

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

For Your Wellbeing



Shabbos Table Talks | Week Three: When Feelings Take Over

Introduction

Welcome to **Shabbos Table Talks - Mental Health Edition!** Let's focus on some of the ideas that create the foundation for your family's mental health. Get ready for an interactive discussion with your family! We've set up a step-by-step guide to make it easy to talk to your family about mental health. Stay tuned each week throughout May for another Shabbos Table Talks to help build this healthy foundation.

Activity

Step 1 - Lets collect some points!

- At the Shabbos table, ask your family to remember the feelings we discussed last week. Explain that emotions and character are called middos. Middah means a "measure", because all of our emotions can be healthy or unhealthy if they are not measured and balanced. **Challenge each family member** to share an example where an emotion is healthy, and also how it can be unhealthy. Each person should give one answer before going around the table again.
- **Award 1 point** to each family member who provides an answer such as: sadness, depression, striving to be like others, jealousy, anger, losing one's temper, nervousness before a test or big event, anxious to the point that it's hard to get through your day. **Award 2 points** for answers like happiness, joy, silliness, fun, calm or relaxed. If your family has five or more points, you're already rooted in emotional health and awareness. A family with less than five points can be tested again after this discussion is over!

Step 2 - Let's Learn some Fundamental Ideas!

Ideas:

- There are some feelings we have which are normal that everyone experiences. However, when our feelings are very strong and make it difficult to get through the day, then it might be part of a mental illness. For example, we all experience times of sadness; that is not a mental health illness. Being "moody" or "down in the dumps" is a natural part of life. But when these feelings of sadness make it difficult to get through the day, it may be an example of someone who is struggling with a mental illness.
- **We can check ourselves to see if these feelings are regular feelings or not.** We can look at how our body is doing. When we have a strong feeling, and we also feel a lot of stomach aches, headaches, loss of appetite or overeating, unable to sleep, feeling hot or cold, shaking, feeling tense, not wanting to talk to people, crying a lot or feeling very worried, then it might be helpful to get some emotional support. Feeling these feelings does not mean something is wrong with you! It just means it might be time to ask

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for help. **If you need help - and we all do sometimes! - you can reach out to your parents, a Rebbe, Morah or teacher, or your school social worker.** Whoever you decide to talk to is up to you, but the important thing is that you ask for help so you can get back to your regular happy self.

Examples:

- If you miss your bus, is it super hard for you or are you able to just find another way to get to school?
- If you do poorly on a test, do you get very sad to the point you don't want to hang out with your friends or do you just realize you may need to study more for the next test?
- Ask your family: "What other examples can you share? How can we tell the difference between normal emotions and feelings that may require help?"

Step 3 - Let's Learn from Each Other

1. (For children of all ages)

1. Can you remember a time when you had a hard time coping with an emotion or feeling? [If your child needs some hints: hearing bad news, being jealous of your friends, being nervous before a big test.]
2. How did you deal with those strong emotions? Did you ignore them, or choose to play and have fun, or speak to someone. What could you change for the next time?

2. **(For middle school aged children):** Who are some of the people in your life who you would be comfortable talking to when you're sad or upset? Why did you choose these people?

3. (For high school aged children)

1. Give an example of how you can support a friend or family member who is experiencing an emotional crisis?
2. What are some of the thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words "mental illness"? What are you basing your assumptions on?

Conclusion

Feelings and emotions are healthy for us to experience and express throughout the ups and downs of our daily lives. This week we learned that sometimes our feelings can affect us deeply and it may be necessary to seek help when learning how to deal with them. We should keep in mind that seeking help is not a sign of weakness but rather an important step in taking care of ourselves. Understanding this can help us support our friends our family members who may be experiencing an emotional struggle.

"Shabbos Table Talks - Mental Health Edition" has been designed by the team of Our Path SEL, a fully developed, research based, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum designed specifically for the Orthodox Jewish Schools, in partnership with the OU (www.ou.org/mental-health). For more information, and to encourage your school to sign up, visit www.OurPathSEL.org. Our Path SEL is a project of Amudim (www.amudim.org).

