



CHAVURAH GUIDE

Updated July 2021

What is a Chavurah?

Chavurot (plural of Chavurah) are informal small groups of congregation members, which meet regularly, usually once a month in each other's homes or at Temple Sinai, to create bonds of friendship. Members decide how often they meet, where and what activities take place. Chavurot are a way for members to create a small community of friends by socializing, learning, doing Mitzvot and celebrating Jewish life together. Chavurot may act as extended family with the sharing of lifecycle events and holidays and may create the beginnings of lifelong friendships.

A Chavurah can take the "alone feeling" out of being a member of a large congregation. Whether you are a new member or an established member, being a part of a group can inject "new life" into your Temple Sinai experience. And it can put "this is where I belong" in every member's heart.

How is a Chavurah formed?

A Chavurah may be based on the interests and similarities of congregants, including a specific type of activity, family orientation, age groups or geography. Here at Temple Sinai we encourage and support the formation of Chavurot. With information provided by prospective Chavurah members, the Chavurah Committee puts groups together, helps organize and launch each new Chavurah and is available for on-going advice and consultation if desired.

Who runs the Chavurah and plans events?

The group runs itself. A Chavurah has no chairperson, no secretary, and no administration. Successful groups choose a coordinator called a "**Point Person**" who ensures that member information is current, that events are being planned, meetings occur on a regular basis, and meetings are facilitated. Members usually take turns planning events, and the Point Person is usually rotated annually.

Why join a Chavurah?

Chavurot offer a way for newcomers and members of long standing to be part of an intimate group setting within the larger congregational family. In a small group you really come to know others and become known. Chavurah members celebrate each other's joys and comfort each other during difficult times.

What kinds of things does a Chavurah do?

It varies with each group's desires and could include sharing holiday celebrations and life cycle events to socializing and attending synagogue functions together. Your group can enjoy Shabbat dinner together, have a Hanukkah party, or engage in community service projects. A Chavurah can go out to dinner followed by a speaker in the host's home, have a potluck supper, attend a concert, go on a hike or even spend a weekend out of town. An idea manual with project ideas and starter kit is given to each Chavurah to help get the group started.

A good Chavurah is a work in progress. As time goes on, some groups will change their emphasis, others will expand their scope. It is the group's decision, which way the Chavurah goes.

Responsibility for activities rests with the Chavurah, as each Chavurah is self-directed.

As a member of a Chavurah, what do I need to do?

Be committed to the group and have fun! Each member should make attending Chavurah events a priority, as the success of the group is only as strong as its members! A member of the Chavurah Committee at Temple Sinai will periodically check in with your group **Point Person** to see if you are in need of new members, or if the Temple can provide any other guidance for your group.

How can I start the process of joining a Chavurah?

Chavurah groups are formed for congregation members of all ages and interests. Some will involve children—others will not. We can help you form a new group and will continue to match people with Chavurot that have space available. <http://www.sinaidenver.org/chavurot/>

The Seven “C’s” of Chavurah

1. Commitment

It is essential to a Chavurah. Commitment involves each group member taking time, energy and responsibility in the planning, execution, and participation in the group’s activities.

2. Cooperation

Groups become cohesive through interaction of all members. Decisions should be reached through general agreement of most of the members. All members (including shy ones) should be encouraged to voice their opinions in a clear, concise manner so as to allow everyone a chance to be heard.

3. Communication

For a group to be gratifying to its members, it is important that each member become an effective communicator. This means developing both active listening and speaking skills. Listening involves hearing not only the words used, but observing the manner in which they are said and grasping the meaning behind the words. Speaking involves expressing yourself directly, honestly and appropriately.

4. Conflict

Even with good communication, conflict in a group may arise. Resolving conflict leads to a more cohesive group. Differences that may cause resentment and/or dissatisfaction should be both articulated and worked out.

5. Confrontation

When there is conflict, it is important to confront the situation before it saps energy from the group. Please note that the point person for the Chavurah is not responsible for resolving conflicts. Each member is responsible for his/her relationship with the other members.

There are several rules to follow for effective confrontation:

- Confront directly – do not gossip, complain, or talk about the person outside the group
- Confront with care, concern, honesty and directness while remaining calm
- Confront the individual directly, preferably one-on-one
- Confront with receptivity. Be open to feedback from the person you are confronting.
- Confront during the appropriate time at a group meeting only if the conflict was not able to be resolved in a one-on-one situation. Usually a difference that remains unresolved between two or more people affects the rest of the group and is best worked out in front of the group.

6. Companionship

It is important to know that when you join a Chavurah group you may be forming an extended family situation. Reach out to other members and get to know them. You are encouraged to interact with members outside of the scheduled Chavurah group meetings too.

7. Change

Becoming a cohesive Chavurah is a continuous process that will change throughout the years. Periodically (probably on an annual basis), the group should set aside some time just to review its goals and expectations, to see if they are current and meeting the needs of all its members most of the time.

Felice Miller, Ph.D. , Los Angeles, California (Revised by Bob Frishman, Denver, CO)

Choosing a Name for your Chavurah

Some ideas are provided below, excerpted from *The Chavurah* by Bernard Reisman, Ph.D.

The name of your Chavurah should reflect the interest and characteristics of the group. Choosing a name can foster group identity and clarity of purpose. Once a name is selected, it can serve to enhance group pride and serve as a reminder of the members' shared intent.

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|---------------|-------------------|
| Aba and Ima | Father and Mother |
| Achdut | Unity |
| Achei Nefesh | Soul Brothers |
| Achavah | Love |
| Alef Bet | One Two |
| Anachnu | We |
| Berit Yedidut | Friendly Alliance |
| Chayim | Life |
| Chevarah | Association |
| Chug | Circle |
| Chaverim | Friends |
| Emet | Truth |
| Garin | Nucleus |
| Gesher | Bridge |
| Hatikvah | Hope |
| Havanah | Understanding |
| Kadimah | Forward |
| Kehillah | Community |
| Keshet | Communication |
| Kinus | Gathering |
| Kulanu | All of us |
| Kevutzah | Group |
| Limud | Study |
| Lechayim | To Life |
| Maagal | Circle |
| Maven | Expert |
| Mishpachah | Family |
| Shalom | Peace |
| Shevet | Tribe |
| Simchah | Joy, Peace |
| Tzibur | Community |
| Yedudut | Friendship |

Let your Chavurah Committee contact know what you've decided for your group so we can update our records.

10 Favorite Chavurah Tips

1. Decide what you want to do and what your general goals are. They will be based on a combination of social activities, Jewish issues, holiday celebrations, etc.
2. Try to reach a consensus, which satisfies the majority of people. This requires patience and “give and take”.
3. Plan a schedule with dates, locations, and programs in advance—6 months to a year in advance.
4. Send out a copy of the entire schedule to each member and then send out monthly meeting cards 10 days to 2 weeks before each meeting with RSVP requested.
5. Fulfill your commitment to each other by doing your share.
6. Attend regularly; make it a priority. Work together to make the meetings something you look forward to.
7. TALK things over if there are conflicts, but be sensitive to the feelings of others.
8. Be sure to be represented in Chavurah meetings at Temple.
9. Recognize the dynamics of your own Chavurah and be realistic about what you do. Some groups will become real extended families; others will develop some close friendships within the group but share a common bond with everyone, enjoying a variety of experiences together; others will be united in their dedication to Judaic study. Don't compare yourselves but strive for the elements which make your Chavurah special to you... with the following exception: what everyone in each Chavurah should have in common is a desire to strengthen your Jewish ties and those of your family, to enrich yourself Jewishly, to reach out to other Temple members, and to enjoy!
10. Remind your Chavurah of coming events of interest at the Temple and in the Jewish community. Check the Jewish press for details. Some of the events may prove to be great activities for the entire Chavurah to attend together.

Activities

Here is a brief list of options for Chavurah gatherings. Many groups find success in varying their activities between Jewish, educational, and social events. Many activities are appropriate for any month, but it is also nice to pay attention to both Jewish and secular calendars. You might choose to meet at a member's home, or in a public space. Library meeting rooms work well.

Attend a Temple Sinai event together
Holiday meals (if not possible to plan on the holiday, find another date to share)
Shabbat meals—potluck at a member's home
Apple themed Shabbat (close to Rosh Hashanah)
Holiday Break Fast (end of Yom Kippur)
Outdoor hike
Park playdate
Build a Sukkah
Share a meal in a Sukkah
Thanksgiving celebration
Assembling/distributing meal bags (contact Jewish Family Service)
Recipe swap
Game night
Tzedakah / Social Action volunteering
Havdalah
Wine tasting
Trip to a special museum exhibit
Attend a play or art exhibit
Attend a lecture
Sub-divide group for specific activities (i.e. men only, women only, children specific)
Plan a trip / travel together
Israeli dancing
Bowling
Attend a local sporting event
Host a shared Passover seder
Discuss family history
Read a book together
Donate books to children
Invite the Rabbi or Cantor to educate your group
Discussion topics: Kashrut, Belief in G-d, Holiday customs/traditions, Jews in society, etc.

Resources

Refer to our Temple Sinai website and calendar for current information

<http://www.sinaidenver.org/>

OneTable brings people in their 20s and 30s together to share Shabbat dinner

<https://onetable.org/>

Jewish Family Service has wonderful volunteer opportunities

<https://www.jewishfamilyservice.org/>

Calendar

You can use this calendar and share with your group to plan your upcoming year in advance. You can decide in your group to remind members of upcoming events by phone calls, emails, a shared online calendar, or via mail.

Based on your schedules, some months might lend themselves better to different activities. Some groups find success in planning for the same time and day every month, and other groups change their schedule based on other commitments. *The choice is yours!*

| MONTH | ORGANIZER | ACTIVITY |
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