

Jewish Students' Affinity Space: A Guide to Building a Supportive, Empowering Community

Affinity Space Vision and Goal

GOAL: To build a supportive network for Jewish-identifying students rooted in mutual respect, empathy, and shared experiences. This space will help participants feel more connected, empowered, and confident in expressing and celebrating their Jewish identity in their schools and communities.

1. Getting Started: Setting Up the Affinity Space

Step 1: Identify and Invite Participants

- School Outreach: Reach out to local schools, student groups, and community organizations to identify and invite Jewish-identifying students interested in joining a supportive network.
- Online and In-Person Options: Create options for both virtual and in-person gatherings to ensure accessibility for students from different schools and locations.
- Focus on Diversity: Encourage students from varied backgrounds, levels of Jewish observance, and schools to join for a richer, more inclusive community.

Step 2: Establish a Central Location

- Physical Space: If possible, designate a central location such as a community center, synagogue, or library to host in-person meetings. Ensure the space is comfortable, welcoming, and conducive to open conversation.
- Virtual Platform: Choose a secure, accessible online platform (like Zoom or Google Meet) for virtual meetings, and a messaging platform (like Slack, Discord, or a private social media group) for ongoing communication.

Step 3: Set Up Leadership and Facilitation Roles

- Adult Advisors: Identify one or two trusted adult advisors (e.g., teachers, counselors, or community leaders) to provide guidance, facilitate discussions, and ensure a safe and respectful environment.
- Student Leaders**: Encourage students to take on leadership roles (e.g., as co-facilitators or resource managers) to help them develop ownership and peer support within the group.

2. Running the Affinity Space: Structure and Guidelines

Guidelines for Safety and Respect

- Community Agreements: At the start, work with participants to create agreements around respect, confidentiality, empathy, and kindness.
- Expectations: Emphasize active listening, allowing everyone to share, and being mindful of diverse perspectives. Create a no-judgment space where students feel free to express themselves.

Session Structure

- Monthly Meetings: Host monthly gatherings to allow time for meaningful discussions and activities. Each session can include:
 - Opening Circle: Begin with a check-in or “rose and thorn” (a high and low from each participant) to build connection and warmth.
 - Themed Discussion: Focus each meeting on a specific theme relevant to Jewish identity (e.g., holidays, culture, antisemitism, Jewish values).
 - Resource Sharing: Dedicate time for students to share resources like books, articles, or media that inspire or resonate with them.
 - Closing Circle: End with a gratitude or reflection round, allowing each student to share something they valued from the session.

Ongoing Virtual Engagement

- Private Online Community: Set up a private group where participants can share reflections, ask for support, and celebrate Jewish events together.
- Weekly Discussion Prompts: Post optional prompts or questions weekly to keep students engaged and provide continued opportunities for reflection and connection.

3. Activities and Topics to Build Connection and Empowerment

Discussion Topics

- Celebrating Identity: What are the aspects of being Jewish that bring you pride? What traditions or values are most meaningful to you?
- Navigating Challenges: How do you navigate your Jewish identity in school? Discuss experiences, challenges, and solutions.
- Supporting Each Other: Brainstorm ways to support one another, such as advocating for Jewish holidays in school schedules, educating peers about Judaism, or combating stereotypes.

Activities to Encourage Expression and Connection

- Story Sharing: Invite students to share stories of their Jewish identity, family traditions, or experiences of resilience.
- Creative Projects: Plan activities like creating artwork inspired by Jewish themes, making a recipe book of family favorites, or journaling about identity.
- Role Play and Problem Solving: Use role-playing to practice responses to difficult situations like encountering misinformation or antisemitism, helping students feel prepared and confident.

Virtual Connection Idea

- ****Jewish Heritage Week****: Organize a week for students to post about their favorite parts of their heritage—family stories, music, foods, or holidays—on the online group.
- Buddy System: Create a buddy system where students are paired up to check in with one another monthly or around Jewish holidays for extra support.

4. Building Sustainability and Growth

Reflection and Feedback

- Regular Feedback: After each session, provide opportunities for participants to give feedback on what they enjoyed, what could improve, and topics they want to explore.
- Annual Retreat or Event: Plan an annual in-person or virtual retreat where members from different schools can come together to celebrate, learn, and strengthen connections.

Resources and Future Opportunities

- Resource Bank: Maintain a shared online document with books, articles, and contacts shared by members.
- Expand and Grow: As the space gains momentum, consider opening it to more Jewish students or creating sub-groups for specific interests (e.g., cultural groups, advocacy teams, holiday planning committees).

****Final Note**:** This affinity space is about building a lasting, resilient community where Jewish students can connect deeply, celebrate openly, and support one another. By keeping the space welcoming, intentional, and responsive to students' needs, you'll create a safe and meaningful network for Jewish-identifying students to grow and thrive together.