

HAVAYA
summer programs



Building Community

A Framework for Summer 2024



Over the last number of years, our world has become increasingly polarized.

We often find ourselves in algorithm-crafted echo chambers, sure that anyone who disagrees with us must be wrong, or morally bankrupt. Here in the United States, we've seen this more-and-more since the 2016 election. And in the Jewish community, the polarization since October 7 has been astounding and often painful.

At Havaya, we're proud to be known for creating a deep sense of community – and for leading with our values – even when it's not easy. So, when other organizations are struggling in this moment, we recognize that we're starting from a place of strength. That doesn't mean it's simple, but it does mean that we know how to do this. We know how to live based on shared values. How to hold space for multiple viewpoints. What follows is a framework for how we plan to do that this summer. We know it's a lot to wade through, but it's important. Please take the time to read it, discuss it with your kids, and use it as a guide for the months ahead.

At a glance...

- How We're Thinking 4
- What We're Doing 6
- What We're Asking of You 7
- Final Thoughts 9



How We're Thinking

Community at the core.

Everything we do is focused on creating a space filled with belonging, dignity, justice, and joy. It all comes back to this.

We don't have to agree, but we do have to live together.

In an [interview](#) earlier this spring, Rabbi Sharon Brous shared:

“I get interviewed a lot by people who ask me to condemn other Jews and the way that they're responding to [this moment]. And sometimes I am really hurt by the positions that others in the Jewish community are taking on, but I will not engage in that kind of public shaming of other Jews, because I feel like we're all responding from sorrow. And we're all trying to figure out how to hold a truly excruciating and impossible reality right now, and I understand that there are really good people who come to really different conclusions about how best to do that.”

One of the things that makes Havaya so unique is our commitment to having an open tent. With this comes the reality that we will sometimes say things or do things that aren't exactly in line with what everyone wants. That's okay. But please know – and trust – that we're coming at it with as much integrity, honesty, and care as we possibly can.

It's personal.

For most of us, the war in Israel/Palestine is halfway around the world. We may have strong feelings and deeply held convictions, but we are not living in the midst of it day-in-and-day-out. For our Israeli campers and staff, the reality is much different; they continue to live with, and be surrounded by, the trauma of October 7. And many of them – just like so many of the innocent Palestinians in Gaza and so many of us in the United States over these last many years – don't support the actions of their elected leaders. This is not a place to attack each other over governmental decisions that don't align with our values. There are plenty of places for political conversations and disagreements, but Camp isn't one of them. Rather, it's a place to see each other as people, to share our personal stories, and to hold each other up in the midst of a continually challenging time.

Both, and.

As Reconstructing Judaism [says](#): “our love for Israel exists alongside our desire to seek a just and lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians.” This is not an either/or proposition; it is possible to hold both of these commitments at the same time. But this doesn’t mean we must always speak all our truths in the same breath. Saying we support Israel doesn’t mean we support the killing of tens of thousands of Palestinians. And decrying the loss of life in Gaza doesn’t mean we are anti-Zionist. Surely, we’re capable of understanding (and believing!) that no one among us is in favor of killing babies or kidnapping them, even if we don’t say it out loud. We recognize that this isn’t the case everywhere – but it is at Havaya.

Productive discomfort builds resilience.

Safe space is not the same thing as comfortable space. We don’t always have to be comfortable and like what people are saying in order to be connected to, supportive of (and supported by), and in community with them. We want kids to learn how to work through their own discomfort in order to care for their friends – with a recognition that our Israeli friends will need an extra level of care this summer. We truly believe that having this experience will lead to meaningful growth that will serve our kids, and our community, well into the future.

Build up, don’t tear down.

There is no place for intentionally divisive, hostile, nasty, or rude comments at Havaya – whether in-person or online. As an organization, we strive to be thoughtful, kind, and community-focused. Especially in this moment when feelings are running high, we promise to take a deep breath and pause before responding out of anger to anything that raises our hackles. We ask you to do the same. If we can’t treat each other with the respect, kindness, and love that are so central to our work, we will have failed as a community.

It’s still summer camp.

The news and noise will not overshadow our summer. And the often negative and toxic tone of the world will not overpower our focus on community. Because first and foremost, Camp is about joy, having fun, building connections with friends, and becoming the best versions of ourselves. This continues to be our north star – and we won’t lose sight of it. Not now. Not ever.

What We're Doing

Training staff.



In addition to all the regular preparation it takes to run one of the “best camps in North America,” we’ll be providing our staff with the skills they need to build a community of belonging for – and with – our campers this summer. We’ll do this through values-based learning sessions; workshops with experts from The iCenter and Resetting the Table; and ongoing opportunities to discuss, learn, and grow. We understand that it’s not our role to tell kids what or how to believe but, rather, to lay the groundwork for them to make up their own minds. This isn’t always easy – but we know it’s critical to the work we do and the world we hope to create.

Engaging campers.



No matter where they’re from, our kids just need to get away this summer. They need the respite of a few weeks in the woods, surrounded by friends and laughter and sun and love. As we think about how to engage with the realities of life and war in Israel/Palestine, we’re committed to being as honest, nuanced, and apolitical as possible. (We know this is easier said than done!) Our goal is not for campers to learn statistics or facts or hard data, but to hear stories, make connections, and – in age-appropriate ways – find meaning. This is all part of helping kids become their best selves, which is what Camp is all about.

Welcoming Israelis.



We are intentionally focused on bringing more Israeli campers, families, and staff to Camp than in the past. They are Israelis just like so many of us are Americans – not representatives of the government, not here on a mission, not coming to teach or preach or convince or cajole. They’re coming to be part of our magical, peace-filled, restorative community. And it’s our privilege to bring them into what one of our camper parents recently called our “circle of care.”

Always learning.



If we told you we already have everything figured out, we’d be lying. We’re still listening and reading and learning and growing. We’re sure to make messes along the way because, well, this is messy! We promise to be transparent with you and to own up to our missteps; we hope you’ll join us.

What We're Asking of You

Center relationships.

Ask yourself: “Can I be respectful?” “Am I trying to start a fight?” “Am I trying to prove the other person wrong?” “Am I trying to convince them that I’m right?” Real conversations are about conversing – not convincing. Remember: it’s not only about what you say, but how you say it. Attitudes don’t change because of someone jumping up-and-down, proclaiming they’re right; they change because of longstanding, respectful relationships. Life – at Camp and “in the real world” – is all about relationships. And relationships are about one-to-one connections. If you don’t have a connection with someone, how can you expect to impact them? And if you do have a connection and a meaningful relationship, how can you neglect to think about their feelings?

Listen and learn.

Try to listen – *really* listen – with both your head and your heart. This is not a place to be on your soapbox, to try to convince everybody else of your deeply held views. If you’re coming in to wave a flag, literally or figuratively, and convince others of your ideas, you’re missing the point. As Sally Abed, a member of the national leadership at Standing Together: the largest Jewish-Arab grassroots movement in Israel, recently [said](#):

“I think many people think that if we shout the loudest, if we become more righteous and we become the purest and we insist on it and we condemn louder and louder and louder ... somehow one side will win and then the other will just say, okay, you won.”

Our job is not to get other people to agree with us. At Havaya, we’re not out to change minds but to fertilize the ground in which ideas can grow and thrive. We don’t politicize issues or push specific viewpoints; rather, we give campers (and, we hope, staff members!) the space they need to make up their own minds.

It’s okay to press pause.

Not everyone wants to talk about it right now. (Whatever “it” is!) Before diving into a conversation, ask the other person if they’re open to it. If they say “no,” pick a different topic. And if they say “yes,” make sure to leave enough space for each of you to “tap out” if you need to. If you feel yourself getting a little heated, or you watch the other person start to squirm a bit, or you find that the tone of the discussion is becoming less-than-kind, take a breath and a break. Remember: it’s all about relationships!

Sticks and stones.

Many of us grew up with the adage: “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” But that simply isn’t true. Names do hurt. And words (and images) really matter – whether we say them, wear them on our sleeve, hang them on our walls, or stick them on our water bottles. Some phrases are highly charged, even when we don’t mean them to be: for example, some people struggle with the concept of Zionism, but we know it’s possible to be a Zionist and deeply committed to Palestinian rights. Other people bristle at the term “occupation,” but we know it’s possible to fight against it and support Israel at the same time. While concepts like these should be used with caution, there are others we will not accept – phrases like “apartheid,” “colonialist,” “Nazis,” and “genocide,” and questions about Israel’s right to exist, or painting all Palestinians as “terrorists” or “barbaric” – which are meant to tear down rather than build up. To be clear: this isn’t about quashing freedom of speech; it’s about creating a community where we can live together with respect and dignity.

Ask for support.

This is not easy. We’re all going to make mistakes. What’s important is how we apologize, rebuild connections, and do better next time. If you need help with any of this, or if you just need a moment to step back and breathe, we’re here for you. Whether you find a member of our mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health (MESSH) team; a visiting rabbi; or one of the directors, know that we will gladly sit together, offer you space to share or vent or cry – or just sit silently, and give you the opportunity to recalibrate and recharge before going back to all the fun of Camp.

Presume good intent.

We often say that nobody shows up at Havaya by accident. You’re here, at least in part, because some part of our values speaks to you. The same is true for everyone else here. There’s no need (and no place) for polarization, mean-spiritedness, or anger before understanding; you can – and should! – assume you’re starting every interaction from a place of shared good will. So if you misstep, don’t be afraid to apologize. And if someone says or does something that hurts, help them understand how to do better next time. It’s hard to learn and grow without making some mistakes along the way, so give yourself – and others – some grace.

Final Thoughts

**Here's the bottom line:
we need to let go of
judgment in favor of
humility and curiosity.**

We should focus on compassion (for others) and responsibility (for ourselves) – which, as a parent recently shared with us, will ultimately lead to peace (for all of us). If we all entered each interaction with this framework in mind, imagine what we could dream up!

There's an old story that asks: "How do you know when night ends and day begins? When you can see that the person next to you is your sibling." Camp is all about recognizing just how connected we are to each other. This summer, let us all try to focus more on the person next to us than on ourselves – you'll be amazed at the ways this helps us to open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts. That is how we be.



HAVAYA
summer programs

833-CAMP-HAV (833-226-7428) / hello@camphavaya.org