

# Hineinu: *Here We Are.*

## Building Jewish Community for People of All Abilities

### Table of Contents

For Rabbis and Congregational Leaders .....	3
Forming an Inclusion Committee .....	3
Low-Cost Physical Changes.....	5
Ask the Question: Identifying Attitudes and Barriers.....	6
Ritual Accessibility .....	7
B’nai Mitzvah.....	8
Employment Practices.....	10
Additional Resources.....	12
For Educators .....	14
Ways to Make Your Educational Programs More Inclusive.....	14
Adapting for Special Needs - Eight Techniques for Helping Students Succeed .....	15
Youth Groups.....	16
B’nai Mitzvah.....	17
Additional Resources.....	18
Jewish Texts on Inclusion .....	20
Jewish Texts.....	20
Additional Resources.....	22
Jewish Disability Awareness Month / North American Inclusion Month .....	25
Summer Programs and Camps .....	27
Community Experts .....	28
Movement Resources .....	29
Best Practice Congregations.....	30
Acknowledgments.....	32

## Foreword

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

---

The Torah states that each of us is created *B'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and describes the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah welcoming strangers to their home. Yet there are Jews with physical, developmental, emotional, intellectual, and other disabilities who do not have the opportunities to participate in the richness of Jewish life because multiple barriers still exist in attitudes and access.

When those barriers are eliminated, many Jews with disabilities find warmth, welcome, and a sense of belonging to their Jewish community. As Torah teaches us, “You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind.” (Leviticus 19:14)

Historically, people with disabilities have been regarded in light of impairments that are apparent, such as physical, communication, and sensory disorders. Judaism recognizes that people can have disabilities that are not apparent, including but not limited to autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, executive functioning disorders, and mood disorders. Regardless of whether a disability is apparent, Judaism understands that because each person is unique, accommodations must be able to meet their needs so they can participate in personally meaningful opportunities.

More can and must be done to build a more inclusive Jewish community. In an inclusive community our buildings, facilities, and programming are accessible to all people with apparent and not-apparent disabilities, our demeanor is welcoming, and our language is appropriate – including using “person-first language,” which puts the person before the disability (i.e. referring to a “person with a disability” rather than a “disabled person”). Then all Jews, regardless of ability, will have the opportunity for meaningful participation in the richness of Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the [2011 URJ Resolution “In Support of Access to Lifelong Jewish Learning for Jews with Disabilities”](#)

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from [“Creating a Welcoming Congregation for People with Special Needs”](#) by Becca Hornstein,

## For Rabbis and Congregational Leaders

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

---

People can be faced with a disability at any time. Some may be born with a disability, while others may acquire a disability due to an accident or aging. There are members in our congregations who have visible and invisible disabilities whose needs are not being met. An individual and his or her family may feel uncomfortable talking to others about their personal situations, or may not feel that they will be accepted if they share this information.

Our Jewish values teach us that each of us is created in God’s image and each of us is to be valued. It is our responsibility to ensure that our congregations are welcoming to all.

### Forming an Inclusion Committee<sup>2</sup>

Synagogue inclusion committees provide opportunities for people with disabilities to get the accommodations they require in order to fully participate in congregational life. These committees are the means to continually update and enhance the needs that are being served in synagogue life.<sup>3</sup> Here are some quick tips and ideas to consider when beginning your own inclusion committee or continuing its work. See the “Additional Resources” section of this guide for further ideas, worksheets, and examples.

- Invite a wide range of people to participate, including:
  - congregants who have disabilities
  - family members of people with disabilities
  - professionals in disability-related fields (architects, learning specialists, psychologists, special educators, speech/occupational therapists, social workers, physicians, etc.)
  - clergy and synagogue leadership
  - other interested congregants
- At your first meeting:
  - It may be helpful to have a facilitator run the first meeting.
  - Have an agenda but don’t stick rigidly to it; let discussion evolve. Include a *d’var Torah* that references Jewish texts relating to the inclusion of all people. (See the “Jewish Texts on Inclusion” section of this guide).
  - Let all participants tell their stories. What brings them to the table?

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from [“Creating a Welcoming Congregation for People with Special Needs”](#) by Becca Hornstein, Executive Director of the Council for Jews with Special Needs; [“Why Have an Inclusion Committee”](#), USCJ; and [“Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities”](#) by Shelly Christensen

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from [MetroWest ABLE](#)

- Establish a mission statement and discuss goals for the committee. (See USCJ’s [“Why Have an Inclusion Committee”](#) or [“Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities”](#) for sample mission statements and committee objectives.)
- Identify next steps:
  - What are your congregation’s needs now? Create a questionnaire or ask for existing materials to survey identified individuals with disabilities, parents, the educational director, the early childhood director, the rabbi, and others.
  - What are some obstacles that prevent others from coming to synagogue and/or participating in synagogue life? Consider all types of barriers: awareness, attitudinal, physical, programmatic, and educational.
- Perform an Inclusion Assessment. How do you know where you are going unless you know where you are? Assess each programmatic area as well as the physical space to determine barriers to inclusion. Review the results and develop both a short-range and long-range plan to address the obstacles that prevent inclusion.
- Write a statement of welcome and inclusion to include in all congregational communications and membership materials. Present this statement to your congregation’s Board for their approval.
- Discuss the presence of attitudinal barriers in your congregation. Explore why those attitudes exist and seek ways to address and eliminate them from your congregational family.
- Assign committee members to develop lists of strategies to break down those barriers and promote full participation of persons with disability conditions. Set deadlines for putting those strategies into effect.
- Publicize your committee. Let your congregants know that the inclusion committee exists and that you are a welcoming congregation.
  - Write newsletter articles.
  - Use the universal accessibility logos.  
[https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools\\_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols](https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols)
  - Place welcoming language in the synagogue bulletin.
  - Offer sensitivity training to ushers.
  - Offer sensitivity training in congregational school.
  - Offer large-print bulletins and *siddurim*.
  - Make assistive hearing devices available.
  - Provide special greeters and aides.
  - Give sermons and text studies on disability awareness using Jewish values.
  - Involve people with disabilities as members of the inclusion committee.

## Low-Cost Physical Changes<sup>4</sup>

- Make plastic magnifying sheets available for use with your *siddurim* and *chumashim*. These can easily be sewn into a book's cover so it can be placed over the pages as an easy and cost-effective way to provide for those who need large-print books.
- Lower the *mezuzah* at the entrance to your synagogue so it is reachable by everyone, including people in wheelchairs.
- Lower your box of *kippot* so that everyone, including people in wheelchairs, can reach them.
- Provide parking spaces reserved for people who use wheelchairs or cannot walk long distances to the synagogue's entrance.
- Educate ushers about the various inclusion features your synagogue offers. This knowledge goes a long way in creating a welcoming environment for people who benefit from your barrier-removal efforts.
- Mount a cup dispenser next to your water fountain as a low-cost alternative to buying a new one. Make sure the dispenser is mounted at a height convenient for use by people in wheelchairs. It is also important that cups be maintained in the dispenser.
- Improve your synagogue's air quality by dusting woodwork and brass in the sanctuary, vacuuming with a HEPA filter, and cleaning air conditioning filters routinely so that people who have allergies are able to participate comfortably.
- Post appropriate signage indicating the location of your inclusion entrance, disability-friendly restrooms, and how to get to them.
- Include the universal symbols of accessibility in all publicity and marketing for your congregation (ex: the icons for wheelchair access, assistive listening devices, etc.)[https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools\\_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols](https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols)

---

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from [USCJ](#)

## Ask the Question: Identifying Attitudes and Barriers<sup>5</sup>

Use these questions for discussion of attitudinal barriers in your congregation:

- Do people with disabilities participate in the religious or political leadership of the congregation?
- What does the congregation do to encourage the participation and recognize the contributions of people with disabilities?
- Is there a plan for including children with disabilities in your religious school?
- Can and do people with disabilities celebrate life cycle events in your congregation? If not, do you know why?
- Is there a way for people with disabilities to offer suggestions and expertise on reducing barriers in the congregation without feeling like they are complaining or imposing?
- Are all congregational services, events, and meetings scheduled in accessible locations?
- Do you use people-first language in your speech, newsletter, etc.? (This is language that refers to the person first and the disability second. For example, “person with paraplegia,” instead of “paraplegic.”)
- Does your congregation offer a way to teach members and children about people with disabilities?
- Do you reach out to members of the congregation who can’t get to the building? Does someone offer to drive? Do you offer to hold a service or class at their home?
- Do you reach out to and acknowledge the needs of family members and life partners of people with disabilities?
- Is the rabbi a role model for creating a welcoming attitude?
- Does your synagogue have a board-level committee or task force on the inclusion of people with disabilities?
- Has your congregation adopted a statement on inclusion?
- Does your congregation indicate a willingness to raise money for and/or think creatively about ways to be accessible and welcoming?

---

<sup>5</sup> This list of a portion of checklists combined from [That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities](#) by Ann Rose Davie and Ginny Thornburgh, National Organization on Disability, 1992; [Who Makes People Different: Jewish Perspectives on the Disabled](#) by Carl Astor, United Synagogue of America Department of Youth Activities; <http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource-files/files/JRF-Taskforce-Disabilities.doc>; [Open Wide the Gates, the Gates of the Temple So That All May Worship](#), USCJ; Keshet: Working Together to Include People with Disabilities in Jewish Life (Cincinnati, Ohio); and [Jewish Disability Awareness Month Resource Guide](#), Partnership for Jewish Life & Learning

- Has there been a discussion or training session with staff members, board members, congregants, and teachers about how to make guests and constituents with disabilities feel welcome and included?
- Do all publicity and written materials say “All are welcome”? Is it written in an easy-to-read typeface and font?
- Is the universal access symbol posted in ads, signs, and in the congregation’s newsletter or bulletin?
- Do people with disabilities participate as ushers, lead services, sing in the choir, or serve on committees?
- Are people with disabilities encouraged to apply for jobs and serve on the Board of Directors?
- Are written materials, including prayer books, bulletins, newsletters, fliers, and brochures available in large-print, Braille, and/or by e-mail?
- Is the building accessible to people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices? Is there a passenger elevator in the building does not include the service elevator? Is there a ramp or lift to the building and to the *bimah*?
- Is sign language interpretation provided at all programs and events that people who are Deaf might attend?
- Does everyone enter through the same doorway? If not, is the accessible doorway welcoming and attractive?
- Are assistive listening devices available in the sanctuary, classrooms, and meeting rooms?
- Are light switches, water faucets, water fountains, and *mezuzot* at appropriate heights for people who use wheelchairs or who are small?

### Ritual Accessibility<sup>6</sup>

- Invite people with disabilities to participate in services.
- Clear space in different parts of the sanctuary for people who use wheelchairs.
- Provide large-print *siddurim*, *chumashim*, and other materials in Braille.
- Make print and recorded versions of sermons and other materials available.
- Place a portable or permanent reading table on the sanctuary floor so people with physical disabilities have greater access for Torah reading and honors.<sup>6</sup>
- Dedicate a *kiddush* or *oneg* Shabbat in honor of Jewish Disability Awareness Month, which is observed every February (see “Jewish Disability Awareness Month” section of this guide).
- Include special prayers or readings at each Shabbat service during Jewish Disability Awareness Month.

---

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from [Jewish Disability Awareness Month Resource Guide 2011-2012](#).

- During Jewish Disability Awareness Month, add a relevant quote to each Shabbat bulletin.
- Have a nursery school or religious school class lead and sign a prayer they learned with the help of a qualified interpreter at a Shabbat service.
- In the context of Torah study or a sermon, explore the difference between “healing” and “cure.”
- Educate ushers, greeters, receptionists, and others who welcome and guide visitors about the various accessibility features offered by your congregation.
- Place all *mezuzot* (or additional *mezuzot*) at wheelchair height on doorways throughout the congregation.
- Lower your box of *kippot* and basket of women’s head coverings so they can be reached by everyone, including people who use wheelchairs.
- Visit accessible congregations and other houses of worship in your area to get ideas for your own congregation.
- Provide plastic magnifying sheets for use with *siddurim* and *chumashim*. They can be sewn into book covers to overlay the pages of the book.
- After Shabbat, deliver *bimah* flowers and extra copies of service bulletins to those who are sick or unable to leave their homes.

## B’nai Mitzvah<sup>7</sup>

The bar or bat mitzvah of a young person with a disability demonstrates vividly what Judaism is, or should be, about. The ultimate success of such a ceremony is a triumph, not only for the individuals involved, but for the entire Jewish community. The challenges are not insurmountable; it only takes flexibility, creativity, and the willingness to plan ahead. In this way, we can truly “educate each child according to his or her ability” (Proverbs 22:6) and fulfill our obligation to provide a Jewish education for every child.

- Recognize that many people with disabilities have emotional ties to the Jewish people and therefore wish to become a participant in the community.
- Provide the child with the opportunity to declare his or her value and dignity before God and the community.
- Understand that those with disabilities may not reach the same level of learning of a child without disabilities.
- Modify the conventional training, as well as the actual service.
- Become acquainted with the learning challenges and styles of the student.

---

<sup>7</sup>Adapted with permission from “[What Makes a ‘Special Needs’ Bar Mitzvah Truly Special,](#)” URJ and [MyJewishLearning.com](#) (To learn more about Jewish life and to sign up for their free newsletters, visit them [here](#).)



- As educators, recognize your learning challenge, which is to be open, nonjudgmental, creative and compassionate.
- Meet with the student and his or her family and discuss goals and what they hope to get out of the ritual.
- Incorporate the learner in a conventional classroom with additional assistance, such as an aide.
- Provide a resource room that the student may learn in during part of the day, allowing for some individualized education.
- Around 4-6 months prior to the b'nai mitzvah, meet with the student and assess the student's progress, then begin sketching out the day and the accommodations needed. Take into consideration the following:
  - Has this child ever performed in front of an audience before, such as at a dance or choral recital or in school plays)?
  - How long can the child be expected to stay on the *bimah* or even in the sanctuary?
  - Will the child follow directions to participate in various portions of the service?
  - If the child can verbalize portions of the service, how much should he or she be expected to do on that day (lead the congregation in prayers, read Torah and Haftarah, deliver a d'var Torah)?
  - If the child is nonverbal, what is an alternative way for him or her to have an active part in the service (such as accepting and putting on a *tallit*, opening the ark, and/or carrying a small Torah)?
  - Can the child (with adult assistance) prepare a small speech to express what this event means to him or her? If not in words, can the child draw a picture or make another artistic rendering of his or her experience?
  - What makes this child happy? Even a child with the most severe limitations may take joy in tapping on a tambourine as the cantor sings or holding the Kiddush cup while the blessings are spoken by another person.
- Record the b'nai mitzvah student's speech or even the some of the blessing before the service.
- At the service, family members may speak on behalf of the student, connecting the b'nai mitzvah to the family/friend.

## Employment Practices<sup>8</sup>

Accessibility means that Jews with disabilities not only have access to buildings and lifecycle events but to all things Jewish, including jobs. Although synagogues are legally exempt from parts of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we are morally bound to its spirit of non-discrimination and equal opportunity. All employers, religious or not, that employ 15 or more people must comply with Title I of the ADA, which prohibits employment discrimination. These employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified persons with disabilities so they may have an employment opportunity equal to that available to individuals without disabilities. Religious organizations may, however, give employment preference to people of their own religion or religious organization.

The ADA prohibits discrimination in all employment practices, including job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. It applies to recruitment, advertising, tenure, layoff, leave, fringe benefits, and all other employment-related activities. Employment discrimination is prohibited against "qualified individuals with disabilities," including employees and applicants for employment. An individual is considered to have a disability if: he or she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment. People who experience discrimination because they have a known association or relationship with an individual with a disability are also protected.

- Review hiring practices and train hiring staff so that qualified individuals who have disabilities are considered for open positions based on their skills to do the job (with accommodations)
- Provide individuals with disabilities with reasonable accommodations in the workplace.
- Handle each accommodation process on a case-by-case basis. Do not assume that an individual with disabilities will require accommodations in the workplace.
- Include the individual in the accommodation process.
- When deciding on accommodations, ask questions of the individual and the employer:
  - What symptoms or limitations is the individual experiencing?
  - How do the individual's symptoms or limitations affect job performance?
  - What specific tasks are problematic as a result of these symptoms and limitations?
  - What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems?
  - Are appropriate resources being used to determine accommodations?

---

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from [JAN: For Employers](#) and *Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities* by Shelly Christensen

- Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the individual to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
- Do supervisory personnel and employees need disability awareness training or training on the Americans with Disabilities Act?
- Use these steps during the accommodations and hiring processes:
  - Define the situation.
  - Perform needs assessment.
  - Explore alternative placement options.
  - Monitor accommodations.
- Put specific policies or procedures in place for dealing with accommodation requests to ensure requests are handled properly and consistently. This will help employees know what to expect and will help employers track their efforts to comply with ADA.
- Be open to restructuring job description, required tasks, compensation, work schedule, etc. to accommodate an individual with disabilities.
- Allow individuals to use personal need items in the workplace (such as canes, walkers, guide dog, hearing aides, etc.)

A special tax credit is available to help smaller employers make accommodations required by the ADA. An eligible small business may take a tax credit of up to \$5,000 per year for accommodations made to comply with the ADA. The credit is available for one-half the cost of "eligible access expenditures" that are more than \$250 but less than \$10,250.

For more information: The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has developed several resources to help employers and people with disabilities understand and comply with the employment provisions of the ADA. Resources include a Technical Assistance Manual that provides how-to guidance on the employment provisions of the ADA, as well as a resource directory to help individuals find specific information and a variety of brochures, booklets, and fact sheets.

## Additional Resources

### **“Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities”**

This is the go-to, user-friendly manual for any congregation seeking to provide a more supportive and inclusive environment for people with disabilities and their families. It was written by Shelly Christensen, MA, Program Manager of the Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities.

[www.jfcsmpls.org/pdf/inclusionordernew.pdf](http://www.jfcsmpls.org/pdf/inclusionordernew.pdf)

### **“Al Pi Darco: According to Their Ways”**

This URJ Special Needs Resource Manual includes information for B’nai mitzvah planning, religious school, and congregational needs.

[www.urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item\\_id=3500](http://www.urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item_id=3500)

### **“Opening the Gates of Prayer So That All May Worship”**

This article offers conceptual support for physical accessibility and a list of Conservative congregations that serve as models of best practices.

[www.uscj.org/JewishLivingandLearning/SocialAction/SocialJustice/CurrentIssues/Political\\_SocialIssues/OpeningtheGatesofPrayerSoThatAllMayWorship.aspx](http://www.uscj.org/JewishLivingandLearning/SocialAction/SocialJustice/CurrentIssues/Political_SocialIssues/OpeningtheGatesofPrayerSoThatAllMayWorship.aspx)

### **“Look Into My Eyes: Coming Face to Face with Disability”**

This mini-course held at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, was designed to help participants increase their capacity to work with people of differing abilities. It offers insights from Jewish tradition, explorations of the heart, and teachings from rabbis who are leaders in serving diverse communities.

[www.rrc.edu/node/1330](http://www.rrc.edu/node/1330)

### **“Brain Injury: When the Call Comes--A Congregational Resource”**

This booklet includes pastoral anecdotes, articles and stories developed in collaboration with the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey and the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities.

[wjms.umdj.edu/boggscenter/products/documents/BrainInjury.pdf](http://wjms.umdj.edu/boggscenter/products/documents/BrainInjury.pdf)

## **JBI International**

The JBI Library provides individuals who are blind, visually impaired, physically handicapped or reading disabled with books, magazines and special publications of Jewish and general interest in Audio, Large Print and Braille formats. The unique services provided by JBI, all of which are free of charge, enable over 35,000 children, adults and seniors – from New York to New Zealand, from Ft. Lauderdale to Moscow, from Tel Aviv to Buenos Aires – to participate fully in the life of their communities.

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

## **“A Guide to Funding Disabilities and Special Needs”**

Commissioned by the Jewish Funders Network's peer network on disabilities and special needs and edited by Steven M. Eidelman, this 12-chapter ebook has important information for funders, with sections on employment, synagogue inclusion, recreation, community living, and more. Each chapter is written by an expert in the field specifically for the funding community.

[www.jfunders.org/disabilityguide](http://www.jfunders.org/disabilityguide)

## For Educators & Youth Leaders

*“Every member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah—regardless of whether one is rich or poor, physically able or with physical disability.” (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah, 10)*

---

Jewish education is special education. Jewish schools have a moral and ethical obligation to provide a quality Jewish education for all. As Jewish educators, we must be clear on this mission, we must increase our expertise, and we must build strong, trustworthy relationships with parents and students.<sup>9</sup>

### Ways to Make Your Educational Programs More Inclusive<sup>10</sup>

- Write a statement of inclusion that welcomes all students, irrespective of their learning styles or level of academic competence, and include it in marketing of your religious school as well as in your school registration form.
- Include a “Special Needs” section in your school registration packet that inquires about any academic challenges or difficulties, the student’s specific diagnostic label, modifications or accommodations required for the student’s success, and any medication the student takes. Assure parents that the student’s teacher and school director will use this information for the student’s benefit.
- Employ a special education teacher to serve as your religious school “inclusion specialist.” That person will observe students, offer suggestions to the teachers, develop curriculum changes, and help set realistic goals for the student who has special needs.
- Learn about the many ways in which to modify a bar or bat mitzvah for children who have a wide variety of disabilities. Establish a policy that ensures that all children will have the opportunity to celebrate their bar/bat mitzvah from the *bimah* when and if they are ready.
- Integrate disability awareness and sensitivity training into your religious school curriculum in a way that is touched upon in each grade.
- Provide disability awareness and sensitivity training for school staff and youth group leaders, and offer strategies for successful inclusion in these areas. (Use professionals who work with individuals who have disabilities who are members of your congregation).
- Train post-B’nai mitzvah students to become *madrichim* (classroom aides and tutors) for children who have difficulties with the regular religious school curriculum.
- Promote a “best buddies” group for teens to develop friendships with children and teens who have special needs.

---

<sup>9</sup> Fran Pearlman, Summer 2007, [“Torah at the Center.”](#)

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from [“Creating a Welcoming Congregation for People with Special Needs”](#) by Becca Hornstein, Executive Director of the Council for Jews with Special Needs

## Adapting for Special Needs - Eight Techniques for Helping Students Succeed<sup>11</sup>

Here are suggestions for adapting lessons. The modifications here are designed for students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

1. If your student needs help reading and comprehending...
  - Shorten or edit student reading materials, or select a portion for the student to read.
  - Allow students to read in pairs, partnering a weaker reader with a stronger one.
  - Highlight the main ideas that are important for the student not to miss.
  - Record the reading and allow the student to listen to it being read to him/her.
2. If your student needs help understanding and following directions...
  - Create a short instruction sheet of routine directions.
  - Give directions to the class one at a time. Once one task is completed, give the next step.
  - Have the student or a group of students repeat directions back to you to check for understanding.
  - Use signals or symbols to indicate kinds of directions (e.g., a pencil for writing work, a book for reading, turning lights on and off to indicate a roleplaying or moving activity).
  - Show samples of what the completed work will look like to better communicate expectations.
3. If your student needs help writing...
  - Modify the writing tool to make it more comfortable, such as pencil grips, felt tip markers, or larger pencils.
  - Allow the student to compose on a computer.
  - Allow the student to audio-record his/her responses.
  - Provide lined paper rather than blank paper, or draw lines on workbook pages.
4. If your student needs help working with other students in small groups...
  - Carefully compose groups based on what you know about students, rather than letting students choose their own groups.
  - Try the activity as a whole class.
  - Prep the student and review behavioral expectations prior to beginning an activity.
  - Have adult or teen volunteers work with the small groups.
  - Give the student feedback with a checklist for behavior or a visual signal.
5. If your student needs help expressing himself or herself orally...
  - Choose simpler questions to ask him or her in front of the class.
  - Prep the student by giving him or her questions privately before asking them in front of the class.
  - After you ask a question, wait. Give the student enough time to compose his or her thoughts.
  - Give multiple choices or ask the student to recognize rather than recall.
6. If your student needs help understanding vocabulary...

---

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from the URJ [Chai Curriculum](#)

- Teach difficult or new words at the beginning of the lesson.
  - Create a simple glossary of terms for the student to keep on his or her desk.
  - When you say or read a difficult word, stop and explain it again.
7. If your student needs help completing art activities or drawing assignments...
- Give students the option of pasting a collage or even circling objects, rather than drawing or painting.
  - Provide stencils for tracing.
  - Provide larger crayons or markers that are easier to use.
  - Pair the child with another child who is stronger in this area.
8. If your student needs help organizing materials...
- Only give him or her the materials to complete one step at a time.
  - Color-code materials so students have easy reference cues.

## Youth Groups<sup>12</sup>

For all teens, especially teens with disabilities, inclusion and acceptance into a group of their peers is important and valuable. Youth groups provide many opportunities for friendships, activities, learning, and leadership development. Unfortunately, many young people with disabilities have been left out of youth groups. Every Jewish teen deserves the opportunity to enjoy the many benefits of a youth group and to feel valued among their peers.

- Ask young people with disabilities to participate and get involved.
- Meet with teens and parents individually to find out what specific accommodations each member or prospective member needs.
- Hold events in locations that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Build a network for the new participant with disabilities. Ask some of the more responsible teens to show them around and make them feel included in the group when they first arrive.
- Inclusion is about attitude. Run programs on disability awareness.
- Provide disability awareness training to your youth group board and members.
- Find ways for young adults with disabilities to participate, be leaders, and find friendship within your youth group.
- Listen to adolescents themselves about their participation and needs. Make decisions *with* them, not *for* them.
- Provide individuals with disabilities with the same opportunities for growth and friendship as their typically developing peers.

---

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities, Shelly Christensen.



## B'nai Mitzvah<sup>13</sup>

The bar or bat mitzvah of a young person with a disability demonstrates vividly what Judaism is, or should be, about. The ultimate success of such a ceremony is a triumph, not only for the individuals involved, but for the entire Jewish community. The challenges are not insurmountable; it only takes flexibility, creativity, and the willingness to plan ahead. In this way, we can truly "educate each child according to his or her ability" (Proverbs 22:6) and fulfill our obligation to provide a Jewish education for every child.

- Recognize that many people with disabilities have emotional ties to the Jewish people and therefore wish to become a participant in the community.
- Provide the child with the opportunity to declare his or her value and dignity before God and the community.
- Understand that those with disabilities may not reach the same level of learning of a child without disabilities.
- Modify the conventional training, as well as the actual service.
- Become acquainted with the learning challenges and styles of the student.
- As educators, recognize your learning challenge, which is to be open, nonjudgmental, creative and compassionate.
- Meet with the student and his or her family and discuss goals and what they hope to get out of the ritual.
- Incorporate the learner in a conventional classroom with additional assistance, such as an aide.
- Provide a resource room that the student may learn in during part of the day, allowing for some individualized education.
- Around 4-6 months prior to the b'nai mitzvah, meet with the student and assess the student's progress, then begin sketching out the day and the accommodations needed. Take into consideration the following:
  - Has this child ever performed in front of an audience before, such as at a dance or choral recital or in school plays)?
  - How long can the child be expected to stay on the *bimah* or even in the sanctuary?
  - Will the child follow directions to participate in various portions of the service?
  - If the child can verbalize portions of the service, how much should he or she be expected to do on that day (lead the congregation in prayers, read Torah and Haftarah, deliver a d'var Torah)?

---

<sup>13</sup> Adapted with permission from "[What Makes a 'Special Needs' Bar Mitzvah Truly Special](#)," URJ and [MyJewishLearning.com](#). (To learn more about Jewish life and to sign up for their free newsletters, visit them [here](#).)

- If the child is nonverbal, what is an alternative way for him or her to have an active part in the service (such as accepting and putting on a *tallit*, opening the ark, and/or carrying a small Torah)?
- Can the child (with adult assistance) prepare a small speech to express what this event means to him or her? If not in words, can the child draw a picture or make another artistic rendering of his or her experience?
- What makes this child happy? Even a child with the most severe limitations may take joy in tapping on a tambourine as the cantor sings or holding the Kiddush cup while the blessings are spoken by another person.
- Record the b'nai mitzvah student's speech or even the some of the blessing before the service.
- At the service, family members may speak on behalf of the student, connecting the b'nai mitzvah to the family/friend.

## Additional Resources

### **“Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities”**

This is the go-to, user-friendly manual for any congregation seeking to provide a more supportive and inclusive environment for people with disabilities and their families. It was written by Shelly Christensen, MA, Program Manager of the Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities.

[www.jfcsmpls.org/pdf/inclusionordernew.pdf](http://www.jfcsmpls.org/pdf/inclusionordernew.pdf)

### **“Al Pi Darco: According to Their Ways”**

This URJ Special Needs Resource Manual includes information for B'nai mitzvah planning, religious school, and congregational needs.

[www.urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item\\_id=3500](http://www.urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item_id=3500)

### **URJ Resources for Special Education**

This page includes articles, podcasts, and quick tips for improving and supporting learning opportunities for all Jews.

[www.urj.org/learning/teacheducate/specialneeds/](http://www.urj.org/learning/teacheducate/specialneeds/)

### **“A Guide to Funding Disabilities and Special Needs”**

Commissioned by the Jewish Funders Network's peer network on disabilities and special needs, and edited by Steven M. Eidelman, this 12-chapter ebook has important information for funders, with sections on employment, synagogue inclusion, recreation, community living, and more. Each chapter is written by an expert in the field specifically for the funding community.

[www.jfunders.org/disabilityguide](http://www.jfunders.org/disabilityguide)

### **Jewish Special Education International Consortium**

The Jewish Special Education International Consortium is a professional network of directors, coordinators, and administrators of Jewish special education services in Central Agencies for Jewish Education. Their website is the result of the efforts of these individuals to provide support and services to children and adults with special needs in the Jewish community. Throughout this site, you will find resources and materials for your use to help make your community a welcoming place for all.

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

### **V'khol Banaikh**

This Jewish special needs resource describes various disabilities and provides an array of options including program models, professional development, interventions, and resources, both material and organizational.

[www.torahaura.com/ItemDetails.aspx?ItemNo=VKORBAN](http://www.torahaura.com/ItemDetails.aspx?ItemNo=VKORBAN)

### **“Look Into My Eyes: Coming Face to Face with Disability”**

This mini-course, held at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, was designed to help participants increase their capacity to work with people of differing abilities. It offers insights from Jewish tradition, explorations of the heart, and teachings from rabbis who are leaders in serving diverse communities.

[www.rrc.edu/node/1330](http://www.rrc.edu/node/1330)

## Jewish Texts on Inclusion

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

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

### Jewish Texts<sup>14</sup>

- “For my house shall be a house of prayer for all people.”(Isaiah 56:5)
- “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’ And God created man in His image in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)
  - On “let us make man” – As long as God is still creating, He does not in fact say ‘I,’ He says ‘We,’ an absolute, all-inclusive term which does not refer to an I outside the self but is the plural of all-encompassing majesty. It is an impersonal I, an I that does not face another Thou, that does not reveal anything but lives, like the metaphysical God of pre-creation, only in itself.” (Franz Rosenzweig)
  - On “in the image” –“Beloved is man for he was created in the image of God. Still greater was God’s love in that He gave to man the knowledge of his having been so created.” (Pirke Avot 3:18)
- Two translations/interpretations from Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5:
  - “A human being mints many coins from the same mold, and they are all identical. But the holy one, blessed by God, strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique.”
  - “(An individual man was created) to show the greatness of God. While a person stamps many coins from a single die, and they are all alike, the King of kings has stamped every person with the die of Adam, yet not one of them is like his fellow.”
- “One who sees...people with disfigured faces or limbs, recites the blessing, ‘Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who makes people different.’ One who sees a person who is blind or lame, or who is covered with sores and white pustules (or similar ailment), recites the blessing, ‘Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who

---

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from the [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource-files/files/JRF-Taskforce-Disabilities.doc) and <http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource-files/files/JRF-Taskforce-Disabilities.doc>

- is a righteous judge.’ But if they were born that way (with the disability), one says, ‘...who makes people different.’” (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot B’rachot 10:12, based on B’rachot 58b)
- “But Moses said to the Lord, ‘Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?’” (Exodus 4:10-11)
  - “Every member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah—whether one is rich or poor, physically able or with physical disability.” (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah, Ch. 10)
  - Two translations/interpretations from Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers, 4:3:
    - “Ben Azzai taught: Do not disdain any person. Do not underrate the importance of anything for there is no person who does not have his hour, and there is no thing without its place in the sun.”
    - “Treat no one lightly and think nothing is useless, for everyone has a moment and everything has a place.”
  - “Do not look at the container, but what is in it.” (Pirke Avot 4:27)
  - “Speak up for those who cannot speak...speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.” (Proverbs 31:8 )
  - “*Hinei ma tov u’ma na’im shevet achim gam yachad.*” “Behold how good and pleasant it is when all people live together as one.”(Psalm 133)
  - “*Rachmana leib’i.*” – “God wants only the heart.”
    - “The Mishnah tells us, ‘Don’t look at the flask, but at what it contains.’” In teaching ourselves to see the inner sparks that light a person’s soul, rather than merely glancing at the casing that holds those precious assets of personality, aspiration and caring, we can act like God in the wilderness, healing when we can, and transcending limits when we cannot.” (Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson)
  - “Do not curse a person who is deaf and do not place a stumbling block in front of a person who is blind.” (Leviticus 19:14)
  - Deuteronomy 24:17 and 27:19, and Jeremiah 22:3 teaches us “not to oppress the stranger, the orphan and the widow.” These three are offered as examples of the weakest, least well-protected members of society. The Torah repeatedly delineates that protection and help must be afforded such members of the group.
  - “Teach a child according to his way.” (Proverbs 22:6) (according to his needs and abilities)
  - “All Israel is responsible for one another” (Mishnah Sanhedrin)
  - “We may sell a synagogue, and, similarly, all holy objects – even a Sefer Torah – in order to provide for Torah students and orphans.” (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim 153:6)
  - “Rabbi Yochanan said: ‘Each of the 40 days that Moses was on Mount Sinai, God taught him entire Torah. And each night, Moses forgot what he had learned. Finally, God gave it to him as a gift. If so, why did God not give the Torah to him as a gift on the first day?’

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

- “Human beings were created as a single individual to teach you that anyone who destroys a single life is as though that person has destroyed an entire world, and anyone who preserves a single life is as though an entire world has been preserved. The creation of an individual human being was done also for the sake of peace among humanity, so that no person could say to another, ‘My parent is greater than your parent.’” (Talmud Sanhedrin 4:5)
- “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)
- “Oh God, may all created in your image recognize that they are kin, so that in one spirit and in one friendship, they may be forever united before you.” (Traditional Liturgy)
- “When a person insults someone else, it is own defect that he is revealing.” (Kedushim 70a)
- “If there be among you a person with needs, you shall not harden your heart, but you shall surely open your hand.” (Deuteronomy 15:7)
- “Anyone who deprives a student of being taught Torah is as if he robs him of his father’s legacy.” (Sanhedrin 91b)
- A student should not say —I have understood when s/he has not understood. Rather, s/he should ask again, even several times. And, if the teacher gets angry and abuses the student verbally, she or he should say to the teacher, —Teacher, this is Torah and I must learn it, even if my capacity is inadequate. (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilkhos Talmud Torah, 4:4)
- The decency of a society is measured by how it cares for its least powerful members. (Etz Hayim, commentary ed. by Rabbi Harold Kushner)

### Additional Resources

Abrams, Judith Z. Judaism and Disability. 1998. This book is a commentary on the Jewish texts surrounding disability from the Bible through the Talmud.

Astor, Carl. Who Makes People Different: Jewish Perspectives on the Disabled. New York: United Synagogue of America Department of Youth Activities, 1985. This book examines the traditional Jewish attitudes towards those with special needs. The author discusses legal and Midrashic views, theological implications, and services in the Jewish community.

Al Pi Darco: According to Their Ways. Union of Reform Judaism Department of Family Concerns. This special needs educational resource manual helps religious schools and families provide Jewish learning for students with disabilities.

Carter, Erik W. Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families and Congregations. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2010. This is a practical guide on how to include people with disabilities in religious communities.

Author Erik Carter is one of the leaders in discussions about inclusion and faith. This book addresses how faith communities, service providers, and families can work together to support the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the faith community of their choice.

Christensen, Shelly. *Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities*. Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities, Jewish Family and Children's Services of Minneapolis, Minneapolis: Jewish Family and Children's Services of Minneapolis, 2007.

Dignity and Disability: A Jewish Discovery Kit, Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, Rockville, MD. This introduction of special needs for Jewish schools is a resource guide for Jewish organizations seeking to provide a supportive and inclusive environment for people with disabilities. It includes a step-by-step guide for establishing an inclusion committee, resources to create a plan of action, disability awareness training, and information on raising a child with special needs.

Down Syndrome Among [www.pirchei.co.il/spec\\_ed/down](http://www.pirchei.co.il/spec_ed/down) This is an online Jewish publication about Down Syndrome, meant to provide information about the shared experience of families with a family member with this disease in it.

Gaventa, William C. and Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams. Jewish Perspective on Theology and the Human Experience with Theology, 2012. This book offers an inclusive, kaleidoscopic view of Judaism and Jewish approaches to disability. This work offers perspective on Jewish law, Jewish law and individuals and families, community, and humanity.

Lau, Rabbi Dr. Benjamin. "Disability and Judaism: Society's Influence on *Halacha*," Jewish Dis/Ability Unite. <http://jewishdisabilityunite.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/disability-and-judaism-societys-influence-on-halacha-rabbi-dr-benjamin-lau/> This is a commentary on the Jewish law and modern developments surrounding *halacha* surrounding disability.

*Rife, Janet Miller. From Barriers to Bridges: A Community Action Guide for Congregations and People With Disabilities*, 2001. This book serves as a guide for congregations to make them more open and inclusive environments for people with disabilities.

Rosh Pina, [www.rpcornerstone.org](http://www.rpcornerstone.org). Rosh Pina supports Jewish institutions in becoming Cornerstone Certified and offers a way for organizations to meet the needs of Jews with developmental delays in a truly inclusive way.

Shapiro, Joseph P. No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement. Three Rivers Press. Shapiro, a social policies writer for *U.S. News & World Report*, centers his empathetic review of society's relations to its disabled population on the 1992 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. He documents the political progress of the issue with stories about several of the nation's estimated 35 million disabled people. Included are polio-afflicted activists, Special Olympics competitors, armed services veterans, and elderly people who owe their survival to medical and technological advances.

That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities, Available at AAPD Interfaith Initiative, [www.aapddc.org/AAPDRedesign/Interfaith/Interfaith.html](http://www.aapddc.org/AAPDRedesign/Interfaith/Interfaith.html)  
The Interfaith Initiative for the AADP is the interfaith committee which advocates on behalf of Americans living with disability. This conference is offered by the AADP to bring religious communities in dialog with the disability community at the community level.

Torah at the Center, "Inclusion." Union for Reform Judaism  
[www.urj.org/learning/teacheducate/publications/tatc/?syspage=document&item\\_id=56691](http://www.urj.org/learning/teacheducate/publications/tatc/?syspage=document&item_id=56691)  
This brochure addresses how to include people with disabilities, including a text study, websites, personal essays, and descriptions of community, camp, and day school programs.

Who Makes People Different: Jewish Perspectives on People with Disabilities, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Department of Youth Activities. This book goes through the Jewish law and rabbinic literature that deals with disability and concludes with a call to action on what we can do for the disability community.



## Jewish Disability Awareness Month

*“Good intentions alone not accompanied by action are without value, as it is the action which makes the intentions so profound.” —Chasidic Master Yehudi HaKadosh*

---

Jewish Disability Awareness Month, universally recognized by the Jewish community in February, is a unified initiative to raise awareness and support efforts to foster inclusion of people with disabilities and their families in Jewish communities worldwide. During Jewish Disability Awareness Month (and beyond!) you can:

- Use the Jewish Disability Awareness Month logo on your website and on all printed materials during February. You can obtain the logo by contacting creator Shelley Christensen at [shelly@inclusioninnovations.com](mailto:shelly@inclusioninnovations.com).
- Dedicate a Shabbat worship service to inclusion and the contributions of children and adults who have disabilities.
- Host or participate in a community-wide disability awareness event, such as the showing of *Mary and Max*, *Praying with Lior*, or *Autism the Musical*.
- Give a presentation at your congregation’s February board meeting sharing stories about students with special needs and how inclusion benefits all students.
- Host an art exhibit or musical performance by an artist who has a disability.
- Do an environmental scan of your building, looking at accessibility of the sanctuary, *bimah*, education areas, parking and restrooms.
- Have religious school students create *mezuzot* to be placed at the appropriate height for people who use wheelchairs, and mark the occasion with a special ceremony.
- Invite a disability specialist, parent, or person with a disability to give a d’var Torah on a disability-related topic.
- Focus Torah study on text about Jewish values for inclusion.
- Collaborate with other organizations in the community to host a conference presenting a variety of workshops to educate Jewish professionals and community members about aspects of living with disability.
- Create a pamphlet or online resource about inclusion etiquette with ideas about how to relate to someone with a disability.
- Because children and teens with disabilities are often targets for bullying, use Jewish Disability Awareness Month as an opportunity to address the issue of bullying with youth group members.
- Set the expectation that inclusion is part of the congregational culture and formalize it by starting an inclusion or access committee in February. Create the mission statement in March, do an assessment of all areas of the congregation throughout the spring and early summer, and envision your inclusive congregation and write a strategic plan to start the new year.

- Above all, share your stories of success, the fruits of your work that give people hope that they can belong.

## Summer Programs and Camps

*“Behold how good and pleasant it is when all people live together as one.”*

*(Psalm 133)*

---

### **Union for Reform Judaism Summer Camps**

URJ camps have an Inclusion Coordinator, a trained professional to support campers with special needs, who are prepared to work with caregivers and professionals to plan for and provide a fulfilling camp experience for all children. In addition, two camps offer programs for campers with special needs open to young people from across North America.

[www.urjcamp.org/programs/specialneeds](http://www.urjcamp.org/programs/specialneeds)

### **Camp Ramah Tikvah Program (Conservative)**

Special needs programs at individual Ramah camps serve different populations of children and different age groups. Some camps offer programs to serve campers with various levels of cognitive delay; others offer programs for campers on the autism spectrum, including Asperger’s Syndrome. Several Ramah camps also offer post-high school vocational programs that are designed to maximize independent functioning within a supervised setting or a college campus.

[www.campramah.org/content/specialneeds.php](http://www.campramah.org/content/specialneeds.php)

### **Yachad/NJCD Summer Programs (Orthodox)**

Yachad’s Summer Programs include a variety of summer experiences for youth and adults with developmental disabilities. Yad B’Yad (hand-in-hand) is a summer tour that mainstreams high school students with their Yachad member peers. A number of camp experiences are available for youth in an inclusive environment at camps in the Poconos and Catskills in upstate New York. In addition, vocational programs have also been developed to provide job opportunities for individuals with disabilities in various sleepaway camp or day camp settings.

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

## Community Experts

Shelly Christensen

Founder and Executive Director, Inclusion Innovations, author of Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities, Adjunct Faculty for the URJ on Disabilities and Inclusion, co-founder Jewish Leadership Institute on Disabilities and Inclusion.

[shelly@inclusioninnovations.com](mailto:shelly@inclusioninnovations.com)

612-965-0423

Dr. Shana Erenberg

Chairman, Department of Education, Blitstein Institute of Hebrew Theological College; Special Needs Consultant to the Board of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago; Co-chairman, Jewish Special Educators International Consortium

[erenberg@htc.edu](mailto:erenberg@htc.edu)

Dr. Sandy Miller-Jacobs

Professor and Director of Special Education, Hebrew College, Newton Centre, MA

[smillerjacobs@hebrewcollege.edu](mailto:smillerjacobs@hebrewcollege.edu)

617-559-8615

Dr. Sara Rubinow Simon

Co-Chair, USCJ Commission, North Bethesda, MD

[srsimon@verizon.net](mailto:srsimon@verizon.net)

301-468-0220

Becca Hornstein

Executive Director, Council for Jews with Special Needs, Scottsdale, AZ

[becca@cjsn.org](mailto:becca@cjsn.org)

480-629-5343

## Movement Resources

Each major movement has its own resource page for disabilities. Much of the information in this guide was pulled from these sites.

- [Orthodox Movement](#)  
Yachad, the Orthodox Movement's National Jewish Council for Disabilities, provides training workshops and programs to Jewish organizations seeking to be more inclusive. Their website has many useful inclusion resources for all denominations and information about all the Yachad programs.
- [Conservative Movement](#)  
The goal of the United Synagogue's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities is to educate all members of their communities about the importance of an inclusive and welcoming community. Their website is host to a brief history of the commission, thought-provoking readings, and tools and resources for inclusivity in Jewish communities.
- [Reconstructionist Movement](#)  
The Jewish Reconstructionist Movement's resource page on disability inclusion provides a link to a mini-course held at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College about coming face-to-face with disability and resources providing insight on Jewish values of inclusion.
- [Reform Movement](#)  
The Union for Reform Judaism provides ideas for inclusive programs as well as comprehensive resources for congregations, educators, clergy, community members, and youth group organizers.

## Best Practice Congregations

The following congregations are models of best practices in various facets of disability inclusion.

- Temple Micah (Washington, D.C.)
  - Award winning building, program, attitude
  - Temple Micah has an Inclusion and Accessibility Committee whose goal is to make the congregation a welcoming place for people of all levels of ability. For Jewish Disability Awareness Month, they brought in guest speakers to speak during Shabbat services. Inclusivity is also one of the Temple Micah values. Their *bimah* is completely wheelchair accessible and their building already exceeds the demands required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.
  - Email Committee: [inclusioncommittee@templemicah.org](mailto:inclusioncommittee@templemicah.org)
  - Rabbi Daniel Zemel: [rabbi@templemicah.org](mailto:rabbi@templemicah.org), (202) 342-9175
  
- Temple Isaiah (Lafayette, CA)
  - Building, program, attitude
  - Temple Isaiah's building is very accessible to members with disabilities: handicapped parking spots are designated near the front of the building, all sidewalks have curbs, the building and basement/youth lounge have ramps, the library has books, movies, and CDs in various formats, the *bimah* is wheel chair accessible, *tallitot* and prayer books are available at wheelchair accessible level, large-print prayer books are available, and aisle between pews are wide. Rabbi Judy Shanks has excellent support programs for adults living with mental illness and their families and is very committed to special needs in general.
  - Rabbi Judy Shanks: [rabbi.shanks@temple-isaiah.org](mailto:rabbi.shanks@temple-isaiah.org)
  
- Congregation Bet Shalom (Minnetonka, MN)
  - Building, program, attitude
  - When Bet Shalom developed plans for a new building, they included people who had physical disabilities on the building committee. Access to the *bimah* is the same for all: short curved ramps that ascend on either side of the *bimah*. The building is barrier-free. Rabbis Norman M. Cohen and David Locketz model inclusion as a congregational value through sermons, writings, and actions. Bet Shalom's Inclusion Committee partners with other committees to raise awareness, and created a short film of interviews with people with disabilities and congregational leaders to share for Jewish Disability Awareness Month. During Religious School one Sunday students participated in a ceremony where mezzuzot were affixed to every doorway so people using wheelchairs could reach them.

People with disabilities are lay leaders and board members. The Religious School provides individualized plans for children with special needs to ensure that they are learning according to their needs.

- Congregation Rodeph Shalom (New York, NY)
  - Building, program, attitude
  - Congregation Rodeph Shalom has an elevator that provides direct access into their building. They also have large-print prayer books, devices for those with hearing loss, and a sign language interpreter on one Friday a month and at every *Shireinu* worship service for families with special needs. They also run an excellent special needs Shabbat, accessible holiday services, and exceptionally evolved multi-sensory programming.
  - Email [gro.cynsrc@sdeenlaiceps](mailto:gro.cynsrc@sdeenlaiceps) or 646-454-3124

## Acknowledgments

This resource guide would not have been possible without the direction and support of *Hineinu*. Special thanks to Deborah Berman, LCSW, and Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, whose guidance and insight were immeasurable. Thank you to Shelly Christensen for her vision and vast resources, including “the book” on inclusion.

What makes this guide so powerful was the true collaboration among the different movements and their commitment increasing inclusion for all people in the Jewish community. This collaboration could not have been possible without the diverse backgrounds and insights of the *Hineinu* leadership team, including Dave Feinman, Rabbi Michelle Greenfield, Richard Kammerman, Rabbi Jonah Layman, Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, Rabbi Edythe Mencher, and Daphne Price.

A final thank you goes to the communications staff of all the movements for their edits and permission, including Sean Thibault, Andrea Glick, and Wendy Univer.

Compiled by Raechel Banks, Eisendrath Legislative Assistant at the Religious Action of Reform Judaism.