



Facilitating Your Rosh Hodesh Group

As facilitator, you help the group develop its unique culture, one that promotes bonding, safety, free expression of ideas and feelings, and positive Jewish identity. You wear multiple hats—as coordinator, informal educator, role model, and process facilitator. Each of these important roles is explored below.

COORDINATION

You are the logistics coordinator. You determine the time and date of the meeting and arrange for the location and necessary supplies. You are responsible for communicating with both the girls and their parents. To encourage regular attendance, you can use phone calls, mail, and e-mail. (See the article “Starting and Nurturing a Group” for correspondence samples.) When making arrangements, confirm with parents before assuming you can proceed with your plan.

Make sure that both girls and parents are aware of the expectations of hosting. If the gathering is held in girls’ homes, the facilitator brings supplies, but the parents need to know the best place to set up for the group’s activities. For example, using nail polish to decorate a Miriam’s Cup for the seder requires a room with good ventilation! Other activities may require a kitchen, an open room for movement, a table for crafts, or space to present a skit.

We encourage you to delegate some coordination responsibilities to the girls. For example, whether meeting in an institutional or home setting, you might ask the designated Host Girl to contact the other members of the group to confirm their attendance at a gathering. Although supervising her may be more labor intensive than doing the task yourself, this approach promotes participants’ ownership of the group and develops their leadership skills. If you do delegate responsibility to a girl, make sure she is clear about her responsibility, the timeline, and your expectations for checking in, because her tasks are essential to the group’s success.

INFORMAL EDUCATION

Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing! gatherings create perfect opportunities for Jewish learning. With an experiential, participant-centered approach, learning happens through guided discovery, rather than didactic teaching.

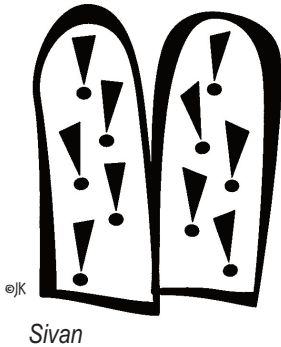
Dr. Joseph Reimer, an expert in Jewish identity and education, has outlined six characteristics of a great Jewish experiential learning program. A successful *Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing!* gathering reflects these traits:

1. The program is well prepared.
2. The participants feel comfort and trust.
3. Participants identify with the group and feel that they belong.

4. Participants feel challenged, stretched, and engaged in the experience.
5. Participants have time to reflect.
6. Participants have time to act.

Keep these principles in mind as you walk the group through the warm-up, the introductions and instructions, and the thoughtful processing of the girls' experience and insights. In your role as an informal educator, you create the opportunity for the intended life lessons to emerge naturally from participation in and processing of the shared activity. Far more effective than “the moral of the story” pronouncements, good questions can help the girls themselves draw the connections between Jewish values and the activity at hand. Through this process, you will set up and support an unfolding “aha” moment of self-discovery or new understanding that is revealed rather than imposed.

Don't be concerned if you are not a walking encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge and practice. The monthly gathering plans provide you with the background you need to be a resource to the girls. Facilitator's Resources are behind-the-scenes backgrounders and the Lev year *Essence Sheets* (also collected in this manual) are rich in Jewish lore. The activities themselves blend fun and personal exploration with the cycle of the Jewish calendar, toward a goal of enhanced self-esteem and a positive Jewish identity. Your role as facilitator is to model appreciation of diverse affiliations and your delight in the richness of our heritage.



BEING A ROLE MODEL

As facilitator, you are a role model for embracing the delights and difficulties of Jewish womanhood. Your words and actions speak volumes to the girls in your group. Modeling your ability to risk, question, share, laugh, empathize, and connect will inspire them to do the same. Valuing yourself while respecting others, speaking out yet being willing to listen, being honest about the struggles and joys of women today, seeking guidance from others and from your heritage as you find your own voice, always striving to learn and grow—these are at the heart of the life lessons which you can embody for the young women in your group.

THE ART OF GROUP FACILITATION

Be Prepared

Read and follow the instructions outlined in “Before the Gathering” well in advance. As you review the Gathering Plan, familiarize yourself not only with the step-by-step instructions, but also with the Life Lessons, so that you can comfortably solicit and affirm these learning goals, which are designed to emerge naturally from the activities. Arrive early to set up the gathering space and greet group members in a relaxed, unhurried state.

Be Authentic

Be yourself. You don't have to be "cool" for the girls to connect with you. You serve them best as a role model if you demonstrate comfort with who you are and an openness to discover who they are and what they can teach you. Being true to yourself and striving to be the best version of yourself will inspire the girls to do the same for their own evolving selves.

Be the Safety Net

Help the group establish and maintain ground rules that create a fun and safe environment. Empower group members to notice and self-correct behaviors that are not in keeping with the group's intentions. Sharing this responsibility demonstrates your belief in the group's competence—but be willing to step in if necessary to ensure that all members feel safe, valued, and included.

Be Attentive

Notice individual and group dynamics, attending to both content and feelings. Listen for the unvoiced concern and the unasked question. You may choose to share your observations—either within the group or privately, as appropriate to ensure the comfort and participation of all members.

Be Flexible

Monitor the group's receptivity and the pace of the gathering, and be willing to make adjustments if necessary. Be prepared to insert an "icebreaker" or respond to a timely issue of concern. Sometimes a discussion takes an unexpected yet valuable turn, providing an unplanned teachable moment. Don't miss this opportunity for the sake of your previous agenda; acknowledge the group's interest and adapt your goals accordingly.

Be Affirming

Be sure to use inclusive, supportive, non-biased language. Ask open-ended questions and respond honestly and without judgment. It's okay not to have all the answers; you can seek and provide them later. You, like the girls, are always growing and learning. You can be each other's teachers.

Don't impose your own views, but guide the group by the Jewish value of respect for self and others. Encourage all group members to participate in their own unique ways, and commend their efforts and insights.

Be Intentionally Inclusive

Be conscious of what you say and how you say it. Remember that not all girls are heterosexual, middle-class, Ashkenazic, from two-parent homes, daughters of two Jewish parents, college-bound, etc. Model and request the use of inclusive language (such as "partner" rather than "boyfriend"), and avoid generalizations (such as "Teenagers are..." or "Jews believe...").

When issues are being explored, ensure that a full spectrum of viewpoints is presented. Elicit or give voice to perspectives not initially offered by the

group (“Some people believe..., while others might say...”). Be aware of your body language and nonverbal cues. Encourage exchanges among group members, rather than dialogue between group members and you. You guide the group best when you aren’t controlling or even central to it.

Be Discreet

Group leaders report that they are sometimes caught off guard when asked to reveal their personal history. Your best judgment, personal style, and comfort level will determine how much of yourself you disclose. For example, if you are asked the age of your first sexual encounter, one response may be, “I’m glad you raised the topic for us. I’m open to discussing this topic, but not my own history. My decisions reflect my circumstances, values, and choices. You’ll need to assess those for yourself.” Or more simply, “I want to exercise my option to pass.” The girls also have the option of not telling all and will appreciate seeing how to say ‘no.’

Be Aware Of Teen Times Today

While the tasks of adolescent development are familiar, today’s realities are different from what you faced as a teen. Learn what you can about their world. Ask questions that demonstrate your interest, not your judgment. Read teen magazines, listen to teen music, and view popular movies, television shows, and web sites. Understanding the joys and challenges of your group will enable you to help them flourish. Acknowledge what you don’t know. The goal is not to modify your behavior for acceptance; your value to them is rooted in your openness, authenticity, and self-acceptance.

Be Self-Aware

Know your limitations and personal issues, and draw upon your strengths and talents. Learn to develop and trust your intuition when responding to group challenges. Reflect ahead of time on sensitive issues from your own adolescence that might be stimulated by group discussions. Prepare yourself for the unearthing of your emotional responses to common issues, such as popularity, relationships with parents, and performance anxiety. Your feelings are important assets that help you empathize with the girls.

Be Patient

Allow the time required for group comfort and cohesion to develop. Become comfortable with silence, providing time for the group to take responsibility for itself. Allow the girls to experience the gathering as their own. Nurture the group process, allowing it to unfold naturally.

Be Fun

Humor helps set a warm tone and reduces tension. The group experience should be an enjoyable one! Be willing to laugh at yourself and model your own ability to risk, learn, and have fun. Each gathering should include opportunity for playfulness (but, obviously, should never involve laughter at someone else’s expense).



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Be Prepared For Challenges

You will inevitably be called upon to respond to the challenges presented by the group as it evolves. The art and science of facilitation combine skill, intuition, and creativity to successfully guide the group process. Some typical difficult behaviors and suggested strategies for addressing them are listed here; more can be found on the group leaders' website.

One common challenge to the group is the monopolizer. She is long-winded and seems to desire endless attention. As facilitator, you must protect the group's time. This means assertively staying on schedule, even if it means cutting off the monopolizer directly by saying, "I am sorry to interrupt, but I want to be sure everyone gets a chance to speak." Sometimes it is necessary to gently coach the monopolizer and help her participate in the group more appropriately.

The flip side is the silent non-participant. You can employ strategies to encourage her participation. The quiet girl can be gently welcomed to speak about her craft project, to take her turn in the round robin, or to light the candle. You can invite her opinions or use pairs or small groups in which she might share more comfortably. Find out about her interests and talents that may be her opportunities to contribute to the group. Keep in mind that shyness may just be a personal style and is not necessarily a problem requiring intervention. Check in with the quiet girl to find out if this is the case.

Another challenging issue that arises in many groups is gossip (*lashon hara*). For example, the girls may share details of experiences that reflect badly on someone who isn't present. As facilitator, you are responsible for reminding the girls of their ground rules. "It's not in keeping with our group intention of respect to talk about someone who is not present to defend themselves. Instead of discussing specific people, let's talk about the issue and ways to handle it." Model warmth, caring, and assertive positive regard, and hold clear expectations that group members will speak and act kindly.

Sometimes the group seems to have great potential, but it is not going well because there is one girl who is consistently disruptive. You are encouraged to address the issue privately and directly with the girl involved, being very behavior-specific. For example, you might say, "I notice that you often have a negative reaction when activities are introduced, like rolling your eyes and making comments. It's hard to keep the group energy positive with that behavior. I need you to become a more positive participant in the group next month. I think you have a lot to offer." If the problem persists, the facilitator must be proactive on behalf of the whole group. It is OK, and sometimes necessary, to make the difficult decision to counsel the girl to leave the group.

Be aware that sometimes a disruptive group member actually expresses a larger group dissatisfaction or is meeting the group's unconscious need to be distracted from what is planned. You may need to consider what needs to be changed in order to more actively engage the group.

When you are concerned about a girl's serious emotional problem, it must be handled outside of the Rosh Hodesh session. It is your responsibility to identify a concern, move the group back to the gathering plan, and then to follow up with the individual and her family as appropriate. A response plan will vary depending on the issue and should be developed in consultation with your supervisor. It is likely that your institution can offer support and referrals to appropriate professional resources. It is your obligation to direct anyone at risk to a professional; it is not in the scope of your role as a *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* group leader to address serious problems yourself. Though Rosh Hodesh groups sometimes offer an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues, it is never appropriate to do a therapeutic intervention during a gathering.

Of course, girls in distress may share things with each other and not directly with you. Encourage a girl who may be concerned about a fellow group member to share her concerns with you, her parents, or other adults who can help.

Be assured that the most common challenge for groups is that they can become silly, giggly, loud, and chaotic. Guide, but don't squelch, this energy. Remember that playful energy is fun. Fun builds friendship and keeps the group strong. Facilitating the Rosh Hodesh group well will develop your ability to be both flexible and assertive.

If you are well prepared and attend to the group, watching for signs of engagement or impatience, the Rosh Hodesh group will thrive, and the girls will continue to astonish you with their insight, enthusiasm, and creativity.

Believe in the Group

Seek and celebrate what is special about your group. Get to know and appreciate each group member and help each participant recognize the value of her contributions. Convey your enthusiasm and confidence in the group's ability to support each other, have fun, and grow. Your positive attitude and your respect for the girls set a tone for the group that becomes self-fulfilling.

We hope that you enjoy the many hats a *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* facilitator wears—coordinator, informal educator, role model, and process facilitator. Of course, the most important "hat" you wear is your own. The spirit, dedication, and fun that you bring to the group are what make it a cherished experience for everyone.

Portions of this introduction to facilitating your group are adapted from "Rosh Hodesh Group Leadership" by Merle Berman, in Sourcebook for Leaders (Philadelphia: Moving Traditions, 2001, 2006) 30-35.