



WHO DO I SPEND TIME WITH?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource explores the issue of **loneliness** through the value of **diversity**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource explores how diversity of friendships can enrich our lives and alleviate loneliness. It engages with what might be hard about building diverse relationships, what holds us back, and what might also be able to propel us forward.



Time Estimate:

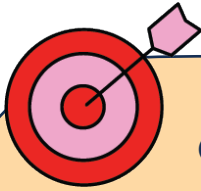
40 minutes



Best Uses:

- For an honest conversation about the relationships we build.
- Appropriate for all ages.

LET'S GET STARTED



OPENING PROMPT AND FRAMING

In a NYT article, titled "*Old and Young, Talking Again*" (February 18, 2024) one researcher is quoted as saying:

"A society in which members of different generations do not interact "is a dangerous experiment."



10 min



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What is your reaction to that quote?
- What are some ways you can expand this idea to include not just "old and young" but other types of people who are different from one another? What are some examples you can think of?

Facilitator continues reading:

The article continues to describe initiatives that bring together older and younger people for conversations, sharing, and fostering of friendship. The benefit is not just for the elderly, who are often isolated, and lonely, but the younger participants as well, who find themselves learning, growing and being deeply enriched by the relationships and friendships that are built.



EXPLORE THE VALUE

7 min



These issues prompt us to think about loneliness and its relationship to diversity. Loneliness as a phenomenon is exacerbated when we construct worlds that are small and narrowly drawn. It begs us to ask, how far outside of our natural comfort zone are we willing to go/can we go to spend time with those who are different than we are? Not just age-wise, but in every way possible – race, gender, socio-economic status, background, nationality, interests, a neighbor, a former teacher, a community member, a stranger, etc. The more people in our potential circles, and the more diverse they are, the less lonely we (as individuals and as a society) can be.



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Facilitator prompts the group:

- Why might we not spend time with people who are different than we are?
- Is it merely practical? Something else? Where might vulnerability fit into the picture?



JEWISH ANCHOR

Facilitator reads for framing:

In a beautiful article in the Times of Israel, titled *Aging and the Beauty of Being* Dr. Yakir Englander – who grew up in the Hassidic community, but no longer is a formal part of it – recounts the beauty of the relationship between the older and younger in that community in vivid ways.



Read the following excerpt at and follow the prompts with a havruta:

...Hearing a story from the lips of one of the elders is not about learning new content. Rather, it is about the living presence of the teller. I will never forget the Hassidic tales as told to us by our teacher, Rabbi Yosef Tzeinvirt. His face would become radiant as he spoke, and his blind eyes, intensely blue, would shine a warm light into our lives. The Hassidic tales we heard from him had a special impact on me. Rather than being simply stories with a moral to be understood, they have become archetypal tales whose meaning I strive to live by. At moments of challenge and complexity in my life, they arise in my mind, and shine a light on the pathway of a life journey that can be full of questions and short on answers.

Modern culture has almost entirely lost the secret of the crucial role that the elderly play in society...

Elders play a valuable role for a generation of younger people, focused as they are on action, often unable to catch their breath long enough to find soul and reflection in the midst of their Doing. To live alongside older folk is to experience moments of repose, of comforting touch, and also to learn that beauty is integral to the human body, just as it is, even without the tensed muscle tones of youth. The older person whom we love has earned every wrinkle and crease in their skin, through living a good life, equally rich with both success and disappointments.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- With a havruta/partner, discuss the key points of the excerpt above.
- Based on this reflection how would you describe the value of having diverse relationships?
- In what way(s) does having diverse relationships contribute meaning in your life?

15 min





ACTIVITY

8 min

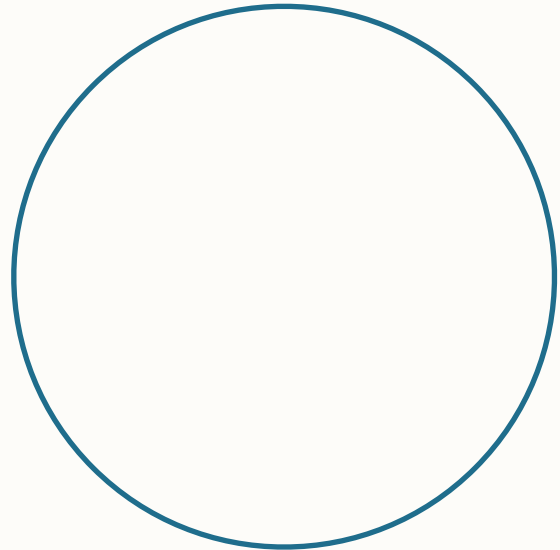
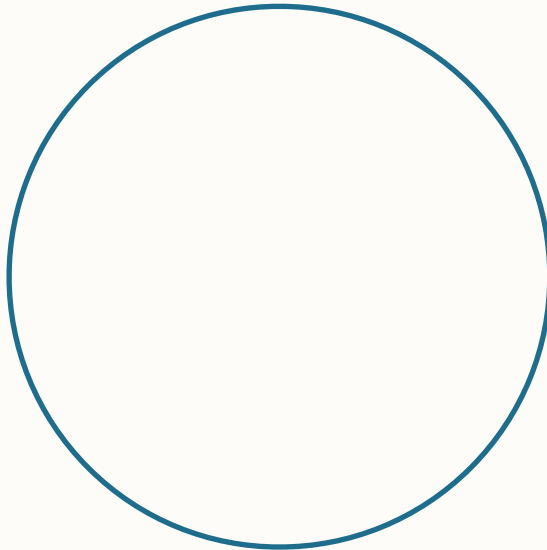


Most Common Relationships:

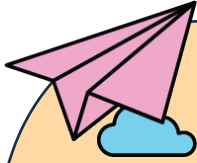
- Think about your month, and in the circle below jot down all the different people you generally spend a lot of time with over the course of an average month.
- Note where you overlap in terms of demographics/attitudes/other attributes; notice where you already experience diversity amongst your connections.

Diverse Relationships:

- Then in the circle beneath – write down categories of people who are different than you are (ex: someone from a different religion, someone much older, etc.) that you don't have relationships with but ideally *would want* to have relationships, friendships and interactions with.



5 min



PROMPT ACTION

There's a big gap between thinking about the people we may want to ideally spend time and build relationships with, and how we can actually go about doing so. Now is a chance to spend time thinking about what it looks like to see out spaces for opportunities to be around others who are different than we are.

- With a partner – think about one concrete way – spaces, places, opportunities – that you can establish a relationship with someone outside your typical orbit?
- In what way would doing so help to combat loneliness and isolation?