

Celebrating the arrival of a new family member

Many families would like to acknowledge the arrival of a new family member, but may not feel comfortable with a traditional christening. Using a celebrant to mark this special occasion provides families with the option to do it in exactly the way that best suits them.

In the same way that civil weddings have grown tremendously in popularity during recent years, so too have non-religious ceremonies to mark the birth of a child, or the arrival of a newly adopted son or daughter. Whilst UK law dictates parents must register the birth of a child, this is a short bureaucratic process, and parents often now look to follow this up with a naming ceremony. Since a naming ceremony is not a legal requirement (unlike a civil marriage) it does not have to take place at a register office, and can be led by a celebrant, as opposed to a registrar.

A celebrant is someone who can help families mark key moments in their life, whether it be a wedding, a funeral, or

the arrival of a new human. Celebrants are good with people, good with words, and good at setting the tone for any occasion. They will often have been trained by an organisation such as the Foundation of Professional Celebrants, and will be experts at creating bespoke ceremonies suited to any event.

A celebrant will work with clients to create a personalised celebration, incorporating elements that are specifically meaningful, and in a location that they are comfortable with. The ceremony could take place in the local park, in a back garden, in the local community centre, or on the seafront.

The ceremony might incorporate the planting of a

tree, the lighting of candles, the scattering of shells or seeds, or other symbolic rituals. It could include poems, readings, singing, the exchange of promises by family members or friends who will take an active role in guiding the baby or child on their journey through life. Some of these people may be taking on the traditional role provided by godparents, but may not themselves be religious. A naming ceremony can be the

perfect way to acknowledge the important responsibility these people have committed to, by welcoming and acknowledging them as 'earthly guardians', 'family guides', 'odd-parents' (!) or whatever term feels relevant.

The ceremony might involve older siblings, grandparents, friends, pets - or anyone else who might be of significant importance.

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Celebrants are there to help families celebrate in whichever way they feel best represents them as individuals. Since celebrants are not representing any religion, or humanist movement, they remain independent, and can be a great way of incorporating multiple beliefs, faiths or viewpoints into one ceremony. For example, perhaps one parent is religious, and the other one isn't. For people who would like to incorporate some religious aspects into the ceremony, many celebrants will be happy to do this. This can be done by the inclusion of a prayer, or playing a hymn, for example. Or perhaps the ceremony might be used to celebrate using aspects of two different faiths, or two different cultures. A celebrant can help the family to form a celebration that feels respectful to both. The celebrant will help by creating the content for the ceremony, as well as leading it on the day.

When two people re-marry a Family Unification ceremony can also be used to announce and celebrate the amalgamation of the families into one new family. It can be a helpful way

to provide a sense of security for younger members of the family, and to offer assurances and promises to how this new future may look and feel.

These ceremonies are not legally binding, and do not have any legal status, so are not formally recorded in any way. However, some celebrants will provide families with a written copy of the ceremony to use as a treasured memento of the event.

Since they are not governed by any legislation there are no restrictions on how, or where, these ceremonies are

delivered, or indeed what is being celebrated. Celebrants are being called upon to mark all kinds of life phases now, including renewal of vows, new home blessings, celebrations of life, milestone birthdays, rites of passage. With many couples now getting married after having children, celebrants are often being called upon to create ceremonies that can involve the couple's children, as well - something that wouldn't be possible in a traditional wedding. Transgender naming ceremonies for individuals wishing to acknowledge and celebrate their transition, are

also gaining in popularity since the broadcasted ceremony for US celebrity Caitlyn Jenner.

It seems that in an age of increasing turmoil, hefty challenges and varying pressures, people are looking to find special ways to mark significant changes in their lives. Oprah Winfrey said, "The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate." And it seems she may be right. 

Hannah Osmond is a Sussex-based celebrant, and member of the Fellowship of Professional Celebrants, offering personalised ceremonies for every occasion. www.hannahosmondcelebrant.co.uk 07780 708864



Wedding ceremony involving promises to the couple's children.

Top baby names for 2016

Parenting advice website, **Bounty Baby Club**, has listed the most popular baby names for the first half of 2016 and revealed previous favourites such as **Mia, Daniel and Harrison** are on the decline.

Holding onto their 2015 top spots, Alfie and Isla remain the most popular names for boys and girls. There is a new trend of baby names; vowel heavy names, particularly for girls. Male names ending in a softer letter are also becoming more popular.

Top 10 most popular baby boy names are:

1. Alfie
2. Oscar
3. Teddy
4. Harry
5. Jack
6. Arlo
7. Noah
8. Charlie
9. Jacob
10. Archie

Top 10 most popular baby girls' names are:

1. Isla
2. Amelia
3. Ava
4. Freya
5. Evie
6. Olivia
7. Esme
8. Elsie
9. Mia
10. Ellie

