

Top tips for hosting a Pride Shabbat

Shabbat is an opportunity to rest and reflect without the distractions of the rest of the week. It is one of the most important aspects of Jewish faith and life. In recent years, many organisations have used this day of reflection to draw attention to subjects and causes that don't normally get spoken about, such as Jewish Women's Aid's Shabbat, and Jami's Mental Health Shabbat.

Many communities across the world have started hosting annual Pride Shabbats to celebrate their LGBT+ members. At KeshetUK, we often get questions from synagogue communities who want to host their own Pride Shabbat but aren't quite sure where to begin. This resource is meant to serve as a guide to some considerations that may help you in planning a new Pride Shabbat event for your community.

The following is by no means a comprehensive list of things to consider, and each community will know best which kind of event best suits them. However, we hope this serves as a useful starting point as you begin to plan your Pride Shabbat.

What is your purpose in holding a Pride Shabbat?

While on the face of it, this may seem like a silly question, understanding and clearly stating the reason you want to hold a Pride Shabbat can help shape what the event looks like. Are you trying to create space to celebrate your LGBT+ members and their contributions to the community? Or do you want to affirm and show to prospective members your community's values? Or perhaps you want to use Pride Shabbat as an opportunity to do education about LGBT+ history. The type of event you hold will be very different depending on your purpose.



Further, when it comes to organising the Shabbat and advertising it to your community, having a real clarity of purpose will make things significantly easier. This is true of any event or activity, but is especially crucial when the event is centred around key aspects of people's identities. Understanding your purpose helps you to explain the 'Why?' to members of your community and avoid any potential harmful moments.

Who is involved in the event?

As with any event focused on LGBT+ people, it is important to think about who is involved with organising the event and who will be speaking at the event to ensure LGBT+ people are represented at each stage of the process. That being said, it is never advisable to make out LGBT+ members feel singled out or pressured to take part in a Pride Shabbat simply due to their identity; it is much better to create opportunities.

It may be the case that your community has no out LGBT+ members, but you would still like to put on a Pride Shabbat. In that case, it is important to think of how else you can centre LGBT+ voices. Partnering with LGBT+ organisations to send a speaker or materials is one option. Perhaps there is an LGBT+ charity or social group in your local area who would like to join you for the event. Alternatively, you may decide to showcase some art, cinema, poetry, or writing by or for LGBT+ people. When bringing in external speakers be sure to vet them and ensure they are someone who speaks for LGBT+ people, not simply about them. There are a number of people who present themselves as experts on LGBT+ topics who make LGBT+ feel unsafe.

When will you hold your event?

Communities across the UK hold their Pride Shabbat on different days. Some prefer to have it tied to a specific parasha, while others prefer to have it always in the same week of Pride Month. This choice is just down to the preference of your community. However, if you do decide to keep it in line with a specific parasha, it is important to consider the themes of that portion and how they may impact the kinds of conversations you want to have at your Shabbat. Parashat Balak is often close to or in Pride Month and has interesting themes around who is allowed to speak, and the importance of issuing blessings, not curses.

How are you educating the community?

Many individuals get in touch when they are planning an LGBT+ focused event because they are worried that they will alienate other members of the community. Doing community education can remove a significant amount of this risk. Taking the time to educate your members on the reasoning behind doing a Pride Shabbat can help them to understand the importance, as well as addressing their fears, concerns, and confusions early.

Opening up space for questions can also address people's concerns. Often, people just want to feel like their opinions are heard and valued. While not everyone will be able to have their preferred outcome in any community activity, providing an opportunity for people to ask questions or provide comments can help a Pride Shabbat run smoothly.

If you need support with community education, KeshetUK has a training menu for communities to support you. Contact us for more information or to book a session on info@keshetuk.org.

What activities could your Pride Shabbat include?

Still unsure where to start? Or looking for some inspiration? The following is a list of some of the types of activities you can consider when planning your Pride Shabbat:

- 1. Special Shabbat Service:** Conduct a Shabbat service with LGBT+ inclusive prayers, readings, and rituals that acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of the community.
- 2. Inclusive Torah Readings:** Select Torah portions that highlight themes of inclusivity, acceptance, and diversity, and have community members participate in the readings.
- 3. Educational Workshops:** Organise workshops that explore LGBT+ history, terminology, or contemporary issues.
- 4. Guest Speakers:** Invite LGBT+ community leaders, or scholars to speak about their experiences, share insights, and discuss the importance of LGBT+ inclusion within the Jewish community.
- 5. Panel Discussions:** Host panel discussions featuring a diverse group of individuals discussing topics related to LGBT+ identity, Judaism, and social justice.
- 6. Artistic Expressions:** Showcase artistic performances, such as music, dance, poetry, or visual art, that express the experiences and creativity of LGBT+ individuals within the community.
- 7. Storytelling Sessions:** Provide a platform for members of the LGBT+ community to share their personal stories. This can create a sense of connection and understanding within the community.
- 8. Symbolic Rituals:** Incorporate symbolic rituals that reflect the theme of Pride Shabbat, such as the lighting of rainbow-colored candles or the use of LGBT+-inclusive blessings.
- 9. Resource Fair:** Set up a resource fair featuring LGBT+ organisations, support groups, and informational booths to provide community members with valuable resources and connections.
- 10. Community Mitzvah Project:** Organise a community service project or charitable activity that supports LGBT+ causes or organisations.

Pride Shabbat should be an opportunity to pause and acknowledge your community's LGBT+ voices and their contributions. It should be an enjoyable experience that you and your community members look forward to each year. We hope this guide has helped you in identifying some of the things to keep in mind and potential activities when planning your event.

If you have further questions, please contact info@keshetuk.org