Hakarot Hatov: Building Gratitude & Connection

A Gratitude and Connection Activity for Facilitators to use with Jewish Teen Groups

EXPECTED ACTIVITY TIMING: 15-20 MINUTES

What we choose to notice matters. Through the Jewish value of *hakarat hatov* (recognizing the good), teens practice noticing moments of care, connection, and appreciation in their lives.

Introduction to Activity and Key Concepts

SUGGESTED FRAMING

All of us have moments when life feels stressful, overwhelming, or disconnected. And sometimes, taking just a minute to notice something or someone we appreciate can help us slow down and feel a little more connected. This isn't about pretending everything is okay, or feeling grateful when things are genuinely hard. It's simply an invitation to make room for the moments of care, kindness, and meaning that can exist alongside everything else we're holding.

Get in Touch

HereNow is building the Jewish teen mental health movement. Through community, creativity, and leadership, HereNow teens are changing the conversation around mental health in their communities.

To learn more or to get involved, reach out to us at **HereNow@jbfcs.org.**

JEWISH CONNECTION

Introduce the Hebrew phrase *hakarat hatov* (הכרת הטוב), often translated as "recognizing the good" or "acknowledging the good." Explain that Jewish tradition encourages us to pay attention to the good in our lives and to recognize the people, relationships, and experiences that help sustain us.

OPTIONAL JEWISH TEXT:

"And you shall enjoy... all the bounty that God has bestowed upon you and your household." -Deuteronomy 26:11

"Ben Zoma would say: How much effort did the first human exert before he found bread to eat: He plowed, sowed, reaped, sheaved, threshed, winnowed in the wind, separated the grain from the chaff, ground the grain into flour, sifted, kneaded, and baked and only thereafter he ate. And I, on the other hand, wake up and find all of these prepared for me. Human society employs a division of labor, and each individual benefits from the service of the entire world. Similarly, how much effort did Adam the first man exert before he found a garment to wear? He sheared, laundered, combed, spun and wove, and only thereafter he found a garment to wear. And I, on the other hand, wake up and find all of these prepared for me." -Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 58a

MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

Gratitude supports mindful attention, recognition of supportive relationships, and connection. It is a wellness tool, not an obligation to feel positive or a substitute for acknowledging difficult emotions. Gratitude can help us intentionally direct our attention toward supportive relationships, meaningful experiences, and sources of hope. It does not remove stress or difficult emotions, but it can help us develop a more balanced picture of what we are experiencing. Practicing gratitude can also interrupt negative thought loops and help us notice positive or supportive experiences that we may otherwise overlook.

Activity: Noticing the Good in Threes

Invite teens to reflect individually on three prompts. They can write a few words, draw, or simply think quietly.

Read each prompt aloud and give teens time to reflect, with the reminder that their answers don't need to be profound, and everyday moments count.

After the reflection, invite teens to choose one response to share with a partner or the group, if they feel comfortable. Passing is always okay.

THE PROMPTS:

1. Something someone did for me
   Think of a moment when someone helped you, checked in on you, made you laugh, or showed you kindness.
2. Something I did for someone else
   Recall a time you supported someone, made them feel included, or did something kind—even something small.
3. Something I'm looking forward to
   It could be a big event or a small moment, like seeing a friend, listening to music, or having time to relax.

MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

Share that these prompts can support mental wellness by helping teens notice the people who care about them, the ways they show up for others, and one small thing they can look forward to. Together, these reflections can help teens feel more connected, and feel a stronger sense of agency in their own lives.

Optional Creative Extension: Appreciation Postcards

Invite teens to turn one of their reflections into a postcard or short note for someone they appreciate.

Provide each teen a piece of paper or an index card.

Ask them to think back to the first prompt about someone who has made a positive difference in their life. This could be a friend, family member, teacher, mentor, or someone in their community.

Invite them to write or draw a message explaining what they appreciate about that person. Encourage specific details, such as a small act of kindness or a moment when the person helped them feel included.

Let teens decide whether they want to give or send the note, keep it for themselves, or simply use the exercise as an additional reflection.

JEWISH CONNECTION

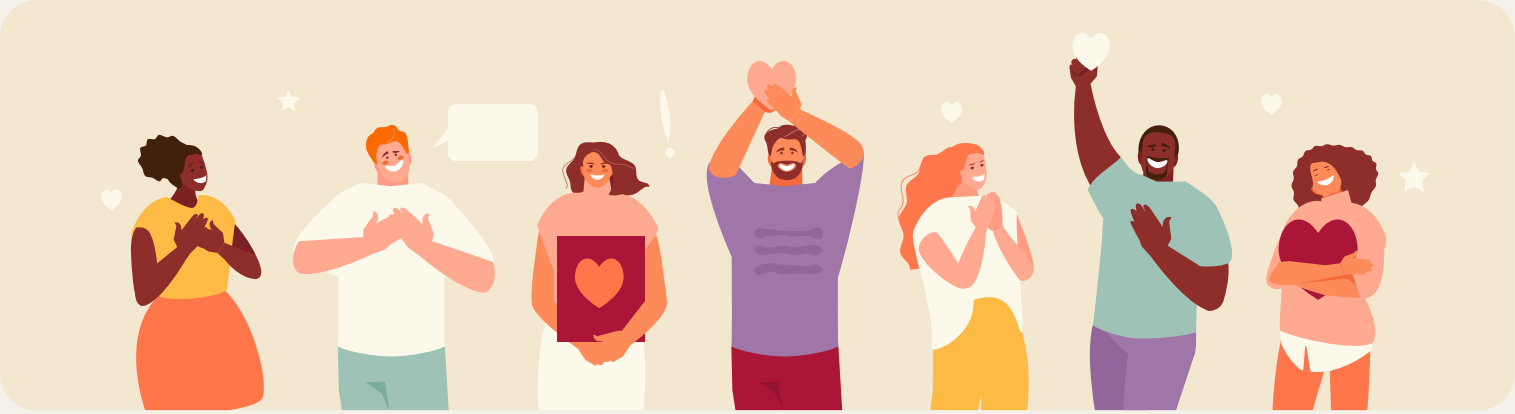
Hakarat hatov is about more than feeling thankful; it is also about recognizing the good that exists in our relationships and communities. Expressing appreciation can turn that recognition into an intentional act of connection.

OPTIONAL JEWISH TEXT:

" Who is he that is honored? He who honors his fellow human beings" -Pirkei Avot, 4:1

MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION:

Expressing appreciation can also strengthen relationships and encourage positive social interactions. The activity also gives teens a concrete way to act on their reflections rather than keeping them to themselves.



Closing Reflections

Bring the group back together and invite teens to consider one or two of the following questions:

- What did you notice when you took time to reflect on gratitude? Did you notice any changes in your body or your mind?
- What did you notice just now as you listened to what other people shared?
- Which was easier: thinking about something someone did for you, or something you did for someone else?
- How might noticing the good help us feel more connected to ourselves or our community? How might practicing gratitude help us manage our self-talk or internal narrative?
- What is one small way you could practice *hakarat hatov* this week?

SUGGESTED CLOSING

Practicing *hakarat hatov* doesn't mean we have to be grateful for everything or pretend that hard things aren't happening. It means making room to notice the good, recognize the people who support us, and appreciate the ways we can support others. Sometimes, noticing those moments can remind us that we are connected and that even small acts of kindness matter. Gratitude also helps us balance out negativity bias, our tendency to focus more on the negative than the positive, and view our lives more neutrally or positively.

Questions about the activity? Interested in more ways to connect Jewish values to mental health practice for Jewish teens? Reach out to herenow@jbfcs.org



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