

## **For Educators: Guidelines for Introducing LGBTQ Content into the Jewish Classroom**

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**Content Area:** Teaching Guidelines

**Grades:** K-6<sup>th</sup> grade, can apply to all grades

**Objective:** This is a guide to help you navigate introducing LGBTQ content into your Jewish classroom. It is primarily written for teachers in elementary classrooms, but most of the principles apply to all age groups.

For many of you, working with LGBTQ content in the classroom will be a new experience and you may need some support in addressing issues that arise. For other of you, the topic of LGBTQ content may have come up many times, and this guide is intended to help reinforce your efforts.

Here are some things to think about before your bring LGBTQ content into your Jewish classroom:

1. Is this the first time LGBTQ content has been introduced in my classroom or school?
2. Do I anticipate strong reactions from the parents of my students?
3. Are there children from LGBTQ families in my classroom?
4. Am I as an educator in need of more support or guidance and do I know where to get it?

If this is the first time that you are introducing LGBTQ content in your classroom, it is often best to discuss it with your school director, and if you both think it is best, send a note home to families. Letting families know ahead of time will help you field any concerns. These concerns can run the gamut from homophobia to feeling like it might not be handled properly.

If there are children from LGBTQ families you want to be sensitive to protecting them from homophobia in the classroom. You also want to help to create an environment that will help them to feel comfortable and share about their families. Including LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum sets the ground work for all your students and families feeling recognized and supported.

Please consult the resource guide below for getting more support.

Commonly asked questions when introducing LGBTQ curriculum into the classroom:

### **What if my students tease or have homophobic responses?**

It is important to frame the lesson or discussion for students. Many of you already have class rules or Torahs to help shape classroom behavior; you can lean on these when setting guidelines. Some helpful frames include:



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*We are going to be learning something new in class today and remember no matter what we learn, we always have a baseline of respect.*

*No matter how we feel about a person, we always treat them as we would want to be treated.*

*Lashon Hora (bad speech) is not allowed in our classroom.*

### **What if my students have more questions about LGBTQ identity?**

Sometimes it is helpful to create simple frames, like explaining what each of the different letters stand for.

It is not age- appropriate to go into too much detail of the sexuality aspect of the identity but you can talk about how every family is different.

If you have older students (3rd grade and above) you might think of devoting a whole class to learning about LGBTQ identity.

### **What if my students ask about my identity or the identity of their friends or other teachers?**

You can help reinforce for them that every one's identity is private. If an individual wants to share their identity it is their choice.

You as a teacher can make the decision to share your identity as you see fit. Coming out to your students, however, should be something that you think through before you bring that to your classroom. It can be a wonderful role-modeling to bring your identity to the table, and go a long way in helping students become more accepting of difference.

### **Why is it important for me to include LGBTQ-inclusive content in my Jewish classroom?**

The world of Judaism that we live in today is made of all kinds of diversity, it is important AND a mitzvah to help our students learn about all different kinds of Jews in the world. This is both a way of bringing tikkun olam but is always a way of including everyone in what defines Klal Yisrael.

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## KEY RESOURCES

### Jewish and LGBTQ Books

Aviv, Caryn and Shneer, David. eds. *Queer Jews*. NY: Routledge, 2002.

Balka, Christie, and Rose, Andy. *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Beck, Evelyn Torton, ed. *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*. Revised edition. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

Brown, Angela, ed. *Mentsch: On Being Jewish and Queer*. LA: Alyson Books, 2004.

Dzmura, Noach, ed. *Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in Jewish Community*. Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 2010.

Elwell, Sue Levi, Alpert, Rebecca T., and Idelson, Shirley, eds. *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Greenberg, Steven. *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Kabakov, Miryam, ed. *Keep Your Wives Away from Them: Orthodox Women, Unorthodox Desires*. Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 2010.

Ladin, Joy. *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

Lieberman, Leanne. *Gravity*. Victoria, B.C.: Orca Book Publishers, 2008.

Michaelson, Jay. *God vs. Gay?: The Religious Case for Equality*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.

Rapoport, Rabbi Chaim. *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View*. Mitchell Vallentine & Company, March 2004.

Shokeid, Moshe. *A Gay Synagogue in New York*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.



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## **Jewish and LGBTQ Films**

*Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School*. Directed by Irena Fayngold, produced by Keshet, 2005. [www.hineinithefilm.org](http://www.hineinithefilm.org).

*Keep Not Silent (Ortho-Dykes)*. Directed by Ilil Alexander, Israel, 2004. Available from Women Make Movies, [www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com)

*Melting Away*. Directed by Doron Eran, Israel, 2011. <http://www.go2films.com/New-Releases/Melting-Away>

*Trembling Before G-d*. Directed by Sandi Dubowski, 2001. [www.tremblingbeforeg-d.com](http://www.tremblingbeforeg-d.com).

*Yossi and Jagger*. By Eytan Fox, Amir Harel, and Gal Uchovsky, Israel, 2002.

## **Websites of Jewish LGBTQ Organizations**

[www.keshetonline.org](http://www.keshetonline.org) – *Keshet*. Resources, information, events, links, guide to Jewish GSAs, *Hineini* film resources.

[www.glbtjews.org](http://www.glbtjews.org) – *World Congress of GLBT Jews – Keshet Ga'avah*. Comprehensive list of Jewish GLBT organizations, synagogues, resources, books, and films.

[www.huc.edu/ijsa/jhvrc](http://www.huc.edu/ijsa/jhvrc) – *Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center on Sexual Orientation Issues in the Jewish Community*. A resource of the Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation of Hebrew Union College. You must register to use this website but registration is free.

[www.nehirim.org](http://www.nehirim.org) – *Nehirim*. A nonprofit organization devoted to building community for GLBT Jews, partners, and allies through retreats and other programs which celebrate GLBT culture and spirituality, and empower GLBT Jews to become active voices in their home communities.

[www.nujls.org](http://www.nujls.org) – *The National Union of Jewish Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex Students (NUJLS)*. An organization that seeks to empower Jewish LGBTQI students to feel proud of and affirmed in all their identities. NUJLS hosts an annual Spring conference for queer Jews from across the United States and Canada.

<http://www.eshelonline.org> – *Eshel*. An organization working to build understanding and support for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people in traditional Jewish communities.



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