

New Beginnings

Group Session Models For Those In the Process of Conversion

Goal: To support and enrich the process of conversion for those choosing Judaism and their partners.

Participants: Individuals considering choosing Judaism and their partners (when applicable.) New Jews may be included as well.

Method: Small group psycho-social discussions to be held in partnership with sponsoring rabbi(s) and in conjunction with an Introduction to Judaism class. Groups may be facilitated by Outreach Fellows alone or together with the rabbi(s).

Design: *The following are suggested parameters that should be adjusted in consultation with your rabbi to fit your particular circumstances.*

1. Plan 6-10 sessions of 1-1/2 to 2 hours each.
2. Hold sessions on a regularly-scheduled monthly or bi-monthly basis.
3. Choose topics and experiences oriented to the expressed needs of and relevance to your group.
4. Consider visiting Jewish sites (synagogues, bakery, mikvah for example) as individual or group assignments for the program, and end with a pot-luck Shabbat dinner or Havdalah service.

Set-Up:

5. Use a comfortable, intimate Jewish setting where participants can feel free to talk uninterrupted. A temple library, youth lounge or appropriately-set classroom are good choices. A home setting is also possible.
6. Provide light refreshments.
7. Use nametags and provide a list of names, addresses and phone numbers with participants' permission.

Common Elements: These small group sessions will be most effective when they mirror the values of Jewish community—*Torah, Avodah, gemilut chasadim*. A trusting, warm environment, where group members treat each other with respect and care, is key. Engagement in Jewish study and prayer should be introduced and modeled in the group. This small educational component can greatly enhance the psycho-social learning. Consider incorporating some of the following elements in each of your sessions.

8. "Car talk"—brief discussion of leftover issues from previous sessions or pressing new concerns. (You can ask participants to think about something specific for next time, or to reflect on something they've heard or tried for the first time.)
9. *devar Torah*—brief text-based study led by Outreach Fellow or participant, with your offer of support.
10. Blessings at appropriate moments. The *shehecheyanu* might be a good place to start. (Coordinate with Introduction to Judaism class and provide Hebrew, transliteration and native language translation whenever possible.)
11. Informal "social time" for coffee and a nosh.

Key Topics for Session Models:

The topics that follow fall into three basic categories:

12. Internal issues of religious commitment and change of identity,
13. family issues, and
14. community (and Community) acceptance and belonging.

The questions that follow each title suggest the range of concerns in each area commonly expressed by those considering conversion and their partners. As you plan your sessions, be sure to touch on each of the three categories, shaping the specific focus in

accord with the content of the Introduction to Judaism class in your area, your rabbi's preferences for areas reserved for one-on-one counseling, and the needs of your group. It is recommended that you start with sessions I and II as listed.