

# Curriculum for Fostering Healthier Masculinities

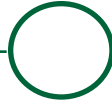


**Habonim Dror North America**



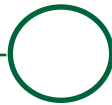


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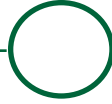
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Thank you all so much, this project could never have been possible without your input and critique.

Love,  
Tzevet Tochnit Gavriut - The Committee for the Masculinity Curriculum  
Bekah Diamond-Bier, Aaron Kay, and Paul Weissfellner



# About Habonim Dror North America



Founded in 1935, Habonim Dror (the Builders of Freedom) is a Progressive, Feminist, Labor Zionist Youth movement whose mission is:

- To build a personal bond and commitment between North American Jewish youth and the State of Israel.
- To create Jewish leaders who will actualize the principles of social justice, equality, peace and coexistence in Israel and North America.

Today, Habonim Dror North America runs 6 summer camps across Canada and the United States, an Israel summer program (MBI), a Gap-year program in Israel (Workshop), and year-round activities in many areas of North America (called *Kenim*). All HDNA programs include regular discussion based education about the pillars of Progressive Labor Zionism, Judaism, Socialism, Social Justice, and *Hagshama* (actualization of values).

Members of HDNA strive for the concrete expression of its values in their own lives and in society. Through our activities in Canada, the US, and Israel, HDNA fosters Jewish leaders who commit their lives to the Jewish community and social justice. As one expression of our Social Justice pillar, HDNA develops extensive educational material to teach youth about feminism and gender identity, as well as racial justice, labor rights, and many other intersecting subjects.

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# Introduction



Growing up at camp, the top priority was to cram as much magical fun into every moment as possible. When counselors would announce the Saturday morning activity options, I would always race to Capture the Flag, base-basket-soccer-ball, or some even wackier game that someone had invented. In my excitement to run and play, it barely occurred to me what it meant when women on staff would offer “a safe space to talk about body image,” or “to view a documentary about feminism.” I remember looking around to see if any boys or men on staff would attend these activities - they never did.

When I was old enough to be on staff, I began to see that the boys for whom I was a counselor were missing something. While many of them were funny and energetic presences at camp, so many of them were emotionally closed off. It was clear that they were sometimes withdrawn or anxious, but they were incapable of explaining why. Even when I found an eleven year-old-boy hiding behind a tree, covering his face with his baseball cap so that no one could see his tears, “I don’t know” was the only language he had to express his feelings.

Camp is ultimately a place for kids to grow. However we cannot expect boys to magically develop their emotional intelligences if we do not provide structured opportunities for them to learn about expressing emotions and supporting the emotional needs of others. Boys who never develop these skills can grow up to be young men with poor relational skills, who may feel uncomfortable opening up in non-romantic relationships, and may be unequipped to care for their friends, their partners, and themselves. When men fail to understand and tend to the emotional needs of those around them, they may inflict serious harm in the forms of aggressive or manipulative interaction styles, gendered bullying, and even sexual assault. If an eleven-year-old boy can learn to say “I feel sad and guilty because I was wrong” instead of “I don’t know,” a lot of this harm can be prevented.

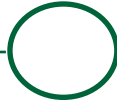
This is where you and I come in. Our campers need our help to learn the skills required to effectively care for others and themselves. This curriculum is designed to aid camp staff in creating the platforms upon which masculine youth can learn to defy unhealthy masculine expectations and instead live freer lives. Its contents can bring up questions that masculine youth may have never been given the space to think about before - questions about interpersonal support, body image, and emotional expression. We acknowledge that there is still a universe to be explored, especially in regards to intersections of masculinity and race, queerness, ethnicity, and class. This curriculum is meant to be first step that will inspire more projects that further explore what healthy masculinities look like.

Boys and masculine folks want to be free from the narrow set of expressions that cultural expectations limit us to. We want to be free to express love and affection for our friends. We want to be free to share who we are beneath the surface, to show what we care about, and what we fear. We wish to share ourselves and to grow as result. This curriculum is designed to guide you and all participants in the process of bringing this vision to life; the process of fostering new, healthier masculinities.

Love,  
Aaron Kay  
May 2018



# How to Use this Curriculum

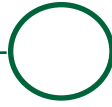


The primary functions of this curriculum are a) to guide staff members in running programs that aid the emotional and social development of boys, and b) to offer conceptual understandings of what positive, healthy masculinity can look like at camp and in the rest of our lives.

- **It is not necessary to run any activity within this curriculum exactly as written.** Rather, each chapter is an assortment of various activities resources, and discussion questions that staff members can pick and choose from while designing a program that best meets the needs and ages of their campers, as well as their campers' prior familiarity with conversations about gender.
- **You should pick and choose.** There are no prescribed rules for which activities you have to run, how many activities you run, or which order they should go in. It's up to you to develop an implementation plan for for the contents will best meet your unique group of participants.
- **This curriculum is designed to be run for groups of masculine youth.** This category may most commonly include boys, and can also include youth who are trans or gender-nonconforming. If you are unsure if certain campers should take part in any activities you choose to run, it may be best to have a conversation with them to gauge their interest, and to ask if there is anything you can do to help them feel comfortable in a space that is specifically geared towards discussions of gender.
- **Activities within this curriculum may be run by staff members of any gender** as long as they are experienced and confident in facilitating educational discussions about gender for youth. It is normal for the contents of this curriculum to bring up questions for staff members, and it is encouraged that staff members take time to talk through these questions and feelings with each other before bringing content to campers.
- **Staff members running these activities should practice or rehearse them before bringing them to campers.** This will help you to familiarize yourself with the flow, timing, and structure of each activity, as well as to explore the discussion questions yourself before bringing them to a conversation with campers.
- **The content of this curriculum may be challenging.** Many of the discussions and activities of this resource are designed to help campers and staff to self reflect. The process of self reflection can often be uncomfortable, and it okay to feel this way. Sometimes self reflection can bring up intense emotions, and can even lead participants to question who they are or to think about troubling experiences in their past. If you sense that any participant is experiencing discomfort, make sure that the camper is followed up with by someone they trust, and arrange for contact with a mental health professional if necessary.
- **To help you prepare for any challenging content, each activity and resource is labeled with a Risk Rating:**
  1. This activity has a low risk for especially intense emotional responses.
  2. This activity will likely evoke challenging emotions and conversations about gender or participants' personal lives.
  3. There is a strong possibility that participants may feel discomfort in this activity, and that participants may disclose experiences of abuse, sexual assault, self harm, or other intense personal experiences.
- **Please provide your feedback.** How did your participants respond to the curriculum? Was the curriculum challenging to use? Was the content not relevant to your participants' lives? What worked well, what would you run again, and what do you wish was included that wasn't? All of your feedback is extremely valuable; you are highly encouraged to complete our [feedback form](#) as soon as you run any part of the curriculum.



# How to Run a Discussion-Based Activity



- 1. Goals:** Trying to run an educational activity without a clear goal is like trying to write an essay without a thesis – it can feel aimless. **You must understand what ideas you want your participants to explore, and what conclusions are you guiding them towards.** In this curriculum, each chapter begins with a rationale and each activity has a stated goal. Feel free to rearticulate these goals in your own words, or come up with your own goals that maintain the curriculum’s integrity.
- 2. Accessibility:** Conversations about gender can often become uncomfortable or heated. There are a few steps that you as the facilitator can take to create a space that minimizes overwhelming discomfort or anxiety.
  - The physical space of the program should be easily leave-eable, in case a participant needs to step out.
  - Fidget toys and coloring/doodling materials should be provided, if not incorporated into the educational methods of the program.
  - You should keep an eye on all of the participants to see if anyone is expressing visual cues of anxiety. Someone might appear distracted or antsy, or may be breathing heavily or crying.
  - Participants should know what to expect from the beginning of the program. This can mean providing a verbal or written “road map” of what the activity will be about, how long it will last, and what kinds of activities to expect. For example, *“We are going to be in this room for about the next hour to have a discussion about masculinity. We’ll start with a journaling activity, then have a group discussion, and lastly we’ll read a brief text.”*
- 3. Activities:** The activities provided in this curriculum are meant to meet a diverse set of learning styles. Some activities are interactive or introspective. Some use audio, visual, or text based media. Others involve physical activity, while some are more about thinking. **It is important to choose an activity that both illuminates your goals and meets the learning style and ability needs of your campers.** Are they an energetic bunch who crave movement? Make sure your activities involve movement or theatrics. Are they a quiet bunch who just look at the floor? Let them read or write to get into ideas. Most likely, your kids will be a mix, so diversify your activities accordingly.
- 4. Discussion:**
  - Be Prepared**
    - Have an internalized understanding of your goal before you start the activity. If the conversation starts going off topic, you’ll only be able to steer it back if you know your destination.
    - Practice asking your discussion questions using a variety of different wordings. If you’re asking your questions with natural speech (instead of reading them verbatim), then the discussion will feel more like a conversation and less like a stop-and-go interview.
    - Take a look at your prepared questions and do your best to predict a few possible answers that campers may have to them. This way you’ll be prepared to deal with answers that are antithetical to your goal or lead the group off topic.
  - Deal with Silence**
    - **Repeat:** Sometimes participants may be silent because they were zoning out. In this case, you should bring everyone’s attention back and then repeat the question.
    - **Rephrase:** Other times, participants may be paying attention but either don’t understand



the question, or don't feel comfortable answering it. In this case, try rephrasing the question or providing more context to it.

- **Embrace the Silence:** Sometimes silence means that participants need time to think and to build up the confidence to speak in front of the group. In this case you can leave the question hanging and simply encourage participants to speak their minds.
- **Individual call-ons:** Often participants who feel uncomfortable speaking will still have thoughtful ideas. Sometimes these people will nod their heads, or open their mouths as if about to make a comment. If you sense this body language, you can prompt the participants by asking "Hey Alex, you look like you might have something to say?" If they decline to speak, just move on.

**5. Co-Facilitate:** We recommend that you never run an activity alone. If something goes wrong, you forgot to bring a supply, a kid gets hurt, some campers are disrupting the activity, you accidentally forget the goal – all of these problems can be alleviated without stopping the program if you have at least one partner running the activity with you. You can also split up sections of the program for different facilitators to lead, so you're switching between primary and secondary roles, or have one primary facilitator and one person to manage participant issues as they arise.

**6. Logistics:** Are you running this activity indoors or outdoors? Is your space big enough? Do you have all of the materials you need? Have you done all of your printing? What time of day is it, can you expect participants to be hungry or tired? How will you make sure you aren't going over schedule?





# Chapter Four: Forging Relationships Through Emotional Support Skills



## Rationale:

The ability to support and console friends in times of adversity and discomfort is an invaluable skill. However, acts of emotional care and nurturance are typically associated with femininity and women's gender roles, so boys are often not expected to develop these skills. As a result, many boys and masculine youth do not open up to each other about personal, emotional issues, and instead rely on women for emotional support and confidence. The following activities are intended to help boys build supportive relationships by expressing their own emotions as well as responding in supportive ways to the emotional needs of others.

## Activity: Warm Up Questions

<b>Ages:</b> 9+	<b>Risk:</b> 1	<b>Duration:</b> 5-15 minutes
<b>Supplies:</b>	Optional: butcher paper and markers for body outlines	
<b>Goals:</b>	For participants to reflect on how they relate to relationships with others	

These questions can be used to get the group thinking about relationships before diving into a deeper activity. For younger participants, it could be fun to draw an outline of a person on a large piece of paper, and have participants write in their answers to these questions within the body.

## Discussion:

- What does being a good friend mean?
- What should respect look like in friendships?
- When have you felt respected in a friendship?



## Activity: Journaling

<b>Ages:</b> 12+	<b>Risk:</b> 1	<b>Duration:</b> 5-25 minutes
<b>Supplies:</b>	Paper and pens for each participant Optional: printed question menus	
<b>Goals:</b>	To reflect on important relationships To provide a space for participants to think about their relationships on a deeper level	

Read out the following questions for participants to journal about, or provide participants with a question menu from which they can answer the questions at their own pace. As a follow-up, you may offer for participants to share aloud any part of what they journalled, or they can keep it private.

### Questions:

- What is one relationship in your life that you value and love?
- What about it makes it so valuable to you?
- How do you and the other person/people express care for each other?
- What has been a time that there was conflict in this relationship? How was it dealt with?
- What is something you really want to tell this person?

## Resource: "I Love You" Radio Segment

<b>Ages:</b> 12+	<b>Risk:</b> 2	<b>Duration:</b> 20-30 minutes
<b>Supplies:</b>	A computer with the downloaded or streamable segment Speakers	
<b>Goals:</b>	To consider how language impacts relationships, and the ways that that is affected by society To create a personal foundation for further thinking or talking about intimacy and relationships	

Listen to "[I Love You](#)," a radio segment about men's discomfort with saying "I love you" to other men in platonic friendships.

### Discussion:

- Why is it so awkward for these men to say "I love you"?
- Have you ever felt this discomfort too?
- Think of a relationship (family, friends, partners, etc.) in your life that regularly does use the phrase "I love you." What is it about that relationship that makes this phrase comfortable?
- How would it impact friendships in your life to introduce this phrase?



## Activity: Defining Emotional Labor

<b>Ages:</b> 12+	<b>Risk:</b> 2	<b>Duration:</b> 20-30 minutes
<b>Supplies:</b>	Three white boards OR three pieces of easel paper Markers	
<b>Goals:</b>	To define emotional labor together and gain an understanding of what it looks like	

Split participants into two groups. Have one group write “Physical Labor” on a large paper or white board. Around “Physical Labor,” write whatever words come to the group’s mind. Have the other group do the same activity with “Mental Labor.” When each group is done, have them share their word webs with each other, and have each group come up with an example of how someone can help their friend with a physical or mental task (like helping to move furniture, or helping to do math homework or write an essay).

Next, write “Emotional Labor” on a large paper and have the group come up with a definition for it all together. Sample definition: The work of helping another to manage their emotions, or to deal with an emotional problem.

### Discussion:

- When was a time that someone did emotional labor for you? A time when you did it for someone else?
- What can be challenging about doing emotional labor?
- Why is emotional labor important?

NOTE: Emotional Labor can also refer to “the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job.” For example, when a restaurant server must appear as though they are in a happy mood even though they are actually exhausted. This is a related yet different form of emotional labor than what this activity is educating about.

## Activity: Practicing Emotional Labor

<b>Ages:</b> 12+	<b>Risk:</b> 2	<b>Duration:</b> 15-30 minutes
<b>Supplies:</b>	Printed scenarios for facilitators to read	
<b>Goals:</b>	To understand what emotional labor is in real life situations To practice building the skills of emotional labor in a controlled environment	

Have participants sit in concentric circles, speed dating style. Pose the following scenarios one at a time, giving each pair a few minutes to answer each question. After it looks like most pairs are done discussing, ask if anyone would like to share their answer. As the facilitator, you may also share the given ‘sample answer’ if the answers that participants come up with seem insufficient. After each question, ask the inner circle to move one space to the left, resulting in new pairs.

Note: The names in the following scenarios are intentionally non-gendered. This is so that participants can imagine utilizing their support skills with friends of any gender, not only friends who are boys.



**Scenario 1:** At the end of math class, the teacher hands back your tests. Your grade is fine, but when you look over at your friend, they look like they might cry. When you find your friend after school, they still look very upset. How can you support your friend in this situation?

**Sample answer:** Offer to walk home with your friend and ask how they're feeling about the test results. Sometimes people just need a listener.

**Scenario 2:** Your friend has had a crush on another classmate, Alex, for a long time. This Friday your friend really wants to tell Alex how they feel. When you text your friend on Saturday to ask how it went, they reply that "Alex said we should just be friends, and then walked away." How can you support your friend in this situation?

**Sample answer:** Offer to either talk about how your friend feels about that interaction, or just hang out together. Sometimes people who feel rejected might not be ready to talk through their emotions, but still want company. It can be nice to text your friend later on to remind them that they're not alone.

**Scenario 3:** Your friend has been nervous about basketball tryouts ever since they got rejected from the team last year. When you go over to their house the night after tryouts to study together, you ask how tryouts went. Angrily, your friend says, "They sucked, I was the worst player there, I'll never be good enough to be on the team." How can you support your friend in this situation?

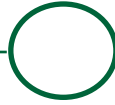
**Sample answer:** Validate your friend's comments - agree that it can be discouraging to feel like you didn't perform as well as you want to. Also remind them that you are their friend regardless of whether they make the team or not, and that you care about them anyway.

**Scenario 4:** Your friend is in the school play, and opening night is tonight. "I'm so nervous," they tell you, "I'm just going to mess up in front of everybody!" How can you support your friend in this situation?

**Sample answer:** Validate their fear, tell them that it's so normal to be nervous about something they care about. Even if they do mess up, their overall performance will still be awesome, and you've got their back no matter what.



# Glossary



**Body Image:** The image one sees, and the meaning they understand, when they picture themselves. Body image is often determined by what one believes about their appearance according to memories, assumptions, and generalizations, and may include a positive or negative value judgement. Adapted from [NEMA](#).

**Emotional Labor:** The act of managing one's own emotions, or supporting another person to manage theirs.

**Feminism:** A political and social movement for the equality of people of all genders in the social, cultural, political, and economic realms.

**Fragile Masculinity:** The phenomenon of boys and men altering their behavior (consciously or subconsciously) to appear more aggressive or stoic in order to fit a cultural expectation of masculinity.

**Gender:** The way that individuals and groups perceive and present themselves, and how they are perceived by others, in relation to personal or cultural notions of femininity and masculinity. Adapted from [Gendered Innovations](#).

**Gender Roles:** A set of behaviors, activities, and forms of self-expression seen as acceptable and appropriate for individuals based on their sex. For more see [Planned Parenthood](#).

**Healthy Masculinity:** A version of masculinity that replaces predominant masculine qualities of dominance and emotional repression with qualities that create safe and supportive relationships with oneself and others.

**Masculinity:** A cultural category that includes behaviors and expressions associated with men. Masculinity varies across geography, time, and culture, and can be performed by people of any gender. Adapted from [Gendered Innovations](#).

**Patriarchy:** A sociopolitical and cultural system that values masculinity over femininity. Patriarchy manifests in macro political and economic planes as well as in everyday interpersonal interactions. Adapted from [Everyday Feminism](#).

**Safe(r) Space:** An environment where individuals commit to minimizing risk for emotional or physical harm, as well as maximizing feelings of belonging and well-being; an environment where individuals feel free to speak up or seek help if they need it.

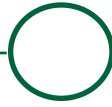
**Sexuality:** A combination of sexual orientation (who a person feels sexually attracted to), sexual experiences, and expressions.

**Sexual Consent:** An agreement to participate in a sexual activity. Consent must be freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific. Abbreviated from [Planned Parenthood](#).

**Toxic Masculinity:** Toxic masculinity is a narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status and aggression. It's the cultural ideal of manliness, where strength is everything while emotions are a weakness; where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly "feminine" traits—which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual—are the means by which your status as "man" can be taken away. - Definition from [The Good Men Project](#).



# Resources for Further Reading



This is a brief assortment of text, video, and image based resources about feminist masculinities. These sources explain the basics of feminist masculinity and its relevance.

## Books

[The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love](#) by bell hooks (2004)

hooks asserts that all people inherently deserve to love and be loved, and explains why men are deprived of these capacities, the impacts of this deprivation, and some alternatives of what feminist masculinity might look like.

[Feminism is for Everybody](#) by bell hooks (2000)

The chapter titled Feminist Masculinity (pages 67-72) discusses the historical dynamics of how feminism has related to both anti-feminist and anti-sexist men.

## Articles

[White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies](#) by Peggy McIntosh (1988)

Distinguishes privilege from liberation, or "earned strength." The section from "For this reason" until "stereotyping and mythology" is particularly helpful.

[The Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture](#) by Nora Samaran (2016)

A psychoanalysis of how boys are conditioned to develop anxious and avoidant attachment styles, and in turn grow up not knowing how to read or respond to the emotional needs of others or themselves.

[Feminism is for Men](#) by Floyd Dell (1914)

An early piece about men's complacency in being enslaved dominators, and explains their resistance to the freedom offered by feminism.

## Videos and Pictures

[Anti-Patriarchal Masculinity Project](#) by Josh Sugiyama (2017)

A project of photographs and brief texts that feature a wide range of men's gender presentations, focusing on soft, gentle, and sensual expressions.

[Aerie Man Advertisement](#) (2016)

An underwear advertisement featuring profiles of men expressing body comfort and sexuality. Aerie admitted to this being an April Fools Day Joke, but the video is still useful for discussing men's body image and sexuality. It can also bring up questions of how capitalism shapes our understandings of gender (see activity #5, Searching for the Opposite of #FragileMasculinity).

[The Mask You Live In by The Representation Project](#) [makers of Misrepresentation] (2015)

A documentary primarily featuring the experiences of men of color and men with low-income, focuses a lot on physical violence and gang activity. Pre-screen before showing to campers to make sure content is relevant.

[A Brave New Paradigm of Manhood: Arturo Nunez](#) (2014)

A Ted (xAustinWomen) Talk about re-envisioning masculine role models as nurturers, focusing on men of color and sports icons.

