

Teen Programming Track: How We Wrestle *Specialty Track*

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| AUTHOR(S): | Sarra Alpert |
| SUMMARY: | One of the names for the Jewish people, Yisrael, means "those who wrestle." And since adolescence is an especially powerful time for exploring our identities and world more deeply, it can lead to a lot of struggle with our relationships, self-understanding, beliefs and communities. So many times, that struggle becomes lonely, isolating, scary and confusing. How can we build better tools for wrestling together? What would it look like to be able to engage in a healthy, supportive, creative way with new ideas and tough moments, finding our way to be able to stay in productive discomfort, even find joy in it? In this track, we'll be exploring tools for helping our teens do just that. |
| TOPIC(S): | Identity, Community Building, Relationship Building, Teen Programs, Leadership Development, Social Justice |
| LEARNING OBJECTIVE: | Participants will have a better understanding of the value of wrestling with challenging topics. Participants will have new tools, new role models and new activities for engaging in this wrestling. |
| AUDIENCE: | Teens |
| TIMING: | Track covers three 90-minute sessions. |
| APPENDICES: | Handouts in process |
| MATERIALS NEEDED: | Lots of art supplies; ropes; various handouts (in process). Most items can be gathered from around camp. Eventually, treats for the celebration. |
| SET-UP DETAILS: | The sessions below include a very wide range of activities, which wouldn't all necessarily need to be done as part of one program. Most activities could take place in a wide range of spaces, so you should be able to be pretty flexible with it all. |

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

SESSION 1:

- Participants will come straight into the opening activity: the “Find Yourself” Scavenger Hunt.
 - Participants will be split into groups of 3 and be given 3 index cards per person.
 - Each person will introduce themselves to their teammates, share three of their best qualities (i.e. “I’m kind, funny and creative”) and write each of those qualities on an index card.
 - Once the team has finished their introductions, they go out on a scavenger hunt -- they need to either find one item or complete an activity (all of their choosing) to represent each of their best qualities. For example, to show that you’re energetic, have your teammates take a picture of you jumping high into the air. Or to show that you’re warm, you might bring back a sweater or blanket.
 - Once the team has all nine items (or has completed nine activities, ideally with photo documentation), they should return to the main program space.
- Once everyone’s back, we’ll do full-group introductions with each person sharing one of their scavenged items or images.
- Have everyone get out their Cornerstone journals and take some time to write a few sentences about how that activity felt - what was hard, what felt good, what they learned.
- Explain that this track will revolve around the idea of programs that help teens develop better tools for growth -- for wrestling with hard ideas, celebrating their strengths, learning about each other and themselves. The activity we just started is one example of the types that will be part of this.
- The overall set of activities is called “sQuad Goals” and is designed to be run over a stretch of time at camp (rather than in one complete time block).
 - There will be a few requirements for each participant: that they write in their journal at least three times and that they complete at least one activity from each of the four worlds: Me, You, Us, Everybody.
 - Beyond those requirements, participants would be able to choose which activities they’re most drawn to. Completing a particular activity gives them a corresponding type of badge (i.e. writing in the journal gets them Grace Paley badges).
 - They’ll be working towards their overall points in teams, making it best for different people to pursue the activities and challenges that best fit them.
 - One idea for how to use these activities is to offer a few different ones during bunk time (either every day for a week to focus on the saga more intensively, or spread out every few days over the course of the session). Another option would be to do a few different unit-wide evening activities with these (again, could be done over a few consecutive nights for a “Saga Week” or something along those lines, or could be a regular program over the course of the session (like every Monday night, for example), building to the final tally and celebration.
 - There are a series of text studies at the end of this packet. Each of the texts can be used for various activities or worlds - choose the ones that work best for your structure and flow.
- List together: what are some of the qualities that one builds through intentional, reflective growth and wrestling?
- Discuss: what gets in the way of developing these? What is it about the teenage years that are at once uniquely suited to this kind of growth and also uniquely difficult for it?

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- Explain that the opening activity was an example of one from the “Me” world of the saga and that we’re going to do one more in today’s session: Defeat the Troll of Self-Doubt!
 - The Troll has three questions that you have to answer before you can pass. For each question, you’ll get to answer in a different way.
 - Question #1: What’s one thing you’re not great at? For this question, each person will write down their answer and pass it in. The group leader will then read all of the answers out loud. Before reading the answers, offer that people can choose to raise their hands if they want to show that they also identify with this particular area for improvement -- it’s entirely optional for folks to raise their hands or not.
 - Question #2: What’s one way you want to be braver? For this question, each person will assume a “power pose” that has to do with their answer. Each person will do their pose for the group (if they want to also share a word or phrase that’s prompting that pose, they can but they don’t have to).
 - Question #3: What’s one gift you have to offer to others at camp this summer? For this question, you’ll share your answer with your teammates so that they can take you up on that over the course of the summer. You’ll then come up with a team cheer that somehow has to do with all of those gifts.

SESSION 2:

- In this session, we’ll do a few activities from the “You” and “Us” worlds of the saga and keep building up our individual badges and team points.
- At any point, participants are welcome to spend time on the sidelines either journaling (for additional Grace Paley badges) or starting an art project with the badges they’ve gotten so far (which would earn them a Marc Chagall badge).
- “You” activity #1: learning curiosity.
 - Make a list of questions that don’t usually come up in get-to-know-you games but which are interesting things to know about people (and which are an appropriate amount of disclosure).
 - Number the questions and give out bingo sheets with those same numbers on them.
 - Play Human Bingo with the question list you all just drew up together -- in order to check off a bingo box, you have to learn someone’s answer to the corresponding question and their answer has to be different from yours (and once you’ve done that, you can write their name in that box).
- “You” activity #2: practicing compassion.
 - Pair up with someone on a different team.
 - Interview each other about what you look for in community:
 - What makes you feel comfortable in particular places?
 - What makes you uncomfortable?
 - What do you tend to look for or notice when you come into a new place or group?
 - What have people done before to welcome you into new spaces?
 - When was that effective for you and why?
 - What do you wish they had done?
 - What was a way that you wanted support from other people in the past but didn’t know how to ask for it?

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- Go back to your team. Make a list together of general qualities that you'd want to build into an environment that would be genuinely enriching and welcoming to the people you just interviewed
 - Come up with welcoming or introductory activities that would work well for those people. If there are real substantive differences between what those people would need, come up with as many different activities as you need.
 - Each group will lead those activities for each other.
- "Us" activity #1: trust and teamwork.
 - Learn about the concept of "ezer knegdo" (one who helps by pushing back against you), a description from Genesis of how Adam and Eve were supposed to be to each other.
 - Find someone you can comfortably sit back to back with (ideally on the floor). Take a few moments to sit and try to lean your weight into each other - feel the balance of how you lean into each other in order to hold each other up.
 - Write for a few minutes about figures who have played that role in your own lives - people whose support has helped to propel you forward, even/especially if that meant they needed to know how/when to push back against you.
 - Spend some time doing some trust games (here are some great examples: <https://www.healthline.com/health/parenting/trust-exercises-for-kids#trust-fall>).
 - Make "action figures" out of pipe cleaners: get into your teams and make pipe-cleaner figures arranged into various positions that represent particular kinds of engagement with each other (i.e. holding each other up, leaning on each other, etc).
 - "Us" activity #2: community care.
 - Participants will share what type of activity helps them to feel cared for -- it could mean that it helps them feel healthier or happier or more connected to others.
 - At least a few people will then lead brief versions of those activities for the group.
 - After those activities, discuss: how does it feel to lead activities that you especially enjoy for others in your community? How does it help you create an environment where everyone is caring for each other? What other ways are there to do that?
 - End with blessings: for each person who led an activity, someone else should come up with a blessing for that person about them having opportunities for the type of care that they want and need.

SESSION 3:

- In this session, we'll start with a couple of activities from the "Everybody" world of the saga and keep building up our individual badges and team points.
- As in the previous session, at any point participants are welcome to spend time on the sidelines either journaling (for additional Grace Paley badges) or starting an art project with the badges they've gotten so far (which would earn them a Marc Chagall badge).

- “Everybody” activity #1: different points of view.
 - On separate pieces of paper, everyone should write out a few statements that either they personally very much disagree with (but that they know someone else might reasonably believe) or that they personally believe but know others in their lives disagree with them about. For our purposes, “reasonable” means that someone believes it for reasons that are rooted in their values, not just in cruelty or lack of knowledge. Statements should be written as in the voice of someone who believes it (i.e. “I believe that everyone who cares about the environment should be vegetarian.”)
 - Put all the pieces of paper in the middle of the room.
 - Each person should choose and pick up one statement that they didn’t write but which they either deeply disagree with or at least feel that they have concerns about and feel that they don’t fully understand.
 - Go around the circle, with each person reading their statement out loud as written. Give people time to observe how their bodies feel in reaction to hearing these statements and to reading the one they chose.
 - Get into pairs or small groups. Each person should present the statement they chose and their group needs to generate at least three reasons that they can imagine that someone might believe that statement. The reasons should be in good faith -- i.e. not imagining that the person who believes that statement is simply cruel or stupid or inhumane. In the group conversations, try to draw on any experiences you’ve had talking with people who believe some version of that statement and see what you can draw out from there.
 - Come back together:
 - Go around and have each person name one value they conceivably share with the person who believes the statement they chose. For example, many Jews who support Israel boycotts and many Jews who vehemently oppose Israel boycotts both believe that that path is the one towards a just, values-driven, sustainable Jewish future.
 - Discuss: why do we have certain impulses towards flat-out rejecting some ideas that we disagree with? When is that the right thing to do? When would another approach benefit us?
 - Show people examples from the “Vent Diagrams” series online (can be found on Instagram or at ventdiagrams.com). Explain the concept of the project, the idea of “a vent diagram” as a diagram of the overlap of two statements that appear to be true and appear to be contradictory. We purposefully don’t label the overlapping middle. Making vent diagrams as a practice helps us recognize and reckon with contradictions and keep imagining and acting from the intersections and overlaps. Venting is an emotional release, an outlet for our anger, frustration, despair -- and as a vent enables stale, suffocating air to flow out, it allows new fresh air to cycle in and through. We’re trying to make “vents” in both senses of the word: tiny windows for building unity and power, emotional releases of stale binary thinking in order to open up a trickle of fresh ideas and air."
 - Ask people to think about two ideas they hold that are: both true, often come into contradiction with each other, and both important enough to you that you want to find a way to hold them together. Put those ideas into your own vent diagram. Take some time to decorate them!

- “Everybody” activity #2: education and memory.
 - Look at some examples of artistic posters that people hang in their community spaces that are about particular current events. Also look at (and read about) some examples of ways of marking space related to important historical events.
 - One volunteer from each team will identify a current event or a historical moment that they think is important to be thinking about this summer.
 - As a team, create an art project that could hang in your camp that would help to draw attention to and educate about that issue or event.
 - Art gallery: we’ll go around to each project so that the group who made it can explain it to us and teach us a little bit about the issue or event that inspired it.
- “Everybody” activity #3: acting together.
 - Download one of curriculum guides from the Avodah “Speak Torah to Power” series: <https://avodah.net/speaktorahtopower/>
 - Watch one or more of the videos and use the accompanying discussion materials.
 - Discuss: How is this speaker encouraging us to act together from a place of Jewish values? What is one idea we can generate for actions we take this summer at camp that help to uphold those values?
- We’ll end the Saga with a roundup of the team points and a celebration!
 - As part of the tally, look for at least one way to honor each team. For example, which team got the highest number of any one badge? Which team got the most different badges?
- We’ll then spend the last third of this session on Q&A and small-group work on how everyone will be bringing all of this back to camp.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

Awesome Jewish figures to use for the badges and points categories:

This is just the beginning of what could be an encyclopedic list! Please continue to build to it by adding your own Jewish heroes.

- Grace Paley (writing points): Grace Paley was a short story writer, poet, teacher and political activist.
- Yavilah McCoy (ezer-knegdo points): Yavilah McCoy is a spiritual leader, teacher, activist, member of the Women’s March Steering Committee, and founder of the Jewish Women of Color Resilience Circle, among other projects.
- Marc Chagall (art points): Marc Chagall painted dream-like subjects rooted in personal history and Jewish Eastern European folklore. He worked in several mediums, including painting, printmaking, and book illustration, and stained glass windows.

- Rabbi Akiva (learning points): Rabbi Akiva was a shepherd-turned-scholar who began his Jewish learning late in life and became one of the leading sages of the Mishnah.
- Hannah Senesh (courage points): Hannah Senesh was a paratrooper who was trained to parachute into Hungary and save Jews during the Holocaust. She was also a poet.
- Ruth Bader Ginsburg (resilience points): Ruth Bader Ginsburg is an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. She was one of only a few women in her year at Harvard Law (where she graduated at the top of her class) and was the second woman appointed to the Supreme Court.
- Elie Wiesel (honoring-memory points): Eliezer Wiesel was a Romanian-born American writer, professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor.
- Rabbi Israel Salanter (reflection points): Rabbi Israel Salanter created the Mussar movement, a Jewish practice of ethical reflection and self-improvement.
- Rabbi Benay Lappe (imagination points): Rabbi Benay Lappe is a Talmudist, teacher and founder of SVARA, “a traditionally radical yeshiva dedicated to the serious study of Talmud through the lens of queer experiences.”
- Rabbi Mira Rivera (community-building points): Rabbi Mira Rivera is the first Filipina-American woman to be ordained from The Jewish Theological Seminary. She is a rabbi and chaplain at Romemu and also co-founded Harlem Havruta, “a brave space for Jews of Color, allies and co-conspirators.”

Text Studies:

Eruvin 13b:10-11

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel, For three years, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai argued. One said, 'The halakha is like us,' and the other said, 'The halakha is like us.' A heavenly voice spoke: "These and these are the words of the living God, and the halakha is like the House of Hillel." A question was raised: Since the heavenly voice declared: "Both these and those are the words of the Living God," why was the halacha established to follow the opinion of Hillel? It is because the students of Hillel were kind and gracious. They taught their own ideas as well as the ideas from the students of Shammai. Not only for this reason, but they went so far as to teach Shammai's opinions first.

Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 54b-55a

Anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of one's household and does not, is punished for the actions of the members of the household; anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of one's townspeople and does not, is punished for the transgressions of the townspeople; anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of the entire world and does not is punished for the transgressions of the entire world. Rav Papa said: The house of the exilarch (Jewish communal authority during Babylonian exile) was punished for the transgressions of the entire world, as Rav Hanina said, "What is the meaning of the verse, 'God will bring judgment on the elders and the officers of the people'" (Isaiah 3:14)? Perhaps the officers have sinned, but have the elders sinned? Rather, this verse signifies that God brings judgment on the elders for not having protested against the transgressions of the officers.

Merger Poem by Judy Chicago

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with one another and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

Pesikta De-Rab Kahana, Piska 12:

Rabbi Levi said: "God appeared to them like a statue with faces on every side, so that though a thousand people might be looking at the statue, they would be led to believe that it was looking at each one of them. So, too, when God spoke, each and every person in Israel could say, „The Divine Word is addressing me.“ ...

Moreover, said R. Jose bar R. Hanina, God spoke with each and every person according to each person's particular power. Nor need you marvel at this. The manna tasted differently to each: to the children, to the young, and to the old, according to their power (capacity). Infants according to their capacity: like the taste of milk from a mother's breast... The young according to their capacity, for of the manna they ate it is said, "My bread also which I gave you, bread and oil and honey"... and the old according to their capacity, as is said of the manna they ate, "the taste of it was like wafers made with honey."

Now if each and every person was enabled to taste the manna according to his particular capacity, how much more was each and every person enabled to hear according to his capacity. Thus David said, „The voice of the Lord is in its strength (Ps 29:4) – not “The voice of the Lord in His strength” but “its strength” – that is, in its strength to make itself heard and understood according to the capacity of each and every person who listens. Therefore God said: Do not be misled because you hear many voices. Know that I am God who is one and the same.”

Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers, 4:3:

Ben Azzai taught: Do not disdain any person. Do not underrate the importance of anything for there is no person who does not have his hour, and there is no thing without its place in the sun."

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson:

"The Mishnah tells us, 'Don't look at the flask, but at what it contains.' In teaching ourselves to see the inner sparks that light a person's soul, rather than merely glancing at the casing that holds those precious assets of personality, aspiration and caring, we can act like God in the wilderness, healing when we can, and transcending limits when we cannot."

Ecclesiastes (4:9-10):

"Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he has not another to help him up."

Midrash Tanhuma, Pinchas:

If you see a great gathering of people, recite the blessing "Blessed is the Wise One who knows all secrets" (Baruhk hacham ha-razim). For just as their faces are different from one another's, so are their minds unlike one another's. In fact, each person has a distinctive and individual mind.

You can see that this is so from the request that Moses made at the time that his death was drawing near. He said to God: Master of the Universe! The mind of every single person is known by You, and you know that no two people are exactly alike. When I leave them, I plead with You -- should you appoint an new leader, please appoint someone who will accept each and every person according to that person's individuality. How do we know that Moses made this request? From the way he addressed God as Adonai Elohei ha-ruchot l'kol basar (Adonai, God of the various kinds of human spirit).