

**GROUP RITUALS
TO BUILD
CHARACTER
STRENGTHS**

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These are rituals for you to incorporate into your group or cabin's regular routine, so they are repeated throughout the session. For example, you might include a new reflection exercise every Shabbat or use a daily morning breathing exercise. By consistently focusing on character-building, you'll help campers develop important social-emotional skills and improve their ability to reflect on themselves.

**Watch your thoughts, they become your words;
watch your words, they become your actions;
watch your actions, they become your habits;
watch your habits, they become your character;
watch your character, it becomes your destiny.**

– LAO TZU

TRIPLE A'S REFLECTION

GRATITUDE, SELF-COMPASSION, FORGIVENESS

Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness

- This functions like a 'rose-bud-thorn,' ritual. However, here the focus is on personal growth rather than expressing things that happened externally that were good or bad. This ritual will help campers reflect and share to build self-awareness and growth, self-compassion, a sense of belonging, caring, and positive relationships.
- Ask campers to reflect on the day and share the following:
 - An "A-ha" moment -- something that they realized about themselves when they tried something new or something they learned about themselves or others.
 - An Appreciation -- something that they appreciate about camp, a counselor, their group/bunk, etc. They can also use this to give encouragement to another camper or themselves.
 - An "Apology" -- something that they want to forgive themselves for so they can stop feeling badly and express self-compassion or an apology they want to offer someone to increase forgiveness and self-compassion.

5-FINGER BREATHING

MINDFULNESS

Self-awareness, self-management

- Deep breathing helps campers center and practice self-regulation which can help during intense emotions. Here are a couple of times to practice regularly:
 - *Before or during prayer/tefillah:* Take a moment for silence and center oneself to make the transition from mundane to holy space.
 - *During transitions:* Transitions can be difficult for many campers. Take a moment before beginning an activity to take a few breaths to refocus and center oneself.
- Demonstration:
 - One hand is the “base” hand, the other is the “tracing” hand (dominant hand). Slowly trace your thumb with your index finger, breathing in as you move up, and breathing out as you move down.
 - Repeat for each finger. Then repeat again.
- Ask campers to share how they feel after the exercise.

**“With every breath we praise The Eternal G-d”
- Psalm 150**

Every time we take a breath, we are reminded of G-d’s holiness, His ruach, and the sacredness within us.

SHEMA: BREATHING & GROUNDING

MINDFULNESS

Self-awareness, self-management

Building listening skills can help us deepen our ability to be kind, caring and empathetic. How can we be better listeners? Why is being a good listener a requirement of being a good friend/bunk mate?

- Have campers say the Shema with intention.
Sh.. mmm...ah.
 - Shh (listen- to your environment)
 - mmm (savor the moment)
 - Ahh (release a deep breath for presence)
- Explain each of the above, and walk campers through that exercise, making the sh...mmm...ah noises together. Repeat the Sh'ma as many times as needed to get everyone to slow down together.
- *Group reflection:* What does listening look, sound, and feel like? What does it feel like when we slow down? What do we gain from listening?

AFFIRMATION STONES

CONFIDENCE, RESILIENCE

Self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills

Materials: art supplies, small stones or wooden disks.

Self-affirmations boost self-confidence, reduce stress, and improve mental health. They also promote a growth mindset and build emotional resilience.

- Have campers write/paint a positive character trait or affirmation on a small stone or wooden disk. These stones can be used for games or rituals, like picking one each morning to guide the day or sharing affirmations at the end of the day based on positive traits observed.
- Campers can also leave affirmations around camp—such as writing notes or decorating rocks—for others to find.
- Consider setting up an affirmation buddy system, having campers create new affirmations weekly, or incorporating a regular reflection on how they use their affirmations.

In Jewish tradition, when someone asks **“Ayeka? Where are you?”** the response is **“Hineni - I am here,”** or **“Here I am.”** Throughout our lives we are asked to show up and affirm who we are to build confidence and make an impact.

KINDNESS PRANKS/RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

KINDNESS, CREATIVITY

Social-awareness, relationship skills

"Kindness Pranks" are a creative and memorable way for campers to embrace kindness while having fun. By the end of the program, campers will have experienced the joy of making others smile and learned the power of thoughtful gestures.

- Take classic camp pranks and put a kindness spin on them!
 - Ex- the classic "spoon" prank (putting a lot of spoons in someone's bed, cubby, or area), consider writing encouraging messages on the spoons first!
 - What other adaptations to typical "pranks" can you do to spread kindness and joy? Prompt campers to think about random acts of kindness or other silly ways to spread kindness.
- What is a random act of kindness you can do to start to fix the world?
 - Ex- give another group/bunk a random standing ovation, clean up a table for another group/bunk, write thank you notes to the bus driver, kitchen staff, maintenance staff or anyone else at camp.

The second temple was destroyed because of *sinat chinam* (senseless hatred).

Discuss: How can we build a world with *senseless love*? Now more than ever we need *achavat chinam* (senseless love).

3-2-1 REFLECTION

By Cain & Ditter

CURIOSITY, PERSPECTIVE

Self-awareness

- Reflection is crucial for growth, curiosity, and perspective. This activity will help campers think critically about their daily experiences, deepen their self-awareness, and apply what they've learned to future challenges.
- You can use this reflection activity after a specific learning/program, or after a day or week at camp. You may also consider using this reflection to close out a program.
- Campers say aloud or write down 3 things they learned, 2 things they found interesting, and 1 question they still have.
- Campers can then share in partners or groups with each other.

NAME IT

By Cain & Ditter

CONFIDENCE, RESILIENCE

Self-awareness, social-awareness, responsible decision-making

This activity helps counselors validate and reinforce positive character development in campers. By highlighting individual strengths in a specific way, counselors can boost campers' confidence, encourage them to be role models for their peers, and help them understand why their positive behaviors matter.

N- name the behavior you see

- Ex- "I noticed you waited for Molly so she wouldn't have to walk alone"

A- affirm the camper for that behavior

- Ex- "I am very impressed; you should be proud of yourself!" "I really admire you for that."

M- make the connection between the behavior and the character strength it exemplifies

- Ex- "That's what we call grit!" "That showed a lot of kindness on your part"

E- encourage others to strive for those character strengths and traits.

KINDNESS AWARD CEREMONIES

KINDNESS, LEADERSHIP

Social awareness, responsible decision-making

- Certain kindnesses can be *easy*! Holding a door, helping a friend, etc. Deep kindness requires being kind when it's not the easy or comfortable thing to do. While confetti kindness is still kindness, deep kindness is where we can make the most impact on others, brighten people's days, or make them feel great!
- Give out weekly or daily awards to campers for being kind. Notice and point out kindnesses you see, when campers go out of their way for others. Emphasize deeper acts of kindness and continued patterns of kindness.
- You may also consider giving out "awards," for different values outside of kindness.
 - Ex- the teammate of the day for exhibiting great teamwork
- Ritualizing weekly award ceremonies can be a great way for campers to showcase positive behavior and character strengths.
 - Ex- Teamwork Tuesday, Forgiveness Friday, etc.

ADDITIONAL RITUALS AND STRATEGIES

Below are some strategies and tools you may consider helping you ritualize some of the activities in the pocket guide or other character-building practices.

- **Create a consistent reflection moment:** End each day with a 5-minute reflection circle or intentional moment, you may refer to some of the activities in the guide such as breathing exercises or Triple-A reflections. Doing it regularly makes it a grounding ritual.
- **Introduce a “Character Strength of the Day”:** Start the day with a quick announcement of the day’s strength, include a definition or example, and encourage staff and campers to “catch” their peers showing it throughout the day. Shout them out at meals or other group/bunk time.
- **Use physical symbols or objects:** Have a “Character Cape,” bracelet, or other silly/fun wearable that gets passed around daily to someone who modeled the camp’s values.
- **Incorporate music and movement:** Make up a short, campy chant or hand motion series for core values or group norms. Repeat it at key transition points like before meals or field trips- it builds identity and shared language.
- **Make visual memory walls:** Dedicate a wall, board, or poster to camper quotes, drawings, or photos showing character moments. Update it throughout the week/session—it becomes a living record of growth.

SHAPE THIS CHARACTER GUIDE:

- Which rituals have you tried with your campers?
How many times and when?

- Which rituals were successful with your campers?

- Which rituals were challenging and what changes would you make to improve them?

- What new rituals would you add to this guide?

- What are other ways you would change and reshape this ritual guide for camp?