Moving Traditions
Connect. Challenge. Change.

Best Practices for Creating Inclusive & Embracing Space

General Tips:
- Think about what's in your background. Everyone has biases and perspectives to be aware of.
- You don't need to know the answer to every question. In some cases, you can throw it back to the group, or you can say "I don't know, but I will look into it and get back to you next session."
- Include participants in the creation of group norms/group covenant.
- For virtual spaces: planning for Zoom facilitation is a lot more work: Diversify activity types and include options that enable anonymity, like whiteboard annotations.
- Each person is the expert in their own needs: Ask how best to help.
- Ask the group high curiosity questions (open-ended and stimulating) to facilitate learning.

Tips for Creating Inclusivity for Diverse Gender Identities:
- Avoid gendered language such as "boys and girls", "ladies and gentlemen", or "guys." Using neutral alternatives like "friends," "learners," "folks," or "everyone" makes space for everyone to feel comfortable.
- Consistently invite participants to share pronouns and names, realizing these may change over time.
- Do not highlight participants' physicality, avoiding language like, "Oh, you look different!" -- let the space be one in which folks can be and try whatever feels comfortable for them in that moment.
- Be mindful of identity gatekeeping: It's no one's job to determine whose identity is authentic.
- Refer youth to opportunities that exist online for LGBTQ youth to gather.
- Since much communication is taking place via email, make sure your pronouns are in your signature. This is a signpost for both students and parents. You can also use this as an educational moment by linking to an explanation of pronouns.
- Maintain confidentiality: young people are out to varying degrees and we need to prioritize their safety. This might mean using different names/pronouns with family communication.

Tips for Creating Inclusivity for Diverse Abilities:
- Share information in a variety of ways, as all folks take information in differently. You may not know who is neurodivergent in your group.
- Person First Language or Identity First Language: Ask the Person. While many professionals within the disability community favor person-first language (person with a disability, or a person who uses a wheelchair), some individuals with disabilities prefer identity-first (disabled person, or Autistic). Ask the person what language they prefer and abide by their wishes.
- Think about other language that you use. Many terms that were once widely used are now considered offensive. Some of these terms are taken to imply inferiority or have other negative connotations. Avoid terms like "wheelchair-bound" and "suffers from." "Accessible bathrooms and parking spaces" should not be referred to as "handicap bathrooms and parking spaces." People with disabilities do not want to be referred to as "victims" or with other negative terms.
- People with disabilities should not be described as "inspirational" or "courageous" just because they have a disability. That assumes that anyone with a disability is inherently worse off than nondisabled people, which further stigmatizes people with disabilities.
- Use the word "disability." Terms like "physically challenged," "special" and "differently-abled" can be seen as patronizing. Many people with disabilities have taken on the word "disability" as a label of pride.

In addition, people with disabilities are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. People with "special needs" are not.

- People without disabilities are not "normal." "Normal" implies that people with disabilities are "abnormal." While people without disabilities often are referred to as "able-bodied," some members of the disability community oppose its use because it implies that all people living with disabilities lack "able bodies." Instead, use the term "nondisabled," "does not have a disability" or "is not living with a disability."
- When in doubt, ask! Just because someone has a disability, do not assume they need help. Do not give assistance without asking first if they want it. Respect someone's choice even if it looks like they're struggling. If there is a dangerous situation, help just as you would help someone without a disability.
- A person's mobility equipment, such as a wheelchair, scooter, or cane, is part of his or her personal space. Do not touch or move the mobility devices of a person with a disability, even if the person puts it down or chooses to leave it somewhere.
- Listen attentively when you are talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for an individual to finish speaking, rather than correcting or speaking for that person. If necessary, ask short or closed-ended questions that require short answers, a nod, or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand when you don't; repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
- There are visible disabilities as well as nonvisible disabilities. Even though some disabilities are not visible to others, they are real and may require accommodation. For example, someone with certain learning or sensory disabilities may prefer to have directions written or spoken because of their disability.
- People who are neurodivergent and/or have mental health disabilities may have varying personalities and different ways of coping with their disability. Some may have trouble picking up on social cues; others may be highly sensitive. Treat each person as the individual they are. Ask what will make them most comfortable and respect their needs to the maximum extent possible.
- It is up to the person with disabilities to decide how and whether to share information about their disability; they are not obligated to disclose a disability to others unless it is required for health or safety.

Tips for creating inclusivity for diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and experiences:

- You don't need to know everything about every racial group but take the time to learn about others and be open-minded.
- Accept that bias and structural oppression are real.
- Avoid arguing with people; it's not necessary and it's not effective teaching strategy. Some people may just not be ready.
- Define the terms used to ensure clarity. Know your terms and be intentional in your choices.
- Acknowledge intersectionality—overlapping identities can layer privilege and marginalization.

Further Resources:

RespectAbility toolkit:

https://www.respectability.org/jewish-toolkit/

DEIJ educator best practices from NAIS:

https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-school/winter-2021/the-art-of-equity-and-justice-facilitation/