyond abiding by the court's ruling is to file for a modification if circumstances change.

If you fail to comply with a court order you could face stiff punishment. You could be arrested, your driver's license could be suspended, and your passport could be revoked.. If you are financially unable to make full payments, try to do the best you can. Always keep paying *something*. Even a small amount is better than not paying anything at all. A judge will look favorably on a parent who has made a strong effort to comply with the order to the best of his or her abilities.

STAYING SAFE

What to do if you are being bullied

Bullying (emotional or physical threats or intimidation) by your ex-spouse or anybody at all (including your own family members or community rabbis) is unacceptable. Such incidents should be taken very seriously.

Reach out to your allies. Ask friends or a Footsteps staff person for support. People are available to accompany you to family events, *beis din*, divorce court, etc. Any harassment may be less likely to occur if you are with someone.

It is very important not to do anything in response to the bullying that could incriminate you. Instead, focus on recording every instance when someone bullies or threatens you. Consider video- or audio-taping frightening interactions (you may be able to do that discreetly with your phone). Try to get what you can in writing (texts, letters, and/or emails) and keep records of what is said, including the date and time. Consider talking to a trusted advisor after each incident, so another ally is brought into the loop. A judge is likely to consider threatening behavior when determining the custody arrangement.

The Resources section at the end of this handbook provides more information on organizations that may be able to help you with bullying issues.

Orders of Protection

If one spouse fears the other spouse may commit (or has committed) an act of violence or harassment, he or she can go to the Family Court and file for a protective order. A protective order restricts the contact that a potentially dangerous person can have with their ex-spouse or children and will be an important factor in custody/visitation outcomes. You can also call the police. If the abuser is arrested, a criminal case will be commenced and you may receive an order of protection from the Criminal Court.

If your ex-spouse files a protective order against you, speak to your attorney. A protective order does not automatically make you a criminal or a bad person, but it can be distressing if you feel the allegations against you are untrue. It is nevertheless important to comply with the order while working with your attorney to determine your options.

Keeping Records Safe

If you are afraid that your records will be found by people you do not trust, you can:

- Find a trustworthy person to keep your records for you.
- Keep some records on a password-protected website that offers free journaling hosting.
- Ask Footsteps staff for help in finding a secure location to keep your records.
- Rent a safe deposit box at a bank. Many banks offer this service, providing you with a key to a box only you can access.
- Create a “scrapbook” that seems like a fun, innocent record of family memories, but that also contains valuable proof of the time you spend with your children.

Strategize about Location

The location of your court case can have a big impact on its outcome. Judges are elected by the public in the location where they serve. This can be a concern in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, where residents, who often vote as a bloc, are powerful constituents. In some areas with high concentrations of ultra-Orthodox Jews, there is concern that some judges rule far more favorably for the ultra-Orthodox side. For example, a judge in Monsey might accept many of your ex-spouse's religious behaviors, while a judge in Manhattan or New Jersey might not.

The location of a custody case is normally determined by the location of the children for the six months before a new custody proceeding. The location for a divorce depends on where the spouses live. However, if you have concerns about your ability to get a fair hearing, you should discuss the issue with your lawyer.

BEIS DIN

The relationship between the Jewish religious court, the *beis din*, and the secular courts is complex. A *beis din* is the only court that can grant a *get*, and civil courts will recognize the giving of a *get* as being legally binding in a divorce proceeding. In New York, the granting of a *get* is a mandatory part of nearly all divorce cases involving religious couples (more on this below). Civil courts will also recognize a divorce adjudicated by a *beis din*, meaning that you can opt to have the entire *get*, divorce, and custody arrangement settled in a religious court. However, people wishing to bypass the *beis din* and forego the giving or receiving of a *get* can file for divorce solely in civil court.

Whichever route you think you might prefer, you should consult with a lawyer who is both knowledgeable about the religious courts and sympathetic to your situation in order to gain a thorough understanding of all potential ramifications. For more information, you can also read the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance's guidebook on divorce at http://www.jofa.org/Advocacy/Beit_Din_Guide/

What Happens at *Beis Din*

If you go to *beis din*, you may have an initial consultation about the case with a single rabbi. The actual court will probably be a group of three rabbis, who will hear both sides of the case and come to a decision. Each Jewish community generally has its own *beis din*. A *beis din* in Kiryas Joel will probably be very different from a *beis din* in the Upper West Side or Flatbush. Trusted friends and others who have gone through the divorce process may be able to help you decide whether and which *beis din* is best for you. Parties are often represented by a "*toen*" or a "*toenet*," an expert in Jewish law. You may choose to hire a *toen* or *toenet* to represent you. It is also highly recommended that you have an attorney to assist and represent you throughout the *beis din* process.

A *beis din* administers the *get*, the Jewish divorce document, but it can also adjudicate on all matters regarding the separation (similar to how a secular court would), including child support, custody and visitation, and dividing up assets. The *beis din* generally makes these decisions according to Jewish law and formula, which can be quite different from secular law and formula. In addition to deciding whether or not to go to *beis din*, be clear about what you expect from *beis din*, i.e., whether you want just a *get* or the resolution of all relevant matters.

If you plan to have *beis din* settle all matters regarding the separation (which may be a cheaper, but riskier option), it is essential that you ensure that the agreement reached is legally binding. If not, you may be misled. For example, you may agree to give your ex-spouse a *get* with the understanding that you would then receive certain visitation rights, but once the *get* is handed over, the separation agreement might be found to be nonbinding by a civil court, and you might be forced to rehash visitation rights from scratch in the secular court system. Again, even if you go the *beis din* route you should retain an attorney to assist you.

The Power of *Beis Din*

The civil court allows a couple to go to an extra-judicial party for arbitration (the settling of a disagreement between two people by a person or organization that they both agree to). If two people willingly go to *beis din* to handle a divorce, and the *beis din* agrees to do so, a civil court will consider any agreement legally binding, provided it is executed according to the relevant legal statutes. This would mean that you would not have to go through a civil proceeding to obtain a divorce.

Preparing for *Beis Din*

You may want to consider bringing secular legal counsel to *beis din*. Before agreeing to a hearing by a *beis din*, you should research various *batei din* until you find one that has a reputation for fair judgments. According to *halachah* (Jewish Law), you can insist that you will not participate in the *beis din* unless it is a *beis din* you choose.

Be aware that promises may sometimes be made to entice someone to go to *beis din* that are then not kept. A *beis din*'s judgment may, in actuality, say something very different from what you were expecting (or promised). Because of its explicit religious focus, a *beis din* may grant favorable judgments to your religious ex-spouse. For example, a *beis din* might be unwilling to grant you custody if you are shown to be non-religious.

Ensure that you are well-informed and well-defended and that you look out for your own best interests. Do not accept any promises without proper assurances that they will be kept. Your lawyer can help you identify legitimate assurances.

If you are a woman, you may want to consider bringing male allies with you any time you appear in *beis din*. You may find the all-male court intimidating or “triggering.” Having male allies, particularly those familiar with the community, can help you retain your confidence.

The Get Law

In 1992, New York State passed “The *Get* Law”. The Get Law (found in Section 253 of the Domestic Relations Law) states that in a contested divorce, if the couple was married in a religious ceremony, a divorce cannot be granted unless:

“he or she has taken, or will take, all steps within his or her power to remove all barriers to the other spouse’s remarriage; or the other spouse has waived in writing the applicant’s obligation to file the statement.”

This means that in New York State you must swear to give a *get* (unless both parties agree not to pursue one) before being granted a civil divorce, although the defendant in a divorce who is not asking the court for any relief cannot be forced to remove barriers to remarriage. You may want to consult with your lawyer to investigate your legal options to ensure your participation in the *get* process goes as smoothly as possible, using your power within that process to maximize your positive outcomes in the civil divorce. Also, as mentioned above, you can refuse to participate in the *get* process unless it happens at a *beis din* of your choosing. A *beis din* in a different segment of the religious community (for example, a Modern Orthodox *beis din*) may result in a more favorable judgment.

If you are forced by the New York State Get Law to go to *beis din*, strategize about whether you also want *beis din* to manage the entire case (not just the giving of the *get*).

Outside of New York State you can refuse to participate in the *get* process. A man can refuse to give a *get* or a woman can refuse to accept a *get*. This could be part of a larger divorce/custody strategy. Outside of New York State, if you want a *get*, you can insist that you will not go to *beis din* until the civil case is first settled by a secular court or arbitrator.

There is power in both giving and not giving the *get* or receiving and choosing not to receive the *get*. Explore your options with trusted advisors and your lawyer to make the best decisions for your overall strategy.

RELIGION AND PURSUING CUSTODY

Limiting Contact

Individuals who choose to leave a religious lifestyle sometimes wonder if it is healthier for their children if they have only limited contact with them. This idea is frequently promoted by people in the Orthodox community in order to pressure non-religious parents to sever ties with their children. Mainstream psychological and child development experts do not support this point of view. They argue that children do best when they are in close contact with both parents.

You may feel that it is your right and responsibility as a parent to be there for your children, regardless of your level of religious observance. Or you may feel that you are hurting them by changing your lifestyle. If you have trouble deciding what is best for you and your children, consider talking to an impartial counselor or therapist in order to work through these issues.

Decisions about custody are life-altering. Taking the time to consider your options and their consequences is an important part of making the right decision for the long term.

Your Children's Religiosity

Deciding whether and to what degree you want religion to be a part of your children's lives can be a difficult decision. You may wish to modify your religious practice or to leave all religion behind. In either case, you will need to think about whether your children are willing and/or able to adapt to a non- or less religious lifestyle, particularly if the children have lived for many years within the religious community. There are important legal and psychological questions that may arise from the specific choice you make.

Although there is no way to predict how a judge will rule, decisions about religion and religiosity could affect the outcome of a custody case. If, for example, your ex-spouse argues in court that your choice goes against the children's best interest a judge could deny you the kind of relationship you seek to have with them. Ultimately, only you can answer the question of how much religion you want for your children. You may find it helpful to talk to an impartial counselor or therapist. You should also consult with your lawyer regarding the legal ramifications.

If you do decide to raise your children without religious observance, you may find it helpful to learn more about parenting in the secular world by browsing secular parenting blogs, making friends with secular parents, and/or connecting with parents who made the journey from a religious to a secular lifestyle. If you would still like to retain an attachment to Judaism for yourself and your children, there are many other Jewish communities, such as Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, Traditional, etc. There are many groups and blogs where parents grapple with how to raise their children based on values identified on their own terms.

What is important to keep in mind is that children are resilient. If you decide to raise your children differently from the religious experience they were born into, they will adapt. Decide on your values, live those values, and be a strong role model and support for your children. Ultimately, this is most important.

FAQ

I am divorced and I didn't receive primary custody of my children. How do I prevent becoming estranged from them?

This is a difficult subject that a counselor or therapist can help you grapple with. Talk to Footsteps staff if you need assistance finding help on this issue.

Most importantly, keep showing up, even if your children go through a stage where it seems they are not interested in you. Children sometimes have a hard time expressing conflicting emotions. Remind them that you love them and try not to get frustrated if they don't reciprocate your sentiments. They may appreciate your presence even if they act or say otherwise.

Try to engage your children in activities you know they like. Help them feel safe and secure in your presence. If your lifestyle is different than theirs, you may want to consider how much you keep private and how much you display. The choices you make will impact your children in a variety of ways.

If there is a court order that allows for visitation, try hard to show up. This is important for your own sake and for the children's. If you don't visit your children, you run the risk of having your spouse argue that your absence has alienated you from the children and he/she might seek a court order to rescind your visitation rights. If the court has established specific rules for visitation, make sure to stick to them. For example, if the agreement or court order is that your children keep kosher, do not take them to McDonalds, no matter how much they beg.

Does a father stand a chance of getting primary custody?

Fathers can and do receive custody. The courts determine custody based on what they think is in the best interest of the children. One of the most important factors is determining which parent has been the primary caregiver in the past. Additionally, there is statistical evidence that fathers who do fight for custody are given equal consideration and are just as likely as mothers to receive it.

Keep in mind that there are many gradations of custody. There is a difference between legal custody and physical custody. Even if you do not have primary custody, you can be granted varying levels of visitation rights. It isn't all or nothing.

What if I just ignore my spouse's decision to file for divorce?

The court case can and probably will proceed without you. There is no advantage to ignoring divorce papers. Doing so would probably result in a most advantageous outcome for your ex-spouse in the form of a default judgment.

FOUR STORIES

Each person's life journey is unique, and no one can predict what will happen in any individual divorce or custody case. Here are four stories that explore different scenarios. Although these stories are fictional, they are based on composites or variations of true events. These stories are not meant to be used to predict outcomes of other cases or to draw conclusions about other situations. They simply provide a variety of scenarios to consider.

Chumy/Candice

Chumy had never had a happy marriage. Her husband was controlling and abusive. When he got very angry, he would slap her or punch her or force her to have sex with him. Chumy had two sons before she decided to secretly go on birth control. Afraid of her husband and disappointed by her rabbis' and family's response to the violence, she found that she no longer wanted to stay in her home or belong to the religious community. She began to gather information about leaving and to secretly plan her escape.

Whenever Chumy had an extra few dollars, she hid them in a hollowed out *shaitel* head. Whenever her husband hit her, she secretly took a photo of what he had done and she wrote about each incident in her diary, which she hid at a friend's house. Whenever she was able, she tried to make an appointment with her doctor or her children's pediatrician to show them the bruises and to tell them about the abuse. The doctors expressed concern and urged her to get help. She reassured them she would, soon.

As part of her plan, she built a network of new friends from all different backgrounds and she learned about the outside world, while imagining herself as the woman she wanted to be. She spent a few hours each week secretly working from home and managed to get hold of additional money during the renovation of her and her husband's apartment. Over the course of two years, Chumy was able to save \$30,000.

One day, when Chumy's husband was away on a trip to Israel, Jane, a new non-religious friend of hers, came to her home and helped her pack three small bags. Jane then drove Chumy and her children to her Manhattan apartment. Chumy, who now began calling herself Candice, settled into Jane's spare room with her sons and called the lawyer she had found to let her know it was time to file papers and a protective order.

Candice's ex-husband was furious and he rallied supporters to pay for an expensive lawyer. But Candice had witnesses who could attest to his abuse and she had documentation of his violence. Each time she had to show up in court, Candice brought along some of her new friends. She continued to work at her part-time job and moved into a small apartment of her own. She enrolled her sons in public school. The case cost Candice twenty-eight thousand dollars, but after 12 months, during which she and her sons built a new foundation for themselves, Candice was free. Her husband was only permitted one supervised visit a month, while Candice gained the freedom to make her own choices for herself and her children.

Duvid

Duvid and his wife had two young children when Duvid realized he didn't want to live a religious lifestyle or to remain in Williamsburg. His wife was very upset by his decision and called her parents. Her father threatened to cut off Duvid from his children if he left.

Duvid tried to suppress his desires, but it became impossible. Internally, he was a secular person. He couldn't continue to live a lie. He moved out, found a lawyer, and filed for divorce. He had

\$13,000 in savings. He worked in life insurance, but after he left Williamsburg, all of his religious customers refused to work with him, so he lost his job. He found a new job at a Starbucks. Although he loved having freedom, his cash flow was severely depleted.

Duvid found out that the community had taken up a collection for his wife's legal fees. He was then served with a restraining order, which falsely alleged that he had been violent towards his wife. Fighting the order would cost more money. The court case had only just begun when Duvid found all of his savings depleted. He struggled for a few months, his legal fees mounting, until he felt there was no point in fighting anymore. He was \$20,000 in debt and earning only \$11 an hour, with no end in sight to the case. On top of this, his ex-wife called his parents to the stand to testify that he was an unfit parent. The emotional and financial pressure became too much.

Duvid agreed to settle, and with few options, agreed to a painful custody agreement his ex-wife's lawyers drew up. According to its terms, he was allowed to see his children once a month at the home of a religious relative. Every month, he would take the train from his new apartment in Harlem back to Williamsburg to see his children. He would knock at the door of what used to be his home, and his ex-wife's new husband would answer. "The children don't want to see you," he would tell Duvid. His two children would look at Duvid with frightened eyes, shrugging their shoulders. Sometimes the older one would agree to walk to the ice cream store with Duvid. But the walks were silent and uncomfortable, and Duvid felt like his child was closed off from him. After a few painful months of fruitless visits, Duvid stopped trying to see his children.

But then Duvid decided to visit a therapist to process the pain of his loss. He found a free clinic, and through discussions with his therapist, gained new tools for coping with his emotions and connecting with his children. Duvid resumed his monthly visits with his children. Although they remained awkward for some months, over time his children began to open up to him again and he began to develop a new and valuable relationship with them. Eventually, he was able to expose them to small parts of his life. When his oldest son, Nuchem, turned 18, he chose to increase his visits with his dad.

Baruch

Baruch and his wife had five children when Baruch realized he wanted to live a different life. His wife was willing to experiment a little bit – she'd watch movies with him and they'd listen to non-Jewish music in the car. But when Baruch started talking about moving out of Boro Park and giving up *shabbos*, *kashrut*, and the rest of the religious lifestyle, she got very upset. She rallied her brother and father for support, kicked Baruch out of the house, and summoned him to *beis din*.

Baruch sought out a group of trusted friends and took stock of his resources and priorities. His wife was a good mother, and while Baruch had some resources, he didn't have enough to fight for custody through the courts. He decided that instead he would fight for significant visitation rights and try to get most of the case settled in *beis din*. However, he refused to go to the *beis din* his wife had selected. He found out about an Orthodox *beis din* in Far Rockaway that had a reputation of being fair-minded and balanced. He told his wife that was the only *beis din* he would agree to go to. Members of the community objected. Eventually, Baruch offered a compromise: He would agree to a specific *beis din* in Monsey. His wife was desperate to receive a *get* and move on with the divorce, so she accepted.

Meanwhile, Baruch remained quiet about his secular interests. He did shave off his beard, but he kept remnants of his *payes* and always wore a *yarmulke* when he was in a religious neighborhood. In preparation for the *beis din*, he hired a persuasive *toen* to represent him. The

beis din decided that if Baruch agreed to keep *shabbos* and kosher he could spend two days a week with his five children. It was a compromise he was willing to make.

Baruch maintains a strong relationship with his children. Although he would love to move to California and never wear a *yarmulke* again, he is willing to keep an apartment in Kensington and maintain the façade of religiosity in order to have a relationship with his children.

Miriam

Miriam lived in Lakewood with her husband and her two children when she decided she wanted to finally pursue a secret dream of becoming a doctor. Although she loved Judaism, she didn't love Lakewood. She wanted to pursue her career and have a more relaxed relationship with her religious heritage. She tried expressing this to her husband, but he was unsympathetic. He grew angry and threatened to kidnap their children to Israel.

Miriam did not bring up the conversation again. Instead, she did research and gathered resources, secretly enrolling in a long-distance learning college, taking CLEP exams for college credits, and earning a degree in 18 months. During that time, she also made friends from other backgrounds, learned more about what she wanted from life, and saved some money.

She was studying for her MCATs when her husband found one of her text books. Outraged, he demanded she stop or he would divorce her. Miriam decided it was time to move out. She moved with her children to an inexpensive apartment in Plainsburg, New Jersey, got a part-time job, and took her MCATs. Miriam had limited funds, so she developed a strategy of her own: She would stall as much as she could, get her children acclimated to a more moderate life, and then see where the chips would fall. She and her husband spent a few months discussing whether or not to go first to *beis din* or to a civil court. She agreed to meet with a few rabbis and speak with them. She did whatever she could to keep the exchanges calm while dragging them out. When her husband finally hired a lawyer and filed papers, Miriam hired a lawyer and instructed her to ask for more time. It was eight months later by the time Miriam actually appeared in court. Her children were well adjusted to their Conservative day school and Miriam had been accepted to medical school. The judge was impressed with this and with how happy and acclimated her children seemed.

Six months later, Miriam was \$29,000 in debt but she received primary custody. Her ex-husband would spend one week out of every month with the children. After the divorce, Miriam had to handle a large financial and emotional burden, paying off her debt and attending medical school while raising the children on her own. For assistance, she found a low-cost therapist and applied for Food Stamps and Medicaid. She bought clothing from second-hand stores. She was motivated by her children and the incremental gains they made in their new lives. When things became especially difficult, she looked five years down the road, imagining how things would be, knowing it would all be worth it.

RESOURCES

“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.” -*Andre Gide*

Footsteps

www.footstepsorg.org

(212) 253-0890

Legal

inMotion, Inc.

Provides legal services in the areas of family, matrimonial, and immigration law for women residing in New York City.

(212) 695-3800

www.inmotiononline.org

Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

Has an online guide to Jewish divorce and the beis din system.

[www.jofa.org/Advocacy/Beit Din Guide/](http://www.jofa.org/Advocacy/Beit_Din_Guide/)

LawHelp/NY

Offers online tool for helping low-income New York residents with their legal problems. Provides access to referrals to free legal services, information on legal rights, and knowledge about the court system and related organizations.

www.lawhelp.org/ny

LIFT (Legal Information for Families Today) Online

Empowers families to advocate for themselves in the complex family court system and addresses the emotional ramifications of court involvement. They offer step-by-step guides to the legal process on their website and on-site in family court.

www.liftonline.org

(212) 343-1122

New York Court Systems

Offers forms, instructional booklets and videos on divorce. Also runs the Collaborative Family Law Project, a form of alternative dispute resolution.

www.nycourts.gov/divorce/forms.shtml

New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Provides consultation and representation on all family and matrimonial matters through its Matrimonial and Family Law Unit. Priority is given to victims of domestic violence. NYLAG's LGBT Law Project also provides consultation and representation for members of the LGBT community.

www.nylag.org/law.htm

(212) 613-5000

Sanctuary for Families

Offers legal advice, assistance, and representation to domestic violence victims in cases involving divorce, child custody/visitation, child and spousal support, immigration, and prosecution of batterers in criminal matters.

www.sanctuaryforfamilies.org

(212) 349-6009

Unchained at Last

Helps women leave arranged marriages and pushes to change the laws that could keep women trapped in such marriages. They provide legal services and mentoring around these issues.

www.unchainedatlast.org

Volunteer Lawyers for Justice

Provides pro bono legal assistance for low-income New Jersey residents involved in civil disputes. (Does not handle domestic violence cases.)

www.vljinj.org

Women's Law

Helps women who are being abused physically, sexually, or emotionally get the support and protection they need.

www.womenslaw.org

Mental Health**Educational Alliance**

Provides counseling on a wide range of issues including family stress, parent/child problems, life changes, and trauma. Accepts Medicaid, Medicare, and most major health insurance plans.

www.edalliance.org

(646) 395-4260

Jewish Board of Family and Children Services

Offers low cost counseling and other social family services to non-Jews and Jews of all denominations through their offices around New York. In addition, they offer support groups for recently single parents.

www.jbfcs.org

(888) 523-2769

Safe Horizon

Provides victims of domestic violence with a wide range of social services, including counseling and legal support.

www.safehorizon.org

(800) 621-HOPE (4673)

SAVI Takanot Program, Mount Sinai Hospital

Offers free, confidential, religiously sensitive, and culturally knowledgeable weekly psychotherapy sessions for female and male survivors of sexual assault, sexual abuse (adult or childhood), rape, molestation, incest, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence.

(212) 423-2140

Victim Services Program, Beth Israel Medical Center

Provides free and confidential short-term and long-term counseling for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Orthodox and non-Orthodox therapists available. Program located at Beth Israel Medical Center in lower Manhattan.

(212) 420-4516

Child Supports**American Academy of Pediatrics**

Provides informational resources for parents on child development, health, and safety, and family issues.

www.healthychildren.org

Educational Alliance

Offers several daycare, preschool, day camp, and youth programs.

www.edalliance.org

(212) 780-2300

Abuse**Administration for Children's Services**

Organization to call if child abuse or neglect is suspected or known.

General Public: (800) 342-3720

In NYC: Call 311 and ask for the ACS hotline

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Project Kol Tzedek, Kings County District Attorney's Office

Offers culturally sensitive support for Orthodox victims of sexual abuse. Social workers offer crisis intervention, counseling, and referrals. Assistant district attorneys available to discuss individual situations, answer questions, file reports, and prosecute cases. Individuals can remain anonymous and will not be forced to proceed with a case.

(718) 250-2005

Male Survivor

Provides informational resources, links to support groups, and discussion boards for male survivors of sexual abuse.

www.malesurvivor.org

Met Council

Advocates to fight poverty and provides services to all New Yorkers in need with a particular focus on the Jewish community. Offers an array of programs, including services to help families and individuals hurt by domestic violence.

www.metcouncil.org

Family Violence: (212) 453-9618

RAINN Hotline: Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network

A free and confidential sexual abuse hotline. Open 24/7.

(800) 656-HOPE (4673)

SOVRI Hotline

An anonymous and confidential emotional support helpline for Orthodox Jewish survivors of sexual abuse. It is under the auspices of the Victims Services Program of Beth Israel Medical Center. The helpline is open Monday-Thursday 9:30am-5:30pm and Friday 9:30am-1:30pm.

(888) 613-1613

Survivors for Justice

Online resource that offers advocacy, education, and support for survivors and their families from the Orthodox world.

www.sfjny.org

info@sfjny.org

Crisis**Met Council**

Provides help in financial emergencies through its Crisis Intervention Services.

www.metcouncil.org

Crisis Intervention: (212) 453-9539

Sanctuary for Families

Helps victims of domestic violence and their children with crisis intervention, emergency and transitional housing, individual and group counseling, job readiness, and mentoring programs.

www.sanctuaryforfamilies.org

(212) 349-6009

Hospital Emergency Rooms

Most hospital emergency rooms are equipped with social workers that can provide assistance to victims of domestic violence.

LGBTQ

Identity House

Provides services for the support and encouragement of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other adults who are struggling with issues of sexuality, alienation, relationship and family.

www.identityhouse.org

(212) 243-8181

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center

Provides social services, educational, cultural, and recreational programs for the LGBT community.

www.gaycenter.org

(646) 556-9300

There are many more resources that provide many different kinds of assistance. Please contact Footsteps for more information.