

Being an Ally to LGBTQI Jews- Do's and Don'ts

Adapted by Rabbi Alissa Wise from materials by Jewish Mosaic

1. Do include LGBTQI Jews as respected and trusted leaders/authorities on non-LGBTQI issues.

What is an example of a way to introduce an LGBTQ issue that is not about sex?

Example: Talk with your teens about what they think about the recent hubbub around a teen girl who wanted to wear a tux to her prom or a teen boy who likes to wear heels and wigs.

Example: When inviting guest speakers/presenters think about inviting queer Jews, Jews of color, or disabled Jews not about the issues around they are identified (ie. Queer Jew/environmental justice or disabled Jew/Talmud)

2. Do utilize the Jewish holiday cycle as an opportunity to include LGBTQ issues.

Choose a holiday and think about how to incorporate LGBTQ issues

Example: Purim is a great holiday to explore gender roles.

3. Do avoid pre-packaged projects on family, love, sex or identity.

How can you lead an activity that asks people to share/explore their families in ways that are open and safe?

Example: Don't pass out a pre-drawn family tree. Introduce that all families look different—offer models of how to explore/depict your family from the outset.

4. Don't restrict participation to traditional gender roles.

How can you model that gender roles are fluid—anyone can wear a kippah, make Kiddush, or light Shabbat candles?

Example: If you are a male teacher/educator, offer to take a girl's role in a play or reading or Unexpected gender roles – Deborah, Yael, Tamar, Ruth and Naomi.

5. Do avoid opposites in teaching lessons.

When teaching, especially Hebrew, think about how you teach and avoid opposites

Example: Try to not introduce Ima & Abba or *zachar & nakeivah* / masculine & feminine as opposites. When talking about family words, teach also Ima & Ima

or Abba & Abba. This can also be reinforced with concepts—like *kodesh*/sacred and *hol*/mundane, or *tov* /good and *rah*/bad. Use real life examples that exist in your community or bring in books/stories that introduce more diverse family structures or gender roles.

6. Do present multiple/alternative readings of problematic texts. Don't always got to problematic texts to approach LGBTQI issues.

When preparing to teach a text, consider how it might sound to marginalized folks—poor people, queer people, single people, people of color, disabled people, etc.

Example: Texts to have multiple interpretations of: Sodom and Gomorrah, Leviticus 18, Adam & Eve. Examples of other texts to use include *b'tzelem elohim*/we are made in the image of God, *v'ahavta l'rei-acha kamocho*/ love your neighbor as yourself, or the story of David and Jonathan as a story of emotional intimacy between two men, or Naomi and Ruth between two women.

7. Do integrate teaching about diverse Jews as part of teaching about Jewish history.

You can teach about many moments of Jewish and/or secular history and at the same time highlight marginalized and often invisibilized communities/people.

Example: Gay & lesbian resistance communities that existed during WWII in Eastern Europe. Highlight Judaism as multiracial and multilingual—explore ladino as well as Yiddish, and the various rituals, prayer practices, and stories of Jews around the world—the Jews of Morocco, Iraq, India, Latin America, China, and Africa as well as those of European descent.

8. Do make use of Jewish wisdom.

Judaism is rich in wisdom of marking transitions, healing from loss or disappointment, of exploring gender and sexuality, for celebrating humanity and its diversity, or for celebrating important moments of all kinds. How can you introduce using Jewish wisdom to model inclusivity?

Example: www.ritualwell.org has many ideas for innovative rituals including a blessing based on the “*asher yatzar*” blessing to celebrate trans, intersex, female, male folks, and everyone else. Others have created rituals for moments of gender transition or for having sex for the first time.

9. Don't make assumptions about someone's gender or sexual identity.

Allow folks to out themselves and make space for that to happen, but don't push too hard. Be aware of assumptions that are made about if someone has a boyfriend or girlfriend, wears skirts or pants, etc.

Example: As folks introduce themselves by name, ask them to also say their preferred gender pronoun. If using examples of couples, for example for an upcoming youth group dance, don't assume a girl is going with a boy.

10. Don't assume talking about LGBTQI issues means talking about sex.

Part of the way homophobia impacts us is by convincing us that to talk about LGBTQ issues means to talk about sex. It doesn't. Below are examples of LGBTQ non-sex related issues

Examples:

1. Love
2. Self-actualization
3. Inclusive spectra vs. binary
4. Alternative family structures
5. Histories of resistance and social change
6. Lack of access to bathrooms
7. Legal discrimination of various kinds (taxes, hospital visitation, etc)
8. Rejection from families
9. Violence
10. Invisibility in religion, media, bureaucracy etc.
11. Lack of representation in government