

Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action



With a Foreword by William Pollack, Ph.D.
Author of *Real Boys* and *Real Boys' Voices*

MOVING
TRADITIONS

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Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation,
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Executive Summary

The Jewish community is losing boys who drop out of Jewish life after bar mitzvah in unacceptably large numbers. Jewish institutions are struggling to keep teenage boys engaged. Left unaddressed, the trend threatens to undermine the Jewish future and leave a generation of boys ignorant of the wisdom, core values, community, and spiritual nourishment Judaism provides.

As an organization uniquely equipped and positioned to engage Jewish teens, Moving Traditions presents *Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action*. We invite policy makers, funders, parents, clergy, and educators to join us in better understanding teenage boys and adopting new ways to work with them. By doing so, we can help Jewish boys connect meaningfully with their Judaism, their masculinity, their peers, and themselves.

Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action draws on knowledge distilled from three years of research, focus groups with Jewish boys, and program development, and grows out of the success of our work with adolescent girls. Moving Traditions' innovative program, *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!*, draws on an understanding of gender and core Jewish values. It has helped thousands of teenage girls negotiate adolescence and develop meaningful identities as young women and as Jews.

The report contains seven lessons and seven principles, supported by a marketing toolkit, a program curriculum sample, appendices describing the research, and a list of resources. Together they provide Jewish educators with the research, concepts, and resources needed to understand and meet the unique needs of Jewish boys.

Moving Traditions calls on Jewish communal leaders and educators to join us in partnership to reverse the exodus of teenage boys from Jewish life through a connected set of actions:

- 1. Advocate for gendered spaces for Jewish teenage boys.** Being male matters to boys: the literature shows it, and our focus groups and action research confirm it.
- 2. Train educators and build the field.** Our ability to engage Jewish teenage boys is limited by a lack of trained men in Jewish education, and a lack of understanding on the part of men and women in education about who boys are.
- 3. Implement Moving Traditions' program, *The Brotherhood*.** When boys participate in programs that put the lessons and principles in this report into practice, they become more engaged in Jewish life.

By working together, we can help adolescent boys grow into self-aware Jewish men comfortable exploring both their religion and their masculinity, strengthening the broader Jewish world that is so precious to us.

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Foreword

Hineini – Here I am before you, grateful for the opportunity to introduce you to the transformative research, insights and curriculum that have emerged from Moving Traditions’ intensive study of the question, *Where have all the Jewish boys gone?* Four years ago Moving Traditions invited me in from the secular world to think about how my research on boys could help us connect with Jewish male youth, a sacred task whose first step has been accomplished by the work encapsulated in this volume.

God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” and he replied, “*Hineini*” (Here I am). And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “Father—” And Abraham said, “Here I am, my son.”

Genesis 22: 1 and 7

This report focuses on seven lessons and seven principles to more effectively reach Jewish teenage boys, to help them reconnect with the educational, social and home environments many readers have lovingly created. Indeed, as you read on you’ll be given a “taste” of a unique, single-gender curriculum sensitive to young men and designed to regain the Jewish *nefesh*, the soul and the heart of post-bar mitzvah teenage boys in our Jewish communities.

In the biblical Hebrew, “Here I am” is rendered poetically as *Hineini*, which I interpret as, “Here I stand before you – ready and waiting.” Today many of us want to say to our boys, *Hineini* – we are here for you, ready to love and value you, and to help you through the journey to manhood. Moving Traditions’ new educational approach helps join word to deed, theory to practice, and desire to action. It gives us a way to be present for Jewish teenage boys in a manner that respects and responds to *their* needs.

Genesis deals with the provocative subject of potential human sacrifice. Yet the original text refers to the story of Isaac’s miraculous rescue from harm as *akeida*: not sacrifice, but rather the “binding” of Isaac. There is a meaningful duality of *crisis* and *opportunity*, of annihilation and connection that describes the dilemma facing teenage boys today, as well as the dilemmas confronting the women, men, girls, and other boys who love them.

This is a central conundrum of our society, one I have set as my task to address. Over years of study with adolescent boys, my research partners and I have uncovered the contradictory, confusing and atavistic injunctions about what “masculinity” is supposed to mean in our culture. We have outlined the treacherous trajectory from boyhood to manhood, shaped and often distorted by the “boy code” or the “code of masculinity.” And we have explored the pervasive, nagging sense many boys have today, that they never quite know what it means to be a “real” boy, and they never really feel secure on their path to “real” manhood.

With the publication of this report, Moving Traditions vividly establishes that the challenges of young manhood ring true in a specifically painful way

for Jewish teenage boys. In this *Call to Action* to engage Jewish teenage boys, we see the duality of Isaac's *akeida*. We see the imminent possibility of the sacrifice of our teenage sons, of their disconnection, of our loss of them from Jewish life and their own loss of a sense of genuine meaning in the labyrinth of today's secular culture. At the same time this crisis gives us an opportunity to offer Jewish teenage boys our best traditions of *menschlichkeit*, which are so much healthier and ultimately more compelling than pervasive secular images of violent male movie "heroes," murderous video games, and sports "role models" with moral feet of clay. Many adults have written off boys who may never have had the opportunity to link the soul-saving values of Judaism with what it means to be a male. Our research shows that when you really connect with teenage boys by engaging in "action talk" and "doing empathy," boys' natural inclination to "do good" emerges and takes concrete form.

Likewise, Moving Traditions' new, exciting work shows that Jewish teenage boys long to be connected with the meaning of our traditions and engaged by caring adults who recognize their pain, empathize with their struggles, and seek to create safe, shame-free zones for them. As you will see in the pages that follow, much like Jewish girls, Jewish teenage boys are loving, empathic and yearn for the teachings that Jewish adults can offer them, if only we listen to Jewish boys' voices as Moving Traditions has done.

In connecting meaningfully with Jewish teenage boys, we enact one of our most important traditions: *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. And we do so not from the top down, but from the boys-eye view, supporting the actions they yearn for and need to engage in, and connecting them to the central moral fiber of Jewish heritage. Indeed, in a secular culture where we are still told that males and females come from different planets and so have little hope for connecting with, let alone respecting each other, what better antidote than our *modern* Jewish tradition of gender equality?

And what better organization to promote this healing than Moving Traditions, which has accomplished so much with Jewish girls across North America through its acclaimed *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* program. Having so successfully reached out to connect modern girls' developmental journey to womanhood with the meaningful ideals of Jewish life, Moving Traditions is uniquely poised to launch a program tailored to boys.

Even more importantly, when Moving Traditions does gender-based research and delivers single-gender programming, it never falls prey to the

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Moving Traditions' work rests firmly on the principle of being boy-supportive while remaining girl-affirmative.

all-too-common belief that meeting the needs of boys or girls must be a zero sum game. Quite the contrary – as you will observe in these pages and in the boys' program, Moving Traditions' work rests firmly on the principle of being *boy-supportive while remaining girl-affirmative*. In fact, bringing post-b'nai mitzvah boys back into a new embrace with Jewish adults and peers will strengthen the work we have begun, to revivify the importance of girls and young women as equal partners in their Jewish heritage of meaning. Reconnecting with our disconnected Jewish male youth reaffirms their, and our, support for Jewish girls and women.

This moment of cultural crisis offers tremendous opportunity: the potential transformation of Jewish teenage boys' lives into ones healthily intertwined with ours, bound together in a new community of love, informed by the most meaningful lessons of our Jewish traditions. We see the potential for transmitting this love, these traditions, and this binding in a new manner that we now know boys yearn for and want us to provide for them.

Whether you read this document from the perspective of a Jewish educator, parent, camp director, rabbi, congregational lay leader, or philanthropic supporter, you will find a wealth of guidance in *Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action*. If you are hungry to better understand how to reach out to teenage boys from within Jewish tradition, and if you thirst for the wisdom to connect to these boys' very real struggles growing up in secular American society, I can promise you ample nourishment in the following pages. Hopefully, you will take away the pieces best suited to your circumstances. And hopefully you will be inspired, as I have been, to create new connections with Moving Traditions, working side-by-side with them to meet the needs of the Jewish teenage boys you know, teach, and love.

So *Hineini* – that is what we are telling our Jewish boys, and it is what Moving Traditions says to you with this *Call to Action*. Using the insights you find here, we can work together to engage the teenage boys in our lives and create a new “Jewish *holding* environment” in which they can journey successfully into Jewish manhood and a brighter Jewish future.

B'Shalom,
William S. Pollack, Ph.D.
Founder and Director, Centers for Men and Young Men
Associate Clinical Professor, Harvard Medical School
Author, Real Boys and Real Boys' Voices

Introduction

Educators struggle to attract teenage boys to Hebrew high school classes and youth groups. Camp directors try desperately to fill boys' bunks. Funders investing in the Jewish future discover that less than 30 percent of the teens they are investing in are boys. Throughout the North American Jewish community, the questions prey on our minds: where have all the young men gone? What can we do to get them back – or most importantly, *how do we inspire them to stay?*

Moving Traditions views Judaism through the lens of gender to create a vital Jewish future.¹ Our unique role in the Jewish community – posing gender-related questions about Jewish teens, generating useful hypotheses, and building effective programs based on those hypotheses – has motivated parents, rabbis, educators, and funders to ask us why Jewish boys are so absent from Jewish communal life.

The problem is clear: boys drop out of Jewish life after bar mitzvah and they are greatly dissatisfied with much of Jewish programming.

In addition, American culture's definition of masculinity sends teenage boys mixed messages and makes conflicting demands upon them. Popular culture geared toward teenage boys often promotes a masculine norm that is sexually predatory, physically aggressive, and emotionally impoverished. A strictly peer-enforced code of male behavior makes it difficult for boys to figure out who they are and to display their hearts. At the same time, boys see men taking more active roles in family and home life.

Yet by and large, Jewish programming is not helping teenage boys explore what it means to be a man.

Moving Traditions seeks to pursue mutually supportive goals: when we help teenage boys navigate the choppy waters of 21st century masculinity by integrating Jewish values into their lives, we also help strengthen their Jewish identity. This conviction is based on our success with girls through our program, *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!*, launched in 2002, which builds self-esteem, leadership skills, and Jewish identity for thousands of teenage girls across North America. It is reinforced by our study of positive youth development, which advocates building teens' healthy development through programming that includes connection to a rich community of values like that offered by Judaism.

When we help teenage boys navigate the choppy waters of 21st century masculinity by integrating Jewish values, we also help strengthen their Jewish identity.

1. We endorse the view that while sex is biologically determined, gender is socially created. Gender norms and expectations differ across cultures, and these various conceptions of masculinity and femininity shape psychological development and socially acceptable life choices – especially for teens, whose developing bodies figure prominently in their search for identity. Gender norms are both pervasive and largely unexamined, so it is important to help adolescents learn to read, filter, and actively choose among the gender messages they receive from the culture in which they live. It is also important for adults who work with adolescent boys to be aware and accepting of the sexual orientation and gender identities of boys, whether straight, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

We focused our research on boys in the years immediately following bar mitzvah, when many drop out of Jewish communal life.

We firmly believe Judaism embodies values that can support adolescent boys as they face the contradictory challenges of growing into men in today's world. To test this belief, Moving Traditions spoke directly to teenage boys and asked them to tell us what they thought. We focused our research on boys in the years immediately following bar mitzvah, when many drop out of Jewish communal life. The timing of this loss is doubly bitter, coming just after the Jewish community has invested so much in them, and just when the boys most need our guidance.

Moving Traditions began this initiative in 2007 with the generous support of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and other funders. In consultation with a national advisory committee of experts in the fields of formal and informal education, both Jewish and secular, we embarked upon a rigorous, two-part research and development process. We reviewed the literature on adolescent religious involvement in America, positive youth development, and Jewish boys' involvement in Jewish life; conducted an environmental scan of existing Jewish and secular programs for boys; completed focus groups with 8th to 11th grade Jewish boys, their parents, and Jewish educators; hosted a roundtable conference in conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education; and conducted market research.

We then engaged Dr. Michael Reichert and Dr. Sharon Ravitch to conduct action research, a reflective and collaborative approach to problem solving. Drawing on our initial findings, Drs. Reichert and Ravitch generated key curricular themes that would most resonate with boys and meet their developmental needs. From these themes we created a draft program and field-tested it with groups of 8th and 9th grade boys at 14 sites. This process allowed us to evaluate how the boys responded to the curriculum while using their feedback to revise the program and to create the framework of the seven principles outlined in this report.

Informed by this research and development process, Moving Traditions has crafted a comprehensive initiative to help both formal and informal Jewish educators better serve Jewish teenage boys:

- **A Conceptual Framework.** The seven lessons and seven principles for more effective Jewish education described in Parts I and II of this report outline in a concise, organized fashion all we have learned through a rigorous process of listening, action research, program experimentation, and evaluation.

- **A Marketing Toolkit.** Part III of this report includes a set of resources produced in concert with the marketing firm AMP, outlining best practices for more successfully reaching Jewish teenage boys.
- **A Program Curriculum.** Suitable for stand-alone use or for incorporation into any number of settings and programs, *The Brotherhood* is a new, boys-only program developed and tested by Moving Traditions with the input of 8th and 9th grade boys. A sample of this eight-session curriculum is included as Part IV.
- **A Path to Implementation.** Moving Traditions offers professional development and training to prepare Jewish educators to implement the seven principles in their work with Jewish teenage boys. The report's conclusion, "A Call to Partnership," describes these opportunities.

Some of the findings in the following pages might seem familiar or obvious, validating and confirming what you already know and do. Other insights may seem surprising and offer inspiration for transforming educational methods or crafting new initiatives. Moving Traditions' ultimate aim is to energize and inspire Jewish communities throughout North America to renew our educational commitment to the precious young men in our lives. In this regard, it is fitting that we draw inspiration from the perspectives and ideas of the boys themselves.

We look forward to working in partnership with you. Together we can help teenage boys grow into self-aware Jewish men, building healthy individuals and our Jewish future.

Sally Gottesman
Board Chair

Deborah S. Meyer
Executive Director

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Part I: The Seven Lessons

Understanding Jewish Teenage Boys

If we are to make Judaism relevant and engaging for Jewish teenage boys, we must strive to understand them deeply and substantively, through their eyes and on their terms.

Moving Traditions' research has been grounded in a simple but powerful belief: if we are to make Judaism relevant and engaging for Jewish teenage boys, we must strive to understand them deeply and substantively, through their eyes and on their terms. Any program will be unsuccessful if it is based on superficial conceptions or unexamined adult assumptions and perspectives on what boys want and feel. For this reason, we have worked hard to listen to the authentic voices, concerns, and feelings of Jewish teenage boys.

An emerging body of research provides a basis for understanding the challenges and dynamics of male adolescence in the 21st century. In the past decade, influential books by psychologists and educators have detailed the social rules that strictly, sometimes violently, limit boys' behavior and emotional expression. These works also reveal the social and personal isolation many boys experience, and highlight the ways traditional educational settings and programs fail to accommodate boys' needs and interests.

Because of its broad, national, and secular focus, little was known about how or to what extent the insights of this literature might apply specifically to *Jewish* boys and their inner lives. To fill this gap in knowledge, Moving Traditions conducted 40 focus groups with 8th to 11th grade boys with widely varying levels of engagement in Jewish life. The focus groups were facilitated by psychologists, educators, and marketing professionals.

In an open, articulate manner that flies in the face of cultural stereotypes about teenage boys, the boys in our focus groups echoed the basic themes highlighted in the research literature while providing essential depth and insight into their uniquely Jewish perspective on male adolescence.

Most impressively, teenage boys who participated in this research and development process not only related rich and insightful accounts of their personal experiences, but also proved themselves critical interpreters of ideas who are able to contribute actively to the design, organization, and content of our curriculum. From their insights, we learned seven lessons that form the basis for the principles in the next section of this report.

I. Judaism Is Home. Boys in our focus groups consistently spoke of Judaism as a source of identity and pride. Whether they attend Jewish day school, participate in a Jewish youth group, or simply hang out with Jewish friends, the boys we interviewed describe Judaism as a “home

base” that helps them feel grounded amidst the changes and challenges of adolescence. Jewishness forms a core component of their identity and enhances their self-image.

The teenage boys feel strengthened by Jewish connection, which provides respite from the marginalization and stereotyping they sometimes experience as minorities in secular environments. In short, the Jewish connections in their lives give them a gratifying sense of belonging. “You have stuff in common with people at school,” explains a boy who attends public school, “but you don’t totally know them. When you go to temple, you’re raised the same way generally. You just have this natural connection.”

Many boys also feel a sense of accomplishment and competence having become bar mitzvah, and are interested in continuing to explore what it means to be Jewish. They have a desire to grapple with meaningful, existential questions through a Jewish lens.

Yet the boys generally feel uninspired by post-bar mitzvah offerings that might help facilitate this exploration. As one says, “There’s this gap, from your middle school and high school years, where there’s really nothing strong. There are youth groups and things, but they’re honestly pretty weak and they don’t keep kids connected.”

Adolescent Jewish boys are not satisfied with the available programming, but they do have a desire for the knowledge and connection Jewish education can give them. Jewish educators thus have a tremendous opportunity to tap into boys’ desire for Jewish community through innovative programming that helps strengthen boys’ pre-existing sense of Judaism as “home.”

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- 2. Jewish Identity Is an Active Choice.** Jews identify with and practice their religion in a wide variety of ways. It is therefore not surprising that most of the boys we spoke with make active, intentional choices about how and when to identify, connect, and engage with Judaism. In their earlier years, boys may have come to Jewish participation at their parents’ behest; but now, as sophisticated teens with many years of parental negotiation under their belts, their choices around Judaism are primarily their own. As one teenager says, “My mom dragged me to services when I was younger; I hated it. But now I love it and find ways to make it work, like I go to the early service on Friday and then I can go to my concert or take a girl out on a date.”

Many of the teenage boys in our focus groups revealed unexpected perspectives on their masculine identities, which stand in stark contrast to the norms of popular culture.

While ongoing parental involvement is essential, our focus groups demonstrate that boys want to be supported in the specific choices they make. Boys are engaging on their own terms, adapting Jewish practice to the currents and demands of their lives. Jewish programming for teenage boys should account for this adaptive quality; it should be as flexible as possible in terms of timing and structure, and avoid making restrictive assumptions about how boys might understand themselves as being Jewish.

- 3. Jewish Engagement Allows for Choices in Masculinity and Enhances Resiliency.** One of our most striking and encouraging findings is that the stronger a boy's Jewish identity, the more his personal conception of masculinity can withstand the distorting pressures of mainstream, secular culture. Like many teenage boys, the boys we interviewed feel restricted by conventional definitions of masculinity. Their development and self-expression are challenged by masculine norms of "toughness" and stoicism, and often are policed by homophobia, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Yet many of the teenage boys in our focus groups revealed unexpected perspectives on their masculine identities, which stand in stark contrast to the norms of popular culture. In their interests, personal styles, social lives, and extracurricular activities, the boys represent the full range of American male adolescence, and they are fully conscious of what mainstream culture expects of them. But they are equally forthright in refusing to conform or be "cool" at all costs. They embrace academic achievement, are comfortable expressing affection towards others, value kindness (including towards younger boys), and care about the larger world. Moreover, they understand that their pursuit of these qualities helps them feel good about themselves, which is particularly important given the negative messages teenage boys often receive about themselves.

The more Jewishly-affiliated boys we interviewed evinced greater resilience: a nuanced self-understanding, a particular kind of maturity, and an expressivity that gives them freedom to operate outside restrictive social norms. As one Jewishly-affiliated boy observes, "There's a stereotype that guys can't express their emotions and I think there's a pretty massive homophobia, but I don't really think that exists with my Jewish friends. We can be comfortable and really talk with each other and not have an issue. But with my friends who aren't Jewish it's harder to talk about

personal things like family, or other stuff in my personal life.” Such comments show us that Judaism is a powerful resource for the healthy emotional development of young men.

- 4. Connection Is Constant.** Today’s teens live in a digital world and are connected 24/7. The majority own cell phones and use them continually for texting, talking to friends, and searching the Internet. Most also have regular access to a computer and report going on-line multiple times a day to visit social networking sites, find information, and email friends. As one boy explains, “I am on-line a ton. After school I get on Facebook and YouTube, and addicting game sites are fun. I text to keep in touch with friends, meet girls, and make plans.” Social networking is not optional or an “add-on” for teens’ understanding of themselves and their worlds; rather, it is integral.

Moreover, research shows that digital life has a particular twist for boys: they spend more time than girls alone or in small groups playing video games. This can make it difficult to engage them in face-to-face, group-based programming. At the same time, it represents a new opportunity to engage Jewish boys by incorporating electronic communication, game play, and other technology-oriented activities into Jewish educational programming.

- 5. Friends Are Central.** Teenagers value peer friendships highly and experience them as central to their lives and emerging identities. The boys we interviewed turn to friends for advice on everything from new topics and trends, to what to do after school, to how to handle personal problems and challenges.

Amid the pressure of school and stress of adolescence – for younger boys, the transition to high school, establishing a group of friends, and dealing with puberty and for older teens, obtaining a driver’s license, finding a first job, and thinking about college – boys enjoy simply “being a teenager” more than anything else. They look for opportunities to be with their friends and have fun. As one boy tells us, “In my free time I like to hang with my friends. We play Xbox or watch TV. We play sports or go to the movies, but mostly we hang out and just chill.”

To connect effectively with teenage boys, Jewish programming must integrate these peer relationships into the experience, making space in the educational enterprise for boys to “just be” together.

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“We go to school five days a week and then we’re doing homework. The last thing I want to do is sit in a classroom again for three hours on a Sunday morning.”

6. It Can’t Feel Like Working Overtime. In our focus groups, it became clear that when teenage boys connect to each other, they are not only creating friendship networks. They are also creating environments in which those networks exist – environments that are intentionally less formal and rigid than those of day school, Hebrew school, and other obligations. Boys say they feel overloaded with highly structured activities that tax their physical, intellectual, and emotional stamina. As one memorably put it, “We go to school five days a week and then we’re doing homework. The last thing I want to do is sit in a classroom again for three hours on a Sunday morning.”

The boys want to be challenged and explore central life issues about meaning and purpose, but they’re insistent that they have a real say in the schedule, pace, and setting of such explorations. Over-scheduled and sleep-deprived, they do not want to feel like they are putting in overtime on nights and weekends. Creating a relaxed, give-and-take environment that respects their time will help fully engage boys in meaning-making activities.

7. It Has to Be Engaging, Challenging, and Relevant. Our respondents expressed discontent with what they perceive as didactic, skill-based learning taught by instructors who don’t really see or connect with them. They highlight three elements of educational programming that can make a difference in their experience and keep them coming back for more.

First, programming must be engaging: boys want experiences that include physical activity, excitement, humor, and a healthy dose of playfulness. Boys love laughter, and often use irony to distance themselves even as they embrace learning. Adults who are comfortable with this and work to accommodate it in their teaching practices will find greater success.

Second, programming must be challenging: boys are drawn to programming whose content speaks to their interests and provokes them to think. While they want a degree of relaxation and levity, they also want educators who take the material, and them, seriously. Educators who display knowledge and passion for the subject matter, as well as dedication to their students, will be able to connect to Jewish teenage boys and tap into their desire for substantive learning.

Finally, programming must be relevant: boys want programming that relates to their lives and addresses issues and questions they find personally meaningful. Boys understand that Jewish education can be enriching if it is presented in a way that speaks to who they are and where they are in their lives.

Too often boys are asked, implicitly and explicitly, to fit themselves into contexts and curricula that do not serve their interests and may, in fact, run counter to their basic needs. They are expected to be silent about this mismatch and submit themselves to it. But if programming is not engaging, challenging, and relevant, boys will act even if they don't speak up. They will vote with their feet: they will tune out, turn off, and walk away.

Part II: The Seven Principles

Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys

Moving Traditions has distilled the insights, experiences, and lessons learned from our research into seven principles for effectively engaging teenage boys:

1. **Honor the journey to manhood** by making issues of masculinity central to educational programming.
2. **Select the best educator**, with a focus on men who understand and connect well with teenage boys.
3. **Create a space** in which relationships and community among participants are as important as the transmission of content between teacher and student.
4. **Harness the power of ritual** by making rituals a meaningful and compelling part of the educational experience.
5. **Bring physical activity into the mix** by combining physical activities with thought-provoking discussions.
6. **Infuse Judaism throughout the program** by presenting text, history, culture, and values in creative and engaging ways.
7. **Get them in the door** by actively marketing educational offerings in ways that reach teenage boys where they are and appeal to their sensibilities.

These principles are particularly suited to programming aimed at boys 8th grade and up, the years following bar mitzvah, because they:

- Draw on Jewish values and wisdom to help boys navigate the journey into manhood.
- Encourage boys to consider what it means to be adult male members of the community into which they have just been graduated.
- Inspire boys to draw on their bar mitzvah learning as a bridge to a lifetime of Jewish engagement.

We are confident that these principles are applicable in any Jewish educational context. We encourage educators in day schools, supplemental schools, camps, youth groups, and elsewhere to implement these principles in a manner suited to the particular needs of their environment and the Jewish boys with whom they work.

Principle One: Honor the Journey into Manhood

Jewish teenage boys – like teenage boys of every race and religion – are deeply engaged in the journey toward manhood, what Joseph Campbell famously called “The Hero’s Journey”: an adventure through uncharted terrain full of tests to pass and challenges to surmount. It does not matter if he is an athlete or an artist, straight or gay, a Manhattanite or rural Texan: for a teenage boy, every day presents situations that test his masculinity. It’s a challenging journey – and popular culture bombards him with a barrage of mixed, often unhealthy messages about how he should walk the path.

Jewish educators should honor the power of this gendered journey in the life of every Jewish boy by making the journey itself a central focus of programming. This means Jewish educators must understand masculinity not as a state of being or set of behaviors but rather as a *developmental process*. As is the case with girls, adolescent boys face a central, almost existential struggle: learning how to be themselves when they don’t yet know exactly who they are. Recognizing, accepting, and appreciating this fundamentally transitional quality of Jewish male adolescence is essential to successfully engaging Jewish boys.

Capturing and holding boys’ interest in Jewish education requires linking Jewish themes and knowledge to this developmental process by following the boys’ lead and structuring curricula and activities according to their interests. In short, the main focus of effective Jewish education for boys is not how they can get closer to Judaism; it’s how Judaism can get closer to teenage boys.

This form of facilitation is not familiar to every educator, yet it is essential if we are to tap into boys’ interests and properly engage them. When done with skill, the combination of substantive Jewish content with a format driven by the boys’ interests can inspire potentially life-changing discoveries.

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2 Principle Two: Select the Best Educator

Given the challenges of effectively guiding Jewish boys through their journey to manhood, selecting an appropriate, effective educator is paramount.

A central goal is to make it possible for Jewish teenage boys to explore issues they rarely have the opportunity to reflect on. The power of the experience comes from the educator's ability to genuinely connect with and understand boys.

A. Hire a Strong Male Educator for Boys-only Programming

Jewish boys learn how to be Jewish men from the Jewish men in their lives. In Jewish education, however, relatively few practitioners are men. Encountering a male Jewish educator who is self-aware, invested in meeting boys where they are, and committed to making Jewish values, community, and texts relevant sends a powerful message to teenage boys. It communicates to them that there are Jewish men for whom Jewish identity and learning are important lifelong pursuits and it opens them to the possibilities of integrating Judaism into a meaningful exploration of their own emerging manhood.

Single-gender educational spaces also allow for conversations that have the potential to go to uncommonly deep and honest places. From our experience with *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!*, we know that a female-only space provides the safety to explore issues like body image, navigating girl-culture, and the possibilities of womanhood.

Our experience testing *The Brotherhood* program confirms that boys need such safe spaces as well. Exploring issues of masculinity, self, and relationships in a male-only space can be a powerful experience for boys, and these discussions will go deeper and be more genuine when there are no girls or women in the room – including the facilitator. Research conducted among adolescents in the U.S. and U.K. confirms that single-sex educational environments break down gender stereotypes, broaden boys' interest in a full range of subjects and activities, and produce personal benefits well beyond the realm of academic pursuits. Given that most teenage Jewish boys' lives are dominated by coeducational experiences, a single-sex educational environment offers a valuable balance and refuge.

B. Choose an Educator Who Is Authentic, Prepared, and Present

A central goal is to make it possible for Jewish teenage boys to explore issues they rarely have the opportunity to reflect on elsewhere in their lives. The power of such an experience comes from the educator's ability to genuinely connect with and understand boys, and from his expertise in creating spaces that allow this type of conversation to occur.

As relational learners, boys are highly attuned to their teachers, and researchers have found that boys read teachers' humor and positive affect as "relaxed," an attitude that greatly facilitates the boys' learning. Authenticity is paramount: when educators possess it they instill confidence and are able to build trust and comfort. Similarly, when educators feel secure in who they are and in their skills, boys will feel confident that the group is in good hands.

At the same time, research shows that for boys memorable experiences grow out of relationships with teachers who come to class fully prepared, create a structured classroom environment, demonstrate mastery of the material, and challenge students to think and excel. Boys learn best from teachers who are not harsh, but rather whose emotional investment, high expectations, and commanding pedagogical style require students to seek higher levels of achievement than they might otherwise have thought themselves capable.

The educators who best capture male students' attention and inspire them to learn have what education researcher Miriam Raider-Roth calls presence: "a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate next step." Students learn best from a teacher who listens to them and responds to them – in short, a teacher who can authentically be with them.

C. Select an Educator Who Believes in the Philosophy

Gandhi's famous assertion that we must be the change we want to see in the world could not be truer when it comes to educating Jewish boys. An educator who believes boys are always tough, never show weakness, don't talk about their inner lives, and should remain emotionally isolated from others will undermine the effectiveness of programming designed to engage boys in authentic and meaningful ways.

Conversely, it is essential to select an educator who sees gender as socially created and variable, understands the complex dynamics of masculinity, and is not sexist in his world-view and demeanor. A male facilitator who values introspection, self-expression, and relational interaction – and who can model respect for girls and women as an integral part of Jewish manhood –

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will have a powerful, positive impact on boys’ learning and development. It is also essential that the educator be accepting of and comfortable with boys’ varying sexual and gender identities.

Moreover, this sort of education will be most successful when everyone involved – clergy, education directors, heads of school, parents, and educators – supports the goal of helping teenage boys grow into self-aware Jewish men comfortable exploring both their religion and their masculinity.

3 Principle Three: Create a Space

The pressures on teens to live up to unrealistic norms or unreachable ideals are intense and adolescents do not yet have fully developed coping mechanisms. For boys, a successful journey to manhood requires the creation of a space that allows them to connect with peers around these challenges and gain self-awareness about the strategies they use to navigate them. Such a space aids in the transmission of valuable information, and has multiple dimensions:

- **Physical:** The venue should be airy, open, and comfortable. Its structure and layout should be conducive to a combination of discussion and physical activity, and should not formally demarcate between “front” and “rear” or teacher’s presentation space and students’ learning space.
- **Psychological:** Boys need an emotionally safe space to interact and learn. They should be engaged from the beginning in establishing group rules and norms. Each participant needs to feel responsible for maintaining a safe space for everyone else, across differences of denomination, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, athletic ability, and so forth.
- **Temporal:** Sessions should be scheduled at times when boys are available, alert, and able to focus. Programming should respect boys’ time by starting and ending punctually, and should feature multiple activities to keep them stimulated and engaged.
- **Spiritual:** The experience should tap into boys’ souls. It should encourage reflection, exploration, and self-acceptance, allowing the boys to build their own connections to Judaism while working together to build a sense of sacred identity.

Because teenage boys' lives and identities are so closely tied to peer relationships, information becomes meaningful knowledge when they can share it with each other and become educators themselves. Conversely, when Jewish programming focuses excessively on the one-way transmission of material from teacher to student, it undermines boys' ability and willingness to learn. By creating a proper space, an educator can make relationships central to the educational experience, thereby facilitating boys' learning, self-esteem, and engagement with the material. In this way educators will create spaces in which boys can learn together, discuss relevant issues, and relate with depth and honesty. In the ideal scenario, a collection of individual boys becomes a highly connected group, bonded through the experience of authentically exploring the journey to Jewish manhood together.

Adult facilitators have a key role to play: investing the conversations with Jewish meaning and content, supporting and challenging the group in ways that deepen learning and make it more interesting, keeping boys focused and present, and handling any conflicts or disagreements. But ultimately, boys need to experience themselves as partners with adults in managing a group and co-creating a community.

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1 Principle Four: Harness the Power of Ritual

Rituals play a powerful and important role in communal life. Rituals facilitate learning when they are enacted in ways that are meaningful to the participants. Effective boys' programming harnesses the power of ritual in ways that build community while helping boys connect to Judaism, themselves, and each other.

One of Moving Traditions' program pilot sites, for example, begins each evening's session with 30 minutes for dinner and unstructured socializing. Once that time is up, the educator shuts off the lights and blows a loud, long blast on a shofar, marking the beginning of the formal program. The lights are then turned on and the group dives into the first activity.

This simple act only takes a moment, but it is rich with drama, significance, and ancient Jewish meaning. The shofar blast connects the conversations that evening to the sacred community that gathers each year for the High Holidays. Boys learn that the blast is a call to presence and accountability,

Educators should work with, not against, boys' physicality, energy, and need for activity.

two themes deeply connected to discussions of manhood. And, just as important, the ritual has a tribal, primal feel that appeals to the boys and makes it notably different from other programming they experience.

Effective programming finds ways to use and adapt ritual so that it becomes meaningful to the boys who participate in it. Variations in light (such as the use of fire or candles) can help boys transition into or out of discussions of sensitive or personal topics. The creative use of symbolic objects and practices (like the shofar) into new contexts can help make boys more receptive to Jewish messages and ideas. And the integration of youth-oriented rituals (such as fist-bumps) and media (such as internet-based content) can reinforce a youth-centered sense of community. Employed in combination, these techniques can have a powerful effect in engaging Jewish teenage boys.

Principle Five: Bring Physical Activity into the Mix

Boys like to move around. Jewish educators are full of stories about their experiences with restless boys, and the research literature bears them out: many teenage boys find it difficult to sit and focus for long stretches of time as required by traditional educational programs. More importantly, the research suggests that the constant negative attention many boys receive at school (“Sit down!” “Be quiet!” “Pay attention!”) is problematic for their confidence, self-esteem, and desire to engage with the material.

Educators should work with, not against, boys' physicality, energy, and need for activity. Throwing a Frisbee or Nerf football around a social hall for 10 minutes may be considered disruptive and distracting in a typical classroom environment, but it can be productive and engaging when part of a well-designed educational program for teenage boys.

Even if such activities only help boys “blow off steam” and have fun, they are valuable parts of a successful educational program: after just a few minutes of physical activity, boys find it easier to sit down and discuss a Jewish text or engage in an exercise focused on listening.

These activities can serve an additional, deeper purpose that speaks directly to the goals of engaging teenage boys in Jewish life: for boys, games and activities are a powerful, experiential way to build the sense of community and connection that forms a key part of their journey to manhood. Physical activity is therefore a useful vehicle for communicating course content and helping boys learn material.

Of course, introducing physical activities into programs raises important issues. It is essential to make sure that no boys feel ostracized or marginalized by those who are stronger or more athletically skilled, and that activities are managed to make sure the boys do not hurt themselves or damage the facilities. After piloting our program multiple times, we are confident that these risks can be managed effectively, and the benefits of integrating physical activities far outweigh the potential downsides.

6 Principle Six: Seamlessly Infuse Judaism

Our research has generated findings that represent good news for all Jewish educators: teenage boys are clear that they care about being Jewish and that they long for more connection to their religion and tradition. Even boys who are not engaged in Jewish education or community life report having a positive Jewish identity, and express a willingness to explore questions through a Jewish lens *if* the programming is engaging, challenging, and relevant.

Jewish boys are indeed interested in learning more about Judaism and becoming more involved, as Jews, in Jewish life. The problem lies with Jewish educational programming that too often leaves these boys feeling bored and uninspired. Fortunately, that's a problem we can address.

The goal is to seamlessly infuse Judaism throughout the experience. Effective approaches may include:

- **Adapting familiar Jewish terms and concepts to lend meaning and tie the boys to Judaism.** Some of Moving Traditions' pilot groups have used the term *brit kehillah* (community covenant) when generating a list of rules and norms that will guide group interactions for the duration of the program. Creating a *brit kehillah* helps participants feel engaged in Jewish tradition while enhancing their sense of belonging to a group. It also provides an opportunity to teach about the component concepts of community and covenant in a manner that is relevant to the boys.
- **Discussing Jewish texts that relate to manhood and masculinity.** Jewish texts can be used to encourage boys to consider the differences between Jewish conceptions of masculinity and the messages they get every day from popular culture. Differences among Jewish texts on

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masculinity can also be discussed to highlight both Jewish intellectual traditions and the central role of variability and choice in defining masculinity.

- **Exploring different models of Jewish masculinity.** Historical, midrashic, and modern traditions can be juxtaposed to broaden boys' understanding of what it means to be a man. For example, King David is a complicated and compelling man in the bible. He battled Goliath, wrote poetry, committed infidelity, and mentored and loved King Saul's son, Jonathan. What lessons about manhood does King David hold for today's teenage boys?

By infusing Judaism into a well-structured educational program that engages their interest, we can open boys' eyes to the richness and wisdom of Judaism.

7 Principle Seven: Get Them in the Door

Effective marketing of Jewish educational programming to boys is a key challenge. In a society oversaturated with advertising, we tend to think of marketing as diametrically opposed to the values of community, self-determination, and spiritual development that motivate us to work with teens in the first place.

Yet even the best designed curriculum is of little use if no boys walk through the door to participate in that first session. As we have found, the challenge of initial engagement is particularly acute with Jewish boys. Conversely, marketing can become an asset to educational efforts for Jewish boys, precisely because they *want* Jewish programs to reach out and connect with them. In short, mastering the art of marketing is essential to inspiring boys to find meaning in Jewish life, and so this final principle is essential to the successful implementation of the other six.

To this end, Part III of this report offers a marketing toolkit prepared by the marketing firm, AMP Agency. The toolkit provides a wealth of detailed recommendations for educators seeking to market their offerings more effectively to Jewish boys.

Part III: The Marketing Toolkit

Resources for Engaging Teenage Jewish Boys



Commissioned by Moving Traditions and produced by AMP Agency, the marketing toolkit outlines challenges in connecting with Jewish teenage boys and a series of strategies and recommendations to persuade them to participate. The toolkit, presented on the following pages, is based on research conducted by AMP in 2009 and early 2010.

1. How to Target Jewish Teenage Boys

Conduct activities with current participants to better understand them.

In order to connect with Jewish teenage boys, it is important first to thoroughly understand who they are, what their lives are like, and what they like to do for fun. By immersing yourself and your educators in boys' lives, it will be easier to create materials and messaging that will connect with the target – Jewish teenage boys.

- ➔ Spend time observing what Jewish teenage boys enjoy doing, what appeals to them, and how they interact with their friends during their free time. Apply areas of common interest and universal appeal among teenage boys to the marketing materials for your programming.
- ➔ Invite teenage boys to participate in the planning and creation of program outreach materials. Allow them to take a hands-on approach in the development of all outreach materials.

2. Outreach

Emphasize fun activities on all marketing materials.

Overall, Jewish teenage boys want to have fun and enjoy being teenagers. They look for opportunities when they can get away from school, part-time jobs, and even their parents, and just be teenagers.

- ➔ On all materials, emphasize activities in which they will have fun participating. Respondents find activities such as “playing video games,” “watching movies,” or simply “hanging out” as fun so including those specifics in outreach materials will help get their attention.

Introduce programming with a phone call or email to Jewish teenage boys and their parents.

A major source of information for respondents is email. Often, their parents will receive emails and pass the information along to them. However, many teenage boys also enjoy receiving calls and emails directly because they like the one-on-one interaction.

- ➔ Call current and inactive teenage boys in your community and invite them directly. (You can get their cell phone numbers from their parents.) Personal outreach and follow-up can make a significant difference.
- ➔ Create a concise email stating the basics of the program – what it will offer, a description of the type of boys it will be geared to, when it will take place, and a reference to where they can find more information (e.g., Facebook page, program leader).
- ➔ Personalizing emails is also an easy way to send one-on-one messages to teens, which satisfies their sense and search for exclusivity. This can be done simply by personalizing the email message to begin with each person’s first name (e.g., Hi Matthew...).

Stay current and create a sense of urgency.

Respondents stated that when they see many different dates for an event, it makes them feel as though there is less pressure to decide whether or not they want to participate. As a result, they will often put off thinking about it and will eventually forget about it.

- ➔ List only the most important or “big” dates on marketing materials. For example, even if there is a reoccurring event or guest speaker, only list the most current date, and then issue new materials for each successive time. This will show teenage boys that this is an ongoing program and that things are kept current and up-to-date.

Use peers as ambassadors to spread the word.

Ask teenage boys who are currently involved in Jewish life to act as ambassadors for your programming. Respondents are most likely to listen to their friends and kids their age when it comes to deciding whether or not to participate. By having passionate teenage boys spread the word, their peers will be more open to participating.

- ➔ Reach out to individual teenage boys who are active in the community and encourage them to promote the programming to their peers.
- ➔ Reward teenage boys for the number of participants they recruit. If they know they will get something in return for spreading the word, they are more likely to pass the word onto their friends.
- ➔ Rewards can include such things as gift cards, movie passes, and free food.

Follow up with an invite to a Facebook fan page for the group.

After reaching out with an email, follow up to the current database of teenage boys with an invitation to a Facebook fan page for the youth programming.

Facebook is a major source of communication for Jewish teenage boys. By using a fan page, it shows that you are up-to-date and willing to communicate and interact with them through a familiar method.

- ➔ Create a fan page and send it out to teenage boys who are currently enrolled or who participate in Jewish life. Encourage them to pass on the invitation to their friends.
- ➔ Make sure to keep the information updated.
- ➔ Have a teenage boy or web-savvy team member, intern, or volunteer help manage the page; this will provide a more authentic voice.
- ➔ Keep current on technology. By the time you read this, Facebook fan pages may already be replaced by a newer social media tool.

Remind teenage boys about the programming by posting flyers in schools and community centers.

Respondents have so much going on in their lives that they often forget about activities and events that they had heard about in the past. Posting flyers in areas where they spend time is a great way to remind them about your program and what it offers.

- ➔ Flyers should include basic information about the program and remind teenage boys how they can sign up and/or get more information.

Show them who is participating through Facebook and sign-up sheets.

A major obstacle to persuading boys to participate in Jewish activities is when they do not know who else is attending. By allowing them to see who will be there, they will be more open to participating – especially if their friends are involved.

- ➔ This can be done by using a Facebook fan page and by posting sign-up sheets in multiple locations that allow them to check who is attending on their own time.

Let them bring a friend.

Jewish teenage boys have friends outside of the Jewish community as well. They enjoy opportunities to bring these friends with them to socialize at Jewish communal events.

- ➔ When having a fun activity or outing that doesn't involve activities specific to Jewish life, allow participants to bring a friend from outside the Jewish community.

3. Design

Use bright colors on dark backgrounds.

Respondents favor and are more likely to notice materials that incorporate bright and lively colors, which help break through the clutter and spark interest.

By placing bright colors over a dark background, images and key messages stand out more and make flyers and other material more attention grabbing.

- ➔ Use bright, bold colors and even enhance these colors by making the majority of the piece dark or colorless. Highlight one main element or color.

Don't use a lot of text.

Respondents made it clear that they don't want to read a lot of text. If there is too much text in an email or flyer, it is an instant turnoff, and they will not bother reading the rest of the message.

- ➔ Give them the basic information – what, when, where the event is, who will be there, and how they can find out more information. If they want to know more, they will seek it out – such as on the Facebook page.

Use real images Jewish teenage boys can relate to.

When using images, make sure they are realistic and relevant. Respondents can easily tell the difference between a photograph that is staged from one that is authentic. They want to see pictures of teenage boys hanging out, working in groups, listening to a young, male teacher, and playing games and sports.

- ➔ Use photos from past events, gatherings, and activities in your marketing materials. Continue to take photos at each program activity and include them in future materials.
- ➔ Upload photos from events and activities to your Facebook page for participants and others to see.

Break up the information.

Breaking up the page and segmenting out information will make flyers stand out and will catch respondents' attention.

- ➔ Break up the flyer into sections – have one section dedicated to the basic information (date, time, location) and other sections for types of activities, how to sign up, and any other relevant information.

4. Get Them Excited

Use a sense of humor.

According to the respondents, the most memorable marketing materials are clever. Grab the boys' attention by using humor, being careful not to be corny.

- ➔ It doesn't necessarily need to leave them rolling on the floor laughing, but incorporating humor (witty comment, funny picture, joke, etc.) can show Jewish teenage boys that this program is not their typical idea of a Jewish youth program.

Use language they use to help show you understand them.

Incorporate lingo and activities that teen boys are familiar with and enjoy.

- ➔ Use words and terms they know, but don't use their slang. Too many "LOLs" and "Kewls" will scream inauthentic to these boys. Instead, refer to things such as playing Xbox/PS3 or listening to various music including hip-hop, alternative, and rock. This will help show that you understand them and their lives.

Let them meet the teachers or leaders before signing up.

A major turnoff for respondents is when they cannot relate to the people who lead the programming. Incorporating young adult males on your staff will make Jewish teenage boys feel more comfortable and open to participating.

- ➔ Look for local role models, as well as Jewish men who have participated in the past and are looking for a way to continue to give back to their Jewish community.
- ➔ Create a meet and greet opportunity where teen boys can go and meet the teachers or leaders who will be running the program.

Incorporate elements of their lives into the program.

Respondents state they are less likely to participate in programs when they have trouble relating to them. They look for activities and programs that are up-to-date on everything from youth culture to world issues.

- ➔ Include and promote elements mentioned above (e.g., video games, movies, music) to rejuvenate programming and enable teenage boys to be able to relate to it.

5. Keep Them Engaged & Coming Back

Promote ongoing participation.

Give Jewish teenage boys a say in the activities and subject matter. Giving them a role in these decisions will provide boys with a sense of comfort in knowing exactly what they are getting into, and a sense of control and customization.

- ➔ Allow participants to submit ideas for games, activities, outings, or even what they would like to learn about, and let everyone vote. Include whatever is chosen as quickly as possible. This will show them that you don't just say you will listen to their ideas, you act on them.
- ➔ Let the teenage boys host or plan sessions – let them choose what material to cover and how to present it.

Feed them.

Teenage boys have massive appetites! Offering them food, especially free food, is a major way to get their attention.

- ➔ Provide food during each get-together. Be sure not to simply say “free food.” Tell them exactly what they are in for, and switch it up. As with program content, too much of the same thing will lose its appeal and the boys will lose interest.

Break up the sessions to mix learning with play.

Respondents don't want to sit through long lectures. They prefer having periods of learning mixed with periods of activity and fun.

- ➔ Allow participants time for learning and time to enjoy themselves. Consider starting and ending with social time to give the boys time to settle down in the beginning of a session and then something to look forward to at the end.
- ➔ Use a variety of teaching methodologies. Consider allowing participants to play a sport or team game, and then discuss the meaning of that activity.
- ➔ Promote these teaching techniques on the marketing materials – e.g., “Learning through team sports.”

Announce co-ed activities.

While they enjoy groups that are boys-only, teenage boys also enjoy opportunities to interact with girls.

- ➔ Make some of the group outings or activities co-ed, such as a party or a movie night where both boys and girls are invited to attend.

Consistently update and vary the content.

Respondents feel they repeatedly learn about the same material. Incorporating new content will keep them interested and engaged, and make the program feel less like school.

- ➔ Let them suggest material, as mentioned earlier. Also, follow relevant tangents and questions that amplify your material. Boys appreciate spontaneity and responsiveness.

Shorten the length.

Respondents state that too many programs and classes are too long. Understand that the boys live very active and social lives, and getting them to commit multiple hours of their time is a big request.

- ➔ Shorten the program or class and also consider its timing. Participating in anything for three hours on a weekend morning will not get them excited. Consider late afternoon or early evening programs.

Provide and highlight opportunities for them to help others.

Many respondents stated that their interest in being Jewish is less about religion and more about a sense of community. They get a sense of pride and fulfillment from participating in activities that help the community.

- ➔ Create opportunities that allow boys to give back to their communities through activities such as neighborhood clean ups, feeding the homeless, assisting the elderly, or charity drives.

Part IV: Curriculum Sample, *The Brotherhood*

Manhood

The divine test of a man's worth is not his theology but his life.

—Morris Joseph, *Judaism as Creed and Life*

At a Glance

In this session, the culminating exploration is one that has been woven throughout the experience: “What does it mean to be a man?” The boys will address this question as they are helped to recognize messages and expectations culturally imposed upon them, to acknowledge the impact of these influences, and ultimately to define manhood for themselves, guided by Jewish wisdom and their experiences and insights.

Goals

- **TO IDENTIFY** and reflect upon American, Jewish, and personal perspectives on masculinity
- **TO RAISE** awareness of the limitations imposed on men by preconceived notions and stereotypes of manhood
- **TO EMPOWER** participants to view and consciously express manhood in their own authentic ways
- **TO PROMOTE** appreciation for the insight Jewish tradition offers regarding what it really means to be a man
- **TO PROVIDE** the participants with a meaningful wrap-up of the group experience

Overview

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	POSSIBLE TIMING*
Welcome	Greeting and introduction of topic	5 minutes
Manliness Barometer	Group members situate themselves on an imaginary line in response to male stereotypes to reveal the impact of gender messages	20 minutes
Stereotype Breakdown	Brainstorm, comparison and analysis of existing stereotypes of American and Jewish men	15 minutes
Portrayal of Man: Media Clips Critique	Using movie clips, participants are helped to recognize and critique stereotypical male behaviors	30 minutes
BREAK		
Jew It: "Who's the Man?"	Activity and discussion exploring Jewish wisdom and personal role models to define the Jewish man the guys want to be	20 minutes
Wrap-It-Up: Celebrating Who We Are	Appreciating our experiences and each other as we say farewell and celebrate the group	30 minutes

* Times are guidelines only – follow the energy of the group.

Getting Started

1. Assemble Materials

- Flip chart/giant post-it paper
- Markers (enough for a group)
- Computer (to view YouTube or other videos)
- Large envelopes (one for each participant and one for yourself)
- Pens and pencils
- Masking tape
- Food and supplies for party
- Optional:
 - Alternative movie clips of your choosing (Portrayal of Man)
 - Popcorn
 - Music and player to be used during breaks and eating

2. Prepare

For This Session

For Wrap-It-Up:

- Prepare a *What's Cool About* _____ handout by filling in the name of each guy in the group and one for yourself

For Every Session

- Read all materials
- Secure an appropriate meeting location

3. Copy Handouts

Make 3 packets, one for each group:



Who's the Man?

One set per participant:



What's Cool About _____

Welcome

DO it



When text appears in italics, it is a suggested "script" for the facilitator.

Today's topic is the underlying subject of our time together: **what kind of man do you want to be?** We are going to explore what being a man means in American society, Jewish culture, and most importantly, what YOU think it means to be a man.

A Manliness Barometer

Sample Transition:

With the barrage of media and cultural messages about what it means to be a guy, it's important that you sort out what it means for YOU.

1. Explain the activity:
 - You (the facilitator) are going to read statements and each guy will respond by choosing where to stand.
 - Identify one side of the room as the "strongly agree" side, the other end as the "strongly disagree" side and the middle is unsure (they can lean toward one side or the other).
 - Once the guys hear the statement, they are to align themselves along an imaginary line and stand in the spot along the line that represents their reactions to the statement.
 - Then they'll have a chance to explain to each other why they chose to stand where they did.
2. Read the statements below, and after each one, instruct the guys to position themselves. Let them know there are no right or wrong answers.

Statements: ***It's a "guy" thing to...***

...have your friends' backs no matter what

...know how to sew on a button

...pay for a date

...ask for directions

...tell someone else how you feel about them

...think about sex a lot

...always want to win

...babysit

...save the day

...be a rabbi

...be obsessed with video games

...say I'm sorry
...do your own laundry
...show affection
...talk to someone while standing at a urinal
...make the first move
...lead the Passover seder
...be the family provider
...play sports
...be a nurse
...blow a shofar
...suffer silently
...be counted in a minyan (required number of Jews needed for certain prayers)
...back down from a fight

3. After each statement and response, invite those who wish to explain their position by asking: *Why did you choose to stand where you are?*
4. Solicit feedback from along the full spectrum. If there is no one to voice a differing opinion, as facilitator offer what someone standing in the unrepresented spot might say.
5. After hearing all viewpoints, invite anyone who wishes to move his position to do so.

- *What surprised you about any of the responses?*
- *Where do we get these ideas about being a man?*
Pop-culture – TV, movies, books, music, and friends, parents, teachers
- *To what extent do these ideas or “rules” influence you?*

We are all influenced by unwritten rules about what is cool or not cool for guys.

Masculinity is defined along a spectrum, and wherever we stand on this spectrum should be an authentic expression of who we are as individual men.

CALL it



LIVE it



DO it

Stereotype Breakdown

1. Point out that the barometer activity highlighted some popular stereotypes about what men are “supposed” to be like.
2. Post a flip chart and ask: *What are some examples of male stereotypes?*
3. Solicit a volunteer to record responses on the left side of the paper. Possible responses include:
 - Competitive
 - Macho
 - Strong
 - Hard working
 - Tough
 - Athletic
 - Doesn't cry
 - Independent
 - Doesn't share feelings
 - Cool
 - Confident
4. Add the heading “American Male” over this list.
5. Draw a line down the center of the page and on the right side write the heading “Jewish Male.”
6. Invite the group to create a list of stereotypes of **Jewish** men (both positive and negative) and ask for another volunteer to record answers. Possible responses include:
 - Smart
 - Rich
 - Wimpy
 - Not athletic
 - Scholarly
 - Mama's boys
 - Successful
 - Cheap
 - Neurotic
 - Responsible
 - Family-oriented
 - Guilt-ridden
 - Make good husbands
 - Nerdy

CALL it



7. Give each participant a marker and ask him to draw a dot next to any description that he identifies with – make note of any patterns that develop.

- *Where do you see yourself in these lists?*
- *Which of these characteristics do you feel good about?*
- *Which make you uncomfortable?*
- *How do these lists compare? What does that mean for you?*

Jewish American men are influenced by two different and sometimes contradictory sets of stereotypes and expectations.

LIVE it



We are constantly bombarded with ideas of manhood that are not always realistic, fair or healthy.

Becoming aware of these messages allows you to choose to accept or reject them.

DO it

The Portrayal of Man: Media Clips Critique

Sample Transition:

Now that we have started thinking about manhood, let's see and critique some of the ideas of masculinity that we see in movies.

Show a selection of movie clips that capture the general categories below. You can use the links to the movie scenes from *Good Will Hunting* provided or select your own. Help the guys reflect on the scenes of your choosing with questions similar to those below.

If using clips from *Good Will Hunting* provide a brief summary of the movie:

Will Hunting (Matt Damon) is a rebellious, working-class genius from South Boston who works as a janitor at MIT. He spends his time hanging with his close friends and his new girlfriend, a rich and witty Harvard student (Minnie Driver). Will secretly solves a complex math formula that the MIT students could not, and the amazed professor tracks him down to understand his talent. The professor offers to help him avoid jail if he agrees to weekly math sessions and therapy. Will develops a strong bond with the therapist (Robin Williams) and finally makes peace with himself.

TIP



If using *Good Will Hunting* clips, please note that the actors use foul language. Prep your group by acknowledging this up front and expressing your assumption and confidence that they will be mature enough to handle it. Redirect to message as necessary.

TIP



The scene description is for your reference, not to be read to the boys; just let them watch the clip after giving suggested instructions.

Clip 1: He's So Cool

Before showing the clip, ask them to pay attention to the male characters being "cool" and think about what is being said about how guys are supposed to act.

Good Will Hunting Scene:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4PiVMasO6s&feature=related>

A tight group of childhood friends, including Will, are in a local bar along with some students from a prestigious area university.

- *Based on the characters in the scene, how would you finish the sentence: "Cool guys **should...**"*

Possible responses:

Try to impress girls ("I'm gonna have to bust a move on the hotties at the end of the bar... work a little magic")

Be smart

Act calm and in control

Have their friend's back (Will steps in when the Harvard guy gives his friend a hard time)

Be willing to fight if necessary ("If you have a problem we can take it outside and figure it out")

- *Do you agree with these statements? Is this what being cool means to you?*
- Challenge the group to come up with their own definition of "cool."
- Rather than finishing the sentence "Cool guys **should...**," ask them to finish the sentence: "Cool guys **ARE...**"
intelligent, sensitive, charming, wealthy, privileged...

Cool people are those who are true to who they are and not who others think they should be. Being real and authentic is cool.

CALL it



LIVE it



Clip 2: He's In Denial

Before showing the clip, ask the guys to observe and think about Will's reaction to his girlfriend inviting him to move with her to California and saying she loves him. How does he react? Why?

Good Will Hunting scene:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rq0apHW6Ezw&feature=related>

Will's girlfriend Skylar asks Will to travel from Boston to California to live with her while she is in graduate school. Rather than admit or face his insecurities, he gets angry and chooses to end the relationship, breaking both of their hearts in the process.

- *What do you think Will was feeling when Skylar invited him to join her in California? Do you understand why?*

He "freaks out," is scared and vulnerable

Insecure

He couldn't trust that she really loves him (his early childhood abuse made him feel unworthy of love)

Defensive

Angry

- *What does this scene say about how some guys cope with emotions?*

Keep feelings in

Mask true emotions with anger

Don't let themselves risk being vulnerable by really opening up

- *What are the advantages of approaching challenges in this way?*

Feel in control, powerful

Don't burden others with your issues

Don't have to deal with pain

Don't have to deal with rejection

- *How might such an approach make things tougher?*

Push people away and find yourself alone

The truth doesn't go away by denying it – it will come back until you deal with it

Not acknowledging or expressing feelings can be harmful physically and emotionally

Denying your true feelings prevents you from living an authentic, "real" life.

Sharing your experiences, thoughts and feelings relieves you of stress that comes from keeping things in, and also connects you to others.

Overcoming insecurities is part of the journey to manhood and takes inner strength and courage.

CALL it



LIVE it



CALL it



Clip 3: He's In Love

Invite the boys to enjoy this scene.

Good Will Hunting scene:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jg_9FQk6UnA&feature=related

Sean describes the Boston Red Sox game that he missed "to go and see about a girl."

■ *Why was Will surprised by the choice Sean had made?*

■ *How does Sean portray a different model of how men can be?*

He is open, admits his feelings

Took a chance with his heart

He feels and copes with his pain rather than denying it

■ *What are the pros and cons of this approach?*

By following his instincts (and not the social pressure to go to the game) he was able to find love

He is able to move on because he acknowledges his pain and learns to focus on what he had, not what he lost

He missed out on the World Series game

■ *What do you think about what he did?*

■ *When have you done something that was not considered "manly"?*

■ *Were you worried that someone would call you on it? Did they?*

■ *How can caring about what others think hold you back?*

Accepting society's ideas of manhood (as reflected in stereotypes) limits who we can be and how we relate to others.

Recognize what society is telling you about manhood, but determine for yourself what you want it to mean for you.

LIVE it



JEW it



TIP



If the guys in group #3 identify a male role model who is not Jewish, encourage them to reconsider the question to find a Jewish man they would want to emulate.

CALL it



LIVE it



Who's The Man?

Sample Transition:

How many of you have ever been told "Be a man," "Don't be such a girl," or to "Man up"? Describe the situation. What do you think was meant by it? How were you expected to behave?

- Point out that the question "Who da man?" is actually an ancient Jewish philosophical one. The Hebrew phrase is "*Mi ha'ish*," and is a song that some of them may know.
1. Ask: *Has anyone heard the Yiddish term mensch? What does it mean when someone is described as a mensch?*
 2. Explain that it actually comes from the German word for human being, and is commonly used in Jewish (and even secular) culture to refer to a person with great integrity and honor.
 3. Point out that they have jointly come up with the qualities that Judaism says are important to be a mensch, and that they have identified qualities real Jewish men possess that you hope they will strive for.
 4. Divide the guys into three groups, and distribute a *Who's the Man?* packet, a piece of flip chart paper and a marker to each group. Instruct the guys to read and respond to their assigned page. Tell them to have someone record responses on the flip chart paper to report their thoughts to the rest of the group.
 5. Give the groups a few minutes to discuss the thoughts among themselves, and then pull them together. Have them post and share their lists.



■ *What did you come up with that describes what it means to be a "Jewish Man" based on your sources?*

- Invite each group to present and share their thoughts in order.
- After group 3 reports, open their question to the rest of the group, allowing them to talk about the Jewish man they admire. Have someone add additions to the group list.

Our Jewish tradition, culture and personal experiences offer us examples and insights into the men we can become.

Becoming aware of how we have taken on (internalized) these expectations can help us be more aware of our choices and free us to be more real.

Despite societal, familial, and peer messages of how one should "be a man," each of us should be empowered to be a man in our own way.

Wrap It Up

TIP



Set out party food, play background music and enjoy the remainder of your time together.

Sample Transition:

I really admire the way you guys have created a place where you can explore important issues such as manhood and brotherhood. To honor the group in this last gathering, let's give "props" to each other and do at least one activity to express our appreciation for each other.

- Write each person's name on a large envelope (make one for yourself as well).
- Post the envelopes around the room – either taping them on the wall or putting them on tables.
- ✋ • Give each guy a pen and a stack of *What's Cool About You?* sheets with names filled in.
- On each person's sheet, instruct the guys to write one thing that they gained from that individual over the course of the time they have shared in the group. (Encourage them to be specific in their feedback – i.e., you taught me A, or you inspired me to B.)
- Each person should do one for himself as well, since self-appreciation is important!
- As the sheets are completed, they are to be placed in the appropriate envelope.

- Affirm their participation in this activity as modeling that even if it may be out of our comfort zone, real men do in fact express themselves!
- Encourage them to take time to read their comments and really take in the feedback of their peers.
- Share what being part of this group has meant to you. Express your hope that they carry with them the lessons gained from their time together, and that they live the insights they have shared by striving to always be the man they want to be.

CALL it



Who's The Man?

Group #1

Mi Ha'Ish*

Who is a man? Someone who appreciates life,
who loves each day
who sees the good
who holds his tongue from evil and his lips from lies
who turns away from bad
who does good
who seeks and pursues peace

מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחֲפֵץ חַיִּים
אוֹהֵב יָמִים לְרֵאוֹת טוֹב:
נֹצֵר לְשׁוֹנְהָ מֵרָע
וּשְׂפָתָיִךְ מִדַּבֵּר מִרְמָה:
סוֹר מֵרָע וְעֹשֶׂה טוֹב
בִּקְשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרַדְּפֶהוּ:

*Mi ha'ish heḥafetz ḥaim ohev yamim lir'ot tov.
N'tzor l'shonḥa meirah us'fateḥa mi'daber mirmah.
Sur meirah va'aseh tov bakeish shalom v'rad'feihu*

—Psalm 34

*Translated by Moving Traditions for this activity

Discuss and Record:

In your own words, what qualities does this source say are important for a Jewish male to possess?

Do you agree? Disagree?



Who's The Man? – continued

Group #2

Read the following Jewish thought:

הלל אומר:
ובמקום שאין אנשים, השתדל להיות איש:

Hillel omer: uv'makom she'ein anashim hish'tadel lih'yot ish.

Rabbi Hillel said "In a place where there are no men... strive to be a man."

—Pirke Avot 2:6

Discuss and Record:

In your own words, what qualities do you think Rabbi Hillel would say are important for a Jewish male to demonstrate?

What do you think Rabbi Hillel meant?



Who's The Man? – continued

Group #3

Discuss:

Which Jewish man would you say is your personal role model?
Why is he someone you admire?

Record:

The traits used to describe the men you admire:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



What's Cool About _____



Conclusion: A Call to Partnership

Jewish institutions are struggling to keep teenage boys engaged, and the Jewish community is losing the participation of boys in unacceptably large numbers. Left unaddressed, the trend of Jewish boys leaving Jewish communal life threatens to undermine the Jewish future, and leave a generation of boys ignorant of the wisdom, core values, community, and spiritual nourishment Judaism provides.

Moving Traditions' seven principles are grounded in research and have been reviewed by thought leaders, as well as proven through multiple pilot tests involving real boys. *We found that when boys participate in programs that put the seven principles into practice, they become more engaged in Jewish life.*

We issue *Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action* to invite policy makers, funders, parents, clergy, and educators to join us in adopting new ways to work with teenage boys. By doing so, we can help Jewish boys connect meaningfully with their Judaism, their masculinity, their peers, and themselves.

Together, we can reverse the exodus of teenage boys from Jewish life through a connected set of actions:

1. Advocate a Gendered Approach to Teenage Boys.

Being male matters to boys: the literature shows it, and our focus groups and action research confirm it. Moving Traditions has begun a substantive discussion about the difficulties of engaging teenage boys in Jewish programming, and about how a gender-aware approach can help. We invite you to join us in this dialogue.

We believe that putting boys' developing masculinity – their journey to manhood – at the center of Jewish programming for boys will keep more of them engaged in Jewish life beyond bar mitzvah. And Jewish programming that creates male-only spaces, facilitated by trained male educators respectful of boys' needs for physicality and relationship, will broaden and deepen their connection to Judaism.

Beginning with the lessons and principles in the preceding pages, Moving Traditions seeks to inspire and galvanize Jewish men and women across communities and institutions to advocate for the creation of positive, gendered spaces for Jewish teenage boys. Use this report in your own advocacy, and contact us so we can move forward together.

2. Train Educators and Build the Field.

Advocacy generates will and resources, laying the groundwork for positive change. But our ability to achieve our ultimate goal – creating a vital Jewish future by reaching and engaging Jewish teenage boys today – is limited by a lack of trained men in Jewish education, and a lack of understanding on the part of men and women in education about who boys are and how to reach them.

Moving Traditions calls on the Jewish community to join us in developing the field of boys' Jewish education. As we have done for facilitators of *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!*, we will train and certify men to implement Moving Traditions' new program, *The Brotherhood*, preparing them to accompany boys on their journey to Jewish manhood. We also will provide clergy, senior education staff, and front-line practitioners – both men and women – with opportunities to increase their understanding of teenage boys and their ability to support teenage boys and boys' programming in their communities and institutions.

In a time of limited resources, we call on policy makers and funders to invest in this priority.

3. Implement Moving Traditions' Program, *The Brotherhood*.

Created with the input of teenage boys, *The Brotherhood* combines the seven lessons and principles for maximum impact. We have been moved and energized by the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response of the teenage boys and adult male facilitators who have tested *The Brotherhood*. We are eager to implement the program across North America, as we have done for girls with our *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* program.

Whether you are an educator or rabbi directly involved in programming, or a parent or family member seeking creative solutions for Jewish boys' programming, Moving Traditions looks forward to helping you bring *The Brotherhood* to teenage boys in your community. Contact us to learn how to get started.

With your partnership, Moving Traditions hopes to transform Jewish education so that every Jewish boy has access to programming that is fun, relevant, and engaging, as well as rich with Jewish wisdom, values, and community.

There is still much to be done. Working together, we can help adolescent boys grow into self-aware Jewish men comfortable exploring both their religion and their masculinity. As a result, we will strengthen the Jewish world that is so precious to us all.

Contact Moving Traditions:

Moving Traditions
115 West Avenue, Suite 102
Jenkintown, PA 19046
(215) 887-4511
info@movingtraditions.org

Join Moving Traditions' Campaign for Jewish Boys

www.movingtraditions.org

Appendix 1

Literature Review

Klau, M. (2007). *Promoting the religious development of Jewish boys: A literature review and environmental scan*. Jenkintown, PA: Moving Traditions.

Moving Traditions commissioned a review of three main literatures:

- 1) Adolescent religious involvement in America, by gender
- 2) Positive youth development
- 3) Jewish boys' involvement in Jewish life

Key Finding: Young men are less present in Jewish life than young women.

- In 2005/6, Hillel's Tzedek Advocacy program enrolled 2 men out of 14 interns. In 2004/5, the program did not enroll any men among its 15 interns.
- In the program year 2005-6, Avodah, The Jewish Service Corps enrolled 5 young men and 28 young women.
- Hebrew Union College (HUC) has seen a steady decline in the rates of young men applying to become rabbis. In May 2006, HUC's Los Angeles campus ordained 14 new rabbis, of which 4 were men and 10 women. HUC's New York campus ordained 20 new rabbis, of which 7 were men and 13 women.

Key Finding: When they do participate, boys are even less satisfied than girls.

Attitude toward current Jewish programming	Agreed to by % Boys	Agreed to by % Girls
"Bar/Bat Mitzvah was graduation from Jewish school" ¹	47%	34%
"Was the connection to Judaism enhanced by Israel experience programs?" ²	32%	46%
Jewish-sponsored classes or activities are: "repetitious" and "not meaningful" ³	68%	60%
Jewish-sponsored classes or activities are: "nothing offered is of interest to me" ⁴	41%	32%
Jewish-sponsored classes or activities are: "boring" ⁵	25%	17%

The complete report can be downloaded from the Moving Traditions website, www.movingtraditions.org.

1. Charles Kedushin, Shaul Kelner, Leonard Saxe, *Being a Jewish Teenager in America*, 2000
 2. Nancy Leffert and Hayim Herring, *Shema: Listening to Jewish Youth*, 1998
 3. Charles Kedushin et al
 4. Ibid.
 5. Nancy Leffert et al

Appendix 2

Intriguing Practices Research

Klau, M. (2007). *On working with boys: Intriguing practices from program directors in the field*. Jenkintown, PA: Moving Traditions.

This research involved interviews with experienced educators and program directors who operate programs recommended to Moving Traditions as being effective with teenage boys in the Jewish and secular worlds. From the interviews we extrapolated themes to investigate further. The list of interviewees is as follows (note that titles reflect positions held at the time of the interviews and may not be current):

Interviewee	Organization	Type
1) Matt Grossman Executive Director	B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO)	Jewish
2) K'vod Wiener Executive Director	B'nai Tzedek	Jewish
3) Miriam Stein Director	Panim el Panim	Jewish
4) Marjorie Berkowitz Executive Director	Prozdor	Jewish
5) Bobby Harris Camp Director	URJ Camp Coleman	Jewish
6) Peter Sterrett Assistant Scout Executive in Massachusetts	Boy Scouts of America	Secular
7) Jim Cox Senior Strategist	Boys and Girls Clubs of America	Secular
8) Keith Fairmont Executive Director	Men's Leadership Alliance	Secular
9) Kay Brennan Training Coordinator	Peaceful Posse	Secular

The complete report can be downloaded from the Moving Traditions website, www.movingtraditions.org.

Appendix 3

Focus Group Research

Reichert, M. C., & Ravitch, S. (2008). *Wishing for more: Jewish boyhood, identity and community*. Jenkintown, PA: Moving Traditions.

Focus group research, made possible by generous funding from Rose Community Foundation, took place in Denver, Colorado in 2008. An overview of the sample interviewed in this research is as follows:

We conducted 12 focus group interviews with 41 boys. Of these, most (34) were currently members of synagogues, 27 of the boys were or had been youth group members, 22 had attended Jewish camp, 18 had attended Jewish day school, and 16 attended Hebrew high school. The average age of the participants was 14.4, with two large groups of younger (6th and 7th graders) boys. In sum, this study was focused on boys who ranged from deeply committed to boys who were less involved, though nonetheless Jewishly-affirming.

Despite the relative similarity in the Jewish involvement levels of our sample, the boys were quite varied across other important adolescent dimensions. Our groups included athletes (wrestlers, basketball players, skiers, and skateboarders) and intellectuals, extroverted leaders and more shy boys, as well as those who were romantically active and those who were more inhibited. Within the range of Jewishly-affirming boys, we were able to talk with boys who occupy quite different social positions in their schools and communities.

We also met with several groups of adults to talk with them about their sons and students. We first met with a group of fathers at a youth group event focused on sports. Later, we met with a group of mothers. In addition, we met with teachers – two men, two women – at a Jewish day school. Finally, we met with a group of religious leaders: rabbis, confirmation class leaders, youth outreach coordinators. Overall, we met with 24 adults.

The protocol for the interviews was semi-structured, loosely following a set of open-ended questions intended to elicit critical features of the boys' lives (e.g., home, school, neighborhood) and allow room for them to tell stories. Anonymity was assured and agreement was reached with participants to record the interviews, which were then transcribed and coded for themes by the study's investigators using an iterative coding process.

The complete report, along with a report covering our spring 2010 pilot sessions in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, can be downloaded from the Moving Traditions website, www.movingtraditions.org.

Appendix 4

Thought Leader Roundtable

Moving Traditions convened a roundtable of Jewish and secular thought leaders on December 13, 2007 at the University of Pennsylvania Hillel. The gathering was co-sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and the Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives.

The title of the conference was “Jewish Life and the Development of Adolescent Boys: Exploring the role of Jewish formal and informal education in expanding meaning, identity and connection in boys' lives.”

The conference was attended by a multi-disciplinary group of thought leaders drawn from a variety of fields, including researchers, practitioners, psychologists, funders, and marketers. The list of attendees is as follows (note that titles reflect positions held at the time of the gathering in 2007 and may not be current):

Facilitator

- Norman Rosenberg, Consultant

Jewish Life Researchers

- Steven M. Cohen, Sociologist of American Jewry, Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at HUC-JIR/New York
- Sylvia Barack Fishman, Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University, and co-director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute
- Benjamin Phillips, Associate Research Scientist, Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University
- Bradley Solmsen, Associate Director, Institute for Informal Jewish Education, Brandeis University

Developmental Specialists /Gender; Writers and Researchers

- Brad Adams, Executive Director, International Boys' Schools Coalition
- Harry Brod, Professor of Philosophy and Humanities, University of Northern Iowa
- Peter Kuriloff, Professor in Leadership Education Division of the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education (GSE); Research Director of Center of the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives

- Marc Mannes, Director Research and Evaluation, The Search Institute
- Sharon Ravitch, Senior Lecturer, Faculty Fellow and Interim Director, Center for Collaborative Research and Practice in Teacher Education, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education
- Michael Reichert, Executive Director of Center of the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives
- Rabbi Karen Reiss-Medwed, Director of Religious Education, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

Youth Marketing Specialists

- Ben Relles, Founder of barelypolitical.com

National Jewish Youth and Education Organizations

- David Bryfman, Ph.D. candidate in Education and Jewish Studies at NYU
- Elaine Cohen, Associate Director of Education, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
- Maggi Gaines, Vice President for Service Learning and Partnership at the Jewish Funds for Justice; Founding Director of Spark Partnership for Service
- Matt Grossman, Executive Director, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization
- Marc Kramer, Executive Director of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network
- Ariele Mortkowitz, Director, Membership & Outreach, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization
- Rabbi Sid Schwarz, Founder/President Panim, The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values
- Devorah Silverman, Education Consultant, Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA)
- Charlene Wendell, Consultant on Camping & Youth Services, JCC Association
- Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit, Congregational Consultant, Director of Outreach and Tikkun Olam, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, writer and speaker on Jewish men's issues

Secular Youth and Education Organizations

- Max Klau, Senior Researcher for Leadership and Evaluation at City Year
- Norman Newberg, Senior Fellow at the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, and former Executive Director of Say Yes to Education, Inc.
- Steven S. Piltch, Head of School, The Shipley School

Local Jewish Professionals

- Peter Eckstein, Director of Education, Temple Israel of West Palm Beach, and Co-Chair CAJE32
- Lori Harrison Port, Senior Associate Director of Planning and Allocations at the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles

Funders and Lay Leaders

- Lisa B. Eisen, National Director, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
- Sally Gottesman, Moving Traditions, Chair
- Jeffrey Schwarz, Moving Traditions, Board member
- Brenda Bodenheimer Zlatin, Program Officer: Jewish Life, Israel, Human Rights, Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation

Appendix 5

Action Research

Reichert, M. C. and S. Ravitch (2009). *Offering Boys Lives of Possibility: A Framework for the Jewish Community*. Jenkintown, PA: Moving Traditions.

Moving Traditions engaged researchers Michael C. Reichert, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives, and Sharon M. Ravitch, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, to develop a program and recommendations to help educators more effectively engage Jewish teenage boys. Drs. Reichert and Ravitch used the process of **action research** to elicit recommendations – the seven principles outlined in this report – from the boys' responses to the pilot program curriculum.

Action research is a reflective and collaborative approach to problem solving. It seeks to widen the field of knowledge beyond that offered by outside experts employing traditional quantitative methods. Drawing on educational, psychological, and ethnographic methods, action research emphasizes moment-to-moment theorizing, interactive data collecting, and a dialogic method of inquiry. The research process is an iterative one, allowing researchers and participants to work together to develop hypotheses, test them, and revise them in the field based on feedback.

Drs. Reichert and Ravitch drew on Moving Traditions' previous research to generate hypotheses about Jewish programming that boys would find enjoyable and meaningful, including the following six themes that were thought to be central to Jewish boys' development:

- 1) Being Yourself (Authenticity)
- 2) Brotherhood (Affiliation)
- 3) Making a Contribution (Tikkun Olam)
- 4) Self-Expression (Emotional Awareness)
- 5) Self-Determination (Freedom)
- 6) Manhood (Moral Aspiration)

Working with curriculum development specialists, Moving Traditions built a program based around the six themes. Drs. Reichert and Ravitch field-tested the curriculum with groups of 8th and 9th grade boys at four sites from May-July, 2009:

- A group of 8th grade boys recruited by Moving Traditions in the suburbs of Philadelphia, PA who had become bar mitzvah but were mostly no longer participating in Jewish life

- Boys who had mostly dropped out of programming post-bar mitzvah from a congregation in Boston, MA
- Boys from a BBYO group in Rockville, MD
- Attendees of Camp Harlam, in the Poconos, PA.

The action research included the following:

- Collaborative field observation with extensive field notes of multiple sessions
- Pre- and post-program surveys for participants
- Focus group observations and field notes from the Philadelphia pilot group and parents
- Guided reflection by the four facilitators on key themes.

The complete report can be downloaded from the Moving Traditions website, www.movingtraditions.org.

Appendix 6

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Acknowledgements

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Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action

The complete report can be downloaded from the Moving Traditions website, www.movingtraditions.org.

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By examining Judaism through a gender lens, Moving Traditions inspires women and men, and boys and girls to engage more deeply with Jewish life. Given that gender is shaped by culture and defines who we are and can become, gender continues to be critical to Jewish text, spiritual practice, education, and participation. By expanding our understanding of gender, we can expand Judaism's ability to help each individual experience his or her full humanity.

Moving Traditions' logo incorporates the word *masorot* (traditions) – every generation is called to move Judaism forward while remaining true to its profoundly moving traditions.

Our innovative programs, including *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* and *The Brotherhood*, draw on an understanding of gender, human development, and Jewish values to help teens develop meaningful identities as young women and men, and as Jews. Our professional development and program certification prepare Jewish educators to effectively challenge and inspire this generation of teenage girls and boys.

This is Jewish learning in a new and fun way.

8th grade boy, Moving Traditions' action research participant

This *Call to Action*, the result of extensive research on adolescent male behavior, values, interests and experiences, lays out a clear and compelling blueprint for dealing with one of the most critical challenges in American Jewish life today: the decline of participation by boys and men in Jewish communal, religious, and educational activities. Full of practical and appealing suggestions, *Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action* should be read and used by everyone who cares about the next generation of American Jews.

Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, Brandeis University

Author, Matrilineal Ascent/Patrilineal Descent: The Gender Imbalance in American Jewish Life

For years, Jewish educators have struggled with the challenge of attracting and keeping teenage boys involved in Jewish learning and other organized activities. Now, at last, thanks to Moving Traditions, we have a comprehensive resource that will enable us to respond to this challenge and opportunity affirmatively and effectively. *Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action* combines in one publication research-based guidelines for creating and implementing successful programs with adolescent boys, a marketing toolkit to draw participants to such programs, and a program sample from Moving Traditions' new curriculum, *The Brotherhood*, based on the principles outlined. Moving Traditions demonstrated the importance and effectiveness of gender-based programming with its pioneering *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing! A Call to Action* promises to have the same impact with an equally critical population.

Dr. Jonathan Woocher, Chief Ideas Officer, JESNA

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Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action is an invitation to policy makers, funders, parents, clergy, and educators to join Moving Traditions in adopting new ways to work with teenage boys. By doing so, we can begin to reverse the exodus of teenage boys from Jewish life. Most importantly, we can help Jewish boys connect meaningfully with their Judaism, their masculinity, their peers, and themselves.

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