



# Challenges and Choices

A Jewish Teen's Guide to a Balanced Life



Leslie-Anne Copes-Finke  
 Director Teen Program  
 leslie-anne@mussarinstitute.org  
 www.mussarinstitute.org

*"It is only with infinite patience that we can arrive at a thoughtful response and a guidance that is built upon the individual nature of the child."*

- Rav Shlomo Wolbe, Mussar Master

## TEENS SEEK MEANING AND PURPOSE THROUGH MUSSAR

Incorporating a contemporary educational focus on social, emotional, and spiritual learning, *Challenges and Choices: A Jewish Teen's Guide to a Balanced Life* from The Mussar Institute will help Jewish teens:

- develop practical life skills to become more balanced and resilient,
  - deepen their spirituality and connection to Judaism,
  - transform into their "best selves," and
  - encourage more ethical and intentional participation in the world...
- All through the Jewish spiritual practice and wisdom of Mussar.



TEENS' ONE WORD TAKEAWAYS



*"Life makes us grow...  
Life is a curriculum."*

*- Alan Morinis, Founder  
The Mussar Institute*

## AN INNER CURRICULUM

Through our nationally-recognized curriculum, teens learn to pay attention to their inner character traits (*middot* in Hebrew) and to develop a personal soul curriculum by becoming aware of how *middot* impact their lives and the lives of others.

Our *middot* units are:

humility/*anavah*  
honor/*kavod*  
envy/*kinah*  
responsibility/*achrayut*  
gratitude/*hakarat ha'Tov*  
patience/*savlanut*  
lovingkindness/*chesed*  
enthusiasm/*zeirut*  
peace-of-mind/*menuchah ha'nefesh*  
silence/*sh'tukah*  
trust/*bitachon*

## AN INNER PATH FOR GROWTH

TM's Challenges and Choices curriculum guides teens towards a sense of purpose and meaning.

Each Facilitator Lesson (one unit per *middah*/character trait) has **form** and **flexibility**.

### Part 1: Setting the Tone and Preparing to Learn

- Transitional Check-In
- Definition of *Middah*
- Centering Exercise (e.g., visualization, meditation)

### Part 2: Core Mussar Learning

- *Middah* Core Reading
- The Range
- Life Through a Jewish Lens
- *Middah*-in-Action
- The Science of Practice

Part 3: Interactive, Creative, & Experiential Activities including group, *chevruta*/partner, community activities, games, video clips, animation, and crafts.

### Part 4: Transitional Closing and Bringing Practice Home

- Personal practices, actions, journaling
- Last words and takeaways to bring the learning to heart
- Parent and Family Communication

Using this flexible framework, the facilitator can select from a variety of choices to design a balanced Mussar session.



## SUPPORT FOR FACILITATORS

*flexible guidance drawing on self-reflection*

## FACILITATOR SUPPORT & STUDENT MATERIALS

Successful teen Mussar learning and growth begins with a self-reflective and effective Mussar facilitator.

The Facilitator's Guide provides guidance and support to lift-up educators who are helping teens navigate the social, emotional, and spiritual challenges of their world, including:

- Introduction to program and description of Mussar
- Best Practices and Suggestions for Leading Course
- Mussar Group Meeting Rules
- Explanation of the Curriculum by section
- Suggested Facilitator Unit Template Outline
- Glossary of Relevant Terms
- Resource Section

The Facilitator's Training Video will provide both new and seasoned Mussar facilitators with a brief introduction to Mussar and Mussar facilitation, instruction on how to make the most out of the Facilitator's Guide, guidance to navigating the 11-unit curriculum, proven ways to make the program most relevant and engaging for teens, and clips from teen group classes as examples.

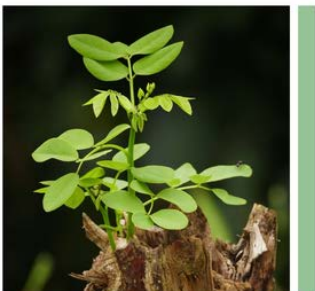
The Student Materials for each unit are also incorporated into the support materials for easy access and at-home practice.

*"I learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues,  
but most of all from my students."*

*- Rabbi Chanina, Talmudic Saying*

*"It's a really great and interesting way to learn more about yourself  
not only as a person but also where you stand as a Jew."*

*- Teen in Pilot Program*



## REVIEWS FROM OUR TEENS, THEIR PARENTS, AND EDUCATORS

"I want to thank you for all you have done for H this year. I truly appreciate the care and enthusiasm you put into bringing Mussar to life for H and her class. You gave her the gift of introspection and the ability to articulate her core values and beliefs. I know this will help to guide her through the challenging situations she will experience in college next year. It makes me so happy to watch her connection to her class continue to grow and thrive every year and I thank you for helping to facilitate and nurture that!"

- Parent of 12th Grade Mussar Student

"The Mussar program not only lends itself to deepening the spiritual, soulful engagement of our teens, we see it also as a contribution to the well-being of the students."

- Professional Educator/Rabbi

"The Challenges and Choices curriculum has been a critical safe space for our teens to learn about their own inner growth, to apply practical Mussar tools for intentionally cultivating a more balanced and compassionate approach to the obstacles in their lives, and most especially, to find a sense of "matterness" within."

- Teen in a Pilot Program Funded by Templeton Grant

"Our Mussar classes have armed me with the ability to be so much more conscious of different middot within all of us. This has taught me how to learn and grow. I am beyond grateful and I can't wait to have a Mussar reunion soon!"

- 11th & 12th Grade Teens in Active Mussar Va'ad

"Mussar taught me so much about myself and life in general. More important, than any immediate benefit, were the skills and techniques this class taught me to stay healthy. It taught me how to look at myself and see what traits were out of balance. It taught me how to relieve stress and how to recognize the good. It taught me the benefits of journaling and meditation, skills I don't use all that often but know I can always use them when I need them. It taught me all this and so much more."

"Mussar is both an opportunity to explore self but also to build a community in which to do that. This was one of the main things that I found to be so great about my experience, as I was able to see through the lens of my own experiences, but I also was able to see the perspectives of the rest of the class and I really appreciated that."

- 11th & 12th Grade Teens in Active Mussar Va'ad

"...even the basics really made me realize a lot about the importance of mental health and inner peace with yourself and keeping your emotions in check and in balance as much as we can."

"I LOVED LOVED LOVED this program!"

- 11th & 12th Grade International Teens following BBYO Teen Mussar Workshop

## LOOKING AHEAD: ENGAGING PROGRAM INNOVATION

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to virtual learning, TMI made the critical decision to develop an innovative, engaging online Mussar platform to be used in virtual, blended, and traditional in-person classrooms.

In addition to our written curriculum, we will offer a library of visual material to illustrate the middot/character traits and to inspire the teens, deepening the learning experience.

## MEASURING IMPACT

Pre and post-program student surveys will measure the depth of learning.

Post-program facilitator surveys will assure continuous improvements.

A 2 year student follow-up will demonstrate the lasting impact of the teen Mussar curriculum.

TMI will also be providing our visionary program investors regular update reports on the number of sites, participants, program feedback, and improvements.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT

How you can bring TMI's *Challenges and Choices* to your community

How you can learn more about the teen program

How you can implement Mussar teen programming as a natural part of teen philanthropy

How you can become trained as Mussar facilitator

Or for information about The Mussar Institute

Please reach out to:

Leslie-Anne Copes-Finke, Director Teen Program  
The Mussar Institute  
leslie-anne@mussarinstitute.org  
617.947.0423

The Mussar Institute  
1025 Gateway Boulevard #303-318  
Boynton Beach, Florida 33426  
[mussarinstitute.org](http://mussarinstitute.org)

