

Teen Facilitation Training Series

November, 2021

As more information has emerged during the pandemic, we have learned that teens need Mussar. The preliminary pre-program data suggests some of the top issues for teens are stress and anxiety, Covid-19, school, friends, and mental health. They are stressed beyond belief without their usual anxiety-reducing social activities of sports and arts. During the ongoing pandemic, they have been surrounded by family more than friends and worried about their social skills. They are aware of their mental health status and the impact it has on their life. So, this summer, The Mussar Institute put out a call on social media to see who wanted to learn to facilitate Mussar for teens.

Teachers recognized the need for this training as the response was overwhelming. We had over 70 Rabbis and educators express interest in becoming trained to facilitate Mussar for teens in their communities. This summer and fall, we hosted two Teen Facilitation Training Series and taught over 40 individuals to facilitate the practice of Mussar for teens. These educators come from a wide range of backgrounds. We have 18 states and 2 other countries represented in our participants. They are Rabbis, Directors of Education, Youth Directors, Lay leaders, and Teachers. Some with extensive prior Mussar knowledge, some brand new to Mussar, all wanting to facilitate this 1,100-year-old tradition for their communities.

The training course has many components: independent study, *chevruta* work, 8-hours of online synchronous learning, and application. For the independent study, participants read parts of Alan Morinis's *Everyday Holiness* to give them a grounding in the *middot* (character traits). They also read pieces of the Teen Curriculum, *Challenges and Choices: A Jewish Teen's Guide to a Balanced Life*. The Facilitator's Guide and Training Handbook are the roadmaps for the training and the content comes from the facilitator's material for each *middah* explored. In *chevruta* (traditional learning pairs), partners review the reading, discuss questions that arise, review the last session, explore how their personal practice is going, and prepare for the upcoming session. A lot of work happens outside of class time!

Each 2-hour class is jam-packed and focused on a particular *middah* (character trait). So far, the *middot* explored were: humility/*anavah*, patience/*savlanut*, trust/*bitachon*, and gratitude/*hakarat hatov*. During the training, participants experience what it is like to be part of a *va'ad*, a spiritual learning group. Part of this philosophy is that before you can facilitate a *middah*, you must first grapple with your own personal understanding and develop your own practice. The hope is that participants will see what it feels like to be a fully-fledged participant and work to recreate that experience for their students. In addition to deep conversation about each *middah*, we invite participants to practice facilitating a piece of the curriculum in a safe space where they can experiment, try something out, and get constructive feedback from their peers.



The Mussar Institute's Teen Program has only facilitated two of these training series so far. As we plan for future series, we hope to continue to be responsive to the needs of our participants. As those who were members of the second cohort can attest, we try to revise and iterate even during the series. In the spirit of the *middah of hitlamdut*, learning from everyone/self-instruction, we are constantly learning as we're going, trying to find the best way to bring all of the energy and excitement we have for this curriculum to the larger community. As Leslie-Anne, the Director of the Teen Program says, "this curriculum is exactly what teens need right now" and we're thrilled so many communities are bringing the tradition of Mussar to their teens this year.