

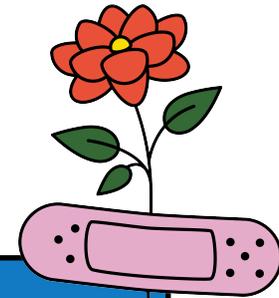
Unbending All of Us

The foremost example of hospitality in the Torah is that of Abraham and Sarah welcoming strangers to their home, which we can understand as an act of service to their community. While so many of us are grateful to be part of a community where our needs are met, there are Jews with physical, developmental, emotional, intellectual, mental health, and other needs who do not experience the same opportunities to participate in the richness of Jewish life.

When we think about what it means to express the Jewish value of community, some of us find ourselves needing to “bend” to spaces and systems that aren’t designed for us. In this way, we might interpret the blessing of “lifting the bent” as a mandate to “unbend” all of us by creating spaces and systems where everyone’s needs are recognized and met.

We are grateful to Yachad for contributing this activity. Much of this content has been adapted from the Yachad Hineinu project.

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We can start by giving gratitude for all of the ways the places where we spend time as a community help us meet our needs.

How does your synagogue, school, workplace, or community center make you feel welcome? What are your needs, and how do (or don't) these places help you meet them?

Inspired by our gratitude for how our needs are met, we can take action to make our community spaces more inviting to people of diverse abilities and disabilities:

1. Ensure your community space has appropriate signage, including easy-to-understand pictures indicating what each sign means so that those who may not be able to read (or speak the local language) can still benefit from the sign.
2. If you have one, lower your box of *kipot* so that everyone, including people in wheelchairs, can reach them.
3. Place cups by the water fountain to make drinking water available for all.
4. Offer large-print bulletins and prayer books, as well as Braille prayer books.
5. Make plastic magnifying sheets available for use with prayer books or other books. These can easily be sewn into a book's cover so it can be placed over the pages as an easy and cost-effective way to provide for those who need large-print books.
6. Make assistive hearing devices available and invite a sign language interpreter for events, services, and gatherings.
7. Have designated, well-marked indoor areas for people who use wheelchairs to sit (instead of on the sides or in the back, where there is typically the most space).
8. Create an Inclusion Committee, whose main purpose is to serve as community advocates for persons with disabilities. Appointing a specific committee ensures that our spaces are accessible; addressing as many obstacles as possible allows people with diverse abilities to fully participate in community life.

If you recognize the need for more access in the spaces where you spend your time, we offer the opportunity to share this list (as well as your own ideas!) with the other members and leaders of those spaces. If you are a leader, we invite you to discuss the list above with your colleagues, boards, and broader community, and determine how to implement them. All of us can aspire to extend the same hospitality as Abraham and Sarah — showing up for those who may feel “bent” and enabling Jews with diverse abilities to find warmth, welcome, and a sense of belonging in their communities.



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