

# Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM)

## Lesson Plan and Teacher's Guide for Teens Lesson

Lesson pairs with Shutaf Inclusion Guide's Resource, Training on the Go-Stay Flexible

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### Objectives

- Teens will identify ways to talk about mental wellness from a Jewish values perspective and will identify ways to take care of their feelings and emotional wellbeing, as they do with their physical health.
- Teens will be able to define the Jewish concept of *Shmirat Hanefesh* as the Jewish value of taking care of our wellbeing—not our physical body but our soul, spirit and emotions. In our Jewish tradition, we recognize the importance of taking care of both our bodies AND our spirits.
- Teens will be armed with tools to recognize their needs and emotions, and determine appropriate responses.

### Materials

- [Link](#) for Support Materials (includes):
  - Tree Mood Meter (Step 1)
  - “The Oak Tree” by Poet: Johnny Ray Ryder Jr. (Step 2)
  - Alon Tree Worksheet (one copy per student) (Step 3 and 5)
  - Photos (Step 5)
- Colored pencils or markers (Step 3)

### Background Resources

- Shutaf's Inclusion Guide Resource: [Training on the Go - Stay Flexible - Shutaf \(shutafinclusionprograms.org\)](https://shutafinclusionprograms.org)
- Background information about the oak tree in Judaism: [Oak Tree \(jewishvirtuallibrary.org\)](https://jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

# Process

## Step One: Introduction

- Show the students the Tree Mood Meter. Ask them to identify the number or describe the person that shows how they are feeling right now.
- Explain that today we are going to talk about mental wellness from a Jewish values perspective and think about ways to take care of their feelings and emotional wellbeing, as they do with their physical health. In Judaism, we talk about the Jewish concept of *Shmirat Hanefesh* (write on the board and ask them to repeat). It's the Jewish value of taking care of our wellbeing—not our physical body but our soul, spirit and emotions. In our Jewish tradition, we recognize the importance of taking care of both our bodies AND our spirits.

## Step Two: Read Poem

- Explain to the students that we looked at a Mood Meter related to a tree. Today we are going to talk about one type of tree in particular- the oak tree. In Hebrew it is called "*alon*" (אלון) which means "strength".
- Read the poem together called "The Oak Tree" by Poet: Johnny Ray Ryder Jr.
- Use the following questions to lead a discussion:
  - What does the oak tree look like in a storm? How did it act?
  - How was the oak tree physically affected by the storm?
  - How did the oak tree survive the storm?
  - What realization did the oak tree have? Why?
- Explain to the students no matter how strong the wind is, the roots in the ground kept it stable. Roots give a tree stability to battle a storm. Your attitude and the way you deal with the storm can help keep you strong and grounded like the *alon* tree.

## Step Three: Tree Worksheet

- Distribute a tree worksheet to each student. Ask students to picture this as an old oak tree. Its roots are firmly planted in the ground. Its branches move and sway with the wind but the trunk, the tree's core, remains stable because of deep roots.
  - Draw yourself on the trunk of the tree. The trunk represents you and your core.
  - Think about what storms are in your life. What in your life is blowing you off balance and making you unstable (ie, parents, social media, stress of school)? Draw it into the picture.
  - Think about your roots. How do you try to ground yourself when you are feeling caught in a storm? What gives you “strength” like the *alon* tree? (ie, friends, exercise, meditation).

## Step Four: The Alon Tree Plan

- Explain to your students that when they are stuck in those storms and they need to find some stability, they can think about the *alon* tree. You are going to teach them about “The *Alon* Tree Plan”. A way to take care of your feelings, *Shmirat Hanefesh*.
  - **First step:** When you feel a storm approaching, **Pause**. Try to pause before you react. Reflecting and noting that “It’s not about me,” can really help your emotional stability and your ability to handle a situation calmly.
  - **Second Step: Acknowledge.** Was it hurtful or offensive or something else? Acknowledge how you feel about it, along with the pause, so you can step back into the situation as calmly as possible.
  - **Third Step: Regulate how you respond to situations.** Learn how to calm your physical and emotional reactions, even during hard moments. Do you need to step away, count to 20, find someone to help, or something else?

## Step Five: Practice the Alon Tree Plan

- Ask the students to share a potential scenario from the storms they drew on their tree worksheet. Work through the three steps as a class to practice.
- An alternative is to use the photos provided to analyze. Ask students to look at the photo and make up a story about what is going on. What is the storm in the photo that is causing instability? Work through the three steps as a class to practice.

## Step Six: Conclusion

- Tell the students they now have their very own *Alon Tree* (the worksheet) to take home and remind them of the *Alon Tree Plan* for when they need some *Shmirat Hanefesh*, the way of taking care of your feelings.
- Explain that anytime that they need support with their emotional wellbeing, just as they might need support if they are feeling sick, that they can reach out to you!