

## Session 1: Manhood

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### Session 1 Group Leader Survey

In a place where there are no men, try to be a man.

— Pirkei Avot

### **Overview**

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This opening session of Shevet engages teen boys in critical discussion around the concept of masculinity. Boys watch videos, play active games, and explore multiple messages that they have received about “being a man”—both the positive messages about manhood that they may have received from people, peers, popular media, and elsewhere as well as the messages about being a man that are confusing or reductive. They will ask: What messages

are unrealistic, simplistic, or confining? What does it mean to be a Jewish man in an America that celebrates a particular kind of masculinity? What does it mean to be a *mensch* and how does being a *mensch* relate to manhood?

## Objective

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**By the end of the session, participants will be able to:**

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- Establish guidelines for the group as a place where boys can be themselves
- Identify core models of masculinity in American culture and to begin thinking critically about them, and the messages boys have received about them
- Raise awareness of the limitations imposed on men by preconceived notions and stereotypes of manhood, and the messages boys have received about them
- Help teens explore how Jewish wisdom might expand their ideas of manhood.
- Empower participants to view and consciously express a positive vision of manhood and of being a *mensch* in their own authentic ways.

## Materials

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- Food/snacks
- Drum or other instruments for singing (*optional*)
- Bubble wrap and a plastic bag, or duct tape
- Objects for circle toss/name game: Suggested objects: toy wrestler or other male “doll”/figurine, a rubber chicken, men’s deodorant, tennis ball, shaving cream bottle, (better to use an empty one!), a hairbrush
- Large sticky note and markers
- Stopwatch
- Computer/projector to show videos

## Group Leader Prep Work

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- Think about what you would like to say to introduce yourself to the group (i.e., why you’re excited to be leading a Shevet group. Reflect on your own feelings and experiences being and working with teen boys to demonstrate your empathy and understanding for them. Think about what, if any of these feelings and experiences is appropriate to share with them, as a way of modeling what you’d like them to share with each other. (Nothing too “raw” or unprocessed!).
- Pick a version of *Hinei Mah Tov* to teach to your group.
- If you are not using a drum to lead this song, you may want to be prepared to instruct boys in making their own percussion using a few rhythms found here:  
<http://bit.ly/2Fu3LqN>.
- Make a “baggy ball” (use duct tape for a solid ball).

- Mark a court by placing two lines of masking tape as your basket areas. Here's a guide to making your own baggy ball: <http://bit.ly/2rQX147>.
- Load/download the videos you want to show.

## Background

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Today, in addition to beginning to explore the question of what it means to be a Jewish man, we are facilitating the formation of our Shevet group, and laying the foundations for its future growth and deepening. The best-known scheme for group development is from Bruce Tuckman. He identified five stages of group development, which included the stages of “forming,” “storming,” “norming,” “performing,” and “adjourning.”

With the first session, we are entering the “forming” stage. This stage represents a moment when the group is just beginning to come together. This time is characterized by anxiety and uncertainty. Members might be cautious with their behavior, driven by the desire to be accepted by all members of the group.

They may avoid conflict, controversy, and personal opinions even as they begin to form impressions of each other and gain an understanding of what the group will do together. Some believe this cautious behavior prevents the group from growing and deepening. However, the focus for group members during the forming stage is to become familiar with each other and their purpose, not on group performance.

Typical outcomes of the “forming stage” include things like gaining an understanding of the group's purpose, determining how the group will be organized and who will be responsible for what, and discussion of major milestones or phases of the group's journey—including an overview of the year, if possible (including when they will meet), and establishing general group rules.

### Facilitator's Tip:

A note about this and future curriculum sessions: Each curriculum session has more activities and discussions that a group can get to in a 2 hour session, especially considering that a portion of those 2 hours will be spent on non-curriculum related (but equally important) activities like catching up and having food. Your role as a group leader is NOT to try and cram in everything, but rather to make thoughtful choices about what activities and discussions will work for your group. Some choices you will make ahead of time and some choices you will have to make on the fly. Every group is unique. Some activities will be better suited to certain groups due to background knowledge, group dynamics, the group's interests, etc. No one knows your group better than you do, so you are empowered to make decisions about what to include and exclude from each curriculum session.

As group leader, it is your role to be inclusive and empowering. Make sure that everyone in the group is involved in its formation. Model inclusive leadership by inviting group members to share their strengths and unique experiences. Identify common purposes. Create an environment that fosters trust and builds commitment to the group. There will be tips throughout this gathering plan on how to do so. In addition, at Moving Traditions training, you will receive tips about how to balance your role as group leader and your role as legal, mandated reporter. In case of a questionable disclosure in your group, speak with your supervisor or contact Moving Traditions' Vice President of Program, Pamela Barkley ([pbarkley@movingtraditions.org](mailto:pbarkley@movingtraditions.org)).

## Introduction (10–15 mins)

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Put food/snacks out before participants begin to arrive (e.g., pizza, pretzels, crudité, and drinks). As participants arrive, invite them to help themselves to the food. Sharing food is a great way for guys to bond and establish a connection, as guys will have something to talk about right away (e.g., their food preferences). Once everyone has arrived, transition right into the first physical game.

Facilitator’s Tip: If possible, keep the food out and keep refilling the snacks throughout each session. When snacks are out, participants who need to step away from the group for a moment (because of restlessness, discomfort, etc.) have something to do that won’t draw undue attention to the fact that they want/need to step away: They can refill their drink or get more food. Also, having snacks on hand will make the group feel taken care of. In subsequent meetings, you might consider asking participants for any requests they have about what types of food is provided. Some group leaders have found that when they request food (including some junk food), guys feel like they are actively contributing to the space and that the space is more permissive than a school environment.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

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Facilitator’s Tip: The themes of the physical activities in this session are forming group identity and exploring Jewish manhood. We suggest beginning with the antigravity basketball game as a way to get the guys moving and having fun right off the bat. Then transition to the second activity, which provides an active way of learning everyone’s names.

### 1) Anti-Gravity Basketball (10 minutes)

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Antigravity basketball is played with a ball made of bubble wrap and a plastic bag. The ball is dribbled by hitting it upward. The object is to shoot the ball into a bucket.

Put two trash buckets on the end lines and separate participants into two teams. Assign each team one of the buckets. We suggest that the game is played in two rounds. First play with a timer to force rushed play. Next, switch the teams and play with a “first team to five points” goal.

ASK

- Who won and why?
- Was there anything that you felt was unfair?
- Which was better, playing with a clock or without a clock?
- Who was the “on court” coach?

Facilitator’s Tip: If boys are really into this activity and you want to extend it, consider asking them to stop and switch up the teams so that they are more evenly matched in terms of athleticism. After playing a game with more evenly matched teams, ask them to reflect on whether evenly matched teams make the game more fun. You might also play a round in which everyone on the team must touch the ball before the team can score.

Life Lesson: As we compete and collaborate in our lives, we have opportunities to reflect on the roles we tend to like: leading or following, speaking first or listening first, competing or collaborating, cheering people on or challenging them. As we notice what roles we easily take on, we can also challenge ourselves to use this group to try on new roles.

## 2) Circle Toss/Name Game (5–10 mins)

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Introduce yourself to the group. Very briefly share a little about your background and why you're excited to be leading this Shevet group. Tell them each session typically starts with some fun physical activity

Place objects in a bag, taking them out one at a time.

The object of this game is to learn one another's names through the action of tossing objects to each other. (If the boys already know one another, then you can substitute names for something else, such as an animal that they identify with.)

- Everyone stands in a circle in which all members are standing at arm's length apart from one another and no one is inside or outside the circle.
- Take turns tossing an object from person to person.
- Starting with one object, the first person to throw has to say the name of the person he is throwing to, and the catcher needs to say the name of the thrower.
- The person who caught the object now becomes the thrower and repeats the process. Then you can add more tossing things and speed things up.
- Once each person has gotten the object and seems to have learned everyone's names, modify the game by challenging them to speed up the pace or add more objects so that multiple namings/throws are happening simultaneously.
- Now time them to see how fast they can get all the objects to go around the circle. They will likely mess up and have to start from the beginning; let them coach each other to make it work.

ASK

- What did you have to do to make this work? Who took on a leadership role?
- What was the experience of messing up like? What was the experience of being successful like?

## COGNITIVE ACTIVITIES

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### 1) What Is Shevet? (5 mins)

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SAY

“Welcome to Shevet. We hope you find, like the thousands of other boys who have participated in this group, that you get something unique out of being in “guy space.”

Through Shevet, which means “tribe” but also references sitting together as brothers—we will explore the question: What does it mean to be a Jewish guy, and how do we think about what it means to be a *mensch*? We will be meeting once a month, in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. I hope you'll find that Shevet is a place to decompress from your stressful lives,

do cool activities, have fun discussions and just be yourself with other boys. As we begin our session today, we'll try to be *mensches* with each other. We're going to spend a little time talking about what that means in this group."

## 2) Group Guidelines (20 mins)

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Facilitator's Note: The group guidelines activity is mandatory to do during this first session to set the tone for future sessions. Make sure you set aside about 20 minutes to complete this activity.

**Say** (in a way that feels authentic to you)

"In this group we are going to talk about stuff that really matters to us as boys. And we're probably going to argue and joke around. But before we start discussing things, we want to make sure that everyone agrees about how we will spend time together in this group. So, let us put down some group rules. Does anyone have a suggestion?"

Facilitator's Tip: As boys suggest ideas, write them down on a large sticky note board. The group will probably suggest: Be respectful, no interrupting, and not talking too long. If the boys do not make suggestions, give them some guidance by saying: "Should we have something about how much people should talk?" and "Should we have something about listening?" If the group does not address confidentiality then say: "What if someone says something or tells a story in this group and then someone else in the group tells people outside of the group about it. Does anyone have a problem with that?"

Encourage group members to be as specific as possible. For example, if someone suggests, "Be respectful," ask that person "What do you mean by that?" The group member might elaborate, "One person speaks at a time," or, "Listen attentively to one another," and so forth. Encourage "fun" rules as well, for example, "Have food at each meeting."

Together with the group, create a cell phone policy. The policy could be "Everyone puts their cell phones in a basket as they enter Shevet" or "Only use cell phones for emergencies or when they are called upon for one of the activities." Make sure whatever policy you create works for you as a facilitator and for the participants. Some group leaders report that they love engaging their participants in activities that involve smartphones and feel able to redirect participants who get distracted by text messages or social media, while other group leaders find that having cell phones out distracts from the participants' experience in the group.

SAY

"You are encouraged to talk about the interesting things you learn and do in this group, but not private information shared in the group. There is one exception to this rule. I will share information with someone outside of the group if I have a reason to worry about the safety of someone in the group. For instance, if you say that you are going to hurt yourself or someone else, I might have to inform another adult outside of the group. However, I won't take that step without letting you know first why I am worried and who I am going to talk to about it. Additionally, if something in the group is making you feel uncomfortable or if something is keeping you from fully participating, I encourage you to come talk to me about it."

Facilitator's Tip: Once the rules are up on the sticky-note board, make sure that everyone is in agreement. This could be documented by signing the sheet, initialing it, or even putting their handprints on it. (This last step requires washable paint!)

### 3) Boys in the Media (15 mins)

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Facilitator's Tip: Below are provocative clips that will get a conversation started about what it means to be a man. Watch the clips before the session so that you feel comfortable with the images and the potential issues that they will raise. Show the first clips (Burger King and Wells for Boys). If you have more time, you can opt to show another clip or two. Be aware that some clips represent misogynistic attitudes of boys toward women. We include it to address it directly, rather than to perpetuate this attitude. The way to approach material like this, as we do here, is to critically examine it—as well as these particular representations of masculinity. Advertisements like the following were created to sell a product at all costs. Encourage the boys to think about why this particular brand of masculinity is considered successful marketing.

#### A) Burger King: <http://bit.ly/2Elr1rn>

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ASK

- What are some of the things men do in this commercial (throw minivan off bridge, break blocks with fist)?
- Why are they doing this, according to this commercial (“I am man”)?
- What does the commercial want you to believe about Burger King (It’s for men, eating meat, especially a Double Whopper is manly)? What does it assume you believe about boys (they are strong, like meat, have big appetites that they don’t actually want to control, don’t care about healthy “chick” foods)?
- How does this commercial represent women? (they like “chick food,” and show up as cheerleaders when a guy rips his underwear off and burns it.) What is it saying about women? about being a “feminine” guy?
- How do you relate to this idea of what it means to be a guy?

Facilitator's Tip: You might consider following up with a discussion about the new trend of “Beyond” and “Impossible” meat. [Here is an article](#) about how these new meatless burger companies are trying to expand the definition of meat so as to encourage men to eat their burgers. After sharing, consider asking the group their relationship with meat alternatives. When, if ever, have they felt pressure to eat meat? How do they feel about the advertising methods of the Beyond and Impossible burger, like the endorsements from the NBA's [Kyrie Irving](#) and [Chris Paul](#) ?

#### B) Wells for Boys: <http://bit.ly/2h8ciY2>

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ASK

- What is the well for? What other toys are in this imaginary line of toys for “sensitive little boys”?
- Why is this video funny? (It’s an exaggeration of what it is to be a sensitive guy.)
- What does it mean to be a sensitive guy, according to this video? (He’s reflective and introspective, is an introvert—gets overwhelmed by too much input, relates to mother better than father.)

- How do you connect with this image of being a guy? (You might also ask how many people like time alone to reflect, etc.)

### **C) Audi: Bravery Is What Defines Us: <http://bit.ly/2KST0Ss>**

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Facilitator's Tip: You might want to show this clip two times, the second time just with the sound.

ASK

- How would you define bravery? What does being brave have to do with being a man?
- What does the mom tell her son? What does she give him? The dad — what does he tell him/give him? What is the role of the sister? (people go alone/boutonniere; have fun/keys to his car)
- What does the boy do? (parks in principal's spot, races at red light, kisses prom queen without consent)

Facilitator's Tip: If the boys don't bring up the nonconsensual kiss, you might say something like: Did you notice how he approached the prom queen? How did she feel about the kiss? How do we know? What was the problem with his actions?

- How does this commercial define bravery? (independence, taking what you want, being aggressive and driving fast, recklessness, not caring about authority, being physically violent toward other boys and aggressive with women)
- Are there other places where you get these messages? (friends, other popular culture, etc.)
- What did you notice when we just listened to sound?
- How does this definition compare to the one we came up with before?

### **D) Breaking Bad – “A Man Provides” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MwB6nFovjl>**

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In this video, Walter White's boss, Gus talks about a man's responsibility to provide for his family, no matter what.

ASK:

- According to Gus, what should a man do?
- What is your reaction to what Gus said about a man's role in his family (that he should provide for his family, no matter whether he is appreciated, respected, or loved)?
- How might this belief affect men? How might it affect their families?

### **E) Iron Man Test Flight: <http://bit.ly/1wcUybs>**

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Facilitator's Tip: You may decide to share some of the history of Jews in comic books: Iron Man was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby: two Jewish comic book writers. Many of the creators of noteworthy superheroes were Jewish, including the creators of Superman, Captain America, Batman, Spiderman, The Hulk, the Fantastic Four, the X-men, Thor, and the Avengers. In the 1930s, there was a lot of anti-Semitism in the mainstream media and journalism fields. However, comic book publishers were mostly Jews. Up until the late 1930s, most comic books were not very good quality. However, after writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster created the first edition of Man of Steel and it was published by DC Comics, Superman became a huge hit and the “Golden Age of Comics” began. Later writers like Lee and Kirby



created less optimistic comics with superhero characters who were metaphors for Jews, African Americans, and other minorities. For more on Jews in the comic book industry, visit <https://bit.ly/2xccY7C>.

ASK

- What kind of man is Iron Man?
- How would you describe Jarvis's personality? (has British accent, robotic/unemotional, cautious) Why is Jarvis necessary? What does this say about Iron Man (doesn't "check" himself very well, is not good at thinking about the consequences of his actions)
- How does Iron Man react when Jarvis tells him he needs to run more tests? (stops him, says, "Sometimes you need to run before you can walk.")
- What does this tell us about what it is to be a guy? (be reckless, take risks)
- How else does he demonstrate these attitudes during his test flight? (shows off publicly, tries to fly to the moon despite Jarvis's warning)

### **F) Cool Guys Don't Look at Explosions: <http://youtu.be/Sqz5db5zmo>**

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ASK

What are the cool guys doing in this video (other than not looking at explosions)?

Facilitator's Tip: You can extend the discussion in the form of a debate, as follows:

Ask for two volunteers to debate on the topic of manhood.

Each volunteer must begin his speech with:

"I'm going to tell you why cool guys should \_\_\_\_\_."

Give each set of volunteers one of the prompts below to fill in the blank. For instance, one person in the pair should make a speech starting with "I'm going to tell you why cool guys should smell bad" and the other person in the pair should begin his speech with "I'm going to tell you why cool guys should smell good."

- Smell bad vs. Smell good
- Have long hair vs. Shave their head
- Have all their teeth vs. Have a space where a tooth was knocked out
- Have a full beard vs. Have a clean shave
- Be funny vs. Be serious
- Have a gang vs. Not need anybody
- Wear sneakers vs. Wear boots
- After each set of speeches, you could have a judge vote, a panel of three judges vote, or everyone can vote.

### ***Optional Discussion about Patriarchy:***

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ASK

- *When you think of a mother, what do you think of?*
- *When you think of a father, what do you think of?*
- *Of what was just mentioned, what were some stereotypes of mothers/fathers and men/women?*
- *Who has heard of the term patriarchy? (Ask participants to put their thumbs up if they have, thumbs down if they haven't.) What do you know about it?*

*Share bell hooks' definition of patriarchy with the group:*

*Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance.*

ASK

*In your life, when (if at all) do you see systems that encourage men and boys to be dominating and women and girls to be less dominating?*

Facilitator's Tip: if boys are stuck on this question, refer them back to the Audi commercial. Ask them how the boy in the commercial displayed superiority (I.e. he drove fast, he parked in the principal's spot, he kissed the girl he liked without her permission, he got into a fight).

#### **4) Discussion: Being a Man and a *Mensch* (10 mins)**

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Facilitator's Tip: This serves as a good lead in to the group guideline activity.

- How many of you have ever had someone tell you to "be a man"?
- When did this happen? What do you think they meant by that? How did you react? How do you think about this now, looking back on it?

Facilitator's Tip: If the boys share negative experiences of being told to "be a man," ask what positive associations they have with "being a man."

- What does being a man mean to you?
- The word *mensch* is a Yiddish word that literally means "man." How would you define what it means to be a *mensch*?

SAY

"In Jewish tradition, we use this word to describe a specific kind of man—someone to admire and emulate, someone with a sense of integrity, responsibility, dignity, and a noble character. As we saw in the videos we watched earlier, our society and culture often tend to reward "un-menschlike behavior." We're now going to come up with group guidelines to help us remember how to be *mensch*es with each other."

#### **Jewish Folktale on Manhood (15 mins)**

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Facilitator's Tip: As this is a folktale, we recommend telling it in your own words rather than reading it. This can serve as a good lead in to the storytelling activity.

*A King had a son. He said to his son, go away to the kingdom in the mountains for one year and learn from the elders there about how to be a man. The son obeyed his father and went to the kingdom of the mountains. But he did not pay much attention to the elders. After a year he returned home.*

*His father said: "Son, see that rock that has fallen onto the garden path. It has blocked my entrance into the garden. I would like you to move the rock."*

*The son looked at the rock. It was huge, weighing close to a thousand pounds. Wanting to impress his father he said: "Father, it would take ten men to move that rock."*

*"I want you to move the rock, son," said the King. "That's impossible," the son said.*

*His father said: "My son, you have not yet learned what it means to be a man. Go speak with the gardener and ask his advice."*

*The son was upset. He went to the gardener's shack and explained his dilemma. The gardener went out and looked at the rock. "It is true, this rock cannot be lifted by one man. But it can be moved by one man. Take a sledgehammer and break the rock into many small pieces. Then your father will know that you have become a man."*

ASK

- What happened in the story?
- What did you like about the story? dislike?
- What experiences have you had of people telling you that doing something makes you "a man"?
- What does it mean to be a "real man" according to this story? (rather than trying to shoulder a burden by yourself—asking for help, rather than trying to do it by yourself)
- What might the rock symbolize?
- What might the sledgehammer symbolize?
- How do the father and the gardener each move the boy on a journey toward manhood?

Life Lesson: In this group, we are going to be doing a bunch of different types of activities. You might really like some of them and really hate others. Some stuff you'll be great at, and other things will be hard. Try to be patient and forgiving with yourself and others and stretch yourself to try things that you might not be sure you want to do. Like the son in the story, know that it is important to ask for help and to rely on others when you feel challenged in this group. Feel free to give me feedback after the sessions about what you liked or found difficult.

## **EMOTIVE ACTIVITIES**

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### **Storytelling (15 mins)**

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Have the group complete the following sentence. Tell them start with a funny round, and then do a more serious round: “You know you are becoming a man when ... “

ASK

- What does it mean to go from being a child to becoming a teen?
- What does having a bar mitzvah have to do with this? (Boys don’t immediately make the transition into becoming a man at their b’nai mitzvah, but rather to being a teen boy—though they’ll still hear people in their lives talk about how they are now a man.)

## Closing (5–10 mins)

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Facilitator’s Tip: Choose one of the following closing rituals. You may want to experiment with different ones of these closing rituals over the next few sessions, as the group thinks about its identity and perhaps chooses a ritual they would like to close the group with each time. If you choose to use a ritual that is not on the following list, make sure that it contains a physical and a verbal element:

1. Sing or play a recording of *Hinei Mah Tov* (options include the traditional round, or either of these versions: <http://bit.ly/2nrCP3v> or <http://bit.ly/2EpRNz3>)

Invite the group to sit close together. Use a drum, if available and/or invite boys to clap or drum on surfaces (you may want to instruct this, using a few rhythms found here, before singing: <http://bit.ly/2Fu3LqN>)

Invite the group to vary the volume of the melody and to move their bodies to it, perhaps rocking side to side, or forward and back

2. Have the boys get in a circle and put their hands in. Pick a word of the day (i.e., *mensch*, cool guy, rock, etc.). Say that word together while simultaneously lifting hands out of the circle.
3. Do the following *Achim/Simcha* chant: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9pgCO8H6h0>
4. Have as many boys as possible lift a wine glass with only their pinkies touching the bottom. Next pour water into the glass. Have everyone lift the glass and say *L’chayim!*
5. Invite the boys to stand in a circle with their shoulders touching. They should rub their hands together in front of them, building energy between their hands. Whoever feels the energy should let it lift their hands up above their head, and the rest of the group should follow.
6. Have boys share one word or phrase about what they are taking away today.
7. Close by saying or singing *Shehechyanu*:

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheynu, Melech HaOlam, shehechyanu v’kimanu v’higianu lazman hazeh. Amen.*

Life Lesson: In this group—and in other spaces in your life, may you find a space that offers you safety, one that honors your gifts, and makes you feel comfortable. May this also be a “brave space” for you—where you can discover a balance between pushing yourself to have conversations that might sometimes be new and a little scary, and taking a break and taking care of yourself.

Take it home: Over the next few weeks until we meet again, try to notice when behavior fits within the stereotypical “box” of manliness and when your behavior expands or redefines manliness. And/or when you’re watching TV, movies, or YouTube, try to notice the ways that men and boys are portrayed.

As we build this brave space together, we bring more parts of ourselves into this space. Next time, we will be talking about wisdom. I invite you to bring something meaningful to you that represents wisdom, perhaps something connected to a particular gift or talent you have.

Facilitator’s Tip: If you are having the boys bring something next time, in addition to telling them now, you’ll also need to send a reminder a few days before your next session.

## **Session 1 Group Leader Survey**

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