

SHIVA CARDS: WHAT TO EXPECT DURING A SHIVA VISIT

Shiva cards give information about what a visitor might see, hear, do, say, and wonder when they visit a shiva house - a house of mourning. Use shiva cards to talk about what might happen, similar to a social story. Social stories use plain language to demystify a new situation and reduce anxiety.

Shiva cards give an idea of the sad parts of a shiva house, but also some of the unexpectedly happy or everyday things that a visitor might encounter.

What is shiva?

In the Jewish tradition, shiva is a 7-day period of mourning for a close relative. Shiva begins after the funeral.

During shiva, mourners aren't expected to do most day to day obligations - like work, cooking, or cleaning. Other members of the community help to take care of them by preparing the house for shiva, bringing food, and visiting the each day to comfort them or attend a prayer service.

Visiting mourners during shiva is a wonderful and important way to support someone you know who is going through a hard time.



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Who are shiva cards for?

Shiva cards are for anyone who feels nervous about visiting a friend or relative who is mourning the death of someone close to them, or nervous about encountering Jewish rituals around death and mourning for the first time.

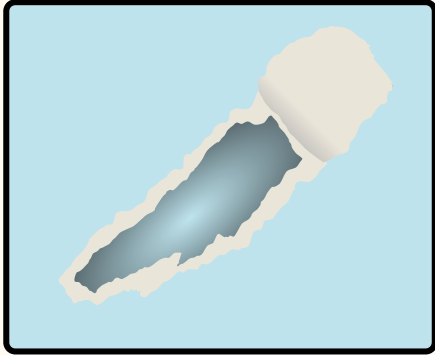
The cards are appropriate for elementary or middle school students, and assume that a visit to the shiva house involves seeing a "friend," perhaps a peer, who is mourning the recent death of a relative.

Cut these cards out to discuss them individually, or lay out a variety of cards to identify information that is surprising or leads to concrete questions. Explore the cards, discuss any feelings that they inspire, and remember that showing up during shiva is the most important step.

Created by Wilhelmina Gottschalk



I might SEE

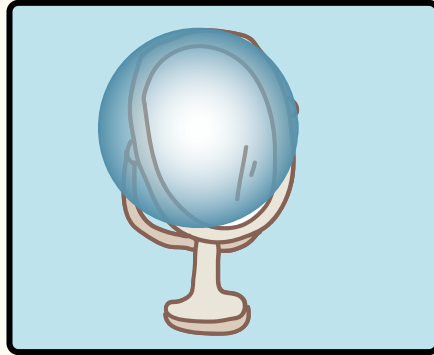


TORN CLOTHING

Torn clothing is a sign that a person is mourning - that something is broken in their lives. Mourners might wear a black ribbon instead of ripping their clothing.



I might SEE

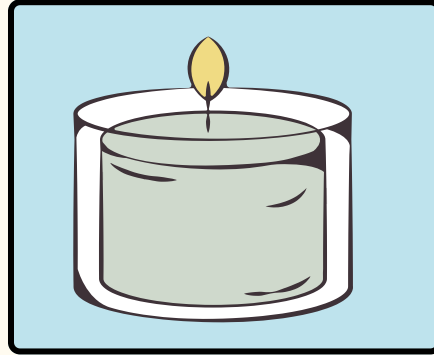


COVERED MIRRORS

Mirrors covered in cloth are common in a shiva house. The mourner shouldn't worry about looking nice or dressing up right now.



I might SEE



CANDLE

A candle's flame reminds us of the beautiful spirit of the person who died. You might see a thick 7-day candle that will burn through the 7 days of shiva.



I might SEE



SHORT CHAIR

The mourners may sit on special short chairs, or on the floor. This is a traditional symbol of sadness and loss.



I might SEE



PRAYER BOOKS

If a prayer service will take place at the shiva house, then someone will probably bring enough prayer books for everyone to use.



I might DO

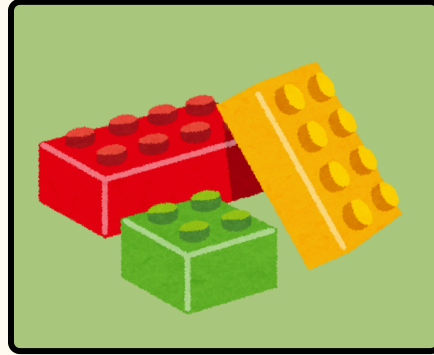


PRAY

There will usually be a short prayer service during a shiva. This gives the mourners a chance to say a special prayer, the Mourner's Kaddish.



I might DO

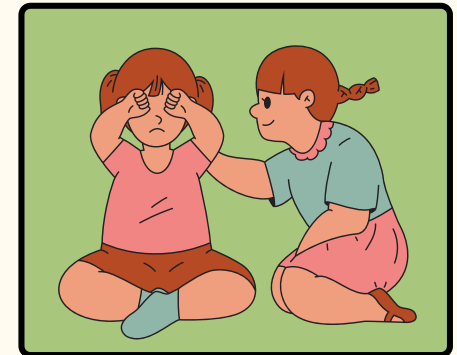


PLAY WITH MY FRIEND

Even during hard times, someone might want to take a break from feeling sad all day. That's ok. If your friend wants to play, follow their lead.



I might DO



SHOW SYMPATHY

There are different ways to support someone who is mourning. You can get them something they need, give them a hug if you both want, or just be close to them.



I might DO

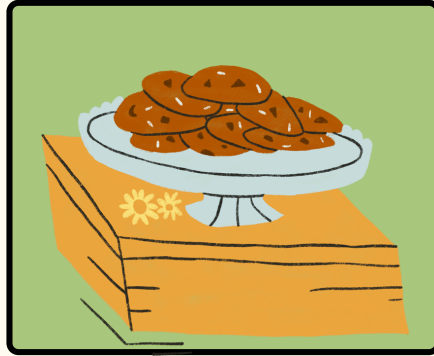


BRING FOOD

There is almost always food at a shiva house, especially cookies or snacks. Often, visitors sign up to bring food to share, or bring something they know the mourners would like.



I might DO

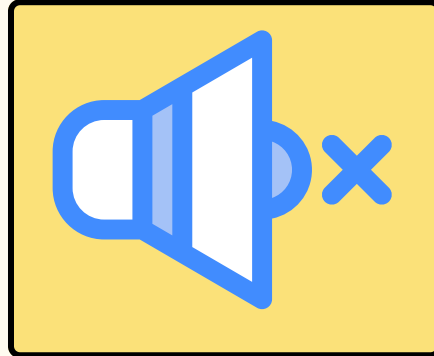


EAT SOMETHING

If everyone is eating and talking, you can too. If there is food spread out on a table, it's for everyone who wants to eat.



I might HEAR



SILENCE

Sometimes, the mourners don't feel like talking. That's ok. Don't try to fill the silence, even if it feels strange. Let the mourner talk first.



I might HEAR

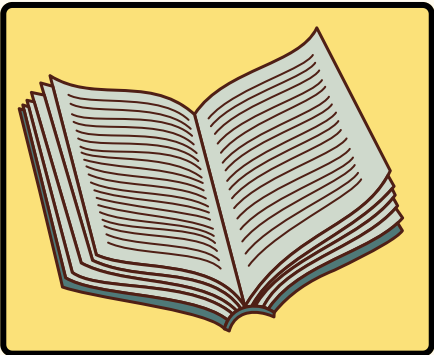


STORIES

During shiva, the mourners will usually tell stories about the person who died. This is a special chance to learn about the person they lost.



I might HEAR



MOURNER'S KADDISH

The Mourner's Kaddish is a traditional prayer that mourners recite while they are sitting shiva. It usually comes at the end of the prayer service.



I might HEAR



HEBREW WORDS

There are certain traditional phrases that visitors may say. If you don't know the Hebrew, English messages are just as comforting.



I might HEAR

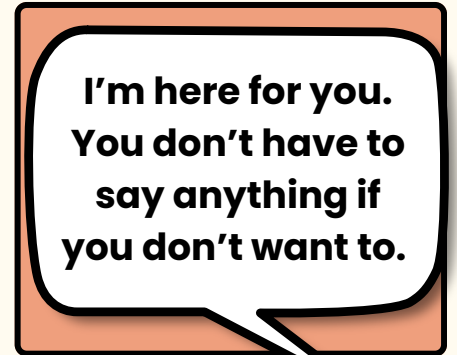


LAUGHTER

You might be surprised to hear people laugh during a shiva, but it can happen! Mourners may tell happy or funny stories about their loved one.



I might SAY



The fact that you came to visit probably makes your friend feel comforted. Just being close and giving them your attention is enough.



I might SAY

Tell me something about [the person who died].

During shiva, your friend is thinking a lot about the person who died. They might feel better if you show interest and ask them about their memories.



I might SAY

Can I get you some [water, fruit, cookies, etc.]?

If you don't know how to show support, offer to help with something very easy. Your friend might not know what to ask for, so suggestions can be helpful.



I might SAY

It's okay to feel the way you're feeling.

Your friend might feel embarrassed if you see them crying or feeling upset. You can help by showing them that you understand their feelings. This helps them feel safe.



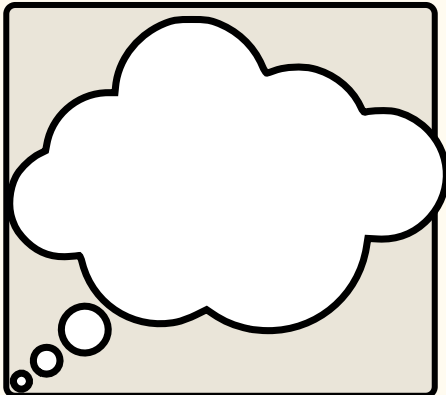
I might SAY

I can't imagine what this is like for you.

Don't say that you understand exactly how they feel. Each person feels sad in their own way. Even if you have also lost somebody, your feelings will be different from theirs.



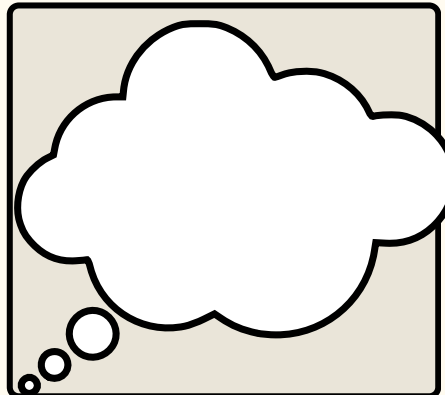
I might WONDER



What do you wonder about your trip to a shiva house? Share your question with a grownup you trust. They might have an answer, or they might have the same question themselves.



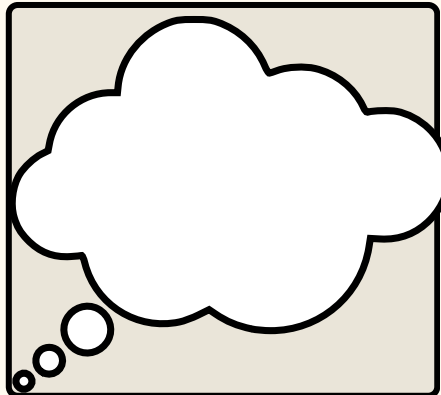
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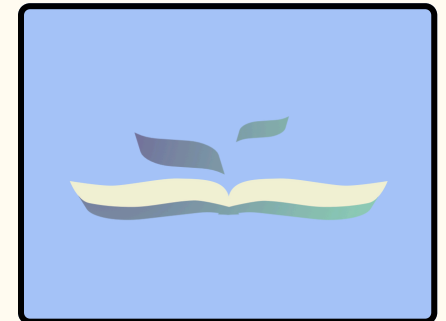
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