

Inclusion and Disabilities: Building a More Accessible World for All (Part 2) *Specialty Track*

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SUMMARY:	In this session, participants will explore how we use our senses, and how to best support those who might experience high-sensory moments differently. As well, participants will gain tools for better listening to non-verbal communication and communicating with others with non-ableist language. - <i>Submitted by Ariella Rosen</i>
TOPIC(S):	Inclusion and Disabilities
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will be able to modify an experience to make sure participants' senses are engaged in a variety of ways. As well, they will be able to "catch" themselves and others when ableist language is used, and be able to look for clues that are being communicated non-verbally.
AUDIENCE:	Aspects of this session can be done with participants of all ages, but concepts are best understood by those 12 and up. Ideal group size no more than 30.
TIMING:	90 minutes
APPENDICES:	The Reason I Jump, Say It Right
MATERIALS NEEDED:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cloth pouches, ziplocs, or any other sort of bag that can be decorated, • Sharpies • whiteboard paper (cut into 1/4ths to fit in the bag) • feathers • sandpaper • any other sensory material • Copies of handouts
SET-UP DETAILS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The space should be set up so that participants are sitting in a circle. If possible, start the program in a space where the lights can be turned on or off, and/or outside where it's possible to hear nature sounds. • If outside, make sure you can return to an indoor location for the duration of the program. • In advance, scatter the "Say It Right!" pages around the room, either taped to the wall, or on the floor or on a table where they are easily seen but won't be distracting until it is time to use them. • Keep sensory pouch materials out of the way until it is time to use them.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

Standing at Mount Sinai [00:00-00:20]
Sounds of Silence [00:20-00:50]
Communication and Ableism [00:50-01:05]
Making Space for “Alef Us” [01:05-01:20]
Debrief [01:20-01:30]

Standing at Mount Sinai (20 min.)

Set the scene: We have just escaped slavery in Egypt, and have now been wandering through the desert for several days. We're already tired, thirsty, and feeling nervous about what lies ahead. All of a sudden, we've arrived at a mountain, but we aren't going to climb it. Moses told us to stay at the bottom and wait. We don't know what's about to happen, but we know it will be something big.

Instruct the group to pay attention to everything they notice, sense, and feel throughout this experience.

Start making a thunderstorm as a group. Snap fingers, whoosh sounds, slapping palms on legs, stomping feet. All of a sudden, motion for everyone to stop at once. Hold the silence for several seconds.

What did you notice?

Pay attention to the sensory experience.

- How was our recreation of Mt. Sinai a sensory experience? What senses were engaged? How could we engage our senses even more in this experience?
- How might we set up our experience at Mt. Sinai to allow people to choose what senses they want to use?
- How can we support someone who might feel overwhelmed when there is too much sensory input?

Let's try it! Use any materials in the room to modify our Sinai sensory experience.

What are examples of other camp moments where we engage multiple senses at once? (Havdallah, dining hall, pool, performances, going into nature, etc.)

Going Back to Sinai

Draw a large letter alef on flip chart. Share the hasidic teaching that all the Israelites heard at Mount Sinai was the first letter of the first commandment of the 10 Commandments- the letter ALEF. What does it sound like? (It's a silent letter!) What does that mean?

Recreate Sinai again with the group, and listen for the alef. Did you notice anything different this time?

- What do we notice in silence?
- What are other situations where we can notice a lot when there is “silence?”
- How can we use silence (or absence of sensory input) to support individuals who are at times overwhelmed by too much sensory input?
- When we communicate, even when we don't use words, we are saying a lot, and we can learn a lot from another person.

Sounds of Silence: Behavior is Communication (30 min.)

Story/Narration Game: Invite one participant to tell a story only by acting, no speaking out loud allowed. Ask another participant to narrate the story based on what they think the first participant might be acting.

Do this 2-3 times, each time with different volunteers.

Discuss:

- Ask the narrators: what cues did you look for to know what to say?
- Ask the actors: how accurate was the narrator? What would help them tell your story more accurately?
- How can we better pay attention to the cues around us? (Introduce the concept of behavior as a form of communication)

What might you look for if a camper (regardless of whether or not they use words to communicate):

- Has a stomach ache
- Accidentally left their towel at the pool
- Doesn't like the chicken nuggets at lunch and wants to hit up the pasta table
- Is having a great day

Read excerpt from "The Reason I Jump" (below) as an example of an incredibly large amount of information shared without speaking any words out loud.

Invite everyone to stand and notice how their bodies are feeling while listening to the piece. (Make copies available for those who would prefer to follow along visually.)

Reactions and reflections:

- What did you notice in your body as you listened?
- What are some of the things that the author is communicating with his behavior?
- What did you relate to? What felt less accessible to you?
- How do we best support someone who communicates differently?
- Discuss the concepts of advocacy and self-advocacy, and the difference between speaking for another person, and amplifying another person's voice.

How can we train ourselves to listen and notice what is being shared with us?

Communication and Ableism (15 min.)

How do we get better attuned? How do we correct ourselves and others?

How can we train ourselves to notice what messages our words and behaviors are sending others?

Scattered around the room are different words or phrases we might say without realizing the ableist implications (also listed below). With a partner, choose at least 3 to visit, talk about why the language might be problematic, and write a "correction"- what can we say instead that still has the same message without "othering" someone with a disability?

Come back together and discuss:

- Did any phrases surprise you?
- Were there any that were challenging for you to rewrite?
- What other phrases, gestures, actions might we add to this list?

Discuss a definition for the word ableism: the ideology that those of normative ability are the standard, and that those who are not are different.

Making space for “Alef” Us (15 min.)

Explain: the letter Alef can teach us to be mindful of our own language, how we listen better to others, and how we can be more aware of the ways in which our environment affects others. We might not get it right every time, but we can try to set ourselves up for success.

Teach participants the Israeli Sign Language sign for “alef” (same as the letter “A” in ASL). Similar to Mah Tovv in the previous session, sometimes it can be helpful to have a cue that we are on the right track with including “alef us. Teach it to other people at camp. Use it to praise, to remind, to connect.

One last tool: we’re going to make a sensory pouch- a sort of portable respite room and communication tool all in one.

Give everyone a pouch or small ziploc-sized bag, and invite them to decorate it. Suggestion, write “Alef Us” on it in some form either with words, the letter Alef, or the ISL Alef.

Fill the pouch with sensory items, some provided, some you can go look for:

- feathers
- sandpaper
- a small piece of whiteboard paper (marker not included!)
- feel free to look outside for nice smelling plants, rocks that rattle, etc.
- suggested things to add at camp: playdough or another fidget, markers, picture copies of your daily schedule.

Bring everyone to Mount Sinai one last time. End in the silence by making the letter Alef in ISL.

Debrief at the end (15 min.):

Review the 3 main topics covered: sensory experiences, non-verbal communication, ableist language.

- Look back through this session and the different senses we used- when is it too much? When should something be made more multi-sensory? How were different sense engaged in this session?
- Consider the ableist language we explored today- what are ableist behaviors or attitudes that you’ve noticed at camp (not necessarily rooted in language)?
- What are some other contexts in which non-verbal communication is important?

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

- Make sensory pouches at the beginning of camp for every bunch or every counselor, (or even every camper!) so there is always easy access to tools for campers to self-soothe, focus, or take a break.
- Make the Mt. Sinai storm when there is a thunderstorm and discuss how they are similar, the miracles in nature, etc.
- The Behavior is Communication activity can be a fun quick time-filler or as part of an improv games experience.
- Read more pages from “The Reason I Jump” to explore more about how one person with autism talks about his life. Discuss as a bunk or as a staff.