

Lesson Plan: Sticking Together

Caring Connection Goals for 3rd to 5th Grade

Background for Teacher

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the late chief Rabbi of England, writes, “Community is the human expression of Divine love. It is where I am valued simply for who I am, how I live and what I give to others. It is the place where they know my name. Community is a society with a human face – the place we know we’re not alone.” We lead with this quote because we know how valuable it is for each of us to have connection and community.



In May 2023, the U.S. surgeon general released a new advisory on the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation and lack of connection in our country. Lack of social connection has been determined to be as hazardous to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. On the other hand, having stable and supportive connections leads to better physical and mental health outcomes such as longer life, better health and increased ability to cope with stress, anxiety and depression. As U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy says, “Our relationships are a source of healing and wellbeing hidden in plain sight – one that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled and more productive lives.” Social connections also affect community health in a positive way by increasing a community’s resiliency. Supportive and inclusive relationships in a community can lead to increased community health and safety.

With this public health crisis at hand, we must ask what our responsibility is to support ourselves and each other in fostering meaningful connection. The Jewish value, or *middah, kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh* - כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה, all Jews are responsible for one another, is a reminder of our responsibility. It helps us understand we are interconnected and must be invested in the well-being of others.

Materials Needed for Lesson: dry erase markers, pens, pencils, poster board, popsicle sticks, glue or tape, Post-it notes, ball of yarn

*Additional materials to consider jar, cell phone or recording device for student presentations

Set Induction: Read a book or story to Class/Group

Suggestions: *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud, *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson



Create a “I wish I would have” list based on the book *Each Kindness*.

Activities: Choose either a large group or small group activity based on what will work best for your context.

Activity 1: Large Group

Setting Connection Goals (30-35 minutes)

What are caring connections?



- a. Caring connections are those where you experience feeling loved, cared for, and valued.
- b. Examples are friends, family, mentors, coaches, teachers, youth group leaders, rabbis, etc.

Option 1

Brainstorm with class/group 5-10 caring connection actions

Examples - Smile at someone, say hello to someone sitting alone, ask someone to join you on the playground and/or lunch, offer to help someone that may need assistance.

- a. Write ideas on white board and vote on the top 5-10 ideas that they think are the most important and/or doable.



Make a class poster with the top 5-10 ideas. Keep the other ideas to return to at another time. Revisit these additional ideas and maybe add to or change the poster.



Have students write ideas on popsicle sticks. Choose 5-10 top actions and begin creating a popsicle stick bridge of connection. Keep the ideas that were not voted on in a jar. Add popsicle sticks from the jar to the bridge each time you meet.

- b. During future class times check in to see that the class/group is succeeding with their connection actions. Update actions list to include the ones that were not chosen first.

Option 2

Connection challenge exercise and prioritization. A list of connection challenges are typed on the next page. Cut the paper strips. Spread challenges on a table for the kids to choose from. They should choose the challenge that they like the most or the one they think they will be able to do. Each child will read the challenge they chose and say why. Some will have chosen the same challenge. Teachers may ask about commonalities and differences or point them out themselves.

Print and cut each line into strips for the above activity. Make as many copies as needed for your class/group.

Smile at someone.

Say hello to someone sitting alone.

Ask another kid to sit with your group or play.

Find out something you have in common with 3 of your classmates.

Offer assistance to someone you see that may need help.

Make a buddy bench or caring corner in your room or on the playground.

Hold the door open for someone.

Ask someone to tell you about their favorite book, movie, sport, tv show, food...

Comfort someone who seems sad or hurt.

Sit with someone new at snack time.

Activity 2: Small Group

Building bridges to caring connections with popsicle sticks

Option 1

Divide the class into pairs or small groups and have the children create their own lists of social connection actions.

Have each small group write down ideas for social connection (see examples below) on popsicle sticks. Then, have groups build a bridge by gluing or taping the sticks together. See images below. After the bridges are built, have students walk around the room and see the different bridges.

- Make a new friend this year.
- Invite a new person in your class/school to play.
- Get to know the talents of kids in your class.
- Do a school project with a person you don't know.
- Invite someone sitting alone to join you and/or your group in an activity.



Option 2

In pairs or small groups, ask students to discuss what type of social connections and support they would like. They may want to think about connections with family, friends, and new connections they may be seeking. New connections might be based on interests, school clubs, activities, summer camp, classes, youth groups, sports, etc.

Direct students to brainstorm actions they could see themselves taking that build connections and/or build support between themselves and others.

Each pair/small group will create a presentation, skit, or video showing a caring and supportive action they could take to further social connections and support.

Closing Circle: Yarn Connection Activity (10-15 minutes)

Using a ball of yarn, construct a web of connection.

Have students stand in a circle. Hang onto the end of the yarn and call out the name of the person you will toss the ball of yarn to. Then, toss the ball of yarn. The person who catches the ball of yarn shares a talent that they have, something that makes them unique or something they learned about social connections. Holding onto a small portion of the yarn, this person then calls out someone else's name and tosses the ball of yarn to them. The process continues until everyone is connected through the web of yarn.

Concluding statement from teacher: Point out that the web was created by the first person who started the process of taking an action of connection. There is no end to creating these webs, the potential exists to keep it going. Let's go forward into our week continuing to take on the challenges we have outlined and continuing to build our web.