



Part B: The Role of Allies

Core Lesson/Group Activity (or Opening Activity)

1. What Does It Mean to Be an Ally?

Description: This activity begins with a short text study of Talmudic teachings about communal responsibility. Students then explore together the role of an “ally” in creating change. Students are asked to recall moments when they stood up for someone else or when someone stood up for them and to use their experiences to examine what it means to be an effective ally to someone. You can follow the entire lesson plan, or choose portions to do with your students.

Time: 30 – 45 minutes

(the time required depends on how many portions of this lesson plan you choose to do)

Recommended Age Range: grades 7 – 12

Objectives:

- Examine Jewish texts that ask us to be socially responsible for ourselves and others.
- Define the word “ally” as it relates to social change and individual actions.
- Examine what it means to be an ally to others.

Materials:

- Board or easel and paper
- Chalk or markers
- Optional (for a longer time period): “Making It Real” worksheet



Suggested Film Clips:

| Title | Length |
|--------------------|--------|
| The Job of an Ally | 0:37 |
| Rainbow Keychain | 2:05 |

Instructions:

1. Read the following passages from the Talmud to participants and ask them to discuss the meaning of these teachings. (You may also want to write them on the board or hand them out to participants and ask a volunteer to read each one aloud for the group.)

Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh – כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה

All Israel is responsible one for the other.

—SHAVUOT 39A

Share with participants that the rabbis of the Talmud understood this statement to be part of our larger covenant with God in receiving the Torah. It teaches us that we are all responsible for each other’s well being. This *mitzvah* implores us to stand up *for* one another, but also to stand up *to* one another when we see wrong being done. The word *arevim* in Hebrew has a stronger meaning than responsibility. It tells us that if we do not stand up when we see others doing wrong it is as though we have committed the act ourselves.



The great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Hillel, said:

אם אין אני לי מי לי. וכשאני לעצמי מה אני. ואם לא עכשיר אימתי.

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

How is standing up for ourselves related to standing up for others?

2. Write the word ALLY on the board or easel paper in large print and ask participants to brainstorm for two or three minutes all the words that come to mind when they read the word.
3. Record their responses in a “cloud” or circle around the word ALLY. Ask the participants to look at the words they have come up with and discuss how these words are related. Use these words and ideas to create a collective working definition for the word ALLY.
4. Now ask participants to think of a time when they stood up for someone else or a time when someone else stood up for them. How did this make them feel? Ask them to write down the challenges and benefits of being in that situation on a piece of paper that they will then share with a partner. You can give examples such as:
 - “I told someone to stop making fun of another person.”
 - “A challenge was that I was afraid the person would turn his anger toward me.”
 - “A benefit was that I felt good about myself for doing what I thought was right.”
5. Have participants pair up to share their responses with someone else.
6. Ask for volunteers to report back the challenges and benefits of sticking up for someone and/or of having someone stick up for you.
7. Record the responses on the board in two pairs of columns – the challenges and benefits of being an ally and the challenges and benefits of having someone be an ally to you.
8. Ask participants to discuss what they notice from their responses. The following questions might be helpful prompts:
 - a. Is it easier or harder to be an ally or to have someone be an ally to you?
 - b. What makes someone a good ally?
 - c. In what kinds of situations is it easier or harder to be an ally? Does it matter who else is present? Whether you’re interacting with friends or strangers?
9. If you are using this as a longer activity, you can expand the lesson by leading the role-playing game “FREEZE.” First have participants take five minutes to brainstorm some scenarios that would require someone to be an ally to another person. (They can use the situations they described earlier or offer new ones.)
10. Now have a few volunteers act out a scenario. During the role play, any one of the players can call out “FREEZE!” at any time to freeze the action of the role play. The person who calls out “FREEZE” then chooses someone else in the class to replace him or her. The new person joins the scenario so that he/she can take it in a different direction. After the group has acted out a few scenarios in this fashion, discuss the different choices each person made.
11. Close the activity by going around the room and asking participants to share if and how the activity has given them new understanding of what it means to be an ally. Ask participants to fill out the “Making It Real” sheet with commitments to take new steps toward creating change in their community.

Making It Real

One way I can be an ally to others at my school or in my community is...

One step I can take to make my school or community more welcoming to all students is...