

Favorite Chavurah Tips

1. Pick a Representative.

Pick one or two people who will be the representatives of your Chavurah so the Temple or others know whom to contact for information. These people do not have any more “power” than anyone else in your Chavurah, but are willing to commit to the work of communications for the group. These roles should change from year to year so that everyone has the opportunity to serve as representative.

2. Communicate.

Decide as a group how to best communicate with each other...phone, email or postal mail.

3. Goals.

Decide what your general goals will be and what you want to do, based on a combination of social activities, Jewish issues, holiday celebrations, etc. Try and reach a consensus, which satisfies the majority of people.

4. Schedule.

Plan a monthly schedule at least 6 months in advance – a year of planning (at least dates) is ideal! Include dates, who is responsible for hosting, location and program ideas if possible. Send out a copy of the schedule to each member.

5. Plan.

Each member agrees to coordinate and host an event. They are then responsible for reminders, as the time gets closer. Fulfill your commitment to each other by doing your share.

6. Attend.

Attend regularly – make it a priority. Work together to make the gatherings something you look forward to.

*BE REALISTIC IN YOUR EXPECTATIONS and recognize the dynamics of your own Chavurah. Some groups will become *real* extended families; others will develop *some* close friendships within the group but share a common bond with everyone and enjoy a variety of experiences together. Others will be united in their dedication to a common focus like community service or Judaic study. Don't compare yourselves but strive for the elements which make your Chavurah special to you...with the following exceptions:

What everyone in each Chavurah should have in common is a desire to strengthen your Jewish ties and those of your family, to enrich yourself Jewishly, to feel connected with other Temple members and to enjoy!

Chavurah Program Ideas

Tikkun Olam: As Jews it is our responsibility to care for each other, our community, the greater community and the world.

Volunteer as a group for a Temple program: Chanukah, Purim, Passover, High Holy Days...host a Friday night Oneg.

As a group, make a commitment to volunteer for a service organization (Habitat for Humanity, Eastern Illinois Food Bank, Cancer Walk, etc.)

Discussions: Chavurot are often frustrated by the futility of small talk. In an effort to get people to reveal themselves a bit, and to encourage discussion of personal values and experiences, these topics are sure to work. Try going round the room asking people to complete unfinished sentences. For example:

- My most significant book, poem, play or person...
- My most memorable Jewish moment...
- If I won ten million dollars in the lottery I would...
- A good Jew is one who...
- I hope my children remember me as
- The Jewish Community's most pressing problem is...

Learning all year long...some ideas to get you started:

Comparative religions

How other Jews Practice

What Judaism says about...(any social issue)

Discuss a book everyone agrees to read

Jewish history, customs, life cycle events...

Invite clergy or someone of interest to speak to your group

Other activities:

As has already been stated – the sky's the limit!

- Camping
- Picnics
- Movies
- Museums
- Day Trips
- Meals together
- Bowling
- Skating
- Concerts
- Political activities

Celebrating Holidays Together:

Shabbat: Have dinner together either at Temple or in homes.

Havdallah: Having a gathering on a Saturday evening? Start it with the Havdallah service. It's a beautiful and simple service marking the end of Shabbat. You can get a copy of the service from the Temple.

High Holidays: Have dinner at someone's home on Rosh Hashanah or break the Yom Kippur fast together. Attend services as a group.

Hanukkah: This is a wonderful time for a party – with or without children! It is also the perfect time for discussion. Hanukkah always raises issues: explaining the secular Christmas to a Jewish child, negotiating both Hanukkah and Christmas in an interfaith household, feelings of being outside the mainstream culture, materialism...you get the idea!

Tu B' Shevat: The New Year of Trees falls in late January or early February. It's a great time to plant...maybe as a group, rotate each year at a different member's home and over the years, the Chavurah will enjoy seeing the tangible evidence of its growth.

Purim: Join together in the mitzvot of giving *Shalach Manot* (gifts of food to friends and neighbors). Prepare packages of treats together and then deliver them yourselves. Volunteer at or attend the Temple megillah reading and Purim Shpiel.

Passover: If some or all of your Chavurah have no other family in town, join together for first night Seder. Gathering any of the other nights or attending the Temple Community Seder together on the second night is also a great way to connect. Share the responsibilities for cooking and parts of the Seder...have the kids do the story in a play.

Yom Ha'shoah: Holocaust Memorial Day can be observed by having a special service as a group or attending the Temple observance. Another idea is watching an appropriate movie with discussion in someone's home.

Shavuot: Attend services and join the community in celebrating the consecration of the Confirmation class.

Becoming an Extended Family:

Hanukat Habayit (Dedication of the Home): When a member moves into a new home, have everyone bring both food and a special wish for the new homeowners. Be together to hang a mezuzah and bless the new house.

Making a Donation: giving tzedakah or host an Oneg at the Temple on behalf of the Chavurah can be done to honor any special simcha or to memorialize a loss. Times to make donations include: births, graduations, retirements, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, recovery from illness, deaths, yahrzeits, etc.

Shiva & Meal Preparations: Be there for each other during times of family loss. Have the Chavurah assume responsibility for meals during Shiva and sit Shiva with the family.

Bar & Bat Mitzvah: When a member celebrates a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, have the whole Chavurah in attendance on Friday night and host the Oneg.

Long Term Program Planning for Chavurot

1. Plan:

Hold program planning meetings at a minimum of at least every 6 months...planning for a year is great, though usually easier after the first year.

Divide up the responsibilities for this planning meeting: who is taking notes, who will send out the final schedule to all members, refreshments, facilitating the meeting, etc.

Remind all members in advance to bring personal calendars to this meeting.

2. Brainstorm:

Brainstorm possible programs. Consider a combination of social, educational, cultural, community service and religious events (check the ideas list in this booklet and add to it). Reach consensus on the balance between family and adult only activities. Clarify again some of your goals as a group.

3. Schedule:

Schedule your dates. Some Chavurot find that a specific time in the month (e.g. every 3rd weekend) works best for the most commitment. Other groups handpick dates per the groups calendars. Finding what works for your group is essential for best turn out...trial and error in the first couple planning sessions may be necessary for long term success.

Decide who will have responsibility for each program calendared. This can be done alphabetically by last names, or by interest in a specific program. If some change is needed, it is the responsibility of the individual in charge of that event to switch dates with someone else or find a replacement host. *Be sure to notify everyone of the change.*

4. Food:

Decide how you want to handle food: potluck each time, host provides refreshments or others supply food when not hosting?

When you send out the copy of the finalized schedule to each member of the Chavurah, include an up-to-date roster and directions to each home or venue (if needed). You may also wish to include a list of members' birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

Check in with the group on occasion. Are the programs meeting everyone's needs and desires for the Chavurah?

Commit to participating regularly!! It really is the only way for the group to deepen the bonds between members for long-term success. And have fun!