

Anti-Racist Tools for Teens

AUTHOR(S): Sarra Alpert

SUMMARY: In this session, we will build our understanding of how to practice anti-racism every day, from our relationships, to what beliefs we internalize, to how we get involved in making the world a better place.

GOALS:

- Participants will have a stronger understanding of key anti-racist concepts.
- Participants will have new ideas for how to craft age-appropriate anti-racism programming for teens.

AUDIENCE: The programming will be aimed at teens, but the session is designed for staff.

TIMING: 75 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Writing supplies
- Text handouts (included at the end of this document)
- Mitsui Collective's identity map (Included at the end of this document)

SET-UP: N/A

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:10 – *Opening activity*
- 00:10-00:20 – *Stepping back: why this matters and what methods will we use today*
- 00:20-00:35 – *Method #1: Storytelling and bringing our personal lives into camp*
- 00:35-00:50 – *Method #2: Engaging with the outside world*
- 00:50-1:00 – *Method #3: Integrating these values into non-explicit moments*
- 1:00-1:15 – *Closing activity*

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:10 – Opening activity

Opening Activity: the “Find Yourself” scavenger hunt!

- As participants arrive, they’ll head back out into the surrounding space to find three objects that symbolize key aspects of their personality, identity, or life story.
- Once they’ve gathered their objects up, they’ll be directed into small groups to share their items.

00:10-00:20 – Stepping back: why this matters and what methods will we use today

Come back together and discuss the underlying value of that activity: having more (and varied) ways for us to share about our lives and identities. Oppression thrives in being under-discussed, but it also takes time to build up the kind of trust that allows folks to share deeply in an organic way. Activities like this one help to get there.

Group discussion:

- What are the key values behind anti-racism work?
- What are the challenges in practicing anti-racism work?

Pair and share: why does practicing anti-racism matter to you?

Explain that we’ll be approaching anti-racism more expansively than just being about race. Doing so enables us to work on oppression within our communities without isolating our JOC (Jews of Color) members and helps us find more connections and insights across different types of life experiences.

00:20-00:35 – Method #1: Storytelling and bringing our personal lives into camp

Method #1: Identity-based storytelling

We’ll look at the Mitsui Collective’s identity map (included at the end of this document) and discuss the concepts of centered identities vs. marginalized ones.

- In dyads (pairs with dedicated listening before moving onto discussion), participants will respond to the following:

- For your own identities where you experience less power or access, what have you been able to do most effectively advocate for yourself? What have others with more power been able to do to best support you?
- For your own identities where you experience more power or access, what have you been able to do to support others? Where have you realized you may have caused harm?
- We'll then come back together to discuss what we can draw out of those experiences to better understand practices of allyship, support, and harm.
- We'll also briefly look at how this kind of activity can lead towards creating deeper and more effective community agreements.

00:35-00:50 – Method #2: Engaging with the outside world

Method #2: Bringing in the “outside world”

We'll split into groups to take on a few different approaches to how we can bring the outside world into the camp environment. Before doing so, we'll discuss why it's valuable to do so, especially in a context of trying to be a more anti-racist space.

- Approach #1: Memorializing
 - Read the following:

Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, has been spearheading a project to mark the sites of lynchings in the United States (<http://www.eji.org/lynchinginamerica> or you can read [this article](#) about the project). Part of his inspiration for this is the range of memorials that have been installed all over Germany to mourn the Holocaust: “...We need to engage with this in a very different way. You can't go to Germany, to Berlin, and walk 100 meters without seeing a marker or a stone or a monument to mark the places where Jewish families were abducted from their homes and taken to the concentration camps. Germans want you to go to the concentration camps and reflect soberly on the legacy of the Holocaust. We do the opposite here. We don't want anybody talking about slavery, we don't want anybody talking about lynching, we don't want anybody talking about segregation. You say the word “race” and people immediately get nervous. You say the words “racial justice” and they're looking for the exits. If we're going to change the attitudes of the judges who are making sentencing decisions, and police officers who are unfairly suspecting young men of color, and employers and educators who are suspending and expelling kids of color at disproportionately high rates, if we're going to make a difference in overcoming the implicit bias that we all have, we're going to have to deal honestly with this history and have to consciously work on freeing ourselves from this history.” (from [The Marshall Project's interview “Bryan Stevenson on Charleston and Our Real Problem with Race”](#))
 - Discuss:
 - Have any of you been to Germany or other parts of Eastern Europe? How did you feel when you saw the various memorials?
 - How do you think American society would be different if we actively memorialized lynchings, slavery, or other acts of racist violence?
 - How do you see change happen when we actively protest oppressive systems or practices in our society and communities?
 - What do you think sometimes stops us from doing either of those things?
 - Jewish tradition has a lot of ways that we mark both personal mourning (i.e., the customs of shiva) and moments of historical tragedy (i.e., Tisha B'Av). What ideas do you have for how you could use Jewish mourning practices to both mourn the Black lives lost to racist violence and to protest the racism itself? (If you have A/V setup, you can watch clips from <http://www.fargesn.com/> for examples of this)
 - Plan a ritual or design a memorial for your camp space this summer in a way that can effectively and authentically keep this mourning and conversation going rather than

letting these events fade into the background of what's happening in the "outside world." Choose something to memorialize that has relevance to your camp community – one approach could be to identify an event that happened either historically or recently near your camp's location.

- Approach #2: Discussing tough topics
 - Read Leo Ferguson's article ["Police, people of color and a Jewish dream of justice."](#) (note: this is just one example of a written resource connecting Jewish community organizing and current events)
 - Discuss:
 - When have you felt like the kind of bystander that Leo Ferguson describes?
 - What kept you from getting involved?
 - What are some Jewish ideas or teachings that motivate you to get involved in making the world a better place?
- Approach #3: Building ourselves as Jewish leaders
 - There are some excellent repositories of Jewish leaders discussing how to integrate anti-racist ideas into our Jewish communal spaces. Watch one of the relevant videos from the [Eli Talks series](#) (like Ilana Kaufman's "Who Counts" video) or Avodah's [Speak Torah to Power series](#) (like Yavilah McCoy's "Intersectionality as a Jewish Practice" video).
 - Ask the teens to spend time creating their vision of Jewish community.
 - What institutions do they want to be a part of transforming?
 - How would they do that?

00:50-1:00 – Method #3: Integrating these values into non-explicit moments

Method #3: Integrating these values into non-explicit moments. Together, we'll list all the places in the camp environment where these values can be practiced outside of dedicated programs.

- Examples:
 - Space for grief when racist events occur in the world outside
 - JOC (Jews of Color) affinity group space
 - Space for staff leadership to step back and discuss: of the identity categories we've discussed today, which do you know are represented diversely in the camp staff (if you're leading a staff team) or within your campers (if you're a counselor)? On which categories might you not actually know if there's diversity in the room? Do you know whether everyone is getting the support they need in their specific identity? Do you have ideas for how you can offer more support?
 - Making sure that text studies and other highlighting of Jewish leaders and teachings include sources from a wide variety of identities.

1:00-1:15 – Closing activity

- Close with several Jewish concepts that can ground us in our anti-racism commitments and an activity that will help us envision what it would look like at camp for those concepts to be lived out more fully. Here are two examples:
 - *B'tzelem elohim*: this is the concept that all humans are created in the image of God. It comes from *Bereshit*/Genesis and the narrative of the creation story.
 - Possible activity here: put up a long section of paper, with one end labeled as "Most" and the other as "Least". Have participants write up examples of what it looks like to treat others with the kind of reverence and care that this concept is imbued with – what happens when people aren't channeling the spirit of that at all? What happens when people are channeling that spirit as

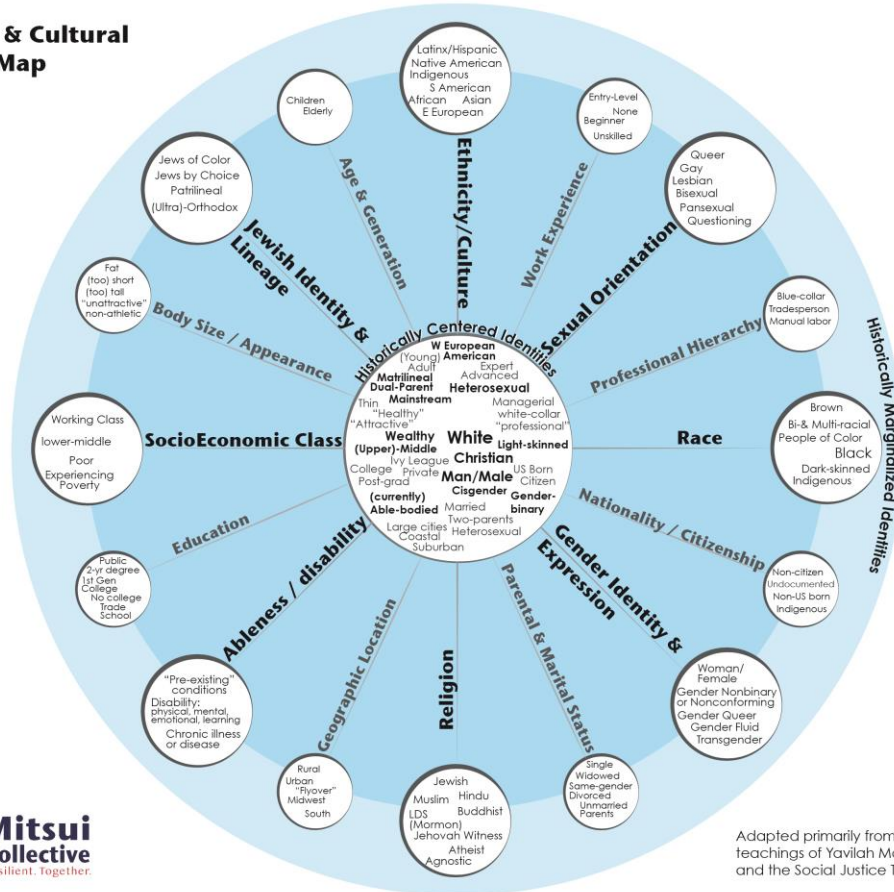
- fully as possible? What are the midpoint ways of recognizing others' holiness/importance? Give everyone time to write and then to read some of the other responses. Then close by having everyone share one thing they're going to do that will push them to live out this concept more fully.
- *Ezer k'negdo*: partner who helps by pushing back. This concept also comes from *Bereshit*/Genesis and is in reference to what God was creating in Adam and Eve's partnership.
 - Possible activity here: Sit back-to-back with someone (make sure folks are matched with others of relatively similar heights). If folks aren't comfortable with that amount of contact, they can also do this activity lying on the ground. Lead a meditation where you encourage participants to release tension from each area of their body and let themselves be supported by either the person behind them or the ground beneath them, to feel what it is to release into another's care but remain supported. Ask everyone to think about someone who helps them do this – someone who helps them feel genuinely held and supported in the world, and in doing so helps them move forward.

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

- The activities that we're practicing here can either be done as whole programs (i.e., an entire evening program dedicated to exploring one of these approaches) or can be used in smaller chunks (i.e., incorporating some of these questions about life and identities into community-building programs).
- The third approach in particular explores methods of integrating these values and ideas into lots of moments, places, and decisions in the camp environment rather than leaving them limited to dedicated programs.
- Finally, a note on the choice to start the session in tasks and groups that can be staggered in their starting time if needed: this is a great way to handle having some folks come on time while others might be late, since you can usher people straight into the activity as they arrive. Folks who arrive on time will get more minutes in their small groups while folks who arrive late will get less, but you don't have to waste any time at the beginning waiting for a quorum or having to re-explain anything or re-introduce folks as others arrive.

Mitsui Collective's Identity Map for Method #1

Personal & Cultural Identity Map



Adapted primarily from the work and teachings of Yavilah McCoy (Dimensions) and the Social Justice Training Institute

Text for Method #2, Approach #1

Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, has been spearheading a project to mark the sites of lynchings in the United States (<http://www.eji.org/lynchinginamerica> or you can read [this article](#) about the project). Part of his inspiration for this is the range of memorials that have been installed all over Germany to mourn the Holocaust: "...We need to engage with this in a very different way. You can't go to Germany, to Berlin, and walk 100 meters without seeing a marker or a stone or a monument to mark the places where Jewish families were abducted from their homes and taken to the concentration camps. Germans want you to go to the concentration camps and reflect soberly on the legacy of the Holocaust. We do the opposite here. We don't want anybody talking about slavery, we don't want anybody talking about lynching, we don't want anybody talking about segregation. You say the word "race" and people immediately get nervous. You say the words "racial justice" and they're looking for the exits. If we're going to change the attitudes of the judges who are making sentencing decisions, and police officers who are unfairly suspecting young men of color, and employers and educators who are suspending and expelling kids of color at disproportionately high rates, if we're going to make a difference in overcoming the implicit bias that we all have, we're going to have to deal honestly with this history and have to consciously work on freeing ourselves from this history." (from [The Marshall Project's interview "Bryan Stevenson on Charleston and Our Real Problem with Race"](#))

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Text for Method #2, Approach #2

Police, people of color and a Jewish dream of justice

[LEO FERGUSON](#)

JULY 13, 2016 1:07 PM



NEW YORK ([JTA](#)) — Last week, we watched in horror and dismay as violent event after violent event unfolded, each amplifying and recontextualizing the one before it. By Friday morning, July 8, five Dallas police officers were dead, three black men had been killed by the police (including the Dallas shooter), and countless families were broken and traumatized.

On Friday evening I was in the streets marching, chanting our movement’s simplest, yet most elusive assertion, “Black Lives Matter.” As a black person and a Jew, I was asserting the value of my own being — attempting to claim agency over my own body and the bodies of those who look like me in the face of racism and violence.

I usually find these marches and rallies empowering, but on this night I was deflated and sad. As we marched through the rapidly gentrifying streets of New York City, I couldn’t stop watching the faces of those people, especially white people — presumably many of them Jewish — who sat in outdoor cafes sipping wine or coasting by in the backseats of taxis. Some cheered or raised a glass, others gawked mutely; some were obviously annoyed at the minor disruption to their day. I joked darkly to a Jew of color who was marching with me that all of our signs should just say, “If you’re standing there, reading this, then you are part of the problem.”

On Sunday I joined a group of Jewish people of color, organized through [Jews For Racial & Economic Justice, or JFREJ](#), to process and hold space for each other after a week of pain.

Many of those in the room with me have been active in the fight to pass the [Right To Know Act](#), a piece of legislation before the City Council here that would help address the very issues that have brought our nation to this terrifying moment. It would create more trust and mutual respect between

communities and the police by requiring officers to identify themselves with a business card when they stop you on the street, thus allowing you to follow up if you believe you were stopped or searched in a discriminatory or illegal manner.

It would also provide a remedy for unconstitutional searches by requiring officers to inform people when they have the right to refuse a search.

The bill would protect everyone in New York by empowering citizens and creating a bond of trust with the police. Our Jews of Color Caucus has been working with the rest of JFREJ as part of a wide coalition of grassroots organizations, [Communities United for Police Reform](#), in a tireless effort to pass this bill. And it was my job on Sunday to tell everyone, even after the week that our country had been through, that the bill is still not on the calendar for a vote in the City Council. We actually have a council majority for both bills, enough to pass the legislation. But it still hasn't been brought up for a vote even though not a single other police reform bill has passed in New York since the death of Eric Garner two years ago.

As I looked at the demoralized faces in the room, I understood why the week left us all so drained and depressed. For decades people of color have protested against discriminatory and violent policing. And while there have been some meaningful victories over the years, we have yet to win the true accountability that we need to secure our full civil rights and dignity. Ever since the death of Garner in my city — in some ways ever since the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles 25 years ago — we've had the proof right in front of us, on our screens. We thought this new phenomenon — ubiquitous cameras providing new evidence of an enduring injustice — would shock the nation into action, but it hasn't. We have organized and marched and rallied, thinking it would move the nation to value our lives and reform its policing. But it hasn't.

All across America, local community groups are working to pass bills and make policy reforms such as the Right To Know Act. Each effort tries to address some small piece of the problem of racism and police violence — to chip off some tiny piece of the iceberg and make some progress. Our movement is growing, but not fast enough. Unless the Jewish community and everyone who is now watching from the sidelines gets involved, we will be sharing these tragic videos for years to come. Now is the moment to say “never again — not one more.” Now is the moment for white Jews to join us in the streets, to call your legislators, to donate your time and money. To invest in a future where we never have to enter Shabbat with the echoes of gunshots in our ears.

The only way we can ensure a future in which black lives matter and the police are trusted and respected by all is if white Jews, and all Americans, actively participate in the campaigns for racial justice and police accountability being waged all across the country by local organizations, especially those led by people of color. We can win, but only by creating movements too powerful to be ignored. In this struggle there is no neutral ground — if the Jewish community isn't part of the solution, then it is part of the problem.

Like those people watching us march past them, most Americans don't see this as their problem to solve. As Jews, we know what it means to fight for our survival while those around us do nothing. And as a Jew of color, I am tired of feeling abandoned by my friends and my larger Jewish community when they sit on the sidelines rather than fighting for my safety and full humanity.

Though these weeks have been painful, I am still filled with hope for change and certainty that we will win. All I have to do is look at the community I am lucky enough to work with — the powerful, brilliant Jews of all races who are struggling for racial justice every day. They remind me of the most potent parts of our tradition: those that call us to strive for justice even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. We won't give up — we will pass bills like the Right to Know Act. [With Jews at my side, I will be out in streets fighting for justice. Will you be there with me?](#)



CORNERSTONE 2023 RESOURCE

(Leo Ferguson is the community and communications organizer for Jews for Racial & Economic Justice.)