

# THE COURAGE TO CROSS THE LINE

## PREP FOR THE SESSION

### *Session Objective*

Through exploring the value of **courage**, learners will experience the physical and emotional aspects of polarization, understand the importance of courage in navigating polarized situations, and practice engaging with opposing viewpoints in a safe and respectful manner.

### *At-a-Glance:*

In a world often marked by division and polarization, finding the courage to stand up and speak out can be daunting. This resource invites learners to explore the power of courage in navigating polarized situations and discover how courage can help them articulate their values, bridge divides, and foster meaningful dialogue with those who hold opposing viewpoints.



#### Time Estimate:

- 45-60 minutes



#### Best Uses:

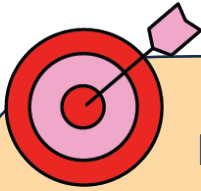
- Teens, Campus, Young Adults
- Best facilitated in-person



#### Materials & Set-Up:

- Masking tape or string to create a line on the floor
- A list of around 5 “hot take” statements that can elicit differing opinions (e.g., “Social media does more harm than good,” “Uniforms should be mandatory in schools,” “Climate change is the most critical issue of our time”)
  - The facilitator should pre-generate a list of a few examples. The facilitator can then engage the group in creating further examples if time permits

## LET'S GET STARTED



### FRAME THE ISSUE

Polarization is a process by which groups or individuals become increasingly divided in their beliefs, values, and opinions, often leading to a lack of understanding and cooperation. Imagine a community where people disagree strongly about a new policy; instead of discussing their differences, they may stop talking to each other altogether, each side convinced the other is entirely wrong. On social media, this might look like two groups posting only with those who agree with them, dismissing or attacking those with opposing views. While we navigate our polarized society, it is easy to feel stuck, isolated and trapped.

5-7 min



***Facilitator prompts the group:***

- What issues are you finding to be polarizing today?
- Are there places or situations where you've been reluctant to contribute to a conversation for fear of being criticized or fear of not being accepted?



## EXPLORE THE VALUE: COURAGE

We're going to explore how the value of courage may help us chart a path forward in bridging divides and building constructive conversations. Courage is the ability to do something difficult when there's risk or fear involved. Courageous people do and say what they think is right despite opposition. Courage is something that can be built, and exercising it takes practice. But it's hard to always act upon, and there may be times where opting against a courageous act feels more appropriate.

The Hebrew term for courage, *ometz* or *ometz lev*, literally means "strength" or "heart-strength." *Ometz* is a core Jewish *middah*, a spiritual and ethical trait with which each of us is innately endowed as human beings formed in the divine image. Even those who consider themselves fearful or anxious can access the quality of *ometz lev* in any given moment.

### *Facilitator prompts the group:*

- What do you think about the translation of courage as "heart strength?" What does this mean to you?
- In the world of polarizing discourse, what do you think takes more courage - speaking your truth to power or listening to the truth of others?



### JEWISH ANCHOR

Let's look at a very powerful modern text, the speech by Jonathan Polin and Rachel Goldberg-Polin, parents of 23-year old Israeli American hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin, given on the third night of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, August 21, 2024. [Read more](#) or [watch here](#).

- What can we learn about courage from their remarks?
- Where in their remarks do they take risks?
- Do you believe the DNC showed courage in inviting them to speak? Why or why not?

30-45  
min





## ACTIVITY

From time to time, we have opinions on things that don't \*quite\* line up with those of our friends, colleagues or family members. Sometimes those opinions and feelings are stronger than others and may align with our core values or beliefs. Through this activity, you're invited to interact with some opinions that may differ from your own. You're encouraged to engage with them, consider how the statements and opinions resonate with your personal views and ultimately take your own stand on the issues.

Hot takes are controversial yet low-stakes statements presented for debate, where there is an inherent conflict between two opposing concepts or values. They can be used to stimulate conversation, bring energy to a group and provide a temperature read amongst a selection of people.

Examples include:

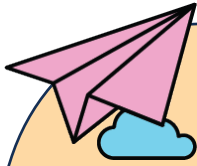
- If you catch a ball at a baseball game you shouldn't be bullied into giving it to a child.
- QR code menus should be in addition to physical menus, not instead of them.
- Wearing socks with sandals is perfectly fine.
- A hot dog is a taco.
- Cold showers are better than hot showers.
- The mullet is a good hairstyle.
- Celebrities should be given privacy.

### Instructions:

- **Set Up the Room:** Create a line down the middle of the room using masking tape or string. This line represents the divide between two opposing viewpoints.
- **Explain the Rules:** Inform the participants that you will read out a series of statements. After each statement, they should decide whether they agree or disagree with it. If they agree, they should stand on one side of the line; if they disagree, they should stand on the other side.



- **Read the Statements:** Begin reading the statements one at a time, allowing participants to choose their side. After everyone has chosen their side, give them a moment to observe where others are standing.
- **Encourage Cross-Dialogue:** Ask for volunteers from each side to explain why they chose their position. Encourage respectful listening. After a few volunteers have shared, prompt the group with, "Does anyone feel courageous enough to cross the line after hearing the other side's perspective?"
- **Reflection:** After a few rounds, gather everyone together and discuss:
  - *How did it feel to stand on your side of the line?*
  - *Was it challenging to consider the other side's viewpoint?*
  - *What role did courage play in either staying on your side or crossing the line?*
- **Conclusion:** Wrap up the activity by highlighting how polarization can create visible divides, but courage enables us to bridge those divides by engaging with and understanding different perspectives. Emphasize that while it's okay to have strong beliefs, it's also important to have the courage to listen to others and possibly reconsider our own positions.



## REFLECT AND PROMPT ACTION

5-7 min



### *Facilitator prompts the group:*

- How can the courage to engage with and understand opposing viewpoints help us overcome polarization in our own lives?
- Consider a time when you felt strongly about an issue—did you take the opportunity to listen to the other side? If so, what did you learn from that experience, and how might you approach similar situations in the future?

In the coming weeks, identify a conversation or situation where differing opinions are present, whether in your personal life, workplace, or community. Challenge yourself to actively listen to the perspectives of others, even if they oppose your own. Afterwards, reflect on how engaging with these perspectives, with courage, impacted your understanding of the issue and your relationships with those involved.

Thank you for challenging yourselves and each other to bring courage to your viewpoints and interactions. May we remember the teaching from Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, “*kol haolam kulo gesher tzar me’od, vehaikar lo lefached klal*”, the whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing is not to fear at all.” Let us move forward courageously and together.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to listen to this “Courage” playlist.

