



**JCOUNSELLING**

*(formerly JMC)*

# **A VISION FOR RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT**

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## **WHO IS JCOUNSELLING?**

Formerly known as the JMC, JCounselling was founded in 1946 to support Jewish marriages and family life. It has evolved over the last 75 years, providing counselling to individuals, couples, and families. Today, the focus is on strengthening the Jewish family which is at the core of the community by building and enabling more positive relationships between all family members, not just the husband and wife.

Our aim is to be the go-to resource for building and maintaining healthy Jewish relationships through confidential, expert, sensitive support for individuals, couples and the entire Jewish family by investing in the tools to build successful relationships.

## **WHAT DOES JCOUNSELLING DO?**

The Jewish community faces the same challenges as the secular world. JCounselling's daily diet consists of families grappling with contemporary issues such as addiction (drug, internet, gambling and pornography), abuse (physical, sexual and emotional), and the inability of so many people to form and maintain stable relationships.

Our BACP qualified counsellors encourage individuals and couples to dedicate time to talking about what a healthy relationship means and how to achieve it through communication, active listening, learning effective strategies to resolve conflict, building trust within an environment where people feel safe.



Very often the problem isn't only or even about couples - our Family Therapists work with children, adolescents and adults to help family members find a modus operandi without taking sides or attributing blame.

If we're not proactive now, these issues will translate into an ever-growing number of dysfunctional homes, and children who have no idea what a healthy marriage looks like.

Lord Jonathan Sacks <sup>ל"ה</sup> asked many years ago whether our grandchildren would be Jewish. The family is the core and foundation of the Jewish community. Without strong families we will not have a strong community. We now need to wonder how many of our grandchildren will be nurtured in warm, stable, loving two-parent Jewish homes.

#### **DEFINITION OF A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP**

No one definition accurately defines what a healthy relationship looks like, but it is certainly likely to include trust, openness, honesty, respect, affection and communication.

JCounselling seeks to help people recognise the components of healthy relationships, those behaviours that are unhealthy, and how to manage situations that have the potential to "get out of control".

When there is conflict in a relationship it is never usually the presenting issue that is at the core of the conflict. Resentment surfaces when one gets angry and a small issue can become magnified. Whilst the deliverer (aggressor is a bit harsh) might feel justified in venting, the receiver would not necessarily understand where these exaggerated emotions are coming from. Good communication and active listening are the two main areas that fail when we become animated or extremely angry.

We show couples how to communicate effectively and how to listen actively. Sometimes couples hope that the other will understand them without words – unfortunately partners are unable to read minds!

### **CHALLENGE VS CRISIS**

And a vital component of a healthy relationship is recognising that, as we travel life's path and as our circumstances and situations inevitably change (e.g., new job, new child, empty nesting, redundancy, illness, bereavement, retirement, etc.), we need to "learn a new dance". Individuals evolve over time and so do our relationships. How we addressed something yesterday may not be the best way to deal with it tomorrow, given who or what or where we are at the time.

Rather than approaching each challenge as a crisis, we should think instead of these moments as opportunities to acquire a new toolset. Whilst we rarely have any control over which challenge is going to hit and when it might do so, where we are effectively



prepared and armed to recognise the tell-tale signs and to know where and how to find support, we can go some way toward averting a crisis.

Successful relationships create and enable an environment in which people feel safe to share their concerns, support each other and work together toward a collective solution that benefits all.

And people cannot be allowed to be stigmatised or diminished or made to feel a “lesser person” by admitting that they might need help.

#### **A VISION FOR RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT**

In simple terms, JCounselling's vision for relationship support is characterised as follows:

- **Signposted.** When you need support, you need it now and you need to know where to find it. JCounselling believes that support pathways should be clearly understood by all – both those in need and those who might be able to assist those in need (e.g., doctors, schools, ministers of religion, etc.) - and those pathways must be readily accessible (without obstruction or delay). This involves proactive and regular engagement with all levels of the community to raise awareness of the issues, to identify “warning signs” and to direct people to appropriate support.
- **Destigmatised.** We still have a journey to travel before there is ready acceptance that relationship counselling and support for mental health issues are as important



and as relevant and as normal as speaking with a cardiologist about a heart condition. JCounselling supports and engages with all suitable initiatives at a local and national level aimed at normalising these issues.

- **Financially Subsidised.** Not everyone has the financial wherewithal to pay privately for therapy. Those who can, should pay. But those who need financial assistance should be supported. Failure to address an issue now will generally result in greater damage and increased costs further down the line. JCounselling works with clients to provide means tested therapy ensuring that no-one is denied support on financial grounds alone. That said, JCounselling believes strongly that people need to be invested in their therapy and that even at the lower end of the scale, a small minimum fee is levied.
  
- **Educated.** Society must be taught to value the importance of healthy relationships (whether in terms of impact on mental health, criminal damage, economic well-being, childhood development, etc.) through effective educational programmes and “preventative” training. Campaigns need to spread the word and effective educational programmes must support human life cycle events by providing everyday tools and awareness to know how to manage a situation either on one’s own or with the necessary levels of support. JCounselling has developed training programmes (and is working on further courses) aimed at helping people navigate these life cycle events. These programmes are aimed separately at high school young adults; post high school; still singles; pre marrieds/engaged couples;



marrieds – newly married, with children, empty nesters, grandparents, retirement, divorce, blended families, etc. Our programs are designed to help people understand:

- What is marriage - Religious vs Secular perspective.
  - How to model behaviours – good and bad examples.
  - What's included in an effective toolkit – communication, self-knowledge, understanding what each other needs, listening, conflict resolution, trust, security, respect, self-confidence, recognizing when you need help, space for us and me and G-d.
  - How to maintain relationships – with our spouse, children, siblings, parents, in-laws, grandparents, society.
  - What gets in the way of a healthy relationship.
- **Effective Counselling.** For some, education alone will be insufficient and their well-being will need to be supported by professional and meaningful therapy. We need to ensure that counsellors are effectively trained, that there is a sustainable throughput of new counsellors and that there is a cultural cross section of people sensitive to the cultural nuances of a diverse population. JCounselling has a team of highly skilled therapists who receive regular training on current and alternative therapeutic approaches. All counsellors are subject to regular supervision to ensure that quality standards are maintained. JCounselling provides a fertile training ground and supervision for new therapists seeking to enter the world of relationship counselling.



- **Mentoring.** All too often, what we really need is a mentor – a non-judgemental listening ear with a rich life experience who has my interests at heart. Most people don't know where to find such a person or how to ask for their assistance. In a faith environment, the mentor role is often filled by a community's religious leader. JCounselling values the role such a religious leader might play but cautions at a few levels – does the religious leader have sufficient time available; is that person sufficiently independent; do they know when it is time to “hand over” to the professionals. JCounselling actively encourage people to find a mentor whether at an individual level or as a couple.

### **HOW CAN GOVERNMENT POLICY CONTRIBUTE TO INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES BEING ABLE TO FLOURISH?**

As society enters the post-liberal era, it is now time to return to those solid values that have stood the test of time and to re-align our moral compass accordingly.

In the pursuit of so-called economic advancement and specialisation, globalisation has decimated communities and torn them apart. And as towns and communities have disintegrated – with jobs and skills transferred abroad and no hope for a future outside of the dole - so too have the families that formed the backbone of those communities.



People no longer have any sense of belonging – to each other, to their family, to the community or to a faith. It is not surprising, therefore, that families are struggling to “hold it together”.

Government policy needs to drive moral values, create inter-generational support, build communities, and develop infrastructures that value families and the communities of which they should be a part and to which they should contribute.

From a JCounselling perspective, we would like to see government policy supporting personal and family well-being through the initiatives described above, specifically:

ISSUE	GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE
SIGNPOSTED	Wherever possible, communities should be made aware of the range of services available and how to access them. This will require proactive messaging in a variety of media formats.
DESTIGMATISED	National campaigns must normalise the need for counselling and support and should draw on role models to highlight specific issues. These campaigns need to be culturally sensitive, recognising that certain

ISSUE	GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE
	<p>communities engage differently with these issues than others might. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.</p>
FINANCIALLY SUBSIDISED	<p>The NHS waiting list crisis extends to mental health challenges just as it does across so many other areas of health. Creative solutions need to be found where, for example, suitably approved agencies (e.g., JCounselling and many others) could be funded to provide necessary support. Charities are limited in their resources and cannot continue indefinitely - unfunded and unsupported - to fill the gaping holes left by government under-investment.</p>
EDUCATED	<p>The work that the JCounselling is doing in building life cycle training programmes could easily be made available – with suitable cultural adjustments – to other organisations and government initiatives. Skills training needs to start at school level but, shockingly, most people are left to their own devices with no training, guidance or support as to what a healthy relationship</p>

ISSUE	GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE
	looks like. It is not surprising that as a community we struggle with such a high level of dysfunctionality.
EFFECTIVE COUNSELLING	<p>Effective counselling is only possible with a sufficient throughput of suitably trained counsellors entering “the system” and with the resources available to make that counselling available to those in need.</p> <p>Government initiatives should encourage and support this process.</p>

### HOW FAITH GROUPS MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO ATTAINING THAT VISION

It might have been true historically that certain faith groups were – or felt – immune from the challenges confronting non- or other faith groups. Divorce rates were lower, mental health issues were less prevalent, domestic violence almost unheard of.

Or was that really true?

Perhaps in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century people are more ready to confront some of these issues.

Perhaps the issues are new ones. Perhaps?



The reality is that no-one is immune from the pressures that today's society brings, from the challenges to traditional family values, from a spinning moral compass.

JCounselling seeks to support and nurture the essence of the Jewish marriage and family so that we can look ourselves and our children in the eye and honestly say that we have done everything possible to give all children a safe and meaningful future built in an environment of healthy relationships.

Furthermore, JCounselling believes in the importance of collaboration across the community. No-one has the monopoly on good ideas. We are not in competition with each other – only with ourselves to do the best job possible.

To that end, JCounselling actively seeks out opportunities to work hand in hand with other organisations who share our ideals and values, and we welcome the chance to work with the Archbishop's Commission on Family and Households to share good practice and to build hope for the future.

Faith groups provide, amongst other things, the sense of belonging so desperately needed by so many. If working together brings us closer to that ideal, JCounselling will contribute tirelessly to that objective.

## **YOUNG AND BELONGING**

One of the many areas of significant concern having a direct impact on the family and the wider community, is the safety and well-being of young people. We have a deep intergenerational responsibility to understand how we have gotten to where we are and what is needed to ensure the safe and meaningful future of our children.

We need to go back to first principles, to understand the context within which we are operating and we must challenge underlying assumptions upon which edifices are often misguidedly built. What are the challenges confronting young people? Is any faith or cultural community immune from these challenges?

Some months ago, I was asked to think about these issues and was privileged to have had access to many young people, to leading psychologists who deal in the issues young people present, to community organisers and leaders, to educational experts, to inspirational teachers and youth workers, and to parents of young people.

It is wellnigh impossible not to have some preconceived notion of what the answers to your deliberation are likely to throw up.

But I never understood then as I do now, that what young people (and dare I say, most people) are looking for is "simply" a sense of belonging.



Of course, drugs, pornography, social media, friendships, Covid, etc. are all challenges confronting young people to some degree or another. But I believe that these are all signposts to a far bigger issue.

Most of us have a strong need to belong. We are challenged when we either encounter rejection or we can't quite figure out how to gain acceptance. And in the process of seeking acceptance, we sometimes reach for exaggerated "tools" to get there – whether through foreign substances, out of the ordinary behaviours, self-harm or the like.

In an increasingly fragmented, deconstructed, disintegrated society we occasionally (or, maybe, all too often) fail to notice the calls from others for attention. I wonder whether we even notice these calls in ourselves. But, more worryingly, we don't do enough to build the structures or environments that provide hope, attachment and belonging so that when someone does shout, we stand a chance of hearing them or, preferably, that we avoid the need for the call in the first place.

Globalisation has disaggregated communities and offered no replacement for human interaction. I might be a member of the global family with access to information from every remote part of the universe. I can certainly purchase goods and services from places I can't even spell. But where are the real people I can touch and feel and love and turn to in times of need? Where are those live bodies from whom I can draw true warmth and comfort? And where are the opportunities for me



to give back when others need me because when we give to others, we build connection?

Not too long ago we used to belong to clubs, gyms, faith groups, PTA's, lodges, Women's Institutes. We would see each other at school, at work, at the pub, in the supermarket. We learned together, laughed together, put on amateur dramatic events together, arranged village fetes together.

And now?

We order our groceries on line, watch Netflix at home, exercise at home, "like" our "friends" on Facebook from our computer at home, etc.

To what do I belong, to whom do I matter, from whom do I draw my role models, from where do I develop any sense of proportion, reality or balance?

Historically we modelled behaviours from teachers, ministers of religion, parents, civic leaders. Today our touch points come predominantly from the multi-billion-dollar, ubiquitous social media and entertainment industries. Their deep pockets and sophisticated tools are designed to lure me into a parallel and perverse other world against whom the traditional models seem incapable of competing.



These “other sources” provide instant gratification, immediate access, 24/7 interaction and endless choice at the swipe of a finger. They titillate, fascinate and occasionally educate. They provide views, news, reality and fantasy. They polarise and bring together. They clarify and usually blur. And all too often they leave one without any sense of what is true and real and what is not.

But they don't really know ME or my family or my values or what might be good or appropriate for me.

A recent Forbes article <sup>1</sup> suggested that the pandemic wreaked havoc with our sense of belonging. Whereas we're hardwired for connectedness, social distancing forced us apart. The author suggests that belonging is “the sense that you're part of something. You feel attached, close and thoroughly accepted by your people. But belonging is more than just being part of a group. Belonging is also critically tied to social identity—a set of shared beliefs or ideals. To truly feel a sense of belonging, you must feel unity and a common sense of character with and among members of your group.”

Jeanine Stewart, senior consultant with the Neuroleadership Institute argues that “being surrounded by other human beings doesn't guarantee a sense of belonging. Belonging actually has to do with identification as a member of a group and the

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<sup>1</sup> Missing Your People: Why Belonging Is So Important And How To Create It Tracy Brower





higher quality interactions which come from that. It's the interactions over time which are supportive of us as full, authentic human beings."

For me the powerful words in the extract above is "over time". Today's society is instant and fast moving and disposable and replaceable. How many relationships or interactions last "over time"? How many intergenerational connections are enduring or even exist at all? And if those interactions aren't "over time" then our sense of belonging is seriously impacted.

Even in the pre pandemic workplace a Harvard Business Review <sup>2</sup> study found that 40% of people claimed to feel isolated at work, leading to lower commitment and engagement. So, even when we found ourselves physically connected to other people in the workplace, we nevertheless struggled for acceptance and inclusion by those around us. Without it, we don't believe we belong.

Belonging is a fundamental human need. When we don't have it, we feel isolated. In a work environment that can translate into lower productivity. In a home or social setting, lack of belonging plays out in so many different – and often harmful – ways.

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<sup>2</sup> The Value of Belonging at Work by Evan W. Carr, Andrew Reece, Gabriella Rosen Kellerman, and Alexi Robichaux

And what can we do about it? I don't claim to have the answers, but I wonder whether we can draw guidance from Deuteronomy Chapter 20 which describes the conditions necessary before a soldier can go to war. Where soldiers have not completed one of the following four conditions, there is no secure knowledge that they are a joint and severable part of the whole, a collective unit able to rely and depend on each other. And what are these conditions:

- He has built a house but not consecrated it;
- He has planted a vineyard but not redeemed it;
- He has betrothed/engaged a woman and not yet married her;
- He has not found security.

In other words, developing a sense of belonging probably derives from some rather basic, fundamental human needs – a home, a job, a family, and security. Perhaps these are the areas where we need to start our efforts to rebuild a society to which our children connect and belong.

I pray that in the post-liberal era we will rededicate our efforts with strength and wisdom to return to strong, family values providing our children with a moral compass and the love, warmth and sense of stability and security which are preconditions for a lifetime of belonging.