

Shavuot:

Kindness Connects Us

Educator's Guide

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators (PCJE) is working on a new initiative to integrate Social-Emotional Learning into the Pardes Mahloket Matters curriculum for constructive conflict resolution. Our aim is to equip students with the competencies and resources they need to navigate today's world, and to support them in transforming challenges into opportunities for growth, connection, understanding, and creative problem-solving. From self-awareness to social responsibility, we are enacting *tikkun olam* from the inside out with a combination of traditional Jewish text study and SEL tools.

This interactive, Zoom-friendly lesson (with accompanying slides) is designed for teachers to use with students in 4th-6th grade as we approach *Shavuot*. Celebrating the gift of the Torah as a source of tremendous wisdom in our lives, we explore a different, nuanced understanding of the "golden rule," *V'ahavta L'reacha Kamocho*.

We hope that students will feel empowered and inspired to care for themselves and others through kindness, appreciating that those acts, whether large or small, impact us all since we are all interconnected. Every simple act can initiate a kindness chain with huge ripple effects; it all begins with how we treat ourselves and one another.

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CLICK HERE
to access
shareable
slides



Enduring Understandings

- The Torah makes a connection between the way I treat myself and the way I treat others.
- Each person has the power to change the world for the better through small acts of kindness that cause a chain reaction.

Essential Questions

- How does the phrase **ואהבת לרעך כמוך** (Leviticus 19:18) reflect Jewish values regarding the relationship that we have with ourselves and others?
- What does it mean to be kind to myself?
- How do acts of kindness impact myself and others?

Grade Level: 4th–6th grade

Duration: 50 minutes

Materials:

- Party hat for teacher (optional)
 - 5 blank pieces of paper/student
 - 1 marker/student
 - 1 pen/student
 - Mirror (optional)
-



Note to Educator

The question-answer and discussion formats that feature so prominently in typical classroom settings can be challenging to facilitate in online learning. Here are a few suggestions that may be implemented at the teacher's discretion throughout this online lesson:

1. Teacher calls on individual students to share their answers while muting other students who were not called on to answer.
2. Teacher instructs students to answer the question in the group chat.
3. Teacher instructs all students in advance that they will need several blank pieces of paper and a marker for this lesson. During the lesson, the teacher instructs the students that they should write their answers to a question in marker on a blank piece of paper. At the teacher's signal, all of the students will hold up their papers to the camera so that students can read their classmates' answers.
4. Breakout rooms for small group work; a representative from each group shares the group's work with the whole class.
5. To encourage active listening skills, teacher and/or students may introduce specific motions that enable students to silently and appropriately react after a classmate has made a comment. This is a way to help students stay attentive and engaged, and show that they care about what others are saying. For example, students point to themselves to indicate "I had the same thought!" or students give a thumbs-up to indicate "I like that idea!"



Celebrating the Torah (5–7min)

Slides 1–3

What kinds of things do you think deserve to be celebrated?



Activity "Celebrate!"

Teacher asks students to think of the thing that makes them most excited to celebrate and to take the next 5–10 seconds to make their best "celebration face" or to do a "celebration dance." Teacher should have some sound or visual to indicate when time is up.



Note to Educator

Teacher may generate student curiosity by appearing on screen at the very beginning of the lesson wearing a birthday hat or having created some sort of “party” background.

On the holiday of *Shavuot*, we celebrate the fact that God gave the Torah to the Jewish people.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think that getting the Torah is a reason to celebrate?
2. Let’s imagine there was no Torah for the Jewish people, what difference would it make? What might you miss?

We’ve talked a lot *about* the Torah, but now let’s take a deep dive *into* the Torah! What does it say inside that makes it so important?



2

V’ahavta L’reacha Kamocha: 2 Interpretations (12–15min)

Slides 4–13

How many words do you think are in the whole Torah? There are 79,847 words in the Torah (this calculation is based on the Even Shoshan concordance). Of those 79,847 words, Rabbi Akiva (2nd Century CE, Land of Israel) highlights **3 words** in the entire Torah that he considers to be the most important of all!

תלמוד ירושלמי נדרים ט:ד
 “ואהבת לרעך כמוך”
 (ויקרא יט:יח) - ר' עקיבא אומר
 זהו כלל גדול בתורה.

Talmud Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4

Rabbi Akiva taught - “**Love your neighbor as yourself.**” (Leviticus 19:18) This is the most important rule in the Torah.



Activity “Considering the Text”

Write down the words **ואהבת לרעך כמוך** on your own paper. Underline the word that you think is most important. Read these three words to yourself. Who wants to read these words out loud and with dramatic emphasis to the whole class?



Activity “Living the Text”

Please write or draw an instance where you or someone you know put **ואהבת לרעך כמוך** into action.

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Your examples all have one thing in common; they relate to how a person treats OTHERS. And that makes good sense because the most common way to interpret the phrase **ואהבת לרעך כמוך** is as a COMMAND, which specifies our obligation to treat OTHERS as we would want to be treated.



ואהבת לרעך כמוך =
Love your neighbor as [you love] yourself

But there is also another way to interpret this phrase. Rather than a command, this phrase can be understood as a DESCRIPTION of the way people tend to behave. The Torah is teaching us that there is often a relationship between how I treat myself and how I treat other people.

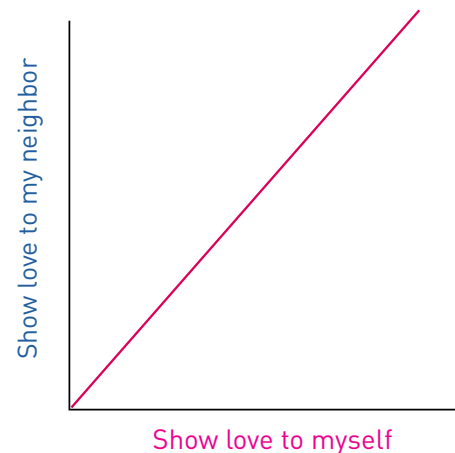


Love for myself

Love for my neighbor

ואהבת לרעך כמוך =
You love your neighbor *to the degree* that you love yourself

In other words, the Torah is telling me that if I **show love to myself** then I am going to be more capable of **showing love to my neighbor**. And if my needs are taken care of (ie. **show love to myself**) then I'm more likely to notice what other people need and to help them (ie. **show love for my neighbor**).



Let's test out this idea on ourselves. Is it true that in our own lives we tend to help out others more when our own needs are met?



Activity “Fist-Five Poll”

You are going to vote with your fist on a 0–5 scale. A closed fist = 0, and you will raise the corresponding number of fingers to vote 1–5. A closed fist means that you completely disagree and 5 fingers means that you completely agree. Get those fists up and ready to vote!

- If I get a good night of sleep, I will probably be more friendly the next day.
- If I had a bad day at school, I am more likely to be forgiving when my sibling gets on my nerves.
- When I am not hungry, I am more likely to share my snack with a friend.
- If I can't go outside and play, I am more likely to help out around the house.



Note to Educator

When explaining how the Fist-Five Poll activity works, the teacher may want to give an example about themselves that illustrates that 1 finger means mostly disagree and 4 fingers means mostly agree.

Based on your own votes, it seems people really are much more likely to be kind and thoughtful to others when they've got what they need and are feeling good about themselves.

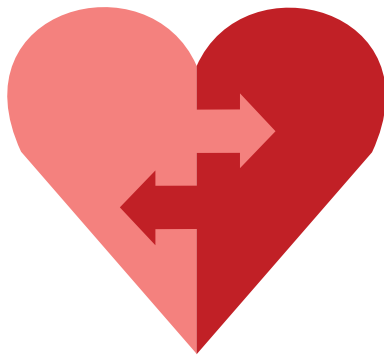
Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think that a person who treats themselves with kindness is in a better position to treat someone else with kindness? For example, why did you vote that you are more likely to share your snack with a friend if you're not hungry?
2. What could it mean to show love or kindness to yourself?
3. What are some ways that you have treated yourself with kindness in the last month?



Note to Educator

An important takeaway from the poll and the ensuing conversation is that it is a lot easier to help someone else when my own needs have been met. So if I take care of myself then I will be in a much better position to notice if somebody else needs something and much more likely to extend a helping hand.



The funny thing is that sometimes caring for ourselves and caring for others happens simultaneously! For example, the kindness that I show my neighbor makes my neighbor feel good. At the same time, it makes ME feel good to know that I helped out my neighbor. So “feel good” vibes travel back and forth between me and my neighbor. Now my neighbor and I are **CONNECTED** through that initial act of kindness, and we have **BOTH** benefited from it!

Let’s check out [this video](#) (2:15 length) for scientific findings about the effects of kindness. As you watch the video, think about the question, ‘what makes an act of kindness so powerful?’

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, what makes an act of kindness so powerful?
2. Can you think of one random act of kindness that someone has done for you in the last 2 months? How did it make you feel?
3. Can you think of one random act of kindness that you did for someone else in the last 2 months? How did it make you feel?



Note for Educator

New ideas raised in this video:

- There is scientific evidence that performing one random act of kindness every day enhances your health.
- Kindness not only benefits the person committing the act and the person receiving it, but all those who *witness* the act of kindness will be positively impacted too. Those witnesses will be inspired to be kind to others, thereby furthering the “chain reaction” of kindness.

Key terms and quotes from the video:

- “It all starts with just one person: you. The thing about kindness is that it’s just about the only thing in the world that doubles when you share it.” (0:23–0:32)
- “Those random acts of kindness can start a chain reaction...” (1:51–1:55)
- “pay it forward” (2:15)

As we saw in the video, kindness “starts with one!” So every single one of us is going to practice some kindness right here, right now.

Since the most basic way to bring kindness into the world is to start by being kind to **ourselves**, let’s start there.



Activity “Self-Talk”

Teacher acknowledges that this activity might feel a little awkward, but it can be fun and rewarding too. This activity helps us practice thinking and saying nice things about ourselves to ourselves. It’s really important to notice the good things about ourselves, because it makes us feel good. And if we feel good then we are more likely to be kind to ourselves and to others.

Teacher explains the activity and will model it by going first and then it will be the students’ turn. Students will be asked to think about 1–2 things that they appreciate about themselves. While on the zoom mute setting, students will be given 5–10 seconds to say out loud what they appreciate about themselves, though each student will only hear themselves. Students are welcome to compliment themselves while looking in the mirror if they’d like. Teacher should have some sound or visual to indicate when time is up.



Activity “Together-Talk”

Teacher and/or class chooses a positive phrase that everyone says out loud at the same time (NOT on mute zoom setting) accompanied by some form of appropriate body language. For example, all students say “I’m awesome” while giving themselves a high-five, pat on the back, etc.



Activity “Contagious Compliments”

Let’s use the positive energy we got from being kind to ourselves and spread it to our **classmates**.

The teacher asks a student to share something they appreciate about someone else in the class. The student who received the compliment then chooses a classmate who has not yet been complimented and so on, until everyone has received a compliment. The teacher should make sure that all students in the class have received a compliment from a classmate.



Note to Educator

Teachers may prefer to use the “Contagious Compliments” activity as a closing for this lesson or as an opening for the next lesson.



Activity “Family Fun”

Let’s take advantage of the fact that we’re all at home by spreading kindness to someone in our **family**.

Teacher instructs students that they have 1 minute to surprise someone in their family right now with a small act of kindness. Teacher can choose a fun [classroom timer](#) to indicate when time is up. The teacher may want to suggest some ideas like hugging a parent, feeding the goldfish, cleaning up some toys. When the minute is up, teacher asks a few students to share their small act of kindness and the recipient’s reaction with the whole class.

Reflection: How did it feel to express something kind about yourself? How did it feel to do something kind for someone else?



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Making a Habit of Kindness (10min)

Slides 20–23

In honor of *Shavuot*, the holiday that celebrates receiving the Torah, we learned and practiced putting into action the words in the Torah that Rabbi Akiva believed were most important of all - **ואהבת לרעך כמוך**.

And since the idea of **ואהבת לרעך כמוך** is SO important, do we want to practice kindness just one day of the year? Of course not! We want kindness, to ourselves and to others, to become a habit as natural to us as brushing our teeth in the morning. How can we make kindness a habit?



Activity “Kindness Commitments”

We are going to make some kindness commitments to ourselves and to others. Let’s challenge ourselves to stick to them for one week. When the week is up, we’ll reflect on how it felt to keep the kindness commitments for that amount of time.

Take a moment to think about how you've been showing kindness to **yourself** lately, and how you want to do it better. Take a moment to think about how you've been showing kindness to **others** lately, and how you want to do it better.

Now copy the sentences below on a piece of paper and fill in the blanks with your commitments.

I commit to showing kindness to *Myself* for one week by _____ every day.

I commit to showing kindness to *Others* for one week by _____ every day.

Beneath the sentences draw a chart to keep track of your commitment each day of the week. Choose a symbol (like a ✓ or a 😊) to indicate each day that you kept your kindness commitment.

Here is an example of how your Kindness Commitment Sheet might look:

I COMMIT TO SHOWING KINDNESS TO MYSELF FOR ONE WEEK BY EATING SOMETHING HEALTHY EVERY DAY.

I COMMIT TO SHOWING KINDNESS TO OTHERS FOR ONE WEEK BY GIVING MY MOM A HUG EVERY DAY.

	Kindness to Myself	Kindness to Others
Sunday	😊	😊
Monday	😊	😊
Tuesday	😊	😊
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

NAME _____

I COMMIT TO SHOWING KINDNESS TO MYSELF FOR ONE WEEK BY _____ EVERY DAY.

I COMMIT TO SHOWING KINDNESS TO OTHERS FOR ONE WEEK BY _____ EVERY DAY.

	Kindness to Myself	Kindness to Others
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Hang the piece of paper somewhere you can see it (e.g. in your room, on the fridge, as your computer background). Keep track of your commitments every day. At the end of one week, we will come together and share how it went.

***Bonus Kindness Challenge

You can also come up with an out-of-ordinary, creative, random act of kindness towards someone in your family or community to do this week. Take a photo of the kind act and email it to your teacher who can make it into a slideshow to share with the whole class.



Teacher concludes the lesson by asking if anyone would like to share a kindness commitment that they have made for the week. Teacher should have a Kindness Commitment of their own ready to share as well.



Note to Educator

The teacher should follow up with students about their Kindness Commitments, either individually or as a group. The teacher should consider how public or private the follow up is meant to be when deciding which particular format students should use for their Kindness Commitments (eg. piece of paper, journal, googledoc, etc.).



Additional Resource


Slide 24

[Kid President - How to Change the World](#) (video, 3:43 length)

In this difficult time of global pandemic, many of our students want to help but it's daunting to figure out how to help in the face of such a massive challenge. However, as Kid President says in this funny and inspiring video, "The world is changed by ordinary people. Little people living out big love!"

This is a great video to generate conversation about how we can support each other in difficult times as well as what types of behaviors and attitudes are not helpful.

* PCJE would love to hear your feedback as we continue to develop Mahloket Matters/SEL materials. Please feel free to email Sefi Kraut at sefik@pardes.org.il with feedback, kindness photos, zoom screenshots, etc.



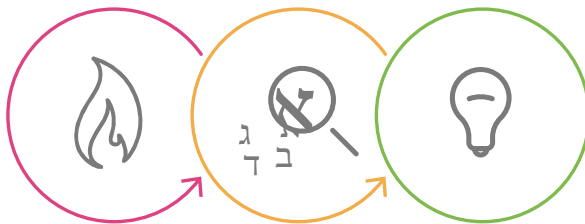
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