
Center for Jewish Education

Disability Awareness Guide for Elementary School

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CENTER FOR JEWISH EDUCATION
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CJE Disability Awareness Guide for Elementary School

The Jewish community is as many and diverse as the stars and sand and our Torah demonstrates the deep value we place on every member regardless of age, background or ability.

The CJE Disability Awareness Guide aims to help you incorporate life lessons about awareness of our diversity and recognition of what each person contributes to the class, to society and to the world. Acceptance, respect and appreciation for each person is a foundation of Judaism and the lessons we take out of each subject, from *mishnah* and *halachah* to literature and science, can be used to teach these attitudes. This packet has a host of ideas for branching off into topics like **diversity and sensitivity** as well as **disability awareness** but how you make the connections to your subject matter are up to you. Each activity and suggestion can be molded to your educational goals, teaching style and time frame. Here are just a few examples:

Mishna: *“Hevei dan es kol ha’adam l’kaf z’chut.” “Judge every person favorably.”* (Avot 1:6)

Suppose someone passes by and bumps into you. This may make you upset and want to say something nasty. However, this *mishna* teaches us to judge every person favorably. It is worthwhile to consider that perhaps a person is behaving in a certain way because he cannot help it or does not realize what he did wrong. It may be because of a disability. We all have strengths and challenges; some are more obvious than others and some disabilities are invisible. Here is a great place to introduce the concept of social skills or Asperger’s Syndrome and play EMOTIONAL CHARADES.

Chumash: *“Vatichahena Einav Me’reos.” “And his eyes became dim to seeing.”* (Breishit 27:1)

Yitzchok lost his vision when he got older, yet he was entrusted with bestowing the blessings on Yaakov and the entire Jewish nation. What senses did Yitzchok use to compensate for his vision loss? *“Hakol kol yaakov v’hayadayim yedei Esav.” “The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau.”* Notice how astutely Yitzchok listened to Yaakov’s words, using his hearing and intuition. After a conversation about each person having strengths and weaknesses, introduce some of the activities described below like the COOPERATIVE PUZZLE ACTIVITY.

Biology: When discussing how the body works, the teacher can guide the conversation to talk about what happens when a person’s body does not function like everyone else’s. Perhaps their legs or ears do not work optimally. Invite a family member, staff member or community member to visit with your class.

Literature: When reading about a character that has social challenges or a disability (obvious or invisible), the teacher can guide the conversation to talk about sensitivity and ask the students if they have ever had a situation where they felt different or had a hard time fitting in. Then introduce THE EGG ACTIVITY.

** It is always important to note that someone in your classroom may have a disability or have a family member with a disability. Instead of dancing around the topic, ask the student or assistant privately if she feels comfortable sharing what she knows about the subject or even inviting the family member to meet the class!**

As Jewish educators we have vast opportunities and teachable moments when we can convey our attitude toward people with differences. It is important to convey an approach of respect and appreciation and not pity or shame. This manual aims at focusing on what people with disabilities *sure CAN do!*

ACTIVITIES

1. **Start the Conversation:** To begin, have a conversation with the class as it ties into your subject. Here is one way to start the conversation:

👏 G-d created us all and He made us each different. We all have things that we are good at and things that we are not so good at. I am pretty good at ____but I'm not so good at _____. Go around the room and ask each student to tell us one thing that they are good at and one thing that they're not so good at.

👏 Ask: Is it your fault if you're not good at basketball or handwriting? Should we make fun of someone who isn't good at basketball or handwriting? Why not?

“Do not despise any person and do not disparage any object. For there is no one that does not have his/her hour and there is no object that does not have its place.” (Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers, (4:3)

2. **The Face - Some Things Can't Be Erased:** Demonstrates the importance of sensitivity and the lasting effects of insults. Also demonstrates the need to think before we speak.

What's Needed?

- Paper and Scissors to cut out large faces
- Markers
- Hard Cardboard or other material to mount the faces - optional

👏 Each student is given a face cutout. Instruct the students to decorate *The Face*—making it look happy!

TIP: For younger children, tell them ahead of time that they are making the face to give to you. Allow for time for them to make one to keep if they want.

👏 Have students crumple their beautifully decorated faces, making big folds. Explain that the folds represent hurtful comments said to *The Face*.

👏 Direct them to apologize to *The Face* for hurting it. Every time an apology is said, have them remove a crease. For example, “Oh, I’m so sorry for hurting you” [flatten a crease]... “Please forgive me for what I did to you” [flatten another]...

👏 Inquire about their success in removing the creases. How’s it going... are the folds coming out?

Does *The Face* look exactly how it did before?

The creases aren't coming out...*The Face* doesn't look the same as it did before? Why not? You apologized!?

👉 Ask the students, "What can we learn from this discussion?"

Prompt them:

- Did the apology take away the folds in the face?
- Is the pain, (the creases) still left in the face?
- What does this show us?

[When someone's feelings have been hurt, an apology does not totally remove the pain. Even after being hurt, a person can smile (as the face is happy), but deep down inside the folds/creases of hurt are still there! An insult followed by an apology is NOT the same as no insult at all.]

👉 Ask the students to share how they felt when their feelings were hurt and if the hurt disappeared totally when the offender apologized.

👉 Listen to a few of their responses. Point out to them that they are able to remember the pain they felt when they were hurt despite the fact that someone apologized.

👉 We have just seen how permanent hurtful words are. People with disabilities may get insulted and hurt often. This may stem from the fact that their actions may seem unusual to other people. When talking or playing with children who have disabilities, one must be extremely sensitive to their feelings and very careful not to say anything that could hurt them.

👉 Mount the student's crumpled faces and put them on display.

👉 Explain that we are all created *B'Tzelem Elokim*, in G-d's image and that we must treat every person with dignity and respect. We should focus on the holiness inside each person. Every person has a soul, a piece of G-d, within him/her.

👉 Even though there are superficial differences between people all Jews have something unique that they contribute to the community and to the world.

"What is hateful to you, do not do to someone else." (Shabbat 31a)

3. **Disability Awareness Quiz:** Demonstrates how much one knows about the abilities of people with disabilities.

Have the children take the simple quiz found at the end of this packet to find out how much they already may know about disabilities. This is a great way to introduce the topic of disabilities or to conclude a lesson to see how much the students retained.

“G-d saw everything that He made and behold it was very good.” Genesis 1:31


4. **Invite with a Person who has a Disability to your Class:** Demonstrates that an individual with a disability is a real person who is capable of doing and feeling lots of things. Demonstrates how to interact appropriately with a person who has a disability. (*Pretty much the same way you interact with others that age! See Appendix.*)

Find out if someone in your class has a brother or sister with special needs. Siblings may be particularly proficient at teaching other children about disabilities. Perhaps someone who works in the school has a disability they feel comfortable to talk about in class. Alternatively, call the CJE to help you find a speaker. Prepare the students by having a discussion about that particular disability and thinking about questions they may have for their guest.



“All of Israel is responsible for one another.” (Shavuot 39a)

5. **Famous People:** Demonstrate that people with disabilities can accomplish and succeed.

What’s Needed? Paper and pen

-  Read this list of famous people to the group and ask them to write down the first thing that comes to mind when they hear each name.

Abraham Lincoln –	(Marfan Syndrome)
Albert Einstein –	(Learning Disability)
John F. Kennedy –	(Physical disability- back injury)
Franklin D. Roosevelt –	(Polio)
Bill Clinton –	(Hearing Impairment)
Walt Disney –	(Learning Disability)

-  Have a few students read out loud the words or phrases they associate with each of these people. Ask the students what they all have in common.
-  Tell the students that they all have a disability and read them the list.

- 👉 Point out that although each of them has a disability, we think of their talents, abilities and accomplishments first.
- 👉 Discuss the implications of what they have learned and their feelings about inclusion of people with disabilities.

TIP: Each week you or the students can present a different accomplishment by a person with a disability. Make a bulletin board of famous people with different disabilities. (This could be a class project.)

“Do what is right and good in the sight of G-d.” Deuteronomy 6:19

6. **The Egg Activity:** Demonstrates that although people may look different, inside we all have feelings.



photo credit: KidsActivitiesBlog.com

Here is an activity based on the above image that will not only help you to teach diversity in ability but can also include a conversation about skin color, race or ethnicity.

What's needed?

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 small white egg | 1-2 eggs (any color) with slight cracks (not enough to break the egg open) |
| 1 extra-large white egg | A bowl for each egg |
| 1 brown egg | Napkins, just in case |
| 1-2 eggs (any color) with marks or "imperfections" | |

- 👉 Display all of the eggs. Ask students to describe the various eggs, noting similarities and differences. Be sure to highlight the following differences:
 - a. Size of eggs b. Color of eggs c. Markings d. Cracks
- 👉 Direct the students to guess what the eggs will look like inside.
- 👉 Crack each egg open in a separate bowl.

- 👉 Compare how, despite the exterior differences, all of the eggs are the same on the inside. Depending on students' age; emphasize the ways we tend to underestimate people and their abilities or character when we judge them by the way they look.
- 👉 Discuss how this might positively change the way we treat people in the future.

TIP: If your classroom has been established as a safe space, some older children may feel comfortable sharing their own challenges or disabilities as a part of this conversation. This could be the perfect opportunity to discuss such “invisible disabilities” as dyslexia, processing disorders, anxiety, etc.

TIP: Make a list of things that are important about you that others would easily know just by looking at you. Make a second list of things that are important about you that others would not be able to know just by looking at you.

- Which list is longer?
- Which list feels more important?
- What can this teach us about ourselves and other people?

“A human being mints many coins from the same mold and that are all identical. But the Holy One, Blessed be G-d, strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique.”

(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5)

7. **Cooperative Puzzle Activity:** Demonstrates the challenge of a social or emotional disability. Demonstrates communication challenges for people who do not speak (English) or do not hear. Demonstrates the power of body language and facial expression in communication.

What's Needed?

A large floor size puzzle with at least one piece per student. This can be store bought or homemade.






- 👉 Give each student a piece of the puzzle.
- 👉 Instruct the students to put the puzzle together without speaking or making any noise.
- 👉 When the puzzle is done, sit or stand around the perimeter of the puzzle, congratulate the students on their efforts and ask them:
 - Which parts were challenging? What did it feel like?
 - How did they overcome the challenges?
 - How might this be similar to communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing?
 - In light of this experience, how can they communicate with a deaf person or an old person who is losing his hearing? What's important?

Ex: • Face the person you are communicating with. • Point to what you are talking about. • Use facial expression and body language to convey meaning.



“You shall not insult the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind.” Leviticus 19:14

8. **Emotional Charades:** Demonstrates how body language helps people understand each other. Demonstrates how to read other people’s body language to pick up on social cues.

What’s Needed? Flash cards with one emotion on each card. Ex: elated, furious, and tired.

-  Instruct the students to take one card and not show anyone else. You decide if they are allowed to use sound (verbal cues) or not.
-  The students take turns acting out that emotion in front of the class. If they are using verbal cues then they can use words that describe physical feelings associated with the emotion (ex: heart racing) but they cannot say the name or a synonym for the emotion.
-  The rest of the class shouts out the emotion as soon as they get it.
-  After each emotion is identified, ask the group how they knew what the student was “feeling”.
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TIP: Prompt descriptions about facial expressions, body cues, sounds, mannerisms and behavior.

-  Ask the students to share a time they experienced that emotion how they acted.
-  Ask the students for a time they saw someone else act in a way that suggested that they were experiencing that emotion.

Emotion cards and more ideas for this activity can be found here:

http://www.cafemom.com/images/sponsor/goldfish/emotion_charades_worksheet.pdf

“If there be among you a needy person you shall not harden your heart, but you shall surely open your hand.” Deuteronomy 15:7

9. **Show a Video:** Ask your school or local librarian to recommend an age appropriate video about a person with a disability.

Ex: *Intricate Minds II: Understanding Elementary School Classmates with Asperger's Syndrome.*

This video highlights children with Asperger's Syndrome talking about their interests and what it is like going to school

<http://www.coultervideo.com/#!intricate-minds-2-asperger-syndrome/c11po>

“Every member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah_ whether one is rich or poor, physically able or with physical disability.” Maimonides Mishna Torah , Hilchot Talmud Torah

You can find more ideas for imparting disability awareness at these websites:

<http://understandingourdifferences.org/>

<http://www.cromwellcenter.org/>

To learn more ideas or to share yours, Please contact Yael Zelinger 410-735-5023 or yzelinger@cjebaltimore.org

Post your comments on Facebook at www.facebook.com/jadeCJE

Beyond Political Correctness

Many times when we encounter a person who has a disability we want to help because we assume that they need and want our help, and so we have become used to doing things for people with disabilities without asking what is important to them or if they want help. Inclusion is based on what is important to someone and supporting them to live how they wish.

Sometimes how you say something communicates more than what you say. Using stereotypes to describe people is disrespectful. This is why we need to use “person first” language. And this is why “person first” language is about much more than being “politically correct.”

Disability Etiquette

- Speak of the person first, then the child’s disability (e.g., a child with Down syndrome, instead of the Down syndrome child).
- Do not label people as part of a disability group (e.g., Leah who likes dancing, instead of Leah, the blind teenager).
- Remember that a person is not a condition (e.g., identify Eli as Eli, the 8-year-old, instead of Eli, the autistic boy).
- Don’t give excessive praise or attention to a person with a disability; don’t patronize them (e.g., Would you want to be praised for something that you do every day, like go to work?).
- Avoid treating people with disabilities as the recipients of charity or pity. They want to participate equally with the rest of the community (e.g., ask Yossi if he wants to play, instead of saying that Yossi needs help with lots of things).
- Let the person do or speak for herself as much as possible (e.g., if one child asks why another uses a wheelchair, let her answer for herself, instead of answering for her).
- Don’t assume that an individual with a disability needs help. Offer assistance, but wait until your offer is accepted before you help (e.g., ask an individual with a disability if he would like you to hold the door open for him, instead of assuming that he needs you to do it for him).
- Focus on strengths rather than limitations
- Focus on similarities rather than differences
- Speak directly to, rather than about or for, a person with a disability
- **Treat everyone with dignity and respect**

Disability Awareness Quiz – True or False

1. You can “catch” a disability from someone else.
 True False
2. People in wheelchairs cannot play sports.
 True False
3. People who talk slow or have a learning disability are not smart.
 True False
4. People who are blind can read.
 True False
5. People with disabilities do not have the same feelings have people without disabilities.
 True False
6. People with disabilities do not have the same feelings have people without disabilities.
 True False
7. People with disabilities cannot live by themselves.
 True False
8. Everyone who uses a wheelchair is unable to walk.
 True False

Disability Awareness Quiz – Answer Sheet

1. You can “catch” a disability from someone else.
False! A disability is not something that you can catch.
2. People in wheelchairs cannot play sports.
False! Almost every sport you can think of has been adapted so that people in wheelchairs can play, from wheelchair basketball, to sled hockey, to rugby.
3. People who talk slow or have a learning disability are not smart.
False! Just because somebody has difficulty vocalizing their thoughts or processing certain kinds of information does not mean that they are not smart.
4. People who are blind can read.
True! People who are blind read with a special kind of alphabet: Braille
5. People with disabilities do not have the same feelings have people without disabilities.
False! Everyone has feelings. Everyone feels good when people are nice to them and hurt when people are insulting.
6. People with disabilities cannot live by themselves.
False! There are many people with disabilities who live independently. There are also many people that live by themselves but may have someone help them with more difficult tasks.
7. Everyone who uses a wheelchair is unable to walk.
False! Many people are in wheelchairs because their legs are too weak to carry them long distances. They may walk for short distances or walk for exercise only.