

Conversation Guide

These resources were compiled for the Jewish Future Pledge by Dr. Erica Brown.

Starting a Conversation About the Jewish Future

What's the last rewarding conversation you had with your family about Jewish purpose, values and meaning?

You may think your family knows what you believe and hold dear, but they won't really understand until you articulate these beliefs yourself. You may not really know yourself until you find the language to explain some of your deepest feelings. That's why throughout Jewish history, our leaders took time to gather their families and explain themselves.



In Genesis 25, when Abraham was nearing his last breath, he "gave gifts to the living" and blessed his son, Isaac. In Genesis 49, an elderly Jacob gathered his sons around his bedside, blessing each one separately. He did not leave it to chance.

When you gather your family together, what Jewish wisdom do you want to bless your family with? Are they aware of the importance of sustaining the Jewish people? Do they know why the Jewish future matters to you?



Here are five exercises to help you begin a conversation that matters.

Reflective Exercise #1: Judaism in One Word

Write a list of single words you associate with Judaism. These may be nouns, adjectives or verbs. They may be emotions, behaviors or objects that have helped you forge a strong Jewish bond.





Reflective Exercise #2: Chai Time – 18 Prompts

These prompts may help you as you start your conversation:

- When I think of Judaism...
- My most important Jewish charity is...
- The most significant thing I learned from my parents...
- My favorite mitzva is...
- The hardest mitzva is...
- My advice about friendship is...
- A Jewish value that's central to me is...
- I first visited Israel when...
- My favorite Jewish food is....
- Israel has always meant...
- What I love most about Judaism is...
- My favorite Jewish holiday is...
- The Jewish people are special because...
- I've always felt Jewish pride when...
- My most loved Jewish ritual is...
- The most influential Jewish text I ever read is...
- If I could get other people to observe one aspect of Jewish life, it would be...
- I get all choked up about Judaism when...



Reflective Exercise #3: My Jewish Elevator Speech

Consider the things you care about Jewishly, the things you do and the things you think about – your Jewish heart, mind, and soul – and continue this prompt in less than one hundred words.



Reflective Exercise #4: Ten Guiding Values

The Ten Commandments are divided evenly: five laws between humans and God and five laws that govern human interactions. Create ten of your own values here. You can divide them the same way, make a simple list, or find your own creative division.

Reflective Exercise #5: My Repair-the-World Campaign

Select one charity of those you support and describe why it is important to you and what you've gained through your giving. Share how giving makes you feel and the aspirations you have for this particular organization. A compelling explanation of why your *tzedakah* choice is important may go a long way in inspiring the next generation to continue their support.

Ask your children or spouse to do the same with a Jewish organization or movement they care about.





Preparing for this Important Conversation

Having a conversation with your adult children and grandchildren about your life and legacy can be hard, but the anxiety before the conversation is a lot worse than the conversation itself. Here are a few pointers to ease the way.

Be prepared

Think about what you want to say in advance. Writing down a few bullet points will help you mentally and emotionally prepare.

Don't Overprepare

Don't script the entire conversation or it will come out flat and lifeless. Remember that you are having a conversation, not giving a speech.



Set a good time and place

Important topics deserve the right time and setting. Reserve a time so that you're not rushed and choose a place that feels comfortable without a lot of distraction.

Don't be afraid to be vulnerable

Be open and share how important this conversation is to you. Expressing your own worries or failures will help break down emotional barriers.

Praise and love generously

Spread positivity by complimenting the person you're talking to. Sharing what you've learned from them and what you most admire about them creates an accepting environment and allows them the space to reciprocate their feelings.

Listen actively

Sometimes we're so nervous about what to say that we don't stop saying it. Catch yourself. A conversation involves speaking and active listening, indicating through words and gestures that you can hear what is being said and react appropriately. Give this person the space to open up. Make eye contact and don't shy away from a silent moment. Silence shows respect for the seriousness of the interaction.

Be fully present

Because technology today is a persistent distraction, honor each other and the intimacy of the conversation by leaving your cellphones behind. While you can't demand that of someone else, you can gently request it, and you can set the example.

REMEMBER, IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

It's normal to feel like your conversation wasn't perfect. Don't worry—it doesn't need to be. The first conversation might get cut off, feel awkward and unnatural or surface some difficult issues that need to be aired and cleared before proceeding. **Use this conversation as means to start an ongoing dialogue with your family.**





Talking to Your Kids and Spouse about Life without You

There are many helpful resources out there about dealing with your own mortality and talking sensitively and sensibly to your children and others about a time when you will no longer be here. We've shared only a few here. Let us know if you've found good, accessible resources, and we'll include them.

"How to Talk to Your Grown Kids about Your Mortality,"

by Elizabeth Fishel and Jeffrey Arnett

<https://www.nextavenue.org/how-to-talk-to-your-grown-kids-about-your-mortality/>

"Communicating End-of-Life Wishes," by Jane Terry

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/communicating-end-of-life-wishes/>

"Starting Legacy Conversations with Your Kids," by Jim Sprout

<https://myfw.com/starting-legacy-conversations-with-your-kids/>

"Writing Your Life Story," by Pat McNeas

http://www.patmcneas.com/telling_your_story_29161.htm

"Why You Need to Talk about Death with Your Spouse Right Now"

<https://millennialmoneyman.com/why-you-need-to-talk-about-death-with-your-spouse-right-now/>

