



Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month

# Lesson Plans

*Middle School and High School*



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## ***Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof: Justice Justice You Shall Pursue***

*Recommended for Middle School and High School Students*

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**Overview:** This lesson connects disability rights to Jewish values and exposes learners to the perspectives of disability rights leaders.

**Format:** A 15 minute whole-group framing activity followed by stations (pick and choose the number of stations based on your students and the time allotted).

### **Big Ideas**

- Ableism means prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities
- Activists with disabilities lead disability rights movements
- Pursuing justice is a Jewish value
- Fighting ableism is part of pursuing justice

### **Objectives**

- Students will become familiar with the concept of ableism (prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities)
- Students will connect disability rights to Jewish values
- Students will be exposed to the voices of leaders with disabilities

### **Materials**

- Introduction: Handout - A Letter from Rabbi Regan
- Stations: Materials are listed in the station instructions



## Accessibility Considerations

For any lesson you plan, we encourage you to think about the students in the room and how to avoid potential barriers to individuals' successful participation. The list that follows addresses accessibility considerations for the various activities offered in this particular lesson, with some explanation so that you can extrapolate them to future classroom experiences.

- Select stations that will work well for particular your group of students.
- Think about emotional tone as it might affect students with disabilities - make sure they are not being used as object lessons.
- Students sometimes ask peers with disabilities inappropriate personal questions during lessons about disability. Be ready to correct and redirect if this happens.
- When you say "we" meaning your students or meaning Jewish people, make sure that it is not the opposite of "people with disabilities". (Eg: Don't say "we take speaking for granted, but people with disabilities may not always be able to speak", say "Some people with disabilities may not always be able to speak.").
- Assume that there are students with disabilities in the room whether or not you know who they are.
- Visual considerations: Students who are blind may need to use a tactile version of materials, text and art supplies, or may prefer to write instead of draw.
- Students with motor impairments may need help with art projects, big paper activities or other interactive lessons. Make sure that whoever is helping them follows their instructions without taking over.
- Literacy: Students who are not literate on grade level may need help reading and selecting a verse or quote, or other written materials. Some students may need questions read to them. Allow drawing as an option for students who are more comfortable with that.
- Make more than one type of writing implement available (this can make or break someone's ability to write, and informal writing implements like crayons can be more socially comfortable for some students).
- Make sure the students have text and questions in a format in an accessible format (eg: large print, electronic copy, braille)
- Some students may need help reading articles, texts and questions
- Some students may prefer to write about questions rather than discussing them with the group



•Big Paper Considerations:

- Big paper activities can be problematic for students who have trouble with reading or handwriting, and students who are self-conscious about other people watching them. Consider using a shared Google Doc instead of, or in addition to, the big paper version. (If feasible, give all students this option, because some may prefer it and it avoids singling anyone out.)
- Make post-it notes available to give students greater flexibility about how they write/draw (not everyone can write on a vertical surface!).
- If you have students who are wheelchair users or of short stature, make sure the big paper is hung at a height they can reach.
- Some students may need to type and print out their answers. Make sure a printer and tape are available.

**Introduction:** What is ableism?

**Objectives:** Discuss justice as a Jewish value, introduce the concept of ableism

**Activities:**

- Discussion: The Torah teaches us “tzedek tzedek tirdof”/”justice justice you shall pursue”. Why is it important for Jewish people to pursue justice?
- Read “A Letter from Rabbi Regan” either as a group or individually.

**Discussion:**

- What is ableism?
- What are some examples of ableism?
- How can Jewish people fight ableism?

Explain that in the stations that follow, they will have the opportunity to consider these issues in a variety of forms.

(If anyone uses the word ‘retarded’, explain that people who have been called that word find it offensive, and that it’s better to use more accurate words. Eg: ‘people with intellectual disabilities’ or ‘people with learning disabilities’ or ‘people with developmental disabilities’.)



## HANDOUT: A Letter from Rabbi Regan

To the Jewish community during Jewish Disability Awareness and Acceptance and Inclusion Month:

As a rabbi who is a disabled disability advocate, there are certain things I would like the Jewish community to understand about disability. The Torah taught me that we are all created in God's image. The disability rights community taught me how to mean it. Our society often treats people with disabilities as lesser, but all human beings are equal. The prejudice and discrimination that people with disabilities face is called ableism. The disability rights community fights ableism, and the Jewish community should too.

Adults with disabilities want the same rights that everyone else has. Just like everyone else, we want to live in our own homes, control our own lives, and do the things that matter to us. When people try to take away our freedom, disability rights groups led by adults with disabilities fight back. Sometimes we risk arrest. Sometimes we call Congress, work on legislation, and do other things that are legal. Often, we win.

Matan fights ableism by teaching Jewish educators about including kids with disabilities. As a kid, school was really hard for me because I was different and my teachers did not understand me. Many of them had never met someone like me before, and some of them were not happy to meet me. When they were kids, most kids with disabilities weren't allowed to go to regular school. Some people like me still aren't allowed to go to regular school. We help teachers understand how important it is to treat kids with disabilities equally, and we help them to learn how to do it in practice.

If you are reading this and you have a disability, I want to tell you that you're ok. I know from experience that growing up with a disability can be really hard. Sometimes people don't understand us. Sometimes people do understand and don't care. Sometimes it hurts. Sometimes we miss out on things we really, really wanted to be part of. It doesn't get easier as an adult exactly, but it does get less lonely. There are a lot of ways to be an adult, there are a lot of ways to build a good life, and there are a lot of people fighting for you.

Whether or not you have a disability, all of us have work to do in fighting ableism. What will you do to stop prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities?

Sincerely,

Rabbi Ruti Regan

Rabbinic Disability Scholar in Residence, Matan



**List of Stations: Approximately 10 minutes each; select the stations (and the number of stations - we recommend 3-4) that will work best for your group and your time-frame, allowing students to rotate between them. Full station-by-station instructions and materials below:**

- Art station:** Decorate verses and quotes related to disability (reinforcing disability rights as a Jewish value).
- Hebrew video station:** Discuss videos about disability rights in Israel (videos have English and Hebrew subtitles available).
- English video station:** Discuss videos about disability rights in the United States.
- Group writing and drawing station:** Big paper/butcher paper activity where students write or draw their answer to the question “How can the Jewish community fight ableism?”
- Reading station:** Read and discuss/reflect about ableism against wheelchair users and the complexity of disability.
- Picture book station:** Read a Sesame Street picture book about autism and communication.
- Google station:** Google information about accessible transportation in different cities.
- Text study station:** Read and discuss a Torah verse about disability rights.



## Art Station

### Materials:

- Verses from the “Art Station Handout”
- Art supplies suitable for decorating and illustrating the verses (eg: glue, markers, gel pens, crayons, colored pencils, stickers, magazines, etc.).

## Hebrew Video Station

### Materials:

- Handout: Hebrew Video Discussion Questions
- Just act as usual; it's only autism* (פשוט תתנהגו רגיל זה רק אוטיזם)
- Hebrew with Hebrew subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA5cegDdohQ>
- Hebrew with English subtitles: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_4FWqb5LKQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_4FWqb5LKQ)
- Just act as usual (hearing aid)* שמיעה - טשוט תתנהגו רגיל
- Hebrew with Hebrew subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTXDWi7AaU4>
- Hebrew with English subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6iIozBIZto>
- “*Make Room*” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_iK55KUUxVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iK55KUUxVI) (From the Ruderman Foundation. In Hebrew with English subtitles.)
- A device capable of playing YouTube videos (student phones or a device that you set up)
- If you are providing the device, load the videos before the activity starts.
- If students will be loading the videos on their own devices, send them the links in a way that they can click instead of having to copy them.

### Directions:

- Watch one of the videos, then discuss using the questions on the handout as a guide. If you have additional time, move on to the next video.



## **HANDOUT: Hebrew Video Discussion Questions**

*Just act as usual; it's only autism (רק אוטיזם תתנהגו רגיל זה רק אוטיזם)*

- a. What did the person without a disability do wrong in the first part of the video?
- b. Why do you think he did that?
- c. Have you seen people act like that? When?
- d. What should he have done instead?

*Just act as usual (hearing aid) (שמיעה) - ששוט תתנהגו רגיל*

- a. What did her classmates do wrong in the first part of the video?
- b. What should they have done instead?
- c. Why might people who are deaf or hard of hearing need to see your face when you talk to them?

*Make Room*

- a. Where do the people in the video want to live?
- b. Where do other people want them to live?
- c. Why don't they want to live there?
- d. What examples of ableism are people with disabilities pointing out in this video?
- e. In what ways is separation/living in different places a problem for people with disabilities?





## English Video Station

### Materials:

- Handout: English Video Discussion Questions
- A device capable of playing videos
- If you are providing a device, load the videos in advance
- If students will be using their phones or other personal devices to view the videos, send them the link in a format they can click.
- Institutionalized as a Teen with Jensen Caraballo* (includes descriptive audio and caption options)  
<https://rootedinrights.org/stories/storytellers/institutionalized-as-a-teen-with-jensen-caraballo/>
- Sh\*t people say to nonverbal peeps* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8erfGhAHVY4>

### Note:

- The video *Institutionalized as a Teen with Jensen Caraballo* has captions and audio descriptions available. Make sure to turn on the captions. If there are blind or low vision students, give them the option of listening to the audio description as well.
- Sh\*t people say to nonverbal peeps* does not have captions or an audio description. If you have students who need the visual described, make sure someone describes them



## HANDOUT: English Video Discussion Questions

### *Institutionalized as a Teen with Jensen Caraballo*

- a. Why was Jensen Caraballo sent to live in a nursing home when he was a teenager?
- b. How long did they tell him he would be there for? How long was he actually there?
- c. Why didn't he want to live in a nursing home?
- d. How did he get out?

### *Sh\*t people say to nonverbal peeps*

- a. What did people say to the nonverbal person that was rude?
- b. Why do you think they did that?
- c. What should they have done instead?
- d. What are some ways to listen to people who can't talk?



## Group Writing/Drawing Station

### Materials:

- Handout: Examples of Ways to Fight Ableism
- For activity 1:
  - Butcher paper or big paper
  - Tape
  - Writing/drawing supplies (markers, colored pencils, crayons; etc)
  - Post-it notes or small paper
- For activity #3:
  - Devices capable of editing a Google Doc.

### Activity #1: Butcher Paper/Big Paper Table

- Cover the table with butcher paper or big paper and tape it down.
- Put writing/drawing supplies on the table or in a basket
- Write in the middle of the paper: “How can the Jewish community fight ableism?”
- Make post-its or small paper and tape available so that students who need privacy or a different setup can participate without having to write on the big paper

### Activity #2: Google Doc

- Create a shared Google doc
- Write on top of the doc “How can the Jewish community fight ableism?”
- Share the doc with students and/or set up some devices at the group writing station

Note: If you have students who use screen readers or other assistive technology, ask them in advance what they need in order to participate in a shared doc.



## **HANDOUT: Examples of Ways to Fight Ableism**

- Don't call people ableist names
- Build ramps
- Speak up when you see something inaccessible
- Listen to people who can't talk
- Call congress
- Pursue justice
- Just act as usual
- Don't call people fakers
- Respect privacy



## Reading Station

### Materials:

- Option 1: Handout: “Respecting Wheelchair Users Who Can Walk” and the accompanying discussion questions
- Option 2: Handout: “God on Wheels: Disability and Jewish Feminist Theology”
- Pens or pencils

### Directions:

- Read the article
- Discuss the questions out loud or write your answers



## OPTION 1

### **HANDOUT: Respecting Wheelchair Users Who Can Walk by Rabbi Ruti Regan**

<https://www.realsocialskills.org/blog/respecting-wheelchair-users-who-can-walk>

People use wheelchairs for a lot of different reasons.

Some people use wheelchairs because they are paralyzed and completely unable to walk. That is not the only reason people use wheelchairs, and many wheelchair users have some ability to walk.

Here are some reasons some people who can walk use wheelchairs:

- They can walk, but it's very difficult and not an efficient way of getting around
- Walking causes them severe pain
- Walking is medically inadvisable because of the strain it would put on their heart
- They have cognitive problems that make walking more difficult than wheeling
- Falling causes them to break bones, and they are unsteady on their feet and fall easily
- They can't stand in place because they need to be moving to stay upright
- They can walk some days but not others

If you see someone use a wheelchair sometimes and walk other times, don't assume they don't need their chair. If you see a wheelchair user stand up to reach something, don't assume that they don't need their chair.

People use wheelchairs for a lot of different reasons, and many people who can walk some absolutely depend on wheelchairs for mobility.

Disability is complicated, and personal. There are a lot of reasons that people use various types of adaptive equipment. (None of which are the business of strangers). Knowing one reason people use something doesn't mean you know all the reasons, or that you are in a position to assume you know what's going on with everyone you see using adaptive equipment.

Summary: Many wheelchair users can walk some. They still need their wheelchairs. Don't assume that someone isn't really disabled just because you see them walk or stand sometimes.

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### **Discussion questions:**

- 1.What are some reasons that people who can walk might need to use wheelchairs?
- 2.Why is it ableist to assume that someone is faking?
- 3.Why is it rude to ask someone personal questions about their disability or mobility equipment?
- 4.What can you do if someone says that a wheelchair user is faking?



## OPTION 2

**HANDOUT: From “God on Wheels: Disability and Jewish Feminist Theology” by Rabbi Julia Watts Belser, who is a wheelchair user:**

*“Disability culture is marked by a lively spirit of adaptability, creativity, and resilience – not to mention a vibrant sense of delight.”*

**Discussion questions:**

1. Why might people with disabilities need to be creative and make adaptations to things?
2. What’s fun about making adaptations?
3. What happens when everyone in a group uses their creativity to make adaptations?

*“Disability invites us to rethink the nature of divine power, to jettison the classical image of God as the one who can upend mountains on a whim. An activist friend with significant muscular atrophy describes the way disability has sharpened her skills in the art of delegating and directing a staff of personal attendants, friends, and occasional passersby to facilitate her way in the world.”*

**Discussion questions:**

1. When might someone who can’t move their arms very much need to direct others to do things for them?
2. What’s the difference between being a baby and being an adult who needs other people to do a lot of things for them?
3. What management skills might adults who can’t move their arms very much need?

*“This too, it seems, is the nature of God’s power. I feel the divine presence like a live, wild current running through this world, tuned to and intimately intertwined with flesh and blood and stone. But when God wants something done, brute force simply will not do the job. God cannot pick up a single stone without a human hand to lift it. When God desires direct action in the world of matter, She must inspire and cajole, adapt and orchestrate, trust and yearn. God too, I suspect, finds it occasionally frustrating.”*

**Discussion questions:**

1. Why does Rabbi Watts Belser say ‘God cannot pick up a single stone without a human hand to lift it?’ Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. What can disability culture teach us about God?

Belser, J. W. “God on Wheels: Disability and Jewish Feminist Theology.” Tikkun29, no. 4 (October 1, 2014): 27–29. <https://www.tikkun.org/god-on-wheels/>



## Picture Book Station

### Materials:

- A device capable of playing the ebook (phones work, but it has to be in landscape mode), along with the link to [Family Forever: A Julia Storybook](#)

### Directions:

- Read this picture book on your computer/phone/iPad etc.
- Think about how Julia and her friends communicate and how you could explain this story to elementary school kids.
- Discuss the discussion questions or write down your answers.

### Discussion Questions:

- Why does Julia use a talker to communicate?
- How else does Julia communicate?
- How do Julia's friends and family communicate with her?
- How would you explain Julia's communication to a kindergartener?





## Google Station

### Materials:

- Internet-capable devices students can use to Google things OR
- Printouts of transit accessibility information
- Handout: Accessible Transportation Chart

### Directions:

- Find out about accessible transportation!
- Fill in the table with what you find



**HANDOUT: Accessible Transportation Chart**

	<b>New York City</b>	<b>San Francisco Bay Area</b>	<b>Your town</b>
Are all train stations wheelchair accessible?			
Are the busses wheelchair accessible?			
How many stations are accessible?			
How many stations are inaccessible?			
Is the station closest to your school or home accessible?			
How can you find out whether the elevators are broken?			
How do blind people find out which stop is next? What else did you find			
out about transportation accessibility?			



## Text Study Station

### Materials:

- Handout: Text Study

### Directions:

- Students will read the text study handout and discuss the accompanying questions.



## HANDOUT: Text Study

Lev. 19:14 You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am YHVH.

לֹא-תִקְלֵל חֵרֵשׁ וְלִפְנֵי עֵוֵר, לֹא תִתֵּן מְכֻשָׁל; וְיִרְאֵת מֵאֲלֵהֶיךָ,  
אֲנִי יְיָ-הֱוֵה-הָ.

*Lo t'ka-lel chay-raysh v'leef-nay ee-or lo tee-tayn meech-shol vay-yaray-ta me-elo-checha ani Adonai.*

### Discussion questions:

- What are some things that might be insulting to deaf people?
- What are some things that might create a dangerous situation for blind people?
- How else might ableism cause problems?
- What does this have to do with fearing God?

**Lev. 19:14 You shall**

**not insult the deaf, or  
place a stumbling  
block before the blind.**

**You shall fear your**

**God: I am YHVH.**

**לֹא-תִקְלַל חֵרֵשׁ וּלְפָנֵי  
עֵוֶר, לֹא תִמָּן מִכְשָׁל;  
וְרֵאשִׁית מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ, אֲנִי  
יְ-הוָה-יְ-הוָה.**

Justice  
justice you  
shall pursue

צֶדֶק צֶדֶק  
תִּרְדֹּף

NOTHING  
ABOUT US  
WITHOUT US

**Disability  
rights are  
civil rights**



# You get proud by practicing

Laura Hershey