JEWISH WOMEN'S AID

JWA SHABBAT 20-21 NOVEMBER 2026

SEE THE *Unseen*

See the signs. Start a conversation.



Before I begin, I want to give a content warning to let you know that I'll be speaking in general terms about domestic abuse. There will be no graphic detail, but I recognise that this subject may feel difficult or personal. Please feel free to step out at any point. I'll be here afterwards if you would like to talk or need support.

This JWA Shabbat, Jewish Women's Aid is inviting us to See the Unseen. It is a powerful reminder that abuse is not always obvious. It often leaves no visible marks and can be hidden behind behaviours that appear caring, loving or ordinary.

Last year, 88% of the women supported by Jewish Women's Aid were experiencing coercive control. Coercive control is not about one incident, but a pattern of behaviour that gradually takes away a person's confidence, independence, choices and freedom.

Coercive control may sound like concern: "You don't need to see your friends tonight. They don't get you like I do." It may seem like practical help: "Don't worry about the loan being in your name." It may appear affectionate: "I've texted you 20 times today because I miss you." Yet over time, these behaviours can isolate someone, make them dependent, erode their confidence and leave them feeling afraid.

What makes coercive control so difficult to recognise is that it often disguises itself as care, protection or love. Yet its goal is control, and its impact is deeply destructive. Over time, a person's freedom, confidence and sense of self can be eroded.

We may not always know what is happening behind closed doors, but as a community we can create a culture where people feel safe to speak and know they will be heard. Jewish Women's Aid reminds us that sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is reach out, listen without judgement and believe someone when they share their story. Jewish Women's Aid is here for all women and their children who are experiencing domestic abuse [and sexual violence] as well as partnering with our community to change attitudes an create a healthier community for us all.

This Shabbat, let us commit to seeing the unseen, recognising the signs others may miss, and building a community where abuse cannot remain hidden and every person can live with dignity, freedom and safety.

Shabbat Shalom.

OPTIONAL ADDITION: PARSHAT VAYETZE

This year's JWA Shabbat falls on Parshat Vayetze, where Leah gives birth to her first son and says:

"G-d has seen my affliction; now my husband will love me."

This verse offers a focus for our reflection this Shabbat: pain that others may not see still matters, and no one should feel forgotten or alone. We can carry that message into our own responsibility to notice and respond to suffering today. For women experiencing coercive control, much of the harm happens behind closed doors. This can make coercive control difficult to recognise. At Jewish Women's Aid, we see how women experiencing coercive control face constant criticism, blame and manipulation that leave them feeling unworthy of love, never good enough, or responsible for keeping another person happy. But pain does not have to be visible to be real. This JWA Shabbat, let us answer the call to action: believing women, listening without judgement and helping them access the support they deserve.



WHEN A BAR OR BAT MITZVAH IS TAKING PLACE ON JWA SHABBAT

Today is Jewish Women's Aid Shabbat. JWA is committed to supporting the community to inform and inspire a generation of young people with the confidence and skills to engage in healthy relationships from the start and throughout their lives, while supporting those who have been affected by domestic abuse. JWA educates young people about consent, respect, boundaries and healthy relationships.

For young people approaching a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, this is especially relevant. Becoming a Jewish adult is a moment to reflect not only on what we believe, but on the kind of person we want to be and how we treat others. Judaism teaches that every person is created b'tzelem Elokim, in the image of G-d. When we truly value that principle, we build friendships and relationships based on mutual respect, kindness and dignity, where each person feels safe to be themselves, make their own choices and have their boundaries respected.

By talking openly about healthy relationships, we can help the next generation recognise the qualities that allow relationships, families and communities to flourish.

FOR AN AUFRUF OR SHABBAT CHATAN

Today is also an opportunity to reflect on the foundations of a healthy and lasting marriage. Jewish Women's Aid promotes healthy relationships and consent by educating young people and adults in schools, youth movements and communities across the UK about the importance of respect, boundaries, trust and communication.

As a couple prepares for marriage, we wish them not only happiness, but a relationship rooted in these values. True shalom bayit is a home built on mutual respect, trust, kindness and the ability for each person to be heard, valued and supported. It is a relationship in which both partners can be fully themselves, with their boundaries, independence, and dignity respected.

May your marriage be blessed with understanding, compassion and deep friendship. May your home be filled with kindness, respect and love, and may you be blessed with many years of true shalom bayit.

For free, confidential and culturally sensitive advice and support contact us:

0808 801 0500 **advice@jwa.org.uk** **jwa.org.uk/webchat**

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