



Shevet Group Leader Manual



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Preface

Thank you for joining in partnership with Moving Traditions and many other Jewish educators to answer the question:

How can we draw on Jewish values and focus a gender lens to help pre-teens and teens address the joys and challenges of their daily lives – so that they flourish?

Teens need us—given academic stress, bullying and friendship conflict, confusion around romantic and sexual relationships, and other challenges they face in adolescence that are magnified by social media. However, most teens drop out of Jewish community life after b’nai mitzvah, just when they need us most.

We know from our research that teens love Shevet. In Shevet, middle and high school boys gather together in same-grade groups led by Moving Traditions-trained adult leaders. In their groups, the teens explore social and emotional issues that are relevant to their lives and, in doing so, are empowered to find meaning and connection in Jewish community.

As you enter this experience with Moving Traditions and with your group (or groups!) of teens, I welcome your partnership in realizing our vision of a future when Jewish teens will:

- Experience Jewish community as a source of support and strength.
- Be equipped to challenge narrow and negative ideas of what it means to be a man put forward by peers or in popular culture.
- Believe that women and men are full and equal participants in Judaism and in every sphere of life.
- Expect to participate in a Shevet group, as they expect to become a bar mitzvah.
- Become adult male leaders in both secular and Jewish life.

I wish for you and the boys you mentor a deeply meaningful experience in your Shevet groups. Thank you for helping teen boys grow up confident, compassionate, and connected to Jewish life.

Deborah Meyer
Moving Traditions

Founder and Chief Executive Officer Deborah Meyer has years of experience in the non-profit world, building women’s and Jewish organizations.

Starting and Nurturing a Group

Thank you for being a Shevet group leader. We are pleased that you have joined the hundreds of men across North America who serve as guides, facilitators, role models, and mentors to the teens in their Shevet groups.

Your role as a group leader is paramount to the success of the teens' Shevet experience. Each group leader brings different skills and strengths. Some are experienced with engaging teens in a variety of modalities, and some bring experience facilitating small groups. Others bring a deep understanding of the developmental issues of adolescent teens. Still others are highly conversant in—or receptive to learning more about—Judaism. Sharing your particular strengths and developing the qualities in which you are less well versed will greatly enhance the group.

Regardless of your background, one of the most important things you will bring to this experience is your *kavannah*—your intention. Adolescents are experts in detecting who is being “real,” so enjoy the experience and be authentic with them as you build these relationships.

Steps for the Group Leader

This task list is explained in detail in the paragraphs that follow:

1. With your supervisor, select an **age group**.
2. With your supervisor, identify potential **meeting times and locations**.
3. Publicize the program and **recruit members**.
4. Invite teens and parents to an **Introductory Meeting** (“Taste of Shevet”).
5. Establish and sustain **relationships with parents and teens** before the group begins and between meetings.
6. Attend the training and make the most of ongoing support.
7. Partner with Moving Traditions for the continued success of Shevet.

1. Select an age group.

The Shevet program is designed for teens to begin in 8th grade. In the 8th grade year, teens have already experienced their b’nai mitzvah and have reached a new level of maturity. Work with your supervisor to tap into an existing group of post-b’nai mitzvah teens, such as a confirmation program. Research shows a dip in participation in Jewish life at this stage. Shevet can keep teens engaged and connected with your institution and with each other through a meaningful and engaging post-bar mitzvah Jewish experience.

2. Select meeting location and times.

The space in which the teens gather should be **informal and intimate**, yet provide **ample** space for approximately eight-ten teens to sit in a circle. It must offer privacy and be a place where **food and activities will be welcome**. Everything does not have to take place in the same room. You may gather initially in one setting, and adjourn to another space for activities or eating. It's a good idea to check out sessions in advance for any special monthly requirements (e.g., space for physical activity). There are two models that have been successful: home-based and institution-based.

Home-based Groups

Home-based groups, which rotate the meetings among the teens' homes, provide inviting, hospitable environments. They foster the teens' sense of ownership of the group and commitment to its success. Host teens can be asked to assume a variety of leadership roles, from phone calls to facilitation. Meeting in homes may require attention to socioeconomic differences among the teens and may present challenges related to family lifestyles, such as noise, parent or sibling intrusion, comfort with "mess," level of *kashrut*, or allergies to pets. If you are holding the first gathering in a home, you may not be able to confirm the location until three to five weeks in advance, when you have a few teens on board and have received a commitment from a host parent.

Institution-based Groups

Alternatively, your sponsoring institution may prefer to host the monthly gatherings in its own facility. This model can provide consistency for the Shevet group and deepen the teens' relationship with the host institution. If you are meeting in an institutional setting, you may wish to pay extra attention to ritual and decorative features that will increase the sense of intimacy and ownership of the space. Teens can rotate being the "designated Host Teen," providing food, helping to set up the room, and possibly facilitating part of the meeting.

Scheduling

Your choice of meeting time may intersect with your choice of location. For instance, institutions' buildings may be open on a limited schedule. Many groups meet one Sunday afternoon or evening a month, while others find a weekday afternoon or evening more amenable. Make sure that the time and place you pick is optimal for most of the teens who will be in your group and be consistent with day and time—unless you need to adjust the schedule to avoid secular and religious holidays and competing events in the community.

3. Promote the program and recruit members.

Your objective should be to create wide name recognition for the program, create a "buzz" in the community, and stimulate interested teens and parents to find out more—or at least to be

receptive when your individualized letter arrives. Plan a multi-pronged approach to letting teens and their parents know about the program.

You can recruit teens using these strategies:

- Encourage word-of-mouth and peer outreach by teens participating in an existing group.
- Speak with parents in Jewish adult groups.
- Mail flyers using institutional mailing lists.
- Send announcements using institutional e-mail lists.
- Place articles in institutional/organizational newsletters.
- Place listings and/or advertisements in organizational program guides.
- Post announcements on web sites.

In addition, community institutions may also offer you the opportunity to publicize through:

- Placing brochures and posters in community settings (JCCs, pizza shops, cafes, etc.).
- Staffing a table at special events, such as community fairs.

Our Recruitment Toolkit is available on the Moving Traditions website. And talk it up to as many people as you can. Spread the word!

Emphasize Peer and Parent Outreach

Note that one effective, time-efficient way to get a group going is to find an **interested teen or core of teens** who will want to involve their friends. As you would expect, teens are more apt to attend if they know that their friends will be there. If there is an existing group in your area, asking current participants to do **peer outreach** can be very effective. **Parents** can also be great assets to recruitment. Find one or two parents who have age-appropriate teens to help you build the group.

4. Invite teens and parents to an introductory meeting.

We have found that an introductory meeting with teens and parents is one of the most effective ways of obtaining a commitment from both the teens and their parents. This session, “**Taste of Shevet**” (curriculum guide found on our website under Recruitment Toolkit) provides information about the program and allows both to experience firsthand what a Shevet gathering is like. **It is best to host this meeting in the spring—before the teens go away for the summer.** Excite the teens and parents early and you won’t have to run after them later!

You can present this meeting yourself, or invite your supervisor or an experienced group leader to help you facilitate. Also, if possible, invite a teen or some teens who have participated in Shevet to attend and “excite” the teens about the program.

Rather than sending emails, personalize invitations to the introductory meeting, hand-address the envelopes, and mail with attractive stamps. Depending on your role at your organization and your comfort level with the teens/their families, you might also consider calling each teen whom you have invited and extending a personal invitation. These personal touches will signal to each teen that he is being personally invited to a special group.

Our experience supports publicizing the group to large numbers and inviting about 20 teens to the introductory teen-parent meeting. This usually becomes a group of 8-12 committed and excited teens for your ongoing group. It generally takes a few sessions for the group to “settle in” and a core group of steady teens to solidify. The group may choose to become closed at that point, or explore the inclusion of new members as the issue arises.

Follow-up

We strongly recommend that soon after a teen has expressed interest in a group, you have a conversation with his parent(s). In addition to reviewing the expectations regarding meeting times, attendance, hosting, and costs, this will give you the opportunity to answer parental questions and address any concerns. It will also allow you to ask the all-important question, **“Is there anything I should know about your son?”** so that you can be made aware of concerns, such as kashrut, allergies, and any other religious, health, or social issues.

5. Establish and sustain relationships with parents and teens before the group begins and between meetings.

Parents

Parent understanding of and support for your Shevet group is vital to the group’s success. Beyond the practicalities of driving the teens, paying for the group, hosting meetings, and putting meetings on the family calendar, parents can support the mission and vision of Shevet in important ways. When parents understand the group, they “spread the word” in the community for future groups, support institutional funding, reinforce concepts at home, and can be resources for you, as well.

Parents need to be informed about the nature and intent of the monthly gatherings and the expectations for their involvement. If your group meets in homes, it is particularly important that parents fully understand the group’s needs for privacy and appropriate spaces for food, and activities. Follow-up communication to confirm dates and location of meetings is also important. E-mail parents periodically with a summary of the last gathering, without sharing any information that violates the group’s “safe space.” By focusing on the objectives listed at the beginning of each curriculum session, and mentioning a couple of discussion questions you asked, you can inform parents about the gatherings while respecting the group’s commitment to confidentiality. You might also choose to share a relevant news article about boys or teens with parents in the emails you send. Moving Traditions frequently posts timely

articles on the Trained Group Leader Facebook page from which you can draw. By sharing articles, you can engage parents in the issues related to boys, gender, and Judaism explored within the group.

Other ideas for connecting with parents include hosting a parent/son gathering, end of year celebration, or parent workshop. You might consider creating a parent advisory committee at your institution or setting up a liaison parent for your group.

Top Ten Ideas for Connecting with Parents

1. Host a Taste of Shevet meeting as a part of your recruitment strategy. Even if you aren't recruiting teens, it's a great opportunity to connect with families in your group.
2. Distribute any Moving Traditions handouts after each gathering—you can do this electronically. Encourage parents to be on the lookout for other materials that may be of interest.
3. Email parents regularly with a summary of your gathering. Parents love to be kept in the loop about what the teens explored in their gathering- but remember not to reveal anything private or violate the safe space of your group.
4. Whenever possible, ask families to host gatherings at their homes—both teens and parents value the opportunity to bring the group experience into their homes (clear this with your supervisor first). Plan to touch base with host families a few weeks before the gathering to confirm details.
5. Work with your supervisor to establish a lay committee of parents to support Shevet at your institution. The committee can plan social and educational events for parents and sow the seeds for future groups.
6. Ask teens to interview a parent about a topic that relates to your next gathering, or to share something they learned with a parent. Remember to follow up on this at future gatherings. Some examples:

What was your favorite holiday when you were my age? Why?

Who were your role models?

What do you remember about being a teenager? What did you like most? What was hardest? What do you think is different for teens today?

What are your hopes for me in the future?

7. Some parents have expressed interest in holding their own discussion groups to complement our material. Though Moving Traditions bears no direct connection to these groups, we are delighted to know that parents are meeting and organizing.

Teens

The teens will grow to appreciate that this is a group of their own. (For many of them, this will be the first Jewish educational experience that they are choosing for themselves.) From the start, it is important that you convey to them that you are partners in establishing a unique, special, and valuable experience.

This program is a unique model, different from their other experiences—let teens sense this from the start. Let the teens know you value their experiences by bringing thoughtfully prepared, high-quality supplies. Provide snacks (or encourage host families to provide snacks) that are both healthful and fun. Most of all: let the teens be themselves.

It may take several meetings for the group to bond and for friendships to form. You can help this process by cultivating the group between meetings. Be patient—we expect that over time your high expectations for the group will be fulfilled and all your nurturing efforts will bear fruit.

6. Attend a National Training Conference and make the most of ongoing support.

Attendance at a Moving Traditions National Training Conference is required for all new group leaders and is consistently rated by participants as a “superior professional development” opportunity. Our professional trainers are knowledgeable and passionate about Shevet, are excited to meet you, and are committed to working with you to ensure that your Shevet experience will be wonderful—for you, your institution, and most importantly, the teens. You will meet other facilitators from around the country and will gain proficiency in:

- Using the Shevet materials.
- Facilitating groups.
- Dealing with issues facing adolescent teens.
- Marketing and recruitment.

Moving Traditions is committed to your success. We encourage you to take advantage of the consultation and support we offer through our website, our Facebook and Instagram pages, direct e-mail, and personal contact with our field team staff.

7. Partner with Moving Traditions for the continued success of Shevet

Shevet is the product of many years of writing, field-testing, and editing—made possible by Moving Traditions’ staff and Board and by the national funders committed to the program and its mission. It is also a living, dynamic program that is being expanded and updated every year.

You are a crucial link in the chain of this program’s continuity. Every time you report a wonderful experience, give us feedback that will allow us to improve the curriculum, or post an idea in the Facebook group for Moving Traditions group leaders, you are contributing to the

program and helping to support your colleagues and teens across the continent. Send us pictures of your teens, and share both your challenges and successes!

Finally, you and your supervisor are our links to the teens and their families. Moving Traditions requires all institutions that are using our materials to send us contact information for all program participants and their parents. This includes each participant's full name, mailing address, email address, synagogue, and grade, as well as their parents' names, mobile phone numbers, and email addresses.

We need this important information to share resources with parents, and conduct our own self-evaluation, as well as for reporting to our funders—and we thank you in advance for your assistance!

Successful Timeline for Starting and Nurturing Your Group

Note: This three-month timeline/checklist is structured to lead to a teen-parent introductory meeting prior to the launching of your group. You may need to adapt it to your own needs, but we suggest that you refer to it regarding sequencing and timing of tasks.

The Spring Before Launching a Group (April-June)

Decide who, where, and when:

- Identify age/grade level for outreach in conjunction with your supervisor.
- Get contact information for each teen and his parent you want to invite.
- Set the date, time, and place for the teen-parent introductory meeting and spread the word:
 - Use the template flyer for “Taste of Shevet: An Introductory Meeting.” (See our website under Recruitment Toolkit.)
 - Publicize: send e-mails, go into Hebrew School classrooms, distribute flyers to parents, send snail mail, make calls—get teens and their parents to this meeting! Invite the teens to bring a friend.
 - Send invitation letters to prospective parents and, a few days later, to their sons. (See sample letters on the following pages.)
 - Prepare for the meeting. (See “Taste of Shevet Session Guide” on our website under Recruitment Toolkit.)
- Host the teen-parent introductory meeting:
 - Collect contact information of teens and parents that attended.
 - Ascertain best times and locations for meetings.
 - Get the teens and their parents excited before they go away for the summer and, if possible, let them know the date of their first group gathering in the fall.
- Identify potential times and places for monthly meetings in conjunction with your supervisor.
- Finalize time and place for monthly meetings in conjunction with your supervisor.
- If needed, determine best ways to recruit more teens by the fall (i.e., teens bring friends, etc.)

The Late Spring and Summer (June-August)

Get people on board to support the group’s success:

- Expand name recognition and reinforce a strong “buzz” in your institution. (Print a Shevet article in the institutional bulletin, Hebrew School launch packet, etc...)
- Speak with parents in Jewish adult groups, rabbis, education directors, board members. The more people who are invested in the success of the program, the more successful it will be.

- Develop the meeting schedule for the year, consulting the Jewish and secular holiday schedule, community, and institution calendars. Distribute the schedule both with the letters to the parents and at the teens' opening gathering.
- Write a letter of invitation and introduction to the parents of teens who have expressed an interest in joining the group. Include:
 - A reminder of the introductory gathering last spring.
 - Where and when the group will be meeting.
 - Any fees.
 - Your enthusiasm for the new group.
- Create a fun, personalized note or postcard to each teen, inviting him to the first meeting, to go out at the end of the summer.

The Late Summer/Early Fall (Just Before the Group Begins)

Confirm attendance for the first meeting:

- Send the invitation to each teen.
- Call each household to find out whether they received the invitation and to personally confirm attendance at the first meeting. Try to speak with both the parent and the teen.
 - Answer any questions.
 - Review the few expectations the group will place on parents, including hosting parameters (privacy, space for food and activities, contribution of food and snacks), fees, etc.
 - Confirm first gathering date(s) and location(s).
 - Ask whether there is anything helpful for you to know about the teens' needs (e.g., kashrut, allergies, other special health needs or issues).
- Send e-mail/letter to host parents to confirm expectations.
- Send reminder e-mail to full list, confirming time and place of first gathering.

Sample Introductory Letter to the Parents:

Here is some suggested text that you can adapt to reach out to parents of potential participants.

Dear [parent's name],

I am writing to tell you about an exciting opportunity for [son's name]. This fall, we are launching Shevet, a program to guide teen boys to think critically about the social pressures that weigh on them, to develop their ability to turn to one another and to turn to wisdom from the Jewish tradition to navigate through their challenges, and to think about the steps that they need to take to be a *mensch*.

Shevet is a lot of fun for the guys—they'll be playing various competitive and collaborative games, talking about pop culture, studying great Jewish texts, eating, and sharing stories. But they will also have an opportunity to discuss, in a setting that values personal privacy, critical issues in their lives as teens and young men. The group will meet monthly at/in [homes of members/institution/other location].

I am looking forward to leading the group. [Add one or two sentences MAX about your personal background with teens' leadership.]

We hope you and [son's name] can attend our parent-teen "Taste of Shevet" meeting. You'll get a chance to experience the program and ask questions. It is being held on [day, date] from [start time] to [end time], at [place].

I will be calling you and [son's name] soon to see if the two of you will join us, but feel free to call me at [phone number] or e-mail me at [e-mail address].

I look forward to seeing you both on [the date]!

Warmly,

[Your Name]

P.S. [IF KNOWN:] I am enclosing a list of tentative meeting dates for this year's meetings, so that you can mark your calendar now. Since consistent participation is important for group bonding, please let me know if you anticipate any conflicts with the dates we have chosen.

Sample Introductory Letter to Potential Participants:

Here is some suggested text that you can adapt to reach out to potential participants.

Hi [*participant's first name*],

I hope you are having an amazing spring!

I am writing to introduce myself and to tell you a bit about Shevet—a group for teens your age that meets once a month to talk, have fun, do activities, discuss life - you think of it, we do it! Other teens who have done Shevet say it is a great way to feel good about being Jewish and being a teen.

I am really excited to lead this group and can't wait for us to get to meet and talk more.

Please come to the “Taste of Shevet” meeting where you and a parent can meet me, see who else is interested, and see what Shevet is all about! I will call you soon to touch base.

Looking forward to talking to you,

[*Your Name*]

Making the Most of This Material

The Shevet program aims to engage teen boys with the questions, “What does it mean to be a man” and “What does it mean to be a *mensch*”? Ultimately, our goal is for the teen boys in our program to be able to critique superficial ideas of what it means to be a dude today. We also hope to embolden guys to be authentic Jewish men, value conversation and friendship, foster better relationships, and enjoy the full range of human possibilities.

This group leader manual, paired with the Shevet curriculum, is designed to serve as a step-by-step, user friendly guide to facilitating monthly Shevet sessions that meet the program goals.

This guide presents an overview of the approach and philosophy, an outline of the format and features of the monthly sessions (gathering plans), and suggestions for tailoring the material. We have attempted to include all that is needed to guide and support successful implementation and facilitation of the groups, but, ultimately, it’s in your hands! Therefore, we encourage you to

- **Read** the wisdom within the curriculum and this manual.
- **Draw** on your own strengths and talents.
- **Reflect** on your own adolescence and face any discomforts you have with that challenging stage of life.
- **Work** to push beyond your areas of comfort.
- **Challenge** yourself to be present and authentic in your interactions with the teens.

It is our hope that you will bring your unique style, talents, and positive energy to the Shevet curriculum. Your ability to engage, read, and respond to the group will bring this program to life.

Approach and Philosophy

The curriculum material draws on Jewish wisdom and practice as a resource for teen boys as they explore topics relevant to their lives. Its approach fosters self-expression, critical thinking, and the validation of individual experience.

The method of facilitation is experiential, meaning that group participants will learn key concepts through direct experience and focused reflection, rather than a formal lecture format. The activities and discussions within the curriculum lead participants in an investigation of the question “what does it mean to be a Jewish man/mensch?” They are guided and enriched by Jewish wisdom.

Although it is designed to honor diverse perspectives and experiences, the material reflects the values of pluralism and egalitarianism and a commitment to Jewish life and learning.

Shevet: The Curriculum

Shevet is a program designed for teen boys by a group of rabbis, educators, psychologists, parents, and teens themselves. In general, the program is a lot of fun for the guys—they'll be playing various competitive and collaborative games, talking about pop culture, studying great Jewish texts, eating and sharing stories. But they will also have an opportunity to discuss, in a setting that values personal privacy, critical issues in their lives as teens and young men.

Eighth Grade

In eighth grade, boys discuss teen boys' relationship with manhood, competition, wisdom, friendship, money, sexism, and courage.

Ninth Grade

In ninth grade, boys explore the topics of balance, language, the body, healthy sexuality, drugs and alcohol, social media, Jewish identity, and the soul.

Tenth Grade

In tenth grade, boys explore the topics of stress, anti-Semitism, ritual (religious and secular), healthy sexuality, emotions, beauty, storytelling, and friendship.

Format and Features of the Curriculum

Great education begins with questions. The questions that we pose with the Shevet curriculum are all a version of “What is the relationship between being a Jewish man and _____?” The blank is filled with the theme of each month; each session of the Shevet curriculum focuses in-depth on a topic or theme that relates to the lives of teen boys. Themes include manhood, competition, courage, wisdom, friendship, the body, pleasure, Jewish identity, the soul, money, and stress. Each session is designed for a two-hour meeting and contains a variety of different modalities and discussions for group leaders to choose from. The curriculum is designed to be user friendly, outlining each activity as well as the discussion questions and framing necessary to make the activity relevant and meaningful for participants. The following is an overview of the components of the curricular sessions. Note that there are special elements in your first and last meetings of the year. For more on curricular modalities, see *Experiential Learning in Shevet Groups*.

The Four Educational Components

You will see that each curriculum session has four central components: physical, cognitive, emotive, and ritual.

Here is a brief definition of what we mean by these four categories:

- *Physical*—Involving play and movement, often engaging in competition or collaboration.
- *Cognitive*—Igniting discussion and debate through reactions to game-play or to words, images, film clips, statements, folktales, texts, and concepts.
- *Emotive*—Evoking stories (both impersonal and personal accounts) and exploring the themes of these stories with participants in age appropriate ways.
- *Ritual*—Eating, singing, pounding the table, dancing, blessing the moon, holiday related elements (blasting a shofar, building a sukkah, shaking a lulav, making Havdalah, baking challah, preparing.

Making the transition from the physical activity to whatever cognitive or emotive element that you have chosen for the session will be key. Noticing how the guys interact and offering comments on the physical activity is a great way to begin the next portion of the group. We'll give examples for transitions, but we encourage you to come up with your own.

After the cognitive or emotive elements, you might need to get back to a physical activity, a recharge, so to speak, so we have included at least two physical elements for each session. It is essential to read the energy of your guys and switch modes to keep them engaged.

Cognitive should be fun!

All the cognitive pieces should generate healthy debate. As a group leader, always keep in mind who is participating and who isn't. Who is the most resistant? Who is the most withdrawn? You can easily use the cognitive pieces to change the group dynamic.

If participants are not responding to each other, here are some questions to provoke conversation:

- *Who has a different take?*
- *Who wants to challenge what he just said?*
- *Who agrees with that? Why?*
- *Who hasn't spoken? What are you thinking?*
- *Think about an older man... a grandfather, maybe. What would he say about this?*

Why the emotive is so critical

- One of the challenges many young men face, as articulated by Dr. William Pollack of Harvard Medical School and others, is growing up in a culture that encourages men to hold in their emotions. Anger is an accepted emotional outlet, but any feelings of vulnerability are considered off limits. Since we see the critical role of vulnerable emotion in developing a sense of “closeness” in relationships, we work to challenge the cultural norm.
- But we also want to be careful not to bombard teen boys with the question, “how do you feel?” in a way that pushes them uncomfortably. Instead, we encourage them to tell stories—real stories about their lives. These stories will sometimes be humorous, but they will also contain multiple feelings—hurt, sadness, fear, elation, grief, joy, pride, shame—and we want to help them to understand how sharing these stories with friends can be a great emotional outlet and learning experience.

Curriculum Elements

Objectives

At the beginning of each session there are a set of objectives or goals for what participants will feel, know, and/or do by the end of the session. The activities and discussions in each session are designed to accomplish the objectives.

Materials:

These items are what we suggest you purchase or prepare for the session. This includes handouts or facilitator’s resources you need to print, other supplies you need to purchase, and any special technological requirements for the session.

Facilitator’s Tips

Tips for you, the facilitator, appear throughout the sessions and contain suggestions about how to most effectively lead or adapt content for your groups. Frequently, they suggest how to adapt activities for particularly small or large groups, for different time constraints, and/or for groups of differing interests and maturity levels.

Life Lessons

These are key pieces of wisdom that group leaders are strongly encouraged to communicate to their group in whatever way feels most natural.

Jewish Wisdom

There are opportunities to engage with Jewish wisdom throughout the curriculum. This may consist of a story of a biblical or contemporary Jewish person, a rabbinic or later Jewish teaching, an excerpt from Pirkei Avot (Wisdom of our Ancestors) or other Talmudic texts, or a discussion of a Jewish value. Don't be concerned if you are not a walking encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge and practice. The monthly gathering plans provide you with the background you need to be a resource to the teens in your group. That said, it can also be meaningful for teens to be invited to a Shabbat dinner in a group leader's home or to hear stories about their own Jewish journey.

Often in Jewish education, we begin with an ancient story, such as a Torah reading for example, and try to connect what we hear to something in our own lives. In this curriculum, we do the opposite. We start with our lives now and then we go back to connect the challenges of our lives with wisdom from the Jewish tradition. In this way, we follow the early twentieth-century Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig's teaching about "a learning, no longer out of the Torah into life, but out of life, out of a world that does not know about the law, back into the Torah."

For every session, you will find traditional Jewish folktales, texts, and stories that speak to us in metaphor. Studying these before each session and deciding which resonate with you is a critical step in connecting the spontaneous stories with the Jewish narrative.

Closing

A group ritual provides closure to the meeting. It may include candle-lighting, personal reflection, or a poem. Each closing section in the curriculum also contains a short prayer that connects the session content with the Hebrew month. It is a good idea to check the Hebrew calendar before you lead a session as the sessions may not always be aligned with the months mentioned in the prayer. In these cases, you may choose to rewrite the prayer or to substitute a repetition/niggun (wordless melody) at the end of the session. The closing ritual is an essential component of the gathering, as it provides a meaningful and anticipated way to demarcate the sacred space created by the group.

Facilitator's Resources

Each session is accompanied by several pages of Facilitator's Resources and Handouts. These are materials designed to be printed out before the session so that you can share them with participants during the session. Because we learned that most participants do not want to take papers home, we have generally limited the handouts to papers necessary to be used within the curriculum session.

Experiential Learning in Shevet Groups

The Shevet program calls upon and develops all of a teen’s **multiple intelligences**: intellectual, emotional, creative, and interpersonal intelligence. This happens through a variety of modalities; each curriculum session includes an experiential activity— games or role plays, debates or hands-on projects, writing or rituals. Used in the right spirit, these modalities are among **the most effective teaching tools** available to you—and the “**fun quotient**” keeps the teens coming back month after month, year after year.

Some teens in your group might favor verbal modalities, some the nonverbal; some may prefer using their hands, some their full bodies; some may enjoy role-play and for others it may be anxiety producing. Therefore, we have varied the modalities from month to month, with an eye to overall **diversity and balance**. We recommend that you, the group leader, encourage participants to step out of their comfort zones.

Curricular modalities

This curriculum is designed to meet the needs of participants with diverse interests and learning styles. One of the ways it endeavors to do this is by including a range of modalities, detailed below. All modalities will not necessarily appear in every session, but each session includes multiple modalities. You will be able to choose which types of activities to bring to your group.

Over the course of the year, you will gain insight into the kinds of activities your participants prefer as well as the those that feel most authentic to your facilitation style. That said, there is value in occasionally pushing your participants and yourself to try out modalities that are outside of their/your comfort zones. In fact, being open with participants about how you find a modality challenging can help you model risk-taking and vulnerability for participants in order to encourage them to take risks and be vulnerable within the group.

Videos

The videos included in the curriculum are designed to spark conversation related to the theme of the month. Often, there are several options of similar videos, allowing the group leader to choose which they think is best for the maturity and interests in their group.

Role Play

Role play activities give participants a chance to try out new communication techniques in a supportive environment. These types of activities may feel silly or awkward at first to participants and group leaders. However, many participants have found them to be a powerful and helpful way to physically experience what it’s like to communicate in more effective and assertive ways. Just as a musician or athlete needs to practice in order to improve their skills,

so too all of us can benefit from practicing new ways of communicating and asserting ourselves and even new ways of being in our bodies.

Improvisational role-playing activities give the teens a chance to use their imaginations to step into the shoes of someone different from themselves—perhaps a parent or an ancient biblical figure—or someone like themselves in a different situation—such as a teen confronting his parents about trust issues. Taking on a role is like putting on a mask—it permits us more freedom to experiment, and, paradoxically, to be more authentic than if we just think or talk about what we might do in a given situation.

- To create a supportive context for the role plays, let the teens know that:
 - No one has to participate if he is not comfortable doing so.
 - You are available for “side-coaching”—advice given from the side on how to play the role.
 - Anyone who gets stuck or overwhelmed in a role can get out of it just by asking.
 - There is no one right interpretation—this is imaginative play.
- Key words in introducing role plays are “invite” and “imagine,” as in “Now I invite you to imagine that you are Moses....” “Invite” is pleasantly nondirective (and who doesn’t want to be invited?). “Imagine” opens people up to this kind of play, while the word “pretend” closes people down. (It suggests duplicity and keeps them trying to operate two selves at the same time.)
- This may seem counterintuitive, but do NOT tell the teens how safe the activity is. It’s an odd paradox. As soon as you assure people that something is safe, they immediately worry about why you are reassuring them—and their sense of safety actually diminishes!
- The key to effective role playing is to speak AS the character. If a teen uses language like “I might....” Or “I think I would....,” gently encourage him to speak as the character, “I will...” or “I am feeling....”
- Make sure there is the opportunity for everyone who might want to participate to do so. Don’t allow the activity to be taken over by those teens with the strongest “acting hunger,” whether because they imagine themselves to be amateur actors or because they have a need to “act out.” Occasionally ask the teens who are always the first to volunteer to give others a chance to go first.
- After role plays, give the participants a way to return to their “everyday selves” by “de-role-ing.” This can be done simply by asking them to change seats or stretch, or by asking them to answer a question that they have to think about, such as “What is your favorite ice cream?”

Projects

Projects can include creating ritual objects or other useful things that can serve as reminders and links between Shevet and the rest of life. One group leader gave his teens the plans and

tools to create Adirondack chairs, using this opportunity to develop new skills and practice teambuilding. Projects provide participants with a creative, hands-on experience as well as a chance to relax and focus, often relieving the stress of a social situation. Many group leaders report that some of the most meaningful and productive discussions within their groups have occurred while participants were doing an activity. Once the directions have been given, participants are free to chat, work on their own, or help one another as suits them individually and as a group. It is also helpful to stress that a project in Shevet is another way of practicing not being perfect or aiming for perfection but instead focusing on fun, creativity, and play.

Games and Icebreakers

Similar to the videos, games are designed to spark conversation related to the month's theme. They often promote fun and laughter, and get participants physically moving. Games at the beginning of sessions are also used to break down initial barriers, to set a mood, and to energize teens for the coming activities in the session. Some icebreakers create group bonding and collaboration. In other cases, a warm-up lightly introduces a process or topic that will then be explored with a more serious intention.

If you need games or icebreakers for your group, we suggest you refer to any of the following great resources:

- Viola Spolin, *Theater Games for Rehearsal: A Director's Handbook* (Northwestern University Press, 1985).
- Viola Spolin, *Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook* (Northwestern University Press, 1986).
- Maria C. Novelly, *Theatre Games for Young Performers: Improvisations and Exercises for Developing Acting Skills* (Meriwether Publishing, 1985).

Cooking

A cooking activity closely resembles a project in that each involves materials, tools, and a creative process (in this case, a "recipe"). Cooking tends to be high-energy, somewhat messy, time-consuming, and an opportunity to chat.

- Try out the recipe(s) you will be using.
- Make notes regarding required ingredients and utensils, based on your experience with the directions. The middle of the meeting is not the time to figure out that the butter should be cut in half, or that you need a spatula.
- Make no assumptions! When cooking, *check in advance* with the host family or institution regarding the availability of the kitchen, and any requirements regarding *kashrut*, use of utensils, and clean-up.

- Be careful to accommodate the teens' food allergies, chronic diseases, such as diabetes or celiac disease, and expectations of *kashrut*, just as you would with any snack. Adapt the activity or the recipe as necessary.

Physical activity

Physical activity provides opportunities for movement and nonverbal self-expression with one's whole body. They also help develop a teen's kinesthetic sense (knowing where one's body is in space) and may help develop comfort with and pride in his changing body.

- Make sure that your meeting place has a space large enough and a floor surface suitable for the physical activity.

Music

Bring a speaker and play some music as people arrive or during a break.

Tailoring the Material

Making Modifications

We have learned in our many pilot programs that groups' sizes, time constraints, energies, and interests differ. We have also learned that different group leaders prefer different educational tools. In response to the diverse needs of groups, each curricular session contains many options and more content than you can reasonably get to in one session. We do not expect that anyone will do all of the things in a particular session!

The purpose of the tools in the curriculum is to lead into a serious (or sometimes both a serious and a playful) discussion that gets to the heart of what it means to be a Jewish guy. If participants have gone off topic, but are still talking about something that concerns them about Jews or as guys, and are learning from one another and challenging cultural norms, then you are in the right zone. But if they are just veering off-topic to amuse each other and avoid any meaningful discussion, it is time to pull them back to the curricular materials.

That said, we encourage you to take the first few sessions as an opportunity to gain familiarity with and confidence in the rhythm of the curriculum as it is written. Read through each session, choose the activities and discussions that you will bring to your group, and use the scripting, discussion questions, and facilitators tips to guide your group throughout the session. This experience will allow you, with increasing ease, to create sacred space, prime your participants with an opening question, then engage them in an interactive learning experience. You will gain comfort with highlighting lessons as they unfold, and bringing the group to closure with ritual and reflection.

We also invite you to use these first sessions to get to know the teens, attending to their aspirations, worries, and delights. Once you have a personal sense of them, you can begin to tailor the gatherings to respond to the unique needs or preferences of your group. You might substitute their real-life situations (as appropriate) in place of scripted scenarios or adapt/create material in ways described below. Use your insights to maximize every opportunity to foster your group's connection to you, to each other, and to their Jewish heritage.

Innovating

Use your talents. We hope that you will bring your special talents and strengths to enhance the material. However, we also strongly encourage you to stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone, in order to always provide your group with the full array of modalities.

Share your own stories. As a group leader, you will need to enter each session with stories related to the theme that are easily accessible for you. These stories can be personal (from your own lives or lives of your family members and friends) or they can come from fiction (novels or film), but they need to contain some emotional truth about the human experience that guys can relate to.

Your role in telling a story is to provide a model for the participants so it is important to find stories that are about real challenges and do not simply aggrandize your own efforts or the efforts of others. In other words, while you could spend your time entertaining teens with various tales, the goal of your tales is to help spark in them the desire to tell stories to one another.

Give them what they love. You may notice that your group responds best to a particular approach; for example, some groups are enthusiastic about physical activity, while others prefer discussion. By all means, respond to that preference; if a month doesn't have an activity and your group loves that modality, go ahead and add something. Just be sure to link the activity to the theme and life lessons, as you see done in the materials. But be mindful not to rely only on the group's apparent preferred modality. Everyone learns differently—there may well be a silent minority whose preferences are less visible.

Adjust to size. While the optimal group size is eight to ten, there may be monthly variation in the group's size. Prepare for the maximum number of participants, but consider in advance how to adjust delivery of content with fewer numbers. For example, a physical activity that involves nine teens may require creatively combining or omitting roles, or simply using a different format entirely.

Draw on community resources. Take advantage of local resources—consider hiking, sporting events, guest facilitators—to enhance themes of relevance to young Jewish men.

Bring in the parents. Once the group is well established, you may wish to design a gathering in which you invite the parents to participate. The teens take pride in demonstrating their monthly ritual, and parents are appreciative of the glimpse into their sons' experience in the group.

Meet other Shevet teens. If your area has more than one Shevet group, you might choose to plan a joint gathering or event, enabling the teens to feel a part of something larger than themselves—the “brotherhood” among those who enjoy Shevet.

Be Responsive. Because gathering plans are not designed strictly sequentially, the facilitator has the leeway to respond to an issue proactively, rather than wait to address it when it arises in the curriculum.

You may notice a recurring issue in your group discussions or identify an area of particular concern to the teens. For example, frequently repeated comments might suggest to you the need to address those issues. Refer to the curriculum to find the session plan that addresses the desired topic or formulate a plan of your own.

Keep the context. Even as you innovate, maintain what is familiar and enjoyed by the group. Begin with an opening question that stimulates thought, begins the personal sharing, and pulls the teens in. Include at least two different modalities for varied interest and broad appeal. Most importantly, be sure to maximize interaction and minimize speeches. Plan where you want to take the group and the most fun way to get there.

Leadership Development Opportunities

Shevet groups hold great possibilities for fostering leadership skills and should be mined for that potential. Teens can be given the opportunity to assume some responsibility for the success of their group. Make it clear that any degree of involvement is valued. Initially, teens can choose to send reminder texts, organize materials and snacks, or even monitor ground rules. Eventually, they can suggest a topic, develop and/or implement activity ideas, or facilitate scripted materials.

Work to identify and draw on each teen's unique style and strengths and afford him a leadership opportunity in that venue. Is he an athlete? Encourage him to share a physical activity in which the group can participate. Does he love music? Perhaps he can lead the group in analyzing some pop songs for their messages and comparing them with Jewish values.

Once the rhythm and energy of a group is established, participants are very likely to suggest any number of activities and topics but may need help in maintaining the Jewish context.

Most importantly, by virtue of their active participation in the group, teens are called upon to be open, to listen, to respect themselves and others, and to discover and heed their inner voices. Such skills, fostered each month, are at the core of true leadership. They serve as the foundation for more targeted leadership skill development that becomes the focus of Shevet in later years.

Facilitating Your Shevet Group

As facilitator, you help the group develop its unique culture—one that promotes bonding, safety, free expression of ideas and feelings, and positive Jewish identity. You wear multiple hats: as coordinator, informal educator, facilitator, role model. Each of these important roles is explored below.

Coordinator

You are the logistics coordinator. You determine the time and date of the meeting and arrange for the location and necessary supplies. You are responsible for communicating with both the teens and their parents. To encourage regular attendance, you can use phone calls, texts, and e-mail. When making arrangements, confirm with parents before assuming you can proceed with your plan.

Make sure that both teens and parents are aware of the expectations of hosting. If the gathering is held in teens' homes, the facilitator brings supplies, but the parents need to know the best place to set up for the group's activities. Some activities may require a kitchen, an open room for movement, or space to do an activity.

We encourage you to delegate some coordination responsibilities to the teens. For example, whether meeting in an institutional or home setting, you might ask the designated host teen to contact the other members of the group to confirm their attendance at a gathering. Although supervising him may be more labor intensive than doing the task yourself, this approach promotes participants' ownership of the group and develops their leadership skills. If you do delegate responsibility to a teen, make sure he is clear about his responsibility, the timeline, and your expectations for checking in, because his tasks are essential to the group's success.

Informal Educator

Shevet gatherings create perfect opportunities for Jewish learning. With an experiential, participant-centered approach, learning happens through guided discovery, rather than didactic teaching. Dr. Joseph Reimer, an expert in Jewish identity and education, has outlined six characteristics of a great Jewish experiential learning program. A successful Shevet gathering reflects these traits:

1. The program is well prepared.
2. The participants feel comfort and trust.
3. Participants identify with the group and feel that they belong.
4. Participants feel challenged, stretched, and engaged in the experience.
5. Participants have time to reflect.
6. Participants have time to act.

Keep these principles in mind as you walk the group through the warm-up, the introductions and instructions, and the thoughtful processing of the teens' experience and insights. In your role as an informal educator, you create the opportunity for the intended life lessons to emerge naturally from participation in and processing of the shared activity. Far more effective than "the moral of the story" pronouncements, good questions can help the teens themselves draw the connections between Jewish values and the activity at hand. Through this process, you will set up and support an unfolding "a-ha!" moment of self-discovery or new understanding that is revealed rather than imposed.

Don't be concerned if you are not a walking encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge and practice. The curriculum plans provide you with the background you need to be a resource to the teens. The activities themselves blend fun and personal exploration toward a goal of enhanced self-esteem and a positive Jewish identity. Your role as facilitator is to model the appreciation of diverse affiliations of the richness of our heritage.

Facilitator

Excerpts from "Experiential Jewish Education: Impacting the Formation of Jewish Identity" by Shuki Taylor in Bryfman, David, ed. Experience and Jewish Education (Torah Aura Productions 2014)

In order to foster self-exploration while guiding learners towards predetermined outcomes, the educator must develop two distinct types of facilitation skills:

1. **Reflection:** reflection allows for the process of self-exploration to emerge and flourish. By asking questions that allow learners to respond to and reflect upon the experiences and the content to which they have been exposed, educators can allow learners to access the space they need and can help learners achieve an authentic process of self-exploration. Educators should ask open-ended questions that focus on thoughts about and feelings towards the experience.

In order to ensure authentic self-exploration, the educator should validate whatever feelings and thoughts learners express and should permit any type of reaction. This type of reflection will allow a multiplicity of voices, opinions and approaches to emerge.

2. ***Framing and contextualizing:*** this type of facilitation is geared towards pre-determined outcomes rather than self-exploration. The educator will frame and contextualize the experience in a specific fashion, so that it builds a narrative that can result in the outcomes. When using these skills, the educator does not want to gauge what learners might be feeling, but wants to guide learners towards outcomes. This facilitation technique utilizes guided—rather than open-ended—questions.

When engaged in this type of the facilitation, if the educator is not satisfied with an answer, he should ask if anyone has another opinion. In this way, the educator will be able to build a narrative by asking directed questions and respecting whatever answers are given.

Both types of facilitation skills are necessary. If educators merely foster reflection, learners might get lost in the process of exploration and lose sight of the overall narrative. In such a case, learners might not recognize the deliberate connections that the educator tries to make between activities and experiences. On the other hand, if educators spend too much time framing and contextualizing experiences, they will not enable any form of self-exploration. As a result, learners are likely to lose their unique voices.

Once again, intentionality is crucial: the educator must recognize when it is necessary to use each type of facilitation skill in order to ensure a seamless process of intervention that balances pre-determined outcomes with self-exploration.

Role Model

As facilitator, you are a role model for embracing the delights and difficulties of Jewish manhood. Your words and actions speak volumes to the teens in your group. Modeling your ability to risk, question, share, laugh, empathize, and connect will inspire them to do the same. Valuing yourself while respecting others, speaking out yet being willing to listen, being honest about the struggles and joys of men today, seeking guidance from others and from your heritage as you find your own voice, always striving to learn and grow—these are at the heart of the life lessons which you can embody for the young men in your group. Finally, remain open and curious about the wisdom that participants have to offer. Being a role model and mentor, in the Jewish tradition, is a two-way street. As Rabbi Chanina taught in the era of the Talmud, “I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and the most from my students” (Ta’anit, 7a).

A Few More Notes on Running Successful Groups

Be Prepared: Read and follow the instructions outlined in each curricular session well in advance. As you review the session, familiarize yourself not only with the step-by-step instructions, but also with the life lessons, so that you can comfortably solicit and affirm these learning goals, which are designed to emerge naturally from the activities. Arrive early to set up the gathering space and greet group members in a relaxed, unhurried state.

Be Authentic: Be yourself. You don't have to be "cool" for the teens to connect with you. You serve them best as a role model if you demonstrate comfort with who you are and an openness to discovering who they are and what they can teach you. Being true to yourself and striving to be the best version of yourself will inspire the teens to do the same for their own evolving selves.

Be the Safety Net: Help the group establish and maintain ground rules that create a fun and safe environment. Empower group members to notice and self-correct behaviors that are not in keeping with the group's intentions. Sharing this responsibility demonstrates your belief in the group's competence—but be willing to step in if necessary to ensure that all members feel safe, valued, and included.

A note about safety: While your group will establish confidentiality as a norm, it is important that you state from the beginning that there are situations where you, as the responsible adult, are required to break that agreement. Remind the teens that there is nothing more important to you than their safety and therefore if you feel like they are a danger to themselves or to others, you will break confidentiality to make sure they get the help they need.

Be Attentive: Notice individual and group dynamics, attending to both content and feelings. Listen for the unvoiced concern and the unasked question. You may choose to share your observations—either within the group or privately, as appropriate to ensure the comfort and participation of all members.

Be Flexible: Monitor the group's receptivity and the pace of the gathering, and be willing to make adjustments if necessary. Be prepared to insert an "icebreaker" or respond to a timely issue of concern. Sometimes a discussion takes an unexpected yet valuable turn, providing an unplanned teachable moment. Don't miss this opportunity for the sake of your previous agenda; acknowledge the group's interest and adapt your goals accordingly.

Be Affirming: Be sure to use inclusive, supportive, non-biased language. Ask open-ended questions and respond honestly and without judgment. It's okay not to have all the answers; you can seek and provide them later. You, like the teens, are always growing and learning. You

can be each other's teachers. Don't impose your own views, but guide the group by the Jewish value of respect for self and others. Encourage all group members to participate in their own unique ways, and commend their efforts and insights.

Be Intentionally Inclusive: Be conscious of what you say and how you say it. Remember that not all teens are heterosexual, middle-class, Ashkenazic, from two-parent homes, sons of two Jewish parents, college-bound, etc. Model and request the use of inclusive language (such as “partner” rather than “boyfriend”), and avoid generalizations (such as “Teenagers are...” or “Jews believe...”). When issues are being explored, ensure that a full spectrum of viewpoints is presented. Elicit or give voice to perspectives not initially offered by the group (“Some people believe..., while others might say...”). Be aware of your body language and nonverbal cues. Encourage exchanges among group members, rather than dialogue between group members and you. You guide the group best when you aren't controlling or even central to it.

Be Open *and* Boundaried: Group leaders report that they are sometimes caught off guard when asked to reveal their personal history. Your best judgment, personal style, and comfort level will determine how much of yourself you disclose. For example, if you are asked the age of your first sexual encounter, one response may be, “I'm glad you raised the topic for us. I'm open to discussing this topic, but not my own history. My decisions reflect my circumstances, values, and choices. You'll need to assess those for yourself.” Or more simply, “I want to exercise my option to pass.” The teens also have the option of not telling all and will appreciate seeing how to say ‘no.’

Be Aware of Teen Issues Today: While the tasks of adolescent development are familiar, today's realities are different from what you faced as a teen. Learn what you can about their world. Ask questions that demonstrate your interest, not your judgment. Read teen magazines, listen to teen music, and view popular movies, television shows, and websites. Understanding the joys and challenges of your group will enable you to help them flourish. Acknowledge what you don't know. The goal is not to modify your behavior for acceptance; your value to them is rooted in your openness, authenticity, and self-acceptance.

Be Self-Aware: Know your limitations and personal issues, and draw upon your strengths and talents. Learn to develop and trust your intuition when responding to group challenges. Reflect ahead of time on sensitive issues from your own adolescence that might be stimulated by group discussions. Prepare yourself for the unearthing of your emotional responses to common issues, such as popularity, relationships with parents, and performance anxiety. Your feelings are important assets that help you empathize with the teens.

Be Patient: Allow the time required for group comfort and cohesion to develop. Become comfortable with silence, providing time for the group to take responsibility for itself. Allow

the teens to experience the gathering as their own. Nurture the group process, allowing it to unfold naturally.

Be Fun: Humor helps set a warm tone and reduces tension. The group experience should be an enjoyable one! Be willing to laugh at yourself and model your own ability to risk, learn, and have fun. Each gathering should include opportunity for playfulness (but, obviously, should never involve laughter at someone else's expense).

Be Prepared for Challenges: Inevitably, you will be called upon to respond to the challenges presented by the group as it evolves. The art and science of facilitation combine skill, intuition, and creativity to successfully guide the group process. Some typical difficult behaviors and suggested strategies for addressing them are listed in “Difficult Group Behaviors and Suggested Strategies,” found below.

Believe in the Group: Seek and celebrate what is special about your group. Get to know and appreciate each group member and help each participant recognize the value of his contributions. Convey your enthusiasm and confidence in the group's ability to support each other, have fun, and grow. Your positive attitude and your respect for the teens set a tone for the group that becomes self-fulfilling.

We hope that you enjoy the many hats a Shevet facilitator wears—coordinator, informal educator, role model, and process facilitator. Of course, the most important "hat" you wear is your own. The spirit, dedication, and fun that you bring to the group are what make it a cherished experience for everyone.

Difficult Group Behaviors and Suggested Strategies

One common challenge to the group is the monopolizer. He is longwinded and seems to desire endless attention. As facilitator, you must protect the group's time. This means assertively staying on schedule, even if it means cutting off the monopolizer directly by saying, “I am sorry to interrupt, but I want to be sure everyone gets a chance to speak.” Sometimes it is necessary to gently coach the monopolizer and help him participate in the group more appropriately.

The flip side is the silent non-participant. You can employ strategies to encourage his participation. The quiet teen can be gently welcomed to speak and to take his turn. You can invite his opinions or use pairs or small groups in which he might share more comfortably. Find out about his interests and talents that may be opportunities to contribute to the group. Keep in mind that shyness may just be a personal style and is not necessarily a problem requiring intervention. Check in with the quiet teen to find out if this is the case.

Another challenging issue that arises in many groups is **gossip** (*lashon hara*). For example, the teens may share details of experiences that reflect badly on someone who isn't present. As facilitator, you are responsible for reminding the teens of their ground rules. "It's not in keeping with our group intention of respect to talk about someone who is not present to defend themselves. Instead of discussing specific people, let's talk about the issue and ways to handle it." Model warmth, caring, and assertive positive regard, and hold clear expectations that group members will speak and act kindly.

Sometimes the group seems to have great potential, but it is not going well because there is one teen who is **consistently disruptive**. You are encouraged to address the issue privately and directly with the teen involved, being very behavior-specific. For example, you might say, "I notice that you often have a negative reaction when activities are introduced, like rolling your eyes and making comments. It's hard to keep the group energy positive with that behavior. I need you to become a more positive participant in the group next month. I think you have a lot to offer." If the problem persists, the facilitator must be proactive on behalf of the whole group. It is OK, and sometimes necessary, to make the difficult decision to counsel the teen to leave the group.

Be aware that sometimes a disruptive group member actually expresses a larger group dissatisfaction or is meeting the group's unconscious need to be distracted from what is planned. You may need to consider what needs to be changed in order to more actively engage the group.

When you are concerned about a teen's **serious emotional problem**, it must be handled outside of the Shevet session. It is your responsibility to identify a concern, move the group back to the gathering plan, and then to follow up with the individual and her family as appropriate. A response plan will vary depending on the issue and should be developed in consultation with your supervisor. It is likely that your institution can offer support and referrals to appropriate professional resources. You are obligated to direct anyone at risk to a professional; it is not in the scope of your role as a Shevet group leader to address serious problems yourself. Though Shevet groups sometimes offer an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues, it is never appropriate to do a therapeutic intervention during a gathering and it is not your role to be a therapist.

Of course, teens in distress may share things with each other and not directly with you. Encourage a teen who may be concerned about a fellow group member to share her concerns with you, her parents, or other adults who can help.

Be assured that the most common challenge for groups is that **they can become silly, giggly, loud, and chaotic**. Guide, but don't squelch, this energy. Remember that playful energy is fun.

Fun builds friendship and keeps the group strong. Facilitating the Shevet group well will develop your ability to be both flexible and assertive.

Understanding Group Dynamics

Group Roles

In all groups, individuals play out different roles. Often, exploring different group roles are ways in which teens can express who they are through the various stages of group development.

The Controller

He is someone who likes to assert his power in a group. He may attempt to set group standards or steer content to his liking. You can engage him further by asking him to share his influence and authority while talking with him privately. Ask him to reflect on what he can get out of group participation and build from that as a strength.

The Wallflower

He is someone that listens to discussion, and accepts group decisions. He often needs more time to consider all the options—allow him space before moving on, give him a job that highlights his strength, and check in during a reminder phone call.

The Joker

He may function as a harmonizer, relieving tension and conflict as a recognition-seeker. You have the opportunity to give him a stage when possible, laugh along and then make the transition to the next activity.

The Challenger

He is someone who may be more resistant or likely to clash heads with others or you. A positive way to engage him is to flip the script—talk with him about taking on opposite roles such as the supporter, summarizer, or includer. Ask him what types of activities he enjoys and support him around these.

The Ringleader

He is someone who may attempt to usurp leadership of the group through drawing attention and engaging in dominating behaviors. You may need to pair teens carefully. Another consideration is to free the ringleader's sidekick from him. A way to work with him and build trust in the group is to talk to the ringleader directly to garner his help. For example, "you are a natural leader, I'm hoping you can help get everyone into this activity—what do you think?"

The Teacher's Pet

He is someone you can count on to support you through the group process. Often, it is essential for his development to respect his need to NOT have you rely on him.

The Energizer

He is someone who stimulates the group into action. Often, you can direct his energies to stimulate enthusiasm and excitement.

The Monopolizer

He may dominate the conversation and call more attention to himself while prohibiting others from speaking. The use of additional techniques to manage this include using a talking stick, popcorn talk, or think/pair/share instead of group discussion, or inviting teens to reflect or write their thoughts down before sharing.

Group Stages

All groups go through certain stages as participants get to know one another and trust begins to form. While every group is different, it is helpful to keep in mind the following general guidelines about group formation. When encountering an issue in your group you may refer to this page and realize that your group is right on schedule!

Initial Stage: Forming (Gatherings 1-3)

Because most groups only meet once a month, moving through these stages can be difficult. The Shevet materials are designed to help you facilitate the exploration phase of your group. During this stage is when trust is created. By providing safe space for this trust, more intimate relationships among the teens can begin to form. Reach into your bag of tricks to engage teens more with icebreakers and getting-to-know-you activities.

Transition Stage: Storming and Norming (Gatherings 4-6)

Group members are feeling each other out—and you too! This is where potential subgroups may begin to form. The group leader responses during this stage are best if grounded in genuineness and concreteness (maintaining boundaries). This is also when teens begin to take risks if they feel safe. They will learn to enjoy revealing themselves if they feel heard and all teens' comments are equally valued. Round robins (each teen speaks for two minutes) is a structured way to develop a culture of listening. Consider adding team and trust building techniques to engage teens deeper.

Working Stage: Performing (Gatherings 7-9)

There is less dependence on the group leader to maintain and provide conversation. The group is more self-sufficient regarding roles and norms. During this stage, the group leader can best function with providing activities and feedback and acknowledging what is taking

place in the here-and-now of the group. Allow group members to take on additional roles. The host may help prepare parts of the gathering. Be open to feedback and meeting the needs of group participants.

Separation Stage or Termination (Gathering 10)

The group is getting ready to say goodbye. Because we hope that this is a multi-year process for both you and your teens, this stage could even be characterized as separating for the summer months. Providing a clear final session is important. This session provides an opportunity for teens to discuss their thoughts and explore feelings about the group. Conducting an evaluation will help collect the teens' feedback (and provide valuable information to you and your sponsoring institution). If either you or some teens will not be continuing the following year, this could be an important stage to address feelings of loss. It also is an opportunity for celebration (and fun activities/ food to acknowledge it).

Working with Teens of Various Ages

8th Grade

Teens are coming into their own as young men. Often, their involvement in Shevet may be their tie to their Jewish identities. Provide them space to explore emerging thoughts and ideas around the exploration of identity.

As teens are developing their identities, they are also trying on different roles. Allow them the space to explore this within the safe environment of the group.

9th Grade

Teens are participating in more adult-like activities and are less interested in activities geared to children. They are now in high school, so, using your judgement, treat them as adults.

Teens at this age may like to talk and assert themselves and their identities. Ask them what is on their minds and provide the chance to develop those thoughts constructively.

10th Grade

Teens behave and should be treated as young men. They are much more independent and are grappling with a multitude of issues, activities, and learning experiences.

Don't be afraid to open up and talk. These young men are looking for your wisdom as well as empathy and crave the opportunity to share with you and with each other.

Empowering Teens

Teach teens to be critical thinkers: Teach teens to question the pervasive narrow definitions of teenhood and masculinity. Remind them that they are complex, multi-faceted, unique human beings and encourage them to embrace their gifts.

Do and model your own “work”: Teens learn to become men through the men in their worlds. We can’t help teens feel good about themselves if we can’t do these things ourselves. You don’t have to wait until you’ve figured it all out—model the struggle. Acknowledge that it can be difficult to create healthy relationships or stand up for yourself. Teens will learn to love themselves by watching men who do.

Stop commenting on bodies—your own or others: Show teens that you value people for their actions, thoughts and accomplishments rather than their appearance. Model that feeling good about yourself comes from what we DO not how we LOOK. Teens don’t need any additional pressure to be perfect—it is ever-present in our society. Be the change you want to see and monitor your negative self-talk and your comments talking about bodies.

Engage teens’ full range of emotions: Contrary to messages teens are getting, they are entitled to the full range of their emotions, including the negative ones, such as anger and jealousy. Give them permission to feel their emotions and teach them how to express themselves, so that they can speak and act honestly and directly.

Create safe spaces: In today’s fast-paced hyper-technological world, teens need safe spaces carved out for them to explore their lives, try out new roles and voices, and feel confident in their choices. Offering teens time to pause, reflect and consider their options is essential for their personal growth.

Be present: Listen to teens. Show them your interest by asking them questions about their lives as well as their opinions on a variety of issues. By offering open-ended questions you help teens deepen their understandings of their feelings, situations and the actions they may wish to take. Try to refrain from always offering your wisdom, and create space for them to discover their own.

Support programs and people that empower teens: Attend museum exhibits, speakers and events that celebrate positivity. Tell teens what matters to you—with your words and your actions. Send them links to great articles, blog posts and websites. Support programs that give teens the opportunity to learn important life skills and grow into the fullest expression of themselves.

Second-Year Groups

Preparing for a Second Year

In the spring

Planning (and securing funding) for the next year of your group should begin in the spring of your current year!

1. It is important that the teens in your group know that the intention is for the group to continue together for many years. Share with them that groups across North America have continued into their third, fourth, and even fifth years! Shevet is an ongoing opportunity for them to grow, learn and gather with friends.
2. Decide whether there is a need to invite new teens to join the group. Were there enough teens in the group this year? Even with the best intentions, not all teens return. If a few do not return, will you have enough participants? If you choose to add teens, we suggest that you:
 - a. Involve the current teens by the next-to-last meeting of the year and ask them whether they know others who might wish to join. Gather contact information, so that you can follow up over the summer.
 - b. Ask the current teens to write personal notes of invitation that you will include in correspondence over the summer to the potential members and their parents.
 - c. Plan how you will integrate the new members into the existing group.

In the summer

During the summer, you should plan for your group's second year:

1. Review any feedback you received from the teens at the closing meeting. Consider how you will incorporate this information as you plan for your monthly meetings.
2. Consider what leadership roles you will encourage the teens to take on.
3. Preview the sessions and decide what special events you will incorporate into the coming year, such as a parent-son gathering, field trips, or presentations.
4. Reconfirm which teens are returning and invite new participants as needed.
5. Set dates and meeting location(s) for the year.

Second Year Materials

When preparing for your second year of meetings, it may be helpful to review what you did last year and tie the material into your discussions and activities for *this year*.

Existing Group/Facilitator Leaving

If you are preparing to leave your job as the group facilitator, and your group will continue with a new facilitator, help set the stage for a smooth transition:

- Let the teens know you will be leaving.
- Ask them what qualities they would like to see in a new facilitator. Share this information with the person who will do the hiring.
- Ask the teens what essential information they would like to let the new facilitator know about the group and make sure that information gets passed on to the new facilitator.
- Ask the teens how they would like to welcome their new facilitator. Do they want to write a collaborative letter or make a card? Set aside a few minutes during the closing session for this activity. If you meet the new group leader you can give him this letter; if not, ask your supervisor to give it to him.

Existing Group/New Facilitator

When a new facilitator takes over an ongoing group, there are special challenges for both him and the group members. The group will need time to adjust to and welcome a new person. The teens may be reluctant at first, feeling very attached to their original group leader. The new leader must be sensitive to and respectful of the group dynamics.

Acknowledge the difficulty in making the transition to a new leader, for both the group and yourself. The more the teens know about you, the more they will feel comfortable with you. To facilitate trust, share about yourself, be open, and maintain a friendly, respectful attitude.

If you have the chance during the summer to speak with the former group leader, by all means, take advantage! Learn some of the rituals that are important and special to the group. Ask the former group leader to write the teens a note that you can share at the opening meeting of the second year.

All the best to you!

Ten Essentials of Shevet Facilitation

1. You are the facilitator who attends to group needs and does not impose on, but rather guides the group process.
2. Do not take your position as a role model lightly, also do not forget to use humor.
3. Remember ground rules established to safeguard the integrity and comfort of group members, and keep them holy.
4. Honor each group member, striving to maintain inclusion and balanced participation.
5. Honor your own strengths and limitations in order to be a model for self-awareness, self-acceptance and life-long growth.
6. Do not set yourself up as expert or teacher, rather encourage group members to explore and clarify their own opinions.
7. Do not wed yourself to an agenda so firmly that you fail to respond to spontaneous concerns or insights.
8. Do not forget that group cohesion takes time, but nurture the process to allow trust and comfort to emerge.
9. Do not worry about responding to challenges “correctly,” rather focus on your consistent message of affirmation and support for the growth and learning of your group and each member.
10. Be open, have fun and be true to yourself, thus inspiring your group to do the same.