



LGBTQ+ AFFIRMATION SKILLS TO SUPPORT PRIDE ALL YEAR

The way we recognize and uplift others has a profound impact on our mind and soul, shaping the way we see ourselves and our communities. Affirmation is more than just words – it is the act of celebrating and honoring the presence, identities and contributions of LGBTQ+ Jews. When we intentionally affirm others, we create a culture of affirmation that supports everybody's mental health. A culture of affirmation invites members to be authentic and fosters a sense of belonging, joy and resilience. At the Blue Dove Foundation, we hope to inspire Jewish communities to practice affirming words and actions, so LGBTQ+ community members feel seen, valued and fully embraced in Jewish life – not just during Pride Month, but year-round.



Jewish values are helpful guides to deepen your inclusion practice. According to [Keshet](#), we can draw from seven Jewish values for inspiration for inclusive behaviors.

Kavod: Respect | Sh'mirat Halashon: Guarding One's Use of Language | B'tzelem Elohim: In God's Image | Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Baze: Communal Responsibility | Al Tifrosh Min Hatsibur: Solidarity | V'ahavta L'reiacha Kamocha: Love your neighbor as yourself | Shalom Bayit: Peace in the Home

These values invite us to practice affirmation in how we speak, in how we express respect and love, and in how we advocate for others. Jewish LGBTQ+ communities navigate stress related to both being Jewish and LGBTQ+, which makes affirmation an especially powerful tool for fostering mental wellness in our Jewish community. In addition to Keshet's values, Blue Dove has identified values relevant to mental health that can inspire our affirmation work.



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רפואה שלימה - Refuah Shleimah - Healing and Wholeness

Judaism has a long tradition of recognizing that healing is not just physical; it is holistic, which is to say it has physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual components that are all interconnected. The Jewish tradition also emphasizes healing rather than curing. Even when mental illness is under control, healing and a return to wholeness is needed. The healing process has many components and may be a lifelong journey.

פיקוח נפש - saving a life - Pikuach nefesh

In Jewish law, there is no greater priority than saving a life. This leads to the idea that Jewish mitzvot, or commandments, are not about restricting life but rather about enabling us to live our most meaningful lives and helping others do the same.

לפני עיוור - Lifnei iver - before the blind (inclusivity)

It is our responsibility to do our best to create communities that meet the needs and celebrate the value of everyone. Rather than looking at a disability or mental illness through the lens of a handicap, we can uphold this value by seeking to ensure all individuals can participate fully in the community.

נושא בעול עם חברו - Nosei b'ol im chaveiro - sharing a burden with one's friend

The Torah includes a story of a special friendship between Ruth, who has converted to Judaism, and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth and Naomi face many difficulties together but are able to overcome them, because they support each other.



Jewish Mental Health Values - The Blue Dove Foundation



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Rates of mental health challenges are uniquely high in the LGBTQ+ community, which truly does make affirmation practice life-saving work. **LGBTQ+ youth who have at least one accepting adult in their life were 40% less likely to attempt suicide (Human Rights Campaign).** The LGBTQ+ experience reflects the Jewish values from our stories beautifully – a celebration of resistance, advocacy, liberation, radical joy and hope in the face of challenges.

As you explore these values, which ones resonate with you, and why?

Which ones align with the values you already hold?

Which ones help you think about inclusivity in a new way?

Affirmations on Different Levels

Individual level: When the Trevor Project asked LGBTQ+ youth to share ways they felt most supported by parents and caregivers, they offered the following: being welcoming to their friends and partners, talking with them respectfully about their identity, using their name and pronouns correctly, supporting their gender expression and educating themselves about LGBTQ+ people and issues. These are great examples of affirmation on a person-to-person level. To build your skills, you can practice using a person’s name and pronouns, educate yourself about issues they are facing, and practice talking about LGBTQ+ issues in respectful ways.

SHE/HER



THEY/THEM



HE/HIM

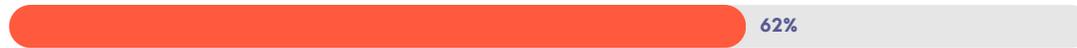




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5 most common ways that LGBTQ youth reported feeling supported by their parents or caregivers (The Trevor Project 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health)

Been welcoming to their LGBTQ friends or partners



Talked with them respectfully about their LGBTQ identity



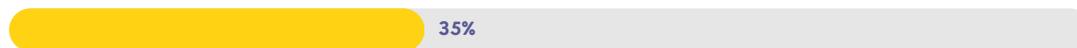
Used their name and pronouns correctly



Supported their gender expression



Educated themselves about LGBTQ people and issues



Community level: We can also find opportunities at the communal level, such as in our Jewish community spaces. In the Trevor Project’s survey, youth described an affirming space as one that includes representation through supporting decor, pride flags, policies put in place to protect LGBTQ+ people against harm, respectful treatment and normalizing the sharing of pronouns. Think of ways individuals interact with your community, such as filling out forms and attending events. Skills here focus on practicing how we speak about LGBTQ+ experiences as part of the organizational community, and taking steps to show verbal and nonverbal signs of welcoming. For example, considering bathroom accessibility, visuals like flags, and inclusive language on forms can all be helpful. We can also come together as a community and work toward broader advocacy for LGBTQ+ mental health and wellness. This could look like organizing to go to a legislative session or attending Pride events together as a group. If you’re not sure where to start, Keshet has a Community Mobilization team ([The Jewish Fight for LGBTQ+ Equality – Keshet](#)) that brings together the Jewish community to advance LGBTQ+ equality nationwide and on the state level. You can even request an advocacy training program.



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Affirming Practices

Start to think about how you can incorporate affirming practices into your life. As you start to brainstorm, we encourage you to do so with a “messy mindset.” Developing a skill requires intentionality and vulnerability. Most of us do not wake up being an expert at something new. A messy mindset means acknowledging we will make mistakes, and we can grow from them with intentionality and accountability.



What efforts most speak to you and are within your power to create inclusive change? Brainstorm some ideas on the individual level (one on one), communal level (organizational) and broader (societal) level.

INDIVIDUAL

COMMUNAL

BROADER



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What steps can you take to ensure you are creating inclusive change on these different levels?

- As you think about the steps you can take, remember imperfection is part of the journey. Creating change is a vulnerable process, requiring us to take a look at what we could be doing better and holding ourselves accountable to take action. There will be mistakes and bumps in the process. Be gentle with yourself and practice self-compassion. Staying stuck in shame hurts us all and hinders change-making. If you notice shame emerging, self-compassion practices can help you move through the stuckness.
- Break changes down into doable steps, and share the responsibility for tasks.

Examples

Individual: Practice using name/pronouns/gender-inclusive language, asking respectful questions and limiting questions that are private concerns.

Communal: Express support through environmental cues like pictures on websites or in offices, questions in paperwork and bathrooms as well as by welcoming LGBTQ+ people in events, rituals and messaging.

Societal: Engage in advocacy, e.g., contacting federal and state legislatures, voting and attending Pride celebrations as a community.

At all levels: Invest in education and training to learn about LGBTQ+ experiences, strengths, challenges and ways to prioritize safety and wellness.

