

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Judaism emphasizes the value of personal safety and preserving human life, known as *pikuach nefesh*. The Talmud teaches that saving one life is equivalent to saving the entire world. The Torah also considers it a responsibility to protect one's own health and safety, as well as the health and safety of others.

As our camps continue to build communities of belonging, wellbeing, and safety, we know that each person in the camp community is coming from their own unique lived experience. In the aftermath of October 7, many Israelis have found their lives impacted, uprooted, or forever changed. As we lead and welcome with empathy and love, we also understand that some 'typical' parts of camp might be particularly challenging this summer, and in our efforts to keep camp safe for everyone, we want to prepare for them differently.

Routine parts of camp that could be triggering:

- Fireworks, Fire Drills, Tornado Sirens, PA System Alerts, Maccabiah Breaks
- Mourners kaddish, Singing Hatikvah, Prayer for the Hostages
- Unexpected challenges, unplanned changes, sudden shift from routine

Best practices for reducing triggering experiences

- Let staff know ahead of time about events that involve sudden, loud noises, bright lights, or anything that is a surprise
- Give staff the choice to help lead, simply join, or opt out of worship experiences that might be difficult
- Always have a backup plan ready and a staff resource available if someone needs to step away

Psychological safety is a culture where people feel comfortable taking risks without fear of negative consequences. It can be developed in several ways, including:

- Empathy - being able to understand and relate to others' feelings can help create a psychologically safe environment.
- Leading by example - leaders can demonstrate the behaviors and attitudes that create a safe and inclusive environment.
- Open communication - creating a culture that supports and encourages openness and honesty can help people feel comfortable asking for help.
- Active listening - when team members actively listen to one another, it creates an atmosphere of respect, support, and trust.
- Feedback - gives people the chance to reflect on their behavior, learn from their mistakes, and grow as individuals.
- Awareness of unconscious bias - emphasizing the ability to change can help people realize that biases can happen unconsciously without harmful intention.

Other ways to develop psychological safety include:

- Genuinely seeking perspectives
- Not putting people on the spot
- Thanking people for sharing their opinions
- Being open when responding to questions or feedback
- Setting clear expectations

[Reform Jewish Resources for Coping with Acts of Terror and Violence](#)

[Communities of Belonging Don't Just Happen...URJ Camps are Putting in the Work](#)