

Judge bars Jehovah's Witness from taking his son to religious events



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A Jehovah's Witness in England embroiled in a family court dispute with his estranged wife has been barred from taking his six-year-old son to some religious events by a judge.

District Judge Malcolm Dodds has refused to allow the man to take the little boy to Jehovah's Witness assemblies, annual conventions and memorials.

The judge concluded that there was a risk of the youngster suffering "emotional damage".

He heard that the couple had separated about a year after the man began to study the Jehovah's Witness faith.

The boy now lives with his mother, who did not practise any religion.

Judge Dodds said the boy was "impressionable" and might suffer as a result of getting "confusing messages" if he went with his father to certain kinds of Jehovah's Witness gatherings.

The boy's father had asked the judge to decide how much time he could spend with the boy. He also wanted the boy to be "part of" his religious beliefs.

The boy's mother had raised concern about the boy being harmed by his father's religious beliefs and had told the judge how her son had once told her "God is good and you are bad".

Judge Dodds had analysed the dispute at a private family court hearing in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, in May.

He has revealed detail in a written ruling.

The family involved has not been identified.



Judge Dodds said the man could spend time with the boy and could take him to Sunday services.

But he said he took a different view about the boy attending "assemblies, annual conventions and memorials".

The judge said the man had already agreed not to take the boy on "field service" - knocking on doors of people's homes, not to read Bible stories to him and not to show him "religious biased media", including cartoons.

"I ... do not wish to restrict him from taking (the boy) to the Kingdom Hall each Sunday for up to two hours," said Judge Dodds.

"I do not see that this practice of the father's faith for a limited period within a group service with child-friendly activities poses a risk of jeopardy to (the boy's) relationship with his mother."

The judge added: "I take a different view of assemblies, annual conventions and memorials. These are much longer events."

He went on: "There is a far greater risk that (the boy) will be influenced ... given his age and how impressionable he is and the risk of emotional damage due to confusing messages.

"As a result I find it necessary and proportionate to prohibit the father from taking (the boy) to Jehovah's Witness assemblies, annual conventions and memorials."

Judge Dodds said the man had been "wise" to agree not to show the boy "Jehovah's Witness cartoons".

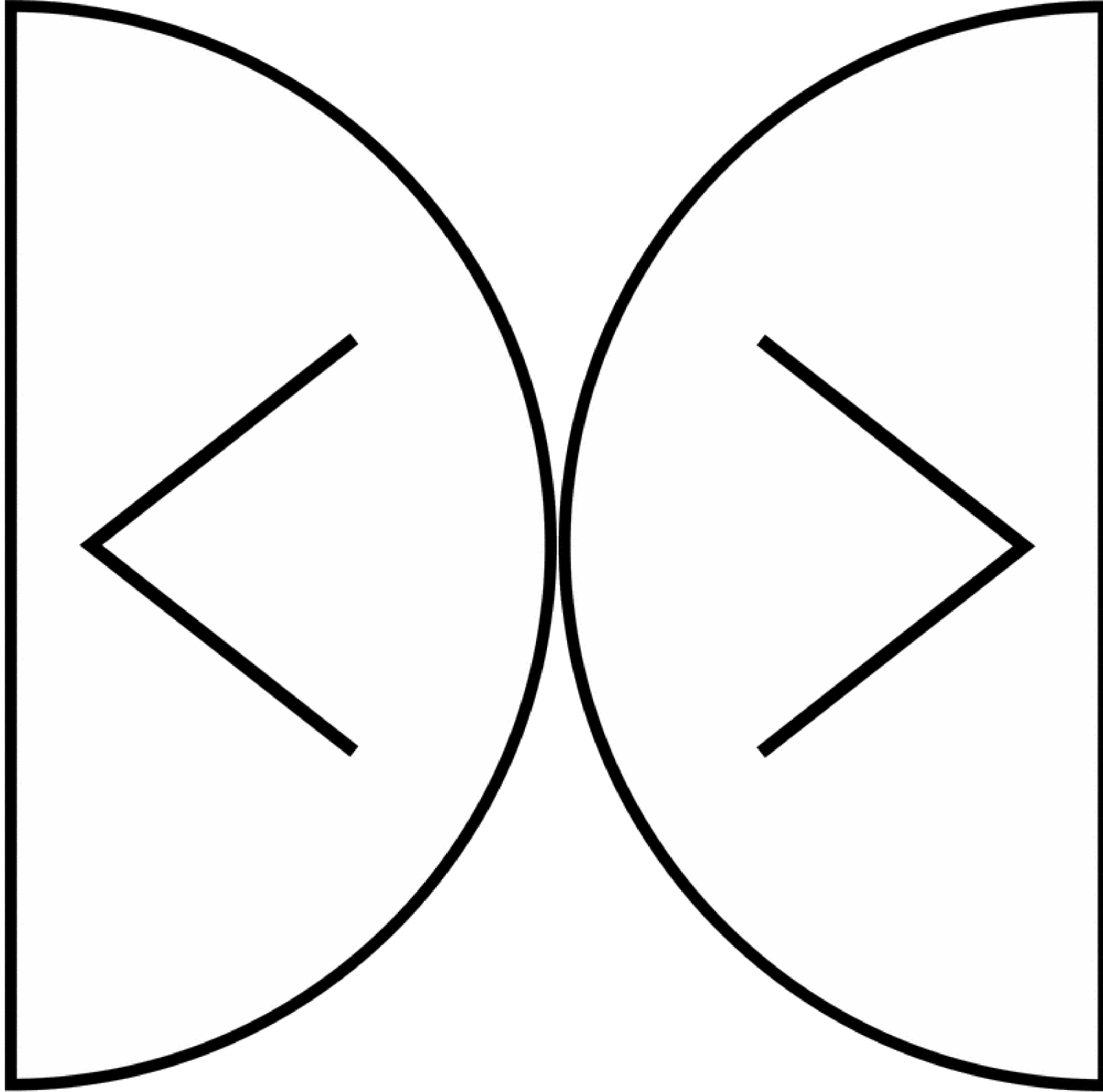
The judge said he had watched cartoons called Obey Jehovah, Pay Attention At Meetings and One Man One Woman.

"In Obey Jehovah a child is taught about the sinfulness of having a cartoon character toy with magical powers which the child had to put in a bin," said the judge.

"While making sense to a child if both parents were Jehovah's Witnesses, such a cartoon would send a very confusing message to a child like (the boy) who has one foot in his mother's world and a wider world (in which magical characters are everywhere in books, television, DVDs, on the internet and in films) and his other foot in his father's world where such magical characters are sinful.

"The mother asserts that in her submissions that the objective of the cartoons and Bible stories is to condition and indoctrinate children into Jehovah's Witness beliefs through a mixture of fear, manipulation and a strict boundary between behaviour which is acceptable and pleasing and that which is not.

"The father accepts that (the boy) should not be exposed to such religious based media until (he) is at least 12."



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