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# Yachad / National Jewish Council for Disabilities

*In conjunction with  
Hineinu: Jewish Community for People of All Abilities*

## DISABILITY *INCLUSION* RESOURCE GUIDE FOR RABBIS



[www.yachad.org](http://www.yachad.org)

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## Foreword

*“A human being mints many coins from the same mold, and they are all identical. But the Holy One, Blessed be G-d, strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique.” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5)*

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Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities, an agency of the Orthodox Union, is a 6,500-member global organization dedicated to the *Inclusion* of all Jews with disabilities in every aspect of Jewish life. With numerous offices and chapters across the U.S., Canada, and Israel, Yachad/NJCD offers diverse services including, but not limited to: summer camps; Israel trips; social programming for all ages; social skills development; support services, case management, counseling for individuals, siblings, and families; shabbatonim; educational opportunities and special needs yeshivas; and vocational services.

The purpose of the *Disability Inclusion Resource Guide for Rabbis*, brought to you by Yachad/NJCD, as part of the cross-Movement Heneinu initiative for a more Inclusive Jewish world, of which Yachad is co-founder and a member organization, is to support Orthodox rabbis and lay leadership in their efforts to make their synagogues more inviting to Jews of varying abilities and disabilities via a plethora of no-cost, small, measurable, and easy-to-implement initiatives.

The Torah states that each of us is created *B'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of G-d (Genesis 1:27) and describes the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah welcoming strangers to their home. Yet there are Jews with physical, developmental, emotional, intellectual, mental health, and other challenges that do not have the opportunities to participate in the richness of Jewish life because multiple barriers still exist, largely on the attitudinal level.

It is only when attitudinal barriers are directly addressed and acknowledged by rabbis and other synagogue leadership that the synagogue community truly begins to move toward *Inclusion*. As the community follows the rabbi's example of active welcoming of persons and families impacted by disabilities, many Jews with diverse abilities and challenges will at last find warmth, welcome, and a sense of belonging to their Jewish community.

Historically, people with disabilities have been perceived in light of visible impairments such as physical, communication, and sensory challenges. People can have disabilities that are not visible, including but not limited to autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, executive functioning disorders, and mood and behavioral challenges. Regardless of whether a disability is apparent, one of Judaism's core tenets is that because each person is unique and that we are all created in the image of G-d, every community is responsible to seek out persons of various abilities and disabilities, and ensure their *Inclusion* in Jewish communal life. We should meet their needs so they may participate in personally and spiritually meaningful opportunities as full

members of the Jewish community, who can contribute to a stronger and more vibrant community.<sup>1</sup>

We know that more can and must be done to build a more inclusive Jewish community. A remarkably high number of Jews have to, or will have to, overcome some barrier to be included in Jewish life<sup>2</sup>. We must ensure that our programming, worship, social events, and facilities are accessible to all people with apparent and not-apparent disabilities; our attitude and demeanor is welcoming; and our language is appropriate. Then and only then will all Jews have the opportunity to enjoy their G-d-given place in the Jewish world and enjoy the fruits of meaningful participation in the richness of Judaism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Text from presentation by Deborah Berman, LCSW, Director of Social Work, Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities to parent groups at Family Shabbaton May 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Presentation by Batya Jacob, Director of Education Services, Yachad, National Jewish Council for Disabilities New Jersey Conference for Jewish Educators, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Text from presentation by Deborah Berman, LCSW, Director of Social Work, Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities for presentation at Continuing Education for MSC seminar, 2013.

## Forming Synagogue-based *Inclusion* Committees/Initiatives

*“For my house shall be a house of prayer for all people.” (Isaiah 56:5)*

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People can be faced with a disability at any time. Some may be born with a disability, acquire disability due to an accident or illness, or become disabled to one degree or another due to old age.<sup>4</sup> In our Jewish communities, there are people with visible and invisible disabilities whose needs are not being met, whose families feel that they are or might be unwelcome at synagogue, and who are being forgotten, unwittingly ignored, and ultimately pushed out of the Jewish world due to lack of awareness or any organized outreach by synagogues.<sup>5</sup>

In order to push the wider Jewish community in a more inclusive direction, there must be a core attitudinal change at the synagogue level, fully endorsed by rabbis, staff, and lay leaders. This may be done most effectively and directly via easy to develop and simple to implement small *Inclusion* committees in synagogues, whose role it is to create actual and ongoing changes in synagogue life, community planning, and encouraging and supporting related changes in social practices among the congregants. Over time, this change happening concurrently in multitudes of synagogue communities will create a more *Inclusive* community where no Jew is pushed out of their rightful place in the Jewish world.<sup>6</sup>

Our Jewish values teach us that each of us is created in G-d’s image and each of us has value. It is our responsibility to ensure that our congregations are welcoming to all persons, regardless of natural variations in abilities.<sup>7</sup>

Forming a synagogue-based disability *Inclusion* Committee need not be a huge undertaking and does not require much funding, if any. Committees may be large or small, meet once a month to 4 times per year, be comprised of clergy or be staffed largely by volunteer lay persons. It is entirely up to the synagogue leadership what these committees look like and how wide their scope is. How many members there are depends on the size of the synagogue and level of resources.<sup>8</sup>

A synagogue *Inclusion* Committee’s main purpose is to serve as a positive force for attitudinal changes on the synagogue community level toward persons with disabilities; set the tone for the entire synagogue that persons with disabilities are welcome, wanted, and actively sought out; and to address as many obstacles as is reasonable and do-able for each synagogue so that as many people with diverse abilities and disabilities may fully participate in congregational life. Further, the *Inclusion* Committee serves as a means by which to continually update and enhance

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<sup>4</sup> Modified from interview of Deborah Berman, LCSW, Director of Social Work, Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities conducted by Raechel Banks of The Religious Action Center of the URJ and merged with Resolution “In Support of Access to Lifelong Jewish Learning for Jews with Disabilities” by URJ, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Shelly Christensen, Winter 2011, “Torah at the Center.”

<sup>6</sup> Modified from mission statement of Heneinu Initiative of which Yachad/NJCD is a co-founder and member-organization.

<sup>7</sup> from interview of Dr. Jeffrey Lichtman, International Director of Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities conducted by Rachel Banks of The Religious Action Center of the URJ.

<sup>8</sup> Modified from mission statement of Heneinu Initiative of which Yachad/NJCD is a co-founder and member-organization.

the needs that are being served in synagogue life.<sup>9</sup> **It is important to remember that an *Inclusion Committee* is not a *chesed* or *tzedakah* project.**

This [Resources For Rabbis Guide](#) contains suggestions and ideas to consider when beginning your own synagogue-based *Inclusion Committee* or, if your synagogue already has an *Inclusion Committee* of some kind, continuing its work.

Keep in mind that forming an *Inclusion committee* need not be a huge undertaking and does not require much of any money and no more than a small handful of dedicated participants. There are highly effective synagogue-based *Inclusion* committees of 2 people and others that have 8-10 participants and others that are a sub-committee of the Board of Directors.<sup>10</sup> It is not the wealth of the synagogue or the number of people on the committee that matters, but rather it is about keeping it simple and focusing on making steady, small, and obtainable changes to synagogue life.<sup>11</sup>

- Invite a wide range of people to participate, including:
  - Persons with disabilities, or persons related to someone with a disability
  - Professionals in disability-related fields (example: teachers, special educators, speech/occupational therapists, social workers, physicians, etc.)
  - Lay people/volunteers
  - Clergy and synagogue leadership, if their schedule and time permits
- At your first meeting:<sup>12</sup>
  - It may be helpful to have a guest facilitator from Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities to help you run the first meeting and serve as a resource and partner.
  - Have an agenda but don't stick rigidly to it; let discussion evolve. Include a *d'var Torah* that references Jewish texts relating to the inclusion of all people. (See the "Jewish Texts on Inclusion" section of this guide).
  - Let all participants tell their stories. What brings them to the table?
  - Start to think about a brief and concise mission statement and discuss small, measurable, and obtainable goals for the committee.
  - Identify next steps:
    - What are some hidden obstacles that prevent others from coming to synagogue and/or participating in synagogue life: awareness, attitudinal, physical, programmatic, and educational. (Note: The most common obstacle is always attitudinal issues within the synagogue. The #1 barrier to persons with disabilities and their families participating in synagogue life is that they feel unwelcome and no one has reached out to them.)

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from [MetroWest ABLE](#)

<sup>10</sup> Chani Herrmann, LMSW, Director of New Jersey Yachad, presentation at Conference of New Jersey Synagogues 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Modified from long range planning memos of Heneinu Initiative of which Yachad/NJCD is a co-founder and member-organization.

<sup>12</sup> From USCJ's "[Why Have an Inclusion Committee](#)" and "[Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities](#)"

- Write a statement of welcome and disability *Inclusion* to become part of all congregational membership materials – synagogue website, mailings, calendar, etc. Present this statement to your congregation’s Board of Directors for their approval.
- Discuss the presence of attitudinal barriers in your congregation. Explore why those attitudes exist and seek ways to address and eliminate them from your congregational family.
- Assign committee members to develop lists of strategies to break down those barriers and promote full participation of persons with disability conditions. Set deadlines for putting those strategies or initiatives into effect. Make sure that those deadlines are not in the distant future and see that they are adhered to.
- Publicize your committee and what you are doing. Let your congregants know that the inclusion committee exists and that you are a welcoming congregation. Some ideas include:
  - Write newsletter articles.
  - Place disability welcoming language in the synagogue bulletin.
  - Offer sensitivity training to ushers.
  - Offer large-print bulletins and *siddurim*.
  - Make assistive hearing devices available for weekday events and a sign language interpreter for Shabbat and holidays, if it is in the synagogue budget, and publicize to the community that these devices are available.
  - Provide special greeters and aides.
  - Give sermons and text studies on disability awareness using Jewish values.
  - Provide printed version of sermon and announcements.
  - Involve people with disabilities and their families.

### ***Ideas for No-Cost/Low-Cost Physical Changes***<sup>13</sup>

If your synagogue happens to have the budget for it, here are some low-cost and easy-to-do physical changes to make that create disability *Inclusion* without the expense of a huge undertaking like retrofitting your building:

- Educate ushers about the various *Inclusion* features your synagogue offers. This knowledge goes a long way in creating a welcoming environment for people who benefit from your barrier-removal efforts.
- Post appropriate signage indicating the location of your *Inclusion* entrance, disability-friendly restrooms (if there are any), and how to get to them.
- Lower your box of *kippot* so that everyone, including people in wheelchairs, can reach them.

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<sup>13</sup> Adapted from an authorized merging of Disability *Inclusion* literature by USCJ, Reconstructionist Movement, and Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities

- Place cups by the water fountain to make drinking water available for all.
- Make plastic magnifying sheets available for use with your *siddurim* and *chumashim*. These can easily be sewn into a book's cover so it can be placed over the pages as an easy and cost-effective way to provide for those who need large-print books.

***Outreach to Your Synagogue Community:***

Use these questions, and other questions you might think of, for discussion of attitudinal barriers in your congregation:

- Is the rabbi a role model for creating a welcoming attitude for persons with disabilities?
- To your knowledge, do people with disabilities come to services or activities? If they come once, do they come back? If not, do you know why?
- Do people with disabilities participate in the religious or political leadership of the congregation? If they do not, why is this?
- What does the congregation do to encourage the participation and recognize the contributions of people with disabilities?
- Can and do people with disabilities celebrate life cycle events in your congregation? If not, do you know why?
- Is there a way for people with disabilities to offer suggestions and expertise on reducing barriers in the congregation without feeling like they are complaining or imposing?
- Do you use people-first language in your speech, newsletter, etc.? (This is language that refers to the person first and the disability second. For example, "person with paraplegia," instead of "paraplegic.")
- Does your congregation offer a way to teach members and children about people with disabilities?
- Do you reach out to members of the congregation who cannot get to the building?
- Do you reach out to and acknowledge the needs of family members of people with disabilities?
- Does your synagogue have a board-level committee or task force on the *Inclusion* of people with disabilities?
- Has your congregation adopted a statement on *Inclusion*?
- Does your congregation indicate a willingness to think creatively about ways to be accessible and welcoming?
- Has there been a discussion or training session with staff members, board members, congregants, and teachers about how to make guests and constituents with disabilities feel welcome and included?
- Do all publicity and written materials say "All are welcome"? Is it written in an easy-to-read typeface and font?
- Do people with disabilities participate as ushers, lead services, or serve on committees?
- Are people with disabilities encouraged to serve on the Board of Directors?

- Are written materials, including prayer books, bulletins, newsletters, fliers, and brochures available in large-print, Braille, or by e-mail?
- Is the physical facility wheelchair accessible? Is there a ramp or lift to the building and to the *bimah*?
- Is sign language interpretation available at events that people who are deaf might attend?
- Does everyone enter through the same doorway? If not, is the accessible doorway welcoming and attractive?

### ***Ritual Accessibility***<sup>14</sup>

Here are some ideas to make worship more *Inclusive* for everyone:

- First and foremost, actively seek out and invite people with disabilities to participate in services.
- Clear space in different parts of the sanctuary for people who use wheelchairs.
- If you identify a community-member who is sight impaired, is it possible for your synagogue to locate large-print *siddurim*, *chumashim*, and other materials in Braille? You may ask Yachad to help you acquire such materials.
- Is it feasible to place a permanent reading table on the sanctuary floor so people with physical disabilities have greater access for Torah reading and honors.
- Dedicate a *kiddush* or *oneg* Shabbat in honor of North American Inclusion Month (NAIM) which is observed every February (see “Jewish Disability Awareness Month” section of this guide).
- Include special prayers or readings at each Shabbat service during North American Inclusion Month (NAIM)
- During North American Inclusion Month (NAIM), add a relevant quote to each Shabbat bulletin.
- Educate ushers, greeters, receptionists, and others who welcome and guide visitors about the various accessibility features offered by your congregation.
- Lower your box of *kipot* and basket of women’s head coverings so they can be reached by everyone, including small people or people who use wheelchairs.
- Visit accessible congregations and other houses of worship in your area to get ideas for your own congregation

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<sup>14</sup> Adapted from a combination of Yachad/National Jewish Counsel for Disabilities Resource Guide for Educators, Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities NAIM material, and the Yachad NAIM Guide 2011-2012, USCJ Guide for making an Inclusive Synagogue, The Religious Action Center of URJ, and additions by Reconstructionist leadership members Heneinu.

## Participate in North American Inclusion Month (NAIM)

*“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” –Anne Frank*

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Every February is North American Inclusion Month (NAIM) and it designated to raise awareness and develop sensitivity of what it means for those who live with disabilities, and how to include them in the larger community.

Some of the NAIM programs from which communities may incorporate through Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities include the following:

- Scholars-in-residence to visit synagogues over Shabbat and speak on issues relating to disability and how to successfully foster communal *Inclusion*.
- Host a lunch and learn or adult education class on disabilities in Judaism
- Upon request, Yachad provides rabbis with samples of disability-specific sermons to give at each Shabbat in the month of February. Contact Deborah Berman for more information.
- Educational seminars in synagogues featuring workshops on sensitivity training and programs to help promote *Inclusion*.
- Yachad Shabbatonim, which offer a fun-filled weekend for both individuals with disabilities and participants from the mainstream community.
- Creating a Disability Awareness Day in schools that highlight the importance of ensuring *Inclusion* for those with disabilities in the Jewish community.
- Many other activities for the whole community such as resource fairs, fundraisers, and recreational programs.
- Contact Yachad for a power point of the Purim story to help congregants with disabilities follow along and feel included in this holiday.

For more information on NAIM please contact:

Eli Hagler, Associate Director, Yachad/NJCD  
[haglere@ou.org](mailto:haglere@ou.org); 212-613-8285

Deborah Berman, LCSW, Director of Social Work, Yachad/NJCD  
[bermand@org.org](mailto:bermand@org.org); 212-613-8172

## Jewish Quotes and Texts for *Inclusion*<sup>15</sup>

*“For my house shall be a house of prayer for all people.” (Isaiah 56:5)*

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Jewish tradition teaches us of our obligation to ensure equal access for all people and to help facilitate the full participation of individuals with disabilities in religious and public life. We are taught “Do not separate yourself from the community” (Pirke Avot 2:5); accordingly, we must prevent anyone from being separated from the community against their will.

Furthermore, in Leviticus 19:14 we are commanded, “You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind.” Stumbling blocks come in many forms, from less-than-accessible buildings, Shabbat services, prayer books and web pages that are harder to access or are not sufficient for people with disabilities. We are obligated to remove these stumbling blocks; this is why Judaism cares so deeply for the rights of people with disabilities.

To make your synagogue more aware of disability *Inclusion*, give a D’var Torah, sermon, newsletter, email, synagogue website, etc. Here are some quotes to help you get started:

### Jewish Texts<sup>16</sup>

- “And G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’ And G-d created man in His image in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)
  - On “let us make man” – As long as G-d is still creating, He does not in fact say ‘I,’ He says ‘We,’ an absolute, all-inclusive term which does not refer to an I outside the self but is the plural of all-encompassing majesty. It is an impersonal I, and I that does not face another Thou, that does not reveal anything but lives, like the metaphysical G-d of pre-creation, only in itself.” (Franz Rosenzweig)
  - On “in the image” – “Beloved is man for he was created in the image of G-d. Still greater was G-d’s love in that He gave to man the knowledge of his having been so created.” (Pirke Avot 3:18)
- Two translations/interpretations from Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5:
  - “A human being mints many coins from the same mold, and they are all identical. But the holy one, blessed by G-d, strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique.”
  - “(An individual man was created) to show the greatness of G-d. While a person stamps many coins from a single die, and they are all alike, the King of kings has

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<sup>15</sup> Combined contributions of Yachad/NJCD and Religious Action Center .

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from Batya Jacob, Director of Education Support Services, Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities, combined with quotes collected by URJ.

stamped every person with the die of Adam, yet not one of them is like his fellow."

- "But Moses said to the Lord, 'Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' And the Lord said to him, 'Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?'" (Exodus 4:10-11)
- "Every member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah—whether one is rich or poor, physically able or with physical disability." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah, Ch. 10)
- Two translations/interpretations from Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers, 4:3:
  - "Ben Azzai taught: Do not disdain any person. Do not underrate the importance of anything for there is no person who does not have his hour, and there is no thing without its place in the sun."
  - "Treat no one lightly and think nothing is useless, for everyone has a moment and everything has a place."
- "Do not look at the container, but what is in it." (Pirke Avot 4:27)
- "Speak up for those who cannot speak...speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy." (Proverbs 31:8 )
- "*Hinei ma tov u'ma na'im shevet achim gam yachad.*" "Behold how good and pleasant it is when all people live together as one." (Psalm 133:1)
- "*Rachmana leib'i.*" – "G-d wants only the heart."
- "Do not curse a person who is deaf and do not place a stumbling block in front of a person who is blind." (Leviticus 19:14)
- "Oh G-d, may all created in your image recognize that they are kin, so that in one spirit and in one friendship, they may be forever united before you." (Traditional Liturgy)
- "When a person insults someone else, it is his own defect that he is revealing." (Kedushim 70a)
- "If there be among you a person with needs, you shall not harden your heart, but you shall surely open your hand." (Deuteronomy 15:7)
- Deuteronomy 24:17 and 27:19, and Jeremiah 22:3 teaches us "not to oppress the stranger, the orphan and the widow." These three are offered as examples of the weakest, least well-protected members of society. The Torah repeatedly delineates that protection and help must be afforded such members of the group.
- "Teach a child according to his way." (Proverbs 22:6) (according to his needs and abilities)
- "All Israel is responsible for one another" (Mishnah Sanhedrin)
- "We may sell a synagogue and, similarly, all holy objects – even a Sefer Torah – in order to provide for Torah students and orphans." (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim 153:6)
- "Rabbi Yochanan said: 'Each of the 40 days that Moses was on Mount Sinai, G-d taught him the entire Torah. And each night, Moses forgot what he had learned. Finally, G-d gave it to him as a gift. If so, why did G-d not give the Torah to him as a gift on the first

day? In order to encourage the teachers of those who learn in a non-traditional manner.” (Jerusalem Talmud)

- “Human beings were created as a single individual to teach you that anyone who destroys a single life is as though that person has destroyed an entire world, and anyone who preserves a single life is as though an entire world has been preserved. The creation of an individual human being was done also for the sake of peace among humanity, so that no person could say to another, ‘My parent is greater than your parent.’” (Talmud Sanhedrin 4:5)
- “And G-d saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)
- “Oh G-d, may all created in your image recognize that they are kin, so that in one spirit and in one friendship, they may be forever united before you.” (Traditional Liturgy)
- “Anyone who deprives a student of being taught Torah is as if he robs him of his father’s legacy.” (Sanhedrin 91b)
- A student should not say —I have understood when s/he has not understood. Rather, s/he should ask again, even several times. And, if the teacher gets angry and abuses the student verbally, she or he should say to the teacher, —Teacher, this is Torah and I must learn it, even if my capacity is inadequate. (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilkhhot Talmud Torah, 4:4)

## Bar Mitzvahs for Learning or Communication Challenged<sup>17</sup>

*“Anyone who deprives a student of being taught Torah is as if he robs him of his father’s legacy.” (Sanhedrin 91b)*

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The bar mitzvah of a young person with a disability demonstrates vividly what Judaism is, or should be, about. The ultimate success of such a ceremony is a triumph, not only for the individuals involved, but for the entire Jewish community. The challenges are not insurmountable; it only takes flexibility, creativity, and the willingness to plan ahead. Yachad/National Jewish Counsel for Disabilities works with numerous families each year across the U.S. Canada and Israel to prepare for this life cycle event and we also work with synagogues to become experts in the needs of young people coming of Bar Mitzvah age. We aim to truly educate each child according to his or her ability and fulfill our obligation to support each and every young person as they enter adulthood.

- Recognize that many people with disabilities have emotional ties to the Jewish people and therefore wish to become a participant in the community.
- Provide the child with the opportunity to declare his or her value and dignity before G-d and the community.
- Understand that those with disabilities may not reach the same level of learning of a child without disabilities, but that this does not make them any less Jewish or any less a part of our community or that they will become any less of an adult than their more typical peers.
- Modify the conventional training, as well as the actual service.
- Become acquainted with the learning challenges and styles of the student.
- Meet with the student and his or her family and discuss goals and what they hope to get out of the life cycle event.
- Take into consideration the following:

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<sup>17</sup> Adapted with permission from “What Makes a ‘Special Needs’ Bar Mitzvah Truly Special,” URJ and [MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com) ; additional contributions adapted with permission from Department of Educational Support Services of Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities.

- Has this child ever performed in front of an audience before, such as at a dance or choral recital or in school plays?
- How long can the child be expected to stay on the *bimah* or even in the sanctuary?
- Will the child follow directions to participate in various portions of the service?
- If the child can verbalize portions of the service, how much should he or she be expected to do on that day (lead the congregation in prayers, read Torah and Haftarah, deliver a d'var Torah)?
- If the child is nonverbal, what is an alternative way for him to have an active part in the service (such as accepting and putting on a *tallit*, opening the ark, and/or carrying a small Torah if he struggles with motor skills and carrying heavy items)?
- Can the child (with adult assistance) prepare a small speech to express what this event means to him? If not in words, can the child draw a picture or make another artistic rendering of his experience?
- What makes this child happy? Even a child with the most severe limitations may take joy in holding the Kiddush cup with support while the blessings are spoken by another person.
- If needed, at the service family members may speak on behalf of the student, connecting the bar mitzvah to the family/friend.

## Synagogue-based *Inclusion* Activities for Teens<sup>18</sup>

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

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For all teens, including teens with obvious or hidden disabilities, the positive impact of acceptance into a group of their peers cannot be underestimated. Synagogue-based youth initiatives, social events, or youth groups provide many opportunities for friendships, activities, learning and a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, many young people with disabilities have been left out of youth groups and peer activities or become objects of pity or fleeting attention through well-intentioned yet dehumanizing and fleeting tzedakah projects by students. Every Jewish teen deserves the opportunity to enjoy the mainstream benefits of a youth group and to feel valued and equal among their peers.

- Inclusion is about attitude. Run programs and sensitivity trainings for teens on disability awareness.
- Seek out and engage young people with disabilities to participate and get involved.
- Meet with teens and parents individually to find out what each member or prospective member needs to increase socialization and achieve a sense of peer-group belonging.
- Hold events in locations that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Find ways for young adults with disabilities to participate, be leaders, and find friendship within your youth group.
- Listen to adolescents themselves about their participation and needs. Make decisions *with* them, not *for* them.
- Provide individuals with disabilities with the same opportunities for growth and friendship as their typically developing peers.

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<sup>18</sup> Adapted from Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities by Shelly Christensen, with additions from Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities literature on teens and inclusion authored by Dr. Joe Goldfarb, Director of Summer Programs, Yachad/NJCD.

## Summer Programs: Camps, Israel Trips, Voc Training, Vacations, Volunteer and Fellowship Opportunities

*“Oh G-d, may all created in your image recognize that they are kin, so that in one spirit, and in one friendship they may be forever united before you.”  
(Traditional Liturgy)*

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### Yachad/NJCD Summer Programs

[www.yachad.org/summer-programs](http://www.yachad.org/summer-programs)

As you encourage congregants to attend Jewish summer experiences, please consider the following *Inclusive* programs for individuals with disabilities and their “typical” peers. Yachad’s Summer Programs include a variety of summer experiences for youth and adults with and without developmental disabilities. Yachad B’Yad (hand-in-hand) is a summer tour that mainstreams high school students with their Yachad peers. There are also disability accessible Birthright trips to Israel. A number of summer camp experiences are available for youth and adults with developmental challenges in an *Inclusive* environment at camps in the Poconos and Upstate New York. Yachad Summer Department has options for campers as well as Vocational enrichment opportunities in a camp setting for adults. All of Yachad’s summer programs focus on fostering socialization, friendship, self-esteem and independence within a safe, secure environment.

The camping experience can make all the difference in the development of any child or young adult. The same is true for anyone living with a disability. The summer offers everyone a chance to grow and mature in an informal educational setting where the “classroom” can be the ball field or the dining room. Yachad Summer Department, the largest provider of Jewish camping opportunities for individuals with disabilities, offers a wide variety of programs catered to each person’s needs of each participant. Depending on age, religious observance, length of your “summer break” and previous experiences, Yachad has the perfect summer program for each individual:

- **The Yachad B’Yad Israel Experience** brings “typical” high school students together with Yachad members (young adults and teens with special needs) on a fabulous Israel adventure. Participants form strong bonds of friendship and undergo personal growth as they experience the Jewish homeland, Israel, in a new and unparalleled way. With safety always our first priority, our group enjoys time in Jerusalem, on an Israeli army base, at the Kineret and Dead Sea, and many other fantastic locations. They ride camels, hike up Masada, and participate in special Shabbat programs. Participants also give back to the residents of Israel by doing community service work.

- **Yachad Morris Sandelbaum High School Fellowship** is exclusively for current high school Juniors, this program provides select students the chance to work (as a CIT) in one of Yachad's various camp programs for one session (approximately three to four weeks) during the summer. Participants will gain intensive leadership training and hands-on experience working for Yachad. Fellows will be supervised by the fellowship program director as well as the individual camp program director, and will have junior counselor responsibilities within the larger framework of the Yachad camp program. The Fellowship will take place in the Yachad camp programs at Camp Nesher, Camp Lavi, Camp Morasha, Camp Moshava, and Camp Mesorah.
- **Getaway and Getaway Travel** is a two-week vacation for adult Yachad members. It takes place in a large, rural retreat center in upstate NY. Participants choose from daily activities which include arts & crafts, dancing, sports, nature walks, hiking, swimming, baking, relaxing and sitting on the wrap-around porch, and much more. Half-day and day-long trips are planned throughout the two weeks.
- **Yachad Vocational Summer Program** offers full time work positions in both a sleep-away camp and day camp setting. Participants, both male and female, are supervised by a job coach/counselor, and are placed in a position suitable to their abilities and needs. Our workers enjoy the camp atmosphere and change of scenery, while learning important life and vocational skills. Positions can include (but are not limited to) working with sports programs, in the kitchen, helping in the dining room, or in the day camp. There is a cost to participate and staff members are paid for their work.
- **Yachad Summer Camps** are unique and *Inclusive* sleepaway programs. Our campers enjoy swimming, boating, sports, arts & crafts, drama, learning, and so much more together with their mainstream peers. Each day, on an individual or group basis, they participate in camp activities with other bunks and campers. Our members form special friendships within their bunk, and, more importantly, with other campers throughout the camp. Our participants have the support of trained, highly motivated staff and sleep in their own bunkhouse. It is a complete camping experience, filled with warmth and care, and a focus on the development of social skills, fostering socialization, friendship, self-esteem and independence within a safe, secure environment.

To learn more about Yachad summer programs, Israel trips, and other summer fun and learning for youth and adults with and without disabilities, contact:

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## Contacting Yachad

For more information about disability *Inclusion* or partnering with Yachad/NJCD to make your synagogue more disability-friendly; to learn more about Jewish social programs for persons with disabilities; to apply for a summer job, internship, or fellowship; request case management or disability legal services; learn more about support services for siblings, families and individuals in the U.S., Canada, and Israel; receive further resources for rabbis and educators; find out more about our special needs yeshivas; and anything else pertaining to moving your synagogue community toward being truly disability *Inclusive*, please call or email:

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