



RANCH CAMP

**CHARACTER
POCKET GUIDE**

Using this Guide

Character strengths are positive qualities in our thoughts, feelings, and actions that support our moral integrity, personal growth, and overall well-being. These core virtues help us navigate life, build strong relationships, and contribute to society. Developing character also involves taking time to reflect on ourselves, our actions, and how we've grown.

COMMON CHARACTER STRENGTHS ARE:

Perseverance/Grit	Relationship skills	Courage
Respect	Teamwork	Curiosity
Responsibility	Trust	Creativity
Resilience	Perspective	Forgiveness
Social intelligence	Open-mindedness	Fairness
Integrity	Enthusiasm	Honesty
Leadership	Gratitude	Hope
		Kindness

AS STAFF YOU HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP CHARACTER IN CAMPERS:

ROLE MODEL

Growing your awareness and demonstrating character. It's your responsibility to be the best version of yourself every day. The campers see you doing it!

ATTITUDE

Bringing your enthusiasm, positivity, generosity, and flexibility to your role.

BEHAVIORS

Narrating your thoughts as you employ problem solving and positivity. Saying it out loud and naming the strengths you and your group are using throughout the day.

Using this Guide

HOW CAN YOU PROVIDE THESE CHARACTER-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAMPERS EVERY DAY?

COMMUNITY—inclusion, belonging and friendship.

AUTONOMY—choice and voice; give campers chances to problem-solve.

MASTERY—appropriate challenges and practice.

PURPOSE—being a part of something bigger, serving others.

CHARACTER STRENGTH INTERVIEWS

TRUST, HONESTY

Self-awareness, self-management

To better understand your campers and help them feel seen and valued, share the list of strengths above with them and interview each camper. Asking them how they prefer to be supported at the start of the summer will help you build trust, get to know each camper individually, and provide the right kind of support throughout the season. You can share your responses to these questions as well. Or you can have campers interview each other.

- Tell me about someone important to you, which strengths do they have?
- Which strengths do you possess a lot of? Which ones are your superpowers?
- What strength do you want to grow in the most this summer? Why?
- How do you like to be treated when you are sad? When you are mad?

Group reflection: How do your strengths relate to our camp's core Jewish values?

First Day Activities

Kindness Chain - Chalutzim - First Day Values Activity

VALUE: KINDNESS, RESPECT

Social awareness, friendship building

Materials: markers, strips of paper, tape/glue/stapler

1. Talk about and brainstorm with campers what kindness looks like at camp – 5 minutes
2. Give each camper a few strips of paper and tell them to write or draw kind things that they can do at camp – 15 minutes
3. After campers are done, make a paper chain with all their paper strips and talk about how campers can create a chain reaction of kindness – 10 minutes
4. Hang the paper chain in your cabin!

Inclusion Quilt – Metapsim - First Day Values Activity

VALUE: INCLUSION

Resilience, social responsibility

Materials: markers, strips of paper, glue/tape, large piece of paper

Your goal is to weave a 'quilt' of inclusion to hang in your cabin!

1. Talk about and brainstorm with campers what inclusion looks like at camp – 5 minutes
2. Give each camper a few strips of paper and tell them to write or draw things that they can do at camp to include others or things that make themselves/others feel included – 15 minutes
3. After campers are done, weave all their paper strips and talk about how campers can create a place of inclusion at camp – 10 minutes
4. Hang the quilt in your cabin!

First Day Activities

Community Puzzle – Toshavim - First Day Values Activity

VALUE: Community

Social responsibility

Materials: markers, puzzle pieces, glue/tape, large piece of paper

Your goal is to create a puzzle of community to hang in your cabin!

1. Talk about and brainstorm with campers what community looks like at camp – 5 minutes
2. Give each camper a puzzle piece and tell them to write or draw things that they can do at camp to create a community or things that they want to bring into their community at camp - 15 minutes
3. After campers are done, have them try to put the puzzle together and glue it to the paper (plot twist! It will not actually fit together – you can talk about this too – it might not always be a perfect puzzle, but we all create the community together) – 10 minutes
4. Hang the puzzle in your cabin

Rituals and Routines

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.

Triple A Reflections - GREAT FOR BEDTIME

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.

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

Rituals and Routines

5-Finger Breathing - GREAT FOR TRANSITIONS AND CALMING DOWN

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.

3-2-1 Reflection - GREAT FOR BEDTIME

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.

Rituals and Routines

Wows, Pows, and chows- GREAT FOR BEDTIME

MINDFULNESS, REFLECTIONS

Self-reflection, social awareness

This functions like a 'rose-bud-thorn,' ritual but asks a for a bit more of a goofier reflection.

- Wow: the moment that inspired the most awe of your day. What was the most awesome?
- Pow: the moment that knocked you down today. What do you hope happens differently tomorrow?
- Chow: the best thing you ate today. What made your tastebuds sing?

Shema Breathing and 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?

Rituals and Routines

NAME IT - GREAT FOR BEDTIME

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.

AFFIRMATION SONGS - GREAT FOR BOKER TOV

CONFIDENCE, RESILIENCE

Self-awareness, social-awareness, relationship skills

- Play on a speaker: Affirmation Song (feat. Snoop Dogg).
- Each camper writes an affirmation. Then, put campers in groups of 4-6 people. Campers get 15 minutes to write a song with their group's affirmations (can be to the tune of any existing song).
- Alternatively, you may collect each person's affirmations into a hat and then each group selects a few at random to work with and write a song with.
- Sing-off/share songs.

Rituals and Routines

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.

Medium Prep Time Activities

AFFIRMATION STONES - GREAT FOR FREE CHOICE/RAINY DAYS

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.

KINDNESS FAIRIES - GREAT FOR FREE CHOICE ACTIVITIES

KINDNESS, CREATIVITY

Social-awareness, relationship skills, gratitude

Materials: paper, things to write with, tape

The kindness fairies spread joy and compliments around camp by anonymously surprising people with kind words and recognition.

- Have campers spend about 25 minutes writing down kind things to others, moments of thankfulness, and other gratitudes to cabins, people, or staff
- Once campers have all their notes, travel around camp and post them in places for everyone to see

Medium Prep Time Activities

KINDNESS PRANKS/RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS - GREAT FOR RAIDS

KINDNESS CREATIVITY

social-awareness, relationship skills

Materials: whatever you need for a prank!

"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).

Medium Prep Time Activities

KINDNESS AWARD CEREMONIES - GREAT FOR BEDTIME

KINDNESS, LEADERSHIP

Social awareness, responsible decision-making

Materials: certificates or awards (you rock rock or bracelet, something easy and small!)

- 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.

According to Judaism, humans have souls and are made in the image of G-d. This means every person, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has a spiritual purpose and an ability to do great things in the world.

Medium Prep Time Activities

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GRATITUDE JAR - GREAT FOR IN CABINS

GRATITUDE

Self-awareness, self-management

Materials: Jar or sealed container of some kind with a slit on top, slips of paper and writing utensils.

- Set up the Gratitude Jar in a shared space, where campers can easily access it. You can let the group decorate it. Place slips of paper and a writing tool nearby so campers can add notes anytime.
- Start by having everyone write one slip to kick off the jar. Campers can write about something they're grateful for, a memory, or something they appreciate about camp. Notes can be anonymous.

At the end of the session, empty the jar and reflect together. You may want to look over the contents in advance to screen for anything you may not want the group to see. Each camper can pull a slip and read it to the group, and you may let them claim 14 slips to elaborate or share additional thoughts.

Medium Prep Time Activities

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"WHO AM I" MOLECULES - GREAT FOR SHABBAT

TRUST, GRATITUDE

Self-awareness, social awareness

Materials: pipe cleaners and construction paper.

- Instruct campers to answer the following questions each with a character strength:
 - Strength your family gave you
 - Strength your friends know you by
 - Strength you are building for yourself

Attach all three strengths (written on circles) with pipe cleaners, to create a personalized 'molecule' of character for each camper.

Group reflection:

- How can you use your strengths to make our camp community kinder and stronger?

Medium Prep Time Activities

PDK- PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF KINDNESS - GREAT FOR SHABBAT

KINDNESS, COMMUNITY

Social-awareness, responsible decision-making

Materials: art supplies, poster paper, or wood/sign supplies.

- Displaying words or reminders of kindness around camp will promote awareness. Use prompts with campers to think about kindness and kindness at camp. What does kindness mean to you? What does kindness at camp look like? What does it take to be a kind person?
- Alternatively, print out quotes about kindness for inspiration. For example:
 - With regard to the Torah, its beginning is an act of kindness, and its end is an act of kindness (Talmud)
 - Acts of kindness never die. They linger in the memory, giving life to other acts in return. (Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks)
 - The world is based on three things - on the Torah, on the service of God, and upon acts of loving-kindness. (Pirkei Avot 1:2)
- Have campers create artwork about kindness to display around camp. These can be hung in the dining hall, posted around camp, or for campers to bring back home.

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.

Medium Prep Time Activities

ABC'S OF KINDNESS

KINDNESS, COMPASSION

Self-awareness, relationship skills

Materials: 26 index cards each labeled with a different letter of the alphabet.

- Explain that the goal of the activity is to show how small actions can make the world better, and everyone has the power to make a difference.
- Give each camper an index card with a different letter. Ask them to think of a word or phrase starting with their letter that represents a positive action or value (e.g., "C" for "Compassion" or "Community Service").
- Have campers write or draw on their cards and afterwards share what they came up with and why.
- Facilitate a reflection and action plan: Which actions can we do at camp this week? Encourage campers to make a plan.
- Consider displaying the alphabet somewhere at camp or making a poster out of the cards.

BIRD CALLS

SOCIAL AWARENESS, OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Social-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making

- Building listening skills helps campers become kinder, more empathetic, and better friends. Ask: How can we be better listeners? Why is listening important for friendships? What does good listening look, sound, and feel like?
- Each camper creates a unique "bird call." One by one, they share their call, and the group repeats it, paying attention to who each call belongs to.
- Campers stand in a circle with eyes closed. The counselor taps one camper at a time, who then makes their bird call. The group repeats the call and then opens their eyes and guesses whose bird call it was.

Group reflection:

- What is the balance between listening to what others say and thinking about what you want to say?
- What are strategies you use to try to listen and pay attention?
- What interferes with your ability to listen?

Medium Prep Time Activities

SUNNY SIDE UP

TEAMWORK, GRIT/PERSEVERANCE

Social-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making

Materials: a tarp, 1-2 tennis balls.

- Have campers stand in a circle around the tarp and take hold of a side to keep the tarp in the air (at chest height). Place a tennis ball on top of the tarp. The goal is to toss the ball into the air, flip over the tarp, and catch the ball on the tarp before it hits the ground.
- To encourage team planning, withhold the ball when you first set this up & give instructions, and give the ball to the group of campers when they have thought of a strategy that they feel 50% confident about.
- If the group is successful, find more ways to increase the challenge and foster teamwork, such as adding a second tennis ball and/or a one-handed hold on the tarp.

Group reflection:

- What strategies did your team use that were successful?
- How did communication impact your success?
- What challenges did you face as a team, and how did your team work through them together?
- What was a frustrating part of the game, and how did you push through that frustration?
- How did your team react when a strategy didn't work?
- What role did encouragement and positive attitude play in your team's success?

Medium Prep Time Activities

A LETTER TO ME - GREAT FOR START AND END OF SESSIONS

GOAL-SETTING, SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness, self-management

Materials: paper, envelopes & pens/pencils.

- Campers write letters to themselves to be opened at the end of the session. Emphasize that this is a personal activity, and only they will read their letters. Highlight how much they can grow during camp and how this exercise helps track that progress.
- Pass out materials and have campers find a quiet spot to reflect and write. Encourage them to write about how they are feeling, their goals, challenges, excitements, nerves, and the character strengths they'd like to develop.
- Collect the letters, seal them with the camper's name, and store them safely. At the end of the session, return the letters with reflective questions to prompt discussion. Consider allowing campers to share their experience of both writing and reading their letters.

Group reflection:

- What goals did you set for yourself at the beginning of the session? Do you feel like you achieved them?
- What challenges did you face during the session, and how did you overcome them?
- What are you most proud of accomplishing this summer?
- How have you changed since you wrote your letter?

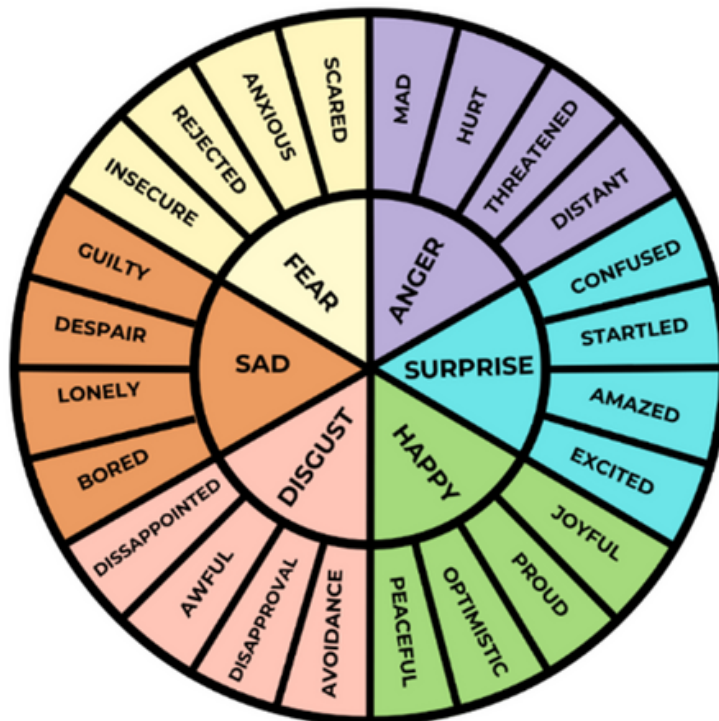
Medium Prep Time Activities

EMOTION CHARADES

RESILIENCE, SELF-REGULATION

Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness

Emotions Wheel



Close your eyes and have your finger land somewhere on the emotion wheel and have the campers act out the emotion it lands on without speaking. The rest of the group will guess what emotion is being portrayed. This helps kids practice identifying and expressing emotions through body language and facial expressions.

Or assign a scenario for two campers to roleplay a scene based on the emotion it lands on.

Group reflection: Hold a discussion on the difference between two close emotions. Discuss constructive ways you can manage difficult emotions. This teaches campers how to handle various emotions in real-life situations and gives them tools to regulate their feelings.

Debriefs and Reflections

You can use the questions below to prompt your campers during group reflections, help campers reflect during one-on-one conversations, or as inspiration in planning and creating moments of character-building.

Self-Awareness & Identity

- What is something you're proud of yourself for this week?
- When did you feel most like yourself today?
- What's one strength you've noticed about yourself since coming to camp?

Emotional Awareness

- What emotion did you feel most today? What do you think caused it?
- When something didn't go your way today, how did you handle it?
- Can you remember a time today when you had a strong feeling? What did you do with it?
- How do you know when you're feeling overwhelmed or excited?

Conflict & Empathy

- Was there a time today when you disagreed with someone? How did you handle it?
- What's something you could do tomorrow to help make camp feel better for someone else?
- How do you show kindness even when you're not in the best mood?

Social Skills & Friendship

- What's something you did today to help someone else?
- How did you include someone who might've been left out?
- What does being a good friend look like at camp?
- When was a time today that you worked together with someone really well?

Responsibility & Integrity

- Did you make a hard choice today? What helped you make your decision?
- What does it mean to you to be someone others can count on?
- What's one thing you took responsibility for today?
- Have you had a moment today where you stood up for what's right?

Growth & Reflection

- What's something you've learned about yourself this week?
- Is there a mistake you made today that you can grow from?
- What's a goal you want to set for yourself for tomorrow?
- If you could do one thing differently today, what would it be?

THANK YOU!

We hope this guide was helpful this summer. Help us make it even better!

- 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?
- Which activities have you tried with your campers?
- Which activities were successful with your campers? Which activities were challenging and what changes can you make to improve them?
- What new activities would you add to this guide?
- What are other ways you would change this guide for camp?

THANK YOU!

We would like to thank the Foundation for Jewish Camp for creating this resource and helping us bring character development to camp in a more intentional and impactful way. We would also like to thank all the camps and camp professionals that contributed their activities and thoughtfulness in developing this guide. And finally, we would like to thank our very first Character Ambassador, Reed Jacobs, for his work in implementing and shaping this guide at camp.

