

Creating Inclusive & Antiracist Classrooms

Reform Jews strive to put our values into action by celebrating the holiness and individuality of every person and the collective diversity* of the Jewish people. As a Jewish educator/teacher, the list below is designed to provide you with ways to be antiracist and foster an equitable and inclusive classroom community. This list will provide you with methods of inclusion that will help give students a sense of belonging in Reform Judaism and create a base for long-lasting engagement in Jewish life. Terms and best practices of inclusion are *constantly evolving*, and we encourage you and your community to continuously update inclusive practices.

***When we say “diversity,” what do we mean?**

North American Jewry is made up of people from different backgrounds in terms of faith, disabilities, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and more. This is especially true amongst younger generations who readily identify as increasingly diverse. It is important to ask yourself: Do our materials, curriculum, programs, media, activities, and interactions allow individuals from these and other backgrounds to participate, identify, and see themselves represented?

Demographic Trends in North American Jewish Life

- **Interfaith/intermarried couples & families**
Since 2000, 71% of non-Orthodox Jewish marriages in the United States have been interfaith. Overall, the Jewish rate of intermarriage in the US has exceeded 50%. (Source: Pew)
- **Jews with Disabilities**
Jews with Disabilities account for 20% of our community. (Source: Ruderman Foundation)
- **Jews of Color and multiracial families**
At least 12-15% of Jews in the United States identify as Jews of Color of African, Latinx, Asian or mixed-race descent (Source: Counting Inconsistencies) and ~10% of US Jews are of Mizrahi or Sephardic heritage. (Source: Bechol Lashon)
- **LGBTQ+ Jews - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer Jews**
Approximately 10% of North American Jewry identifies as part of the LGBTQ community, and that doesn't count those who do not openly identify. (Source: Multiple)

In addition to utilizing this checklist, you may consider using these tools as an opportunity to update your own knowledge on these topics:

- [Create a DEI Working Group](#) and engage in the group process of taking the [Audacious Hospitality Community Assessment](#).
- Religious school and early childhood educators and teachers have undergone DEI training and are aware of [the micro/macroaggressions Jewish children of Color](#) and their families often experience in Jewish settings.
- Acknowledge your own unconscious bias (we all have them). Consider using this tool developed by Project Implicit to explore your own biases and learn how to counter against them: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- Educate yourself regarding the most recent strides in inclusive practices. We often expect marginalized communities to tell us what they need to feel included. Best practice teaches us that professionals and leaders should learn for themselves (utilizing existing resources or contracting a trainer) and change their environments to be as inclusive as possible prior to being asked to do so. (Jews of Color Educational Resource Module p. 24-27**)
- Have questions about inclusive terminology? [Read the Jews of Color Educational Resource Module p. 38-43](#) and the [LGBTQ Educational Resource Module p. 37, 103-113](#).

Planning, Physical Space, and Materials:

- “Nothing about us without us” – design programs in partnership or leveraging resources created by those being represented.
- Ensure that the images of people in your curriculum represent a diverse spectrum of Jewish life, including Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ Jews, Jews with disabilities, etc. (while being mindful to avoid using the same images/people over and over).
- Ensure that children’s books, dolls or figurines, and art materials are inclusive of children with disabilities and many skin tones and diverse Jewish ethnic and racial identities.
- When in person or on Zoom, consider your physical space and how you can incorporate physical displays of inclusion in your environment (Black Lives Matter/Pride flag, etc.).
- Communicate with your entire community your school’s intentions, plans, and methods for creating a school that values and incorporates Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI).
- Create learning opportunities for parents, guardians, and families to learn about REDI.
- Provide parents & guardians with resources to affirm and reflect these values in their homes and outside of school.

Before the Lesson Begins: Day-of Considerations:

- Arrive to your classroom early (if possible) to greet students by name and create a sense of community. While it may go without saying, a warm hello goes a long way!
- Ensure that you learn to pronounce all of your students’ names correctly. If you mispronounce a student’s name, apologize, and ensure that you get it right the next time.
- When learning a student’s name, avoid commenting on the “unusualness” of it or exotifying non-Ashkenazi names, “Wow, I have never heard that name”, “so different”, “what culture is that from?” etc.
- Set “Shared Agreements” or “Classroom Norms” with your students. Shared agreements are a brit, a covenant, used to build and nurture relationships. Shared agreements also create safety and understanding within a classroom to foster a feeling of belonging. [See examples of shared agreements in the Audacious Hospitality Community Assessment Workbook, pgs. 5-7.](#)

While Teaching:

- Resist [colorblind mentality](#) while teaching.
- Understand that Students of Color in largely white dominated groups require more emotional energy to [codeswitch](#), which might take away their ability to be fully present in your classroom/school/community.
- Be prepared to interrupt when you hear micro/macroaggressions between two students, in front of the entire classroom, or even amongst staff. Failing to interrupt racism/homophobia/ableism/sexism/etc. even once signals that oppression is sometimes okay. See pages 3 & 4 of this resource for a common list of microaggressions.
 - Watch [Teaching Tolerance’s “Speak Up at School” webinar](#) to learn how to create a plan to address bias in the classroom utilizing the *Interrupt, Question, Educate, Echo* strategies.
- When calling on students, ensure that you are calling on people who represent a diversity of backgrounds. Try to prioritize the voices of those who have not yet been represented in the activity/conversation.

- The concept of making space/taking space can be incorporated into your classroom shared agreements/classroom norms.
- When teaching about and celebrating holidays, acknowledge and teach about traditions and customs outside of Ashkenazi/white, heteronormative, two parent family culture. (i.e., Breaking Yom Kippur fast with enchiladas, Chinese food takeout for Shabbat Dinner, a pot-luck camping trip for Rosh Hashanah, an interfaith Hanukkah celebration, affirming interfaith students non-Jewish holiday celebrations, etc. to ensure students with various family structures, ethnic backgrounds, and traditions to see their identity reflected).

General Inclusive Practices:

- Do not ask, and educate others not to ask (including students and school community members), “Are both of your parents Jewish?”, “How are you Jewish?”, “Are you *really* Jewish?”, “Is your mother Jewish?” or “Did you have a Bar/Bat/B’nai Mitzvah?” These questions marginalize the recipient and invalidates their Jewish identity. They are also questions often asked of already marginalized Jews (Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ identifying Jews, etc.) and serve to further marginalize them (see Microaggressions section below).
- When teaching, avoid using phrases such as “It’s easy to see...” or “As we all know...”? Such phrases imply that all students were raised similarly or come from similar family’s/ environments/cultures who imparted the same information. These phrases are counterproductive to creating an environment that both expects and appreciates that we all show up with different and valuable lived experience, emphasizing the essential value of our diversity.
- Avoid presuming others have camp/Israel/youth group or any other prior Jewish experience.
- Keep in mind the diversity of Jewish experience in the room. Stay away from phrases like, “You probably remember this melody for ‘Adon Olam’ from summer camp.” Do not open or close with a song that may be unfamiliar without providing transliteration, either written or on a projector, so others can follow along.
- Do not assume that a Person of Color whom you do not recognize in a Jewish space is a maintenance, event staff person, or new to Judaism.
- Demonstrate awareness that students may be in families with relatives of a different faith tradition.
- If a Jew has gone through the conversion process, refer to them simply as Jewish, or a Jew, unless they articulate a desire to be identified differently.
- Do not expect students of any particular group to ‘represent’ the perspectives of others of their race, gender, family configuration etc. in class discussions.
- [Normalize pronoun usage](#) for staff and students. Avoid assuming a person’s gender. Referring to someone with their correct pronouns communicates respect and warmth. Model good pronoun etiquette by:
 - Incorporating pronouns into your displayed name and all introductions and encourage school community to do the same.
 - If asking for pronouns, ask everyone, not only the people you assume might be trans or nonbinary and do not insist a person share their pronouns if they do not want to do so.

Microaggressions:

Be cognizant of the power of language and recognize the way certain terminology can stigmatize and harm People of Color, starting with the examples listed out below. Begin to transition to more inclusive language, encouraging others to do the same.

When speaking to People of Color, the following questions might be asked out of positive or neutral intent. However, these questions (disproportionately asked to People of Color) serve to make People of Color feel alienated, unwelcome, and/or unsafe. Continue to learn about microaggressions and be prepared/practice addressing them in the moment. The examples of microaggressions below have an intersectional lens. (Intersectionality is the idea that people can experience marginalization due to various forms of oppression. For example, Jewish Women of Color experience racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism simultaneously. Jews with disabilities can experience ableism and anti-Semitism. Those of us who identify as queer Jews can experience homophobia and anti-Semitism at the same time.)

Microaggressive Comments & Questions

- So, how are you Jewish?
- Where are you from? No, where are you really from?
- You're not *gay* gay.
- You are my only [Black/Latinx/Asian/etc.] friend.
- I'm surprised you know so much about Judaism/Torah.
- Who are you here with? (i.e., Why are you here?)
- You're so pretty for someone [who uses a wheelchair/who uses braces/who is Trans/who is Black]
- I don't really see you as [recipient's race/gender/sexuality/disability/culture]
- Do you work here? (or other ways of assuming that a POC/working class person is custodial staff rather than a member or guest)

Microaggressive Experiences

- Asking to touch Black people's hair, or worse, touching without asking.
- Being repeatedly *misgendered*.
- Often being confused/mistaken for other People of Color.
- Being asked to speak on behalf of all Trans People/People who are LGBTQ+/Jews of Color.
- Being disproportionately and aggressively questioned by security at synagogue entrances.
- Walking into a space and feeling unsafe as the only Person of Color/Trans Person/Gender Non-Conforming Person.

Additional Resources:

- [Racial Justice Resource List](#)
- [Colorblind Mentality/Microaggression Resource](#)
- [Community Racial Justice Checklist](#)
- [A Tool for White People Navigating Conversations Around Race](#)
- [Video Messages](#) from Reform Leaders of Color, Deitra Reiser, Yolanda Savage-Narva and Evan Traylor, as well as an accompanying [Discussion Guide](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance](#) provides resources and webinars that will be useful in your continued learning.
- For Congregational communities that are ready to further or begin their REDI work, [creating a REDI working group](#) & taking the [Congregational Community Assessment](#) is a great place to start.