



GROUP LEADER WORKSHOP

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DEDICATIONS

We are deeply grateful to Rabbi Asher Knight and his team at Temple Emanu-El from Dallas, TX for acting as teachers to us all. We also extend our gratitude to the Marcus Foundation for the generosity that made all of this possible. Lastly, we thank the Temple Connect Core Team, our Coaches, our Group Leaders, and our members for everything they have done to make Temple Connect a reality.



V'AHAVTA: WHY TEMPLE CONNECT AT THE TEMPLE?

A CENTRAL MESSAGE OF JUDAISM IS CONNECTING TO EACH OTHER

Dear Treasured Group Leader,

Despite all of our new ways of connecting, we live in a world that is increasingly isolating. Even the most connected among us may surprisingly lack the handful of friends that both ground them and challenge them to ask the difficult questions of life. Moreover, if one were to look for this kind of connection, they may not always find it in an average synagogue. This is not a blame game – this is reality and it ignites in us who care deeply about synagogue life something my teacher and colleague, Rabbi Asher Knight, calls “sacred discontent.” It is a feeling that we must act NOW to transform synagogue life into something more vibrant, more relevant, more inspiring and more transformative for us and the world around us.

As we move from our sacred discontent into sacred possibility, we again turn towards our wisdom texts. And we find that we have to look no further than our most central text, the verses from Torah so precious that they’ve become a prayer, the first prayer that our children learn to say, the *Shema*. The theological underpinnings of the *Shema*, which includes the *V’ahavta*, are so deeply profound that we may have missed what they have to teach us about connecting to one another. Yet, when we look closely, we begin to understand its wisdom:

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad. Hear and understand, Israel, God is one, everything around us is linked to each other, all humanity, and God is in all of us. Everything and Everyone around us is an opportunity to know God better. **Knowing each other, in a sense, is coming to understand and know God.** And not just to know God but also to love God.

V’ahavta et Adonai Elohecha, b’chol levavcha, uv’chol nafshcha, uv’chol meodecha. And how do we love God? *Levavcha*: This is with our hearts, first. We may also seek to understand God with our minds, and certainly Jewish tradition places a heavy emphasis on this type of knowing today. **But *V’ahavta* comes to teach us about relating to God, and therefore to one another, with our hearts first – to take the time for real relationship, for listening to one another, for really seeing one another.** Then, still not with our minds but with *nafshecha*, with our souls, deeper still – loving each other from the level of seeing them as *b’tzelem Elohim*, made in the image of God; externally, we look different but our souls are all made from the same God-stuff. Then, still not our minds but our *meod’cha*, our effort and actions. We love God by doing the things that show love – showing up for one another, bringing soup, caring for the sick, burying the dead, celebrating simchas together, teaching our children how to love the stranger and the poor.

Where should these things happen? *B’bayit* and *b’derech* – in our homes and out in the world. You’ll notice - never does it say that Jewish life and learning and experiencing must happen in the synagogue. **A synagogue is essential as a hub of Jewish**

learning and living and experiencing but it is only one place among all the places where that's possible. Torah expected that we'd do this learning IN OUR HOMES and OUT IN THE WORLD, in cafes and back corners of restaurants and in boardrooms and in the synagogue and in someone else's house.

Uk'shartam lot al yadecha v'hayu l'totafot bein einecha. Embody this learning about love through the actions of our hands and through the ways we strive to truly see each other, *Vahavta* teaches. Love means sharing our passions and our pain with each other without fear of judgment. We should share the real stuff going on within, so that others have permission to do the same, and so that we can be resources to one another.

And then, we move from the first to the last paragraph of the Shema, and along the way, we shift from the singular to the plural, from *cha*, "you" in the singular, to *chem*, as we say down here in the South, "all yall." And with that we learn that we can do none of this alone – we cannot love alone; we cannot live Jewish life, or any life alone. This is why we are so proud that you've engaged with Temple Connect. We must come together, trust one another, and take bold steps outside our comfort zones in order to fulfill the vision that Shema lifts up for us. In this way, when we truly see each other, when we love each other, when we seek to build authentic relationships with one another, when we invest in one another, we will become more holy to one another, and create community that is worthy of our ancient and proud past and inspiring and transformative for our future.

Thank you for being a part of our future and this groundbreaking initiative.

Rabbi Lydia Medwin
Director of Congregational Engagement and Outreach
The Temple, 2016

THE VISION FOR TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS AT TEMPLE

Temple Connect Groups are regular gatherings of 8-12 members in people's homes, offices, and other places that promote relationship building. They are led by Group Leaders. Some Temple Connect Groups connect around common interests and affinities. Other groups gather to discuss topics of deep concern or importance to their lives. Still other groups, called Temple Connect Chai groups, will engage in Jewish learning through curricula provided by The Temple.

The idea to create the Temple Connect Groups developed directly out of listening to the needs of our members. Sometimes, we need the anonymity of our robust communal events. Other times, we desire smaller settings in which to grow and share in the lived experience of being a Jew. In truth, we need **both** the large and small gathering moments: to pray, celebrate and learn from our tradition and to experience our Jewish values in personal and relatable smaller settings, where we are seen for who we are, and where we see others for who they are.

Small groups are not new to this congregation: over the years we have had Chavurot and Torah Study and the Temple Choir and much more. What is new, however, is the structure and shared responsibility that we all shoulder in creating a more substantive web of relationships that make up our community and combine to create the Jewish world we hope to see for our future. Therefore, Temple Connect Groups become the intentional connections that we are make in order to inspire each other and transform ourselves and our world.

STRUCTURE AND GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS



THE VISION AND VALUES OF THE TEMPLE AND TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS

Temple Connect Groups intentionally relate to the vision and values of The Temple: **We believe it is critical to learn and experience these values within every Temple Connect Group.**

WE ARE THE TEMPLE: INSPIRING LIVE, TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD.

What inspires me? What is the relationship between my own inspiration and my desire and capacity to transform myself and the world around me for the better? These are the kinds of questions that ONLY The Temple asks in your life; Temple Connect groups are the perfect place to explore those answers.

WE SEEK MEANING.

When we say that we seek meaning, we are thinking about all of the ways that Judaism helps us derive greater meaning and joy from our lives. Temple Connect groups help us translate the wisdom of our tradition into a practical guide for living, by filtering the wisdom through the Torah of each of our lived experiences. You'll see this come alive through your group's growth and development, as you learn together, pray together, do acts of justice together, travel to Israel together, and simply enjoy each other's company.

WE NEED EACH OTHER.

Whether its simple encouragement or more complex levels of need, as humans, we need to share what's going on in our lives and find support and caring. This act brings depth and richness to our lives, and it's core to what Temple Connect groups do.

WE ARE OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE.

Especially here at The Temple, we are inspired by our past and we let that catapult us into the future, as we stand on the shoulders of giants. Temple Connect groups are a great way to bridge the generations of Temple members.

GOD NEEDS US AND WE NEED GOD.

Jewish philosopher Martin Buber espoused the idea that God is present wherever two people truly understand and connect with each other. And we need that kind of connection to something larger than ourselves. But God also needs us, to partner with God in creation and in goodness. When we repair the world, through actions big and small, we are using the tools that God gave us. With your Temple Connect group, you'll have the chance to let God act through your hands and feet to make the world more whole.

WE ALL HAVE GIFTS TO OFFER.

We deeply believe that every single one of us has something unique to offer our community, something at which you are a 10 out of 10. Being in a Temple Connect group helps you discover and cultivate that gift.

OUR DOORS ARE ALWAYS OPEN.

Every person who walks through our doors should be warmly welcomed. Joining a Temple Connect group helps you to find your tribe, the people that make a new place into a home.

In our crazy, broken, mixed up world, we need The Temple and our community more than ever before. We need help making sense of the insanity; we need inspiration to keep us fresh and hopeful; we need a place where we feel safe, so that we can begin to heal those pieces of ourselves that need healing; we need sanctuary, sacred time to put our devices aside and just BE. You can find all of these things, as a part of a Temple Connect group.

BALANCED TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS:

The Temple is a vibrant Jewish community that strives to be a place of sacred encounter, where learning, prayer and deeds change our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our responsibilities in it. For us, community means a sense of warm welcome, meaningful relationships, and mutual responsibility. We seek to bring Jewish learning and values to our daily lives, to nurture spiritual practices, and build an exciting and relevant Judaism that elevates our souls and challenges us to make an impact on a world in need.

To bring this vision of community to life, we engage with our groups in ways that seek to balance many factors: personal vs. communal transformation; sacred time vs. regular time; listening vs. speaking; compassion vs. speaking truth; balancing social time with prayer experiences, social justice, Jewish learning, and commitment to Israel and Jewish communities abroad. In all of these elements, the key is continue evaluating the health of the group and its needs. Coaches are great people to consult in these matters.

Temple Connect Groups are about **personal** and **communal** transformation.

Temple Connect Groups understand that balancing our vision and values is **the key** to a healthy group.

Not every value needs to occur every time your Temple Connect Group meets. Over time, you should try to seek balance.

A Balanced Temple Connect Group will balance: Learning, Prayer, Repairing the World, Commitment to Israel, Offering our Gifts, Community Building.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A HEALTHY GROUP

Expectations of Members:

- Meet regularly in a home or in an agreed-upon setting that is conducive to creating a welcoming space.
- Agree to and observe a covenant (*brit*) with each other.
- Create real and honest relationships.
- Have meaningful discussion of provided materials, where applicable.
- Encourage regular attendance by majority of its members.
- Include sharing by all members.
- Create a place where members are “present” for each other.
- Embrace all participants.
- Have fun and look for joyful opportunities.
- Participate in acts of justice.
- Celebrate Shabbat, holidays, and life-cycles together.
- Attend Temple programs or larger gatherings together.
- Support group members in times of need and celebrate in times of joy.

Expectations of Leaders:

- Communicate outside of meetings.
- Tend to the health of the group as a whole.
- Encourage shared responsibilities.
- Provide feedback to coaches and the Core Team.

THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS

TEMPLE CONNECT AFFINITY GROUPS

These are the originals, based on interests and needs/stages of life. You can find a list of the groups we had last year on the website (www.the-temple.org/getconnected) to get ideas for the future. Current examples range from hiking to Mah Jongg to support groups for professional moms. And if someone can't find the right fit, they can even start a new group!

TEMPLE CONNECT CHAI GROUPS

Based on where you live or work (and if you'd like to meet people in your demographic), these groups will bring our Vision and Values to life by learning from our rabbis via video and related discussion materials, which can all be found on The Temple's website. Meet your neighbors, know what your Temple stands for, and transform your life.

TEMPLE CONNECT PROFESSIONS GROUPS

Based on your profession, meet other people in homes or offices to discuss the Visions and Values curriculum, network with your colleagues, and learn the Jewish perspective on your vocation. Some examples include gatherings of doctors, lawyers, builders, and teachers.

PROJECT CONNECT FOR TEENS

These groups are for our Temple teens. With support from The Temple, teens can choose from a number of different Projects to engage with friends and do something they love. Project Justice is for teens who care about social justice; Project Create is for teens who love to do engage with their creative side through art; Project Fit is for our athletes to train together and push one another, just to name a few. With Projects Tolerance, Geshet, Madrichim, and Tzadikim reformulated, there are so many ways to be involved, and everyone is eligible to go to regional and national NFTY events.

HOW DO TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS FORM?

Any Temple member can form a group. If you have a small group that is already meeting (Chavurah or group of friends), we want to applaud and support you. Your group can become a Temple Connect Group. We'll train a member of the group and you can get the materials to lead the kind of relational conversations that other Temple Connect groups are leading.

If you want help forming a Temple Connect Group, the Temple will help match members to Temple Connect Groups. Contact Rabbi Lydia Medwin, lmedwin@the-temple.org or 404-873-1731 for questions about starting a group.



ROLES FOR TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP LEADERS

As a Temple Connect Group Leader, you are core to weaving the social fabric of shared belonging by cultivating a welcoming atmosphere and modeling behavior that demonstrates your own openness to the transformative power of community.

WHAT IS A LEADER?

Being a leader means that you are willing to welcome a small group of people into your home or arrange for another suitable location. We don't expect you to be Rabbi Akiva, an expert in Judaism. We don't expect you to be Moses, a professional group moderator and facilitator. You only need to be like our patriarch and matriarch, Abraham and Sarah, who welcomed guests and embodied the value of hospitality. You need an open heart and an open mind.

WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP LEADER?

Once your group is formed you should send them a letter of introduction and welcome and set your initial meeting which should take place in your home. As a Leader you will initially be in charge of scheduling and coordinating the calendar of your group. Your group should meet minimally once a month, for six to eight sessions. For our Chai groups, you'll also need to go to our website (www.the-temple.org/getconnected/templeconnect) to download the video and discussion guide before your first gathering, and review it briefly on your own. Consult your coach with advice on best practices for guiding a discussion.

- 3-5 days before each meeting we ask you to send a reminder email to your group confirming time and place. You can use our template as a guide. (See in Addendum).
- At the beginning of each meeting, make sure there is time to *nosh*, say a blessing, review the *brit* (covenant) for the Temple Connect Group, and ask an opening question. We also ask you to record who is present. This will help us in our evaluations.
- At the first meeting read through the sample *brit* and determine an appropriate frequency of gatherings. Then, ask if anyone proposes any additions to the group *brit*. Some possible additions: Meeting place? Childcare? Day of the week? Start time? End time?
- This can also be a good time to talk about the fact that meetings will begin on time and end on time and that attendance at small group meetings is expected to be a priority. Members of your Temple Connect Group are accountable to one another.
- If someone cannot make a meeting, they are expected to contact the Group Leader beforehand. We understand someone may miss one or two sessions, but if absence becomes habitual (three times), it is time to reach out to that individual. Simply calling or scheduling a time to meet and asking about the absences may be enough to find out what is going on. Please be in touch with your coach so she or he is aware of the situation and to talk about strategies if the need arises.

At the end of each session we ask you to send a quick update to your coach. You might respond to the following questions:

- Who came to the meeting?
- How did the group respond to the learning or activity? Did it spark conversation?
- Is there something pressing that needs to be communicated to us?
- Remember, in addition to your day training, each Temple Connect Group Leader will have a coach. Do not hesitate to be in touch.

BASICS FOR HOSTING A TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP AT YOUR HOME

(Share this with anyone from your group who hosts!)

Where it makes sense, we encourage groups to meet in one another's homes. It can rotate among group members' homes. We want to create a space where group members can speak openly and confidentially. For most groups, this is less likely to occur in a restaurant or public space at first. In order for Temple Connect Groups to be effective, members need to feel respected and safe. There is nothing wrong with going as a group to a restaurant or grabbing drinks, but best to do it after a meeting or another day. The setting isn't right when the Temple Connect Group is in its formation stage. Perhaps later, but not at first!

If family is going to be home, it is best if they can be in another area of the home and to ensure that they not walk through your gathering space. We ask that gatherings be kept to those who are part of the invited group.

You may be wondering about snacks or "nosh." You may want to have some light refreshments, but don't go crazy. Different group members can take turns bringing snacks as well. We think it is important to refrain from alcohol in the meeting to help establish the safe space unless alcohol relates to the content of the gathering (i.e. wine tasting event).

TEMPLATES FOR TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP MEETINGS

Temple Connect Groups are designed to be flexible. For example, a dinner group could eat and talk/study from a discussion guide at the same time. That said, if an affinity group wants to do a discussion, we suggest that you guide the discussion *before* participating in a shared activity or affinity. An affinity group may also choose to devote the entire gathering to learning. After a group has met for some time, you may choose to "swap" the interest/learning time for a *tikkum olam* experience once or twice. The point is to create *balance*. If you find that your group is learning, and never celebrating Shabbat or participating in Tikkun Olam, balance it out and create a positive shared experience. We suggest one of the following templates.

Discussion (or Chai) Group Meeting Template #1

0:00-0:15 — Welcome, nosh, blessing, and relational question
0:15-1:10 — Learning and discussion.
1:10-1:20 — Planning or conclusion.
1:20-1:30 — Shmoozing

Affinity Group Meeting Template #2

0:00-0:15 — Welcome, nosh, blessing, and relational question
0:15-1:00 — Shared affinity or activity
1:00-1:10 — Planning and Shmoozing

Chai Groups, please note: Not all learning materials will take one hour. You may choose to guide a session for 45 minutes. Similarly, there may be a learning session that may take longer. You will need to look at the materials and help plan the session accordingly.

MEETING REGULARITY: HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP MEET?

As a part of the development of your *brit*, you will help guide your Temple Connect Group to create a plan about the frequency of gatherings. We suggest that the Temple Connect Group meets once a month, minimally, for at least eight months out of the year. Greater regularity will help deepen the experience. Some Temple Connect Groups will meet weekly. Some will meet every two weeks. The regularity of meetings should be both attainable and worthwhile.

TIPS FOR GETTING TO KNOW YOUR TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP

A WARM WELCOME

We need to remember that some of our members are taking the proverbial “leap of faith” simply by attending a Temple Connect Group meeting. Our initial response to their arrival is important. Put their fears to rest by answering the door with a smile. Introduce yourself right away and help them feel welcome. Then take the time to introduce them to others in the small group. Even these simple tactics let newcomers know we are engaged with them and want to get to know them.

THE NOSH

All Temple Connect Groups should offer a snack and drink. There is natural bonding that occurs over chocolate chip cookies and tea. The casual conversation that occurs breaks down fears for the newcomer. It also enhances relationships that are currently in place, allowing members to talk about their lives. A simple snack and drink can allow for great discussion and opportunities to get to know one another.

BLESSING, BRIT, AND CHECK-IN

Once people have had the opportunity to mingle, mobilize the group with a blessing. Emphasize the shared *brit* – covenant, which will be included in the learning materials. Then, do a check-in question. The blessing, *brit*, and check-in should take no more than 10-15 minutes.

Start with a Blessing:

As we gather in our Temple Connect group, may we honor the values of our Jewish tradition. May we bring compassion, insight, and wisdom to our conversation and our learning/interest [fill in the blank with your group name or topic]. May we recognize the Divine Image in one another, and let that awareness be reflected in our words and actions.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzi-vanu la'asok b'tzorkhay tzibur.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of All, who has made us holy with your mitzvot and instructed us to engage deeply with our community.

Brit:

Read the *brit* aloud or in silence as a reminder of the importance of these intentions and the ground-rules. You might consider asking each person in your group to read a sentence, such that all group members are engaged.

Check-in:

If you don't build the relationships within the group you won't have a group for long. A few years ago Gallup conducted research on the health of faith communities. One of the important factors that contributed to enthusiasm for faith communities was friendship. The research showed that when people have friends—people who call you when you're absent, ask how you are doing spiritually, and encourage you—they were likely have a strong commitments to their faith and to their congregation.

Encourage each person to speak for up to one minute. Please model for the members of the group. There should be no interruptions or questions.

FIRST SESSION:

At the beginning of the first session, say your name and the name of the person who spoke before you. Then tell the group who would be proud of you for committing to be a member of the Temple Connect Group and why that person would be proud.

SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS:

(see Relational Question Bank online at www.the-temple.org/GetConnected/RelationalQuestionBank and Rabbi Medwin's monthly relational questions for more ideas):

- A positive thing that happened to you this past week/month?
- Something that you read or learned recently that energized you.
- If you could go back to any age, which would you choose and why?
- If you could have dinner with a deceased family member, who would it be and why?

These questions may seem silly, but they help open the door to connect members. These questions can also help you know where your members are spiritually and personally.

PERSONAL UPDATES:

Before beginning the interest/activity or starting the discussion that will follow, you might also consider asking the group if there is anybody to whom they would like to dedicate their learning/affinity this week.

Examples:

- a. If it is the *yartzeit* of a family member or friend, the study/affinity could be in memory of that person.
- b. If a family member or friend is ill, it could be in honor of the healing of that person.
- c. If there is a family birthday or other *simcha* (happy occasion) that week, your participation in your group could be in honor of that person or occasion.

The activity or learning could be in honor or memory of more than one person on any given week. This is a way to stay informed of major milestones in the lives of the people in the group. This is not the time to ask questions or give advice. Simply acknowledge the request before beginning. If there is no dedication, that is fine.

LEARNING AND/OR AFFINITY:

Be Aware of What People are Looking for in a Temple Connect Group

- Do I fit here? This is a question of **acceptance**.
- Does anyone want to know me? This is a question of **friendship**.
- Am I needed? This is a question of **value**.
- What is the advantage of joining a group? This is a question of **benefit**.
- What is required of joining a Temple Connect Group? This is a question of **requirement**.

OTHER KEYS TO SUCCESS!

- Be comfortable with silence and quiet.
- Give affirmation.
- Involve everyone.
- Leave sarcasm aside.
- Challenge everyone in the group to share ownership.

SHARED OWNERSHIP

There are many ways to share ownership of a Temple Connect Group. Here are a few examples:

- Create a schedule for hosting, where each meeting is held in another group member's home.
- Ask group to sign up to be responsible up for nosh.
- Lead the first few learning sessions and then invite others to lead the learning as well.
- Ask someone to be responsible for communication between sessions and to send reminders about meeting location and times.

CREATING A COVENANT FOR SAFE SPACE

Temple Connect Groups are designed to be a **safe space** in which we respect each other's soul. We neither invade nor disregard each person's inner lives. We desire to make each other feel valued and supported.

Safe spaces are rare today. Safe space enables us to let down our guard, without concern that we will be wounded or neglected. Safe space permits us to explore the unknown without fear of not having answers for ourselves. Safe space allows us to embrace our questions.

We want Temple Connect Groups to create space for emotional expression and honesty. Thus, safe space is an essential component of Temple Connect. The safe space we create in our Temple Connect Group will allow us to speak from our inner voice.

WITH SAFE SPACE THERE IS NO:

- Cynicism or judging.
- Attacking or criticizing.
- Disregarding.
- Need to be defensive.

WITH SAFE SPACE PEOPLE CAN:

- Deeply listen to one another.
- Value each individual's unique decisions and paths.
- Guard the privacy and integrity of each other's inner life.
- Express successes and failures, dreams and anxieties, momentous and embarrassing moments.
- Share words and solitude with similar equanimity.

In order to help create a safe environment, we ask each group to develop a ***brit***, a covenant (a contract with each other). We have provided a sample. Please feel free to utilize the covenant provided or to amend it to what's right for your Temple Connect Group. The key is that each member agrees to the covenant.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN THE CREATION OF YOUR TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP ***BRIT***:

How often do we want to meet?

At your first meeting, please create a plan with your group about how often and when you want to meet. It should be attainable. The organization of logistics (where, when, who is bringing nosh) doesn't need to be included in the *brit* itself. Please be clear about how often you want to meet in your covenant, so that members of the group can hold each other accountable.

HOW DO WE BALANCE LEARNING WITH SCHMOOZING?

Temple Connect Groups are designed to be transformational. Our goal is to focus on the lives of our members, organize around shared interests, and feature shared Jewish learning and celebration. Groups need to **balance** of all of these things. Indeed, our experience has taught us that groups do not succeed when they focus only on schmoozing or learning or a shared affinity. For those groups with a curriculum, the learning content has been created to allow for anyone to lead it, regardless of experience. Feel free to share the facilitating, and then perhaps celebrate that shared leadership by enjoying dinner as a group during the next session. If you have an affinity group, plan on learning at one of the sessions, spending an entire session just enjoying each other's company and learning together.

WHAT ISN'T INCLUDED IN THE *BRIT* THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOUR GROUP?

The *brit* is designed to help create a safe space for listening, learning, and sharing. But the *brit* is not all encompassing and is fluid. Please feel free to add to it based on what the group members decide. At the same time, please make sure to consider all of the aspects of the *brit* and how the document can help each person commit to the Temple Connect Group.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS THAT DON'T NEED TO BE INCLUDED IN THE *BRIT*:

- Consistent meeting place?
- Childcare? Do parents want to share childcare?
- Day of the week? Start time? End time?



BRIT FOR TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS

ACCOUNTABILITY:

I'll show up to our agreed upon times: (weekly, bi-weekly, tri-weekly, monthly). I'll let the group leader know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone's time.

PRESENCE:

When we're together, I'll be present and mindful. I will listen and share. Life (and our mobile devices) offers many distractions, but I will stay present and engaged.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

I'll maintain complete confidentiality. What I hear and say stays here.

VULNERABILITY:

I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as possible with my perspectives and experiences in order to create a safe environment that might encourage others to take risks as well.

RESPECT:

I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.

NO FIXING, ADVISING, SAVING OR SETTING STRAIGHT:

I will give each person the gift of true attention without trying to "solve their problem." No advice unless it's asked.

LISTENING:

I understand that some of us are talkers, while some of us are quieter. I'll be aware not to dominate discussions and to balance how much I'm talking with how much I'm listening.

CURIOSITY:

Judaism is a religion of exploration; of big questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.

OWNERSHIP:

This is our Temple Connect Group. This is our community to create. While we have guidelines and suggestions, it is ours to shape and form. We will get out of it what we put into it.



TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP COACHES

Each Temple Connect Group Leader will be assigned a coach. Coaches will initially be selected from the Temple Connect Core Team. They will be asked to serve one year and to coach or mentor three to four groups each. Mentoring will encompass the following responsibilities:

- Check in between coach and Temple Connect Group Guide after meetings.
- Share examples of challenges and successes in groups.
- Advise leaders as necessary.
- Suggest techniques to maintain or establish balance in group meetings.
- Suggest ideas for managing all kinds of group members so that everyone is seen, heard, and actively participating.
- Periodically meet with other guides with the same coach.
- Periodically meet with other coaches and guides in the Temple Connect community.
- Provide feedback regularly to Temple Connect Core Team

Coaches will be supported through work with Rabbi Lydia Medwin on a regular basis.

QUESTIONS ABOUT TEMPLE CONNECT GROUPS? CONTACT US. *(Listing as of August 2016)*

Chairs of Temple Connect at the Temple:

Hank Kimmel (hwkimmel@gmail.com)
Janet Lavine (jmlavine@hotmail.com)

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NOTE: You will receive your coach's cell phone number and begin direct communication before your Temple Connect Group begins.

Staff:

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Pastoral Concerns

If pastoral concerns arise and need clergy attention, please contact Dianne Ratowsky, Administrative Assistant to Rabbi Peter Berg at 404-873-1731 or dratowsky@the-temple.org. You may also contact Rabbi Lydia Medwin at lmedwin@the-temple.org.

HELP! MY TEMPLE CONNECT GROUP HAS BEEN HIJACKED!

FOUR COMMON HIJACKERS AND WAYS TO RESPOND.

It's possible for Temple Connect Groups to be dominated by one or more people. During a session, it's always good to re-emphasize the *Brit*. The *Brit* emphasizes the key elements that help make a safe space. You can always ask the group for permission to keep everyone aligned with this covenant they made to one another. This allows you to preemptively respond to a tricky situation before it becomes a problem. Here are four examples Temple Connect Group "hijacker" personalities and how to deal with them:

THE TALKING HIJACKER

This is the person who answers every question before anyone else can respond. While most of the members of the Temple Connect Group are still pondering the question, the talking hijacker is spurting out a response. Though you may be grateful for the liveliness and contributions, the talking hijacker leaves the group with a sense that no one else has a chance to respond. Instead of drawing other people out, the talking hijacker makes people want to withdraw. What needs to be said after it feels like everything has already been said?

Taking Control from the Talking Hijacker

First, try to pull to the person aside one-on-one. Thank the person for their contributions, but be honest about the need for others to contribute. Encourage the person to only to respond to every other or every third question and keep responses brief. Or, encourage the person to allow two or three other people to share before sharing.

If the Talking Hijackers still can't help themselves, you may need to structure your discussions differently. Set up this ground rule for the next session: you'll be calling on specific people to respond to questions. This will encourage the quieter person while deterring the talkative one.

THE EMOTIONAL HIJACKER

This Temple Connect Group member shows up every week with an emotional crisis. Before you know it, the majority of the gathering is spent trying to unravel the problem and the majority of time and energy is spent on the Emotional Hijacker.

Taking Control from the Emotional Hijacker

One way to deal with an Emotional Hijacker is to take the person out to coffee or lunch. Once this person has space to share everything going on in life, he or she may not need as much of the small group's time to share. Spending more one-on-one time may also allow you to better understand the person's needs. Depending on the situation, you may be able to suggest visit with a Temple clergy member. At the next gathering, if the person tries to hijack the group with another crisis, re-emphasize the *brit* and remind the Temple Connect Group that the purpose of the meeting needs to focus on the learning at hand. This will allow you to get through the material and still allow the person to share within a more limited time constraint.

THE BACK-SEAT DRIVER HIJACKER

This hijacker gives you constant directions on how to best guide the group. The Back-Seat Driver assumes he or she has the best approach to guiding and frequently mentions past leadership positions. The other members don't know who to listen to: you or the hijacker.

Taking Control from the Back-Seat Driver Hijacker

Talking directly with the Back-Seat Driver will take courage, but it's the quickest way to a result. Sift through his or her comments to see if you can glean anything helpful. Sometimes there will be good suggestions that can benefit the group. If so, mention these helpful suggestions in your conversation, which will keep the atmosphere positive. Tell how you appreciate his

or her willingness to share leadership skills and then politely ask the back-seat driver to stop doing so at the Temple Connect Group meetings.

Let the Back-Seat Driver know that sharing these ideas during the meeting promotes conflict in the group. Affirm the hijacker by asking for input (at a one-on-one meeting) when you feel you need it, and by offering to listen to suggestions outside of meetings. At the same time, confirm that you are leading in a way that suits your personality and leadership style, noting that it may be different from the hijacker's. If the hijacker makes another comment in a Temple Connect Group meeting, respond by saying: "Let's talk about that suggestion outside of our gathering."

THE LATE HIJACKER

Without fail, this person walks into the Temple Connect Group meeting late. You've spent 20 minutes building momentum toward a specific point, and right before you ask the most important question the Late Hijacker bursts in. The entrance disrupts the group, and you can't get the group's attention again. The momentum and focus are lost.

Taking Control from the Late Hijacker

Approach the Late Hijacker privately and encourage this person to make a better effort to be on time. Explain how it's hard to get the group refocused once everybody is distracted. If the person can't get there any earlier, encourage them to enter more quietly and sensitively.

DISCUSS WITH YOUR COACH:

- Have you encountered these hijackers? What, if anything, did you do?
- Do you still have any of these hijackers in your group? If so, create a plan.

ADDENDUM: SAMPLE EMAILS AND HANDOUTS

SAMPLE WELCOME EMAIL

Shalom!

I want to welcome you to our Temple Connect Group. Our first Temple Connect Group gathering will be on (date) at (time). We will meet at (insert address). (name) will be bringing the snacks [if applicable]. I can't wait to see you all again and start this journey. Be in touch with any questions in the interim. Don't forget to bring something to write on and write with.

All the Best,
(your name)

SAMPLE REMINDER EMAIL

Hi Temple Connect Group!

I wanted to send a quick reminder that our next Temple Connect Group gathering will be on (date) at (time). We will meet at (insert address) and (name) will be bringing the snacks [if applicable]. I can't wait to see you all again and continue this journey. Be in touch with any questions in the interim. Don't forget to bring something to write on and write with.

All the Best,
(your name)

OPENING PRAYER:

As we gather in our Temple Connect group, may we honor the values of our Jewish tradition. May we bring compassion, insight, and wisdom to our conversation and our learning/interest [fill in the blank with your group name or topic]. May we recognize the Divine Image in one another, and let that awareness be reflected in our words and actions.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzi-vanu la'asok b'tzorkhay tzibur.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of All, who has made us holy with your mitzvot and instructed us to engage deeply with our community.



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