

Sample Script for Hopes and Dreams Conversation

Based on original material written for The Jewish Education Project, funded by UJA Federation of NY

Goal:

Selecting a model(s) for your community requires decision makers to deeply understand parents/guardians' hopes and dreams for their children. The material below will guide you through facilitation of Hopes and Dreams Conversations.

Engaging groups of parents in hopes and dreams conversations will generate:

1. Shared language and values that can guide your “model decisions” and experimentation
2. Shared understanding of what and why you are experimenting
3. Energy, volunteerism and optimism for the work ahead

Background:

Research has shown that parents/guardians of children enrolled in Jewish part time settings often **express conflict** about what they want their children's education should achieve. A study done in 2015, based on interviews with 85 parents who sent their children to new models of religious school in New York, showed that with few exceptions, parents were concerned that the model they had chosen was not **striking the right balance between content and engagement**.

Parents **wanted their children to enjoy and be engaged**, but more **often worried they might not learn enough**. This scenario was less likely to emerge when parents were engaged in the learning themselves or when the congregation was very careful to communicate expectations.

Helping parents have a vocabulary that **is in addition to or instead of** “I want my child to be ready for his bar mitzvah,” or “speak Hebrew,” or “have fun,” is helpful.

Who to engage?

You may already have a hunch that you want to start your new model experimentation with a certain age group. Some congregations find it easiest to start with the youngest learners. Prior to parents developing set patterns connected to their children's education, they find parents more ready to experiment.

Other congregations find that pre-bar mitzvah is a helpful starting point. Parents are often engaged at this time seeing the importance of the ritual for themselves and their children.

Starting to think about which group to engage is helpful. It is also important to know why you have selected a particular group. Your team should have a strong rationale for why you want to start experimentation with certain age groups, or group of families. Note, it is challenging, but not impossible, to do early experiments with an entire learning body.

Once you have selected the cohort who will be experimenting with you, identify which parents should be part of your first round of Hopes and Dreams conversations.

Options include: All parents/guardians; specific parents who have more openness to experimentation; and or parents who have strong social connections—able to spread the word and engage others.

Set-up

After conducting your values, priorities, and appreciative inquiry scans, you may have a hunch about which a model type you want to try. If so, when determining where and when to hold your Hopes and Dreams conversations, consider “testing out” your hunch. For example, if you think a certain model will be home based, or Shabbat based, try hosting the Hopes and Dreams conversations in those settings. Giving parents a small taste of what you may explore can be helpful. If you do not yet have a hunch, just make sure the setting you select fosters “good conversation.”

You may not have the luxury of scheduling additional meetings or conversations. You may have to hold these conversations at a time when you already have parents scheduled to participate. Please note these are not survey or online conversations.

When facilitating, have text handouts readily available. Provide name tags for everyone. You’ll need pencils/pens for each participant and something for them to “lean on” to write.

Who facilitates

Two people are needed to lead these conversations. One person should be in the role of facilitator and one as note taker. (Certainly you can switch off).

Recording what is shared in the session is helpful. Having word for word responses enable you to capture the nuance expressed in conversations. Based on the culture of your community, determine if these conversations should be led by lay and/or professionals.

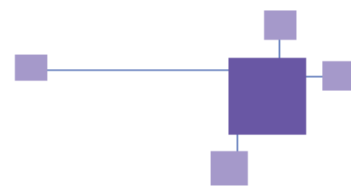
At the end of this document are note templates to help you capture comments.

Part I: Welcome and Introductions (20-25 minutes)

Welcome and thank you for joining us. My name is _____ and I’m part of the team working to create new kinds of Jewish learning experiences for children and families in our congregation.

Joining me is another member of our team, _____, who is going to record our discussion. This fall our team came together to begin what we feel is really exciting and important work for our synagogue. We are part of other congregations through the Reconstructionist Learning Network asking **“Which Model(s) of Jewish Education is Right for us?”**

Your children’s grade/subject/stage in life are the Nachshons for experiments with new models of learning. It would be easy to just pick one of the many emerging across the country (e.g. home based, Shabbat centered,



family online etc.) But we must craft something that reflects who we uniquely are as a community. To uncover what is right for us, we will work with you, and try some prototyping this winter/spring. Your input today and as we go along, will help define those first experiments.

In order to create something that is truly engaging and meaningful we'd like to learn more about your family—what's important to you and what kind of Jewish life you want to live.

We're going to follow together a structured conversation that will bring these thoughts to the surface.

Let's go around and please introduce yourself by name, the names and ages of your children and your answer to this question:

Share one activity that your family enjoys doing together.

Please limit your sharing to one minute.

Suggestion for facilitator: Identify and name a common thread that connects the activities the participants, i.e. family together time around celebrations and holidays.

2 Thank you for sharing. It's great to get to know you a little better. We're trying to create a model that fosters meaningful experiences for you and your children. Your stories give us insight into the direction we will take.

Part II: Shared Voices (25 minutes)

The model our congregation engages in is not (just) about getting your child ready for b'nai mitzvah. We engage in Jewish learning in part to help you achieve your hopes and dreams for your children. We know that it's not always easy to articulate your hopes and dreams for your children. So we're sharing some pieces that others have written to get us started.

On a separate sheet are five short texts and you'll be reading them together in pairs

(Facilitator: assign each pair a different text or two).

As you read, underline the items that relate to your hopes and dreams. When we come back together, each person will share some of their partner's thoughts.

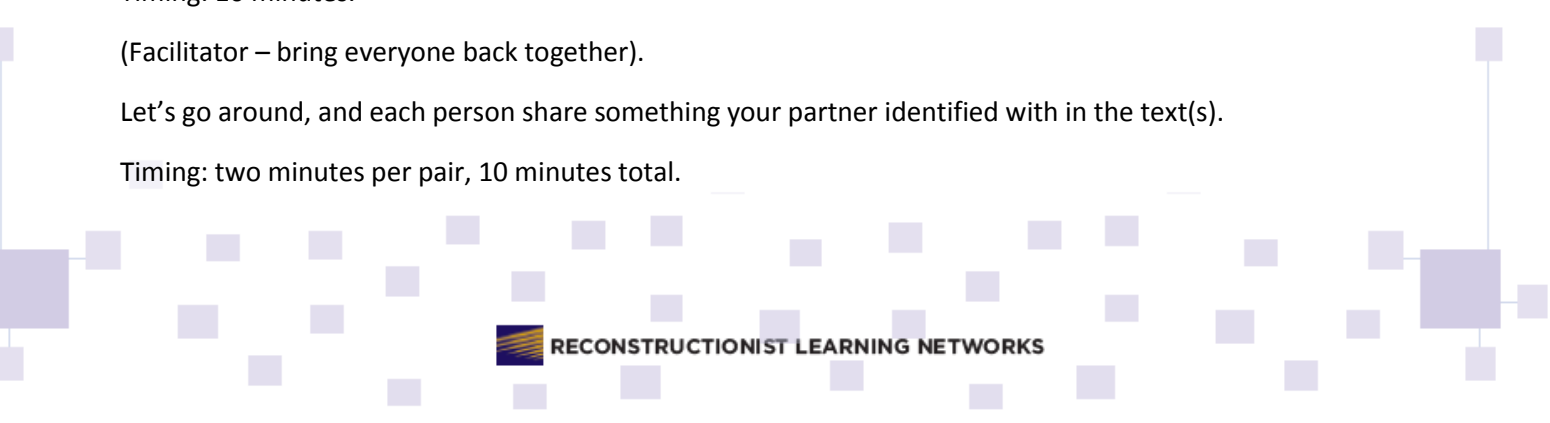
(Facilitator: make sure participants are aware that they will be listening to their partner's thoughts for sharing. When you bring group back together, start the round of sharing to model for others)

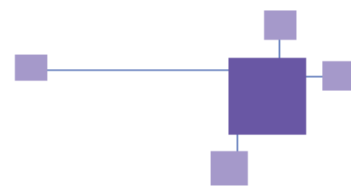
Timing: 10 minutes.

(Facilitator – bring everyone back together).

Let's go around, and each person share something your partner identified with in the text(s).

Timing: two minutes per pair, 10 minutes total.





Please return to your pairs and share a hope and dream for your children that was not expressed in these texts.

After pairs have shared among themselves, ask if there is a volunteer or two who would like to share.

If nothing was related to a Jewish life, you can say; I noticed that we haven't heard anything about living a Jewish life, which could be anything from community, Israel, study, social justice, ritual, etc.

Where does this fit into your hopes and dreams?

Timing: 5 minutes total.

Part III: Living a Jewish life (15-20 minutes)

As you think about your hopes and dreams for your children in our lives today:

What are some things that are helping you reach those hopes and dreams?

Please take two minutes to consider this question. You may want to jot down your thoughts. Turn to the same partner from the earlier round and share.

(Tip for facilitator: direct the sharing from the circle in the opposite direction from sharing in part I).

Thank you.

The next question to consider is: **What are some things in this changing world that are getting in the way?**

Part IV: Facilitator reflection and building your new model (10 minutes)

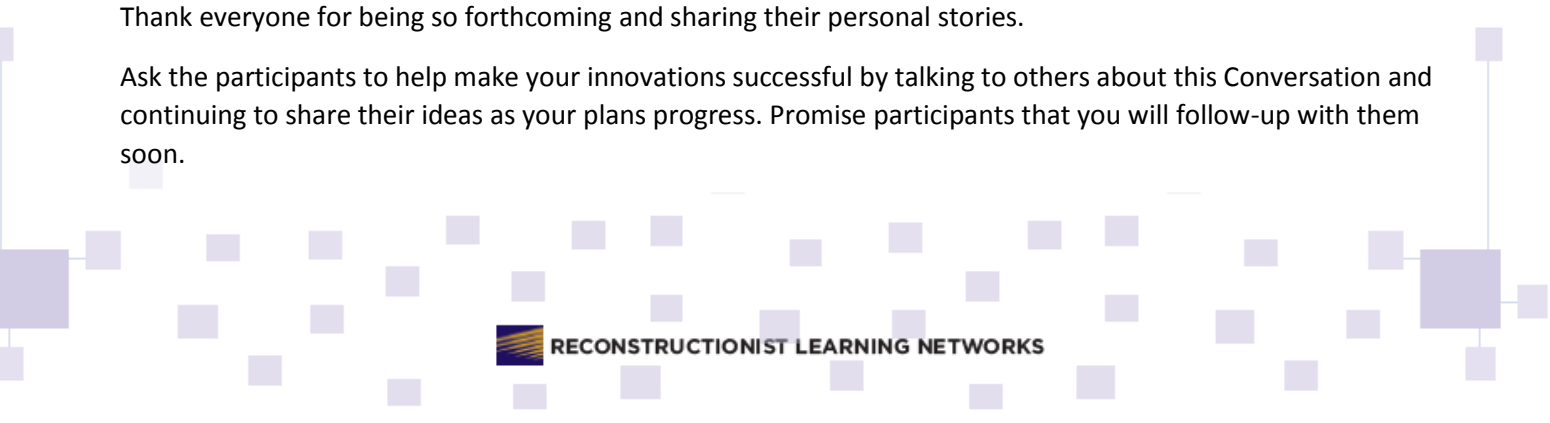
What we've captured today will help inform the direction of our new learning model. You can share with parents your roadmap for what is ahead. Also this is a time to share "We've done some initial work (e.g. values and priority goals, appreciative inquiry scan) and this is what we are hearing. What you have said today will further shape the experiments we'll try in the spring. Together we will create shared priorities and a model that supports you in reaching for your hopes and dreams for children."

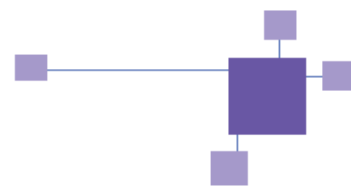
Part V: Group reflection and Wrap-up (10-15 minutes)

Please share one word or image that you now are holding, after listening to the community that you want to make sure is highlighted as we go forward. After listening to others you may have your initial hopes and dreams confirmed or changed.

Thank everyone for being so forthcoming and sharing their personal stories.

Ask the participants to help make your innovations successful by talking to others about this Conversation and continuing to share their ideas as your plans progress. Promise participants that you will follow-up with them soon.

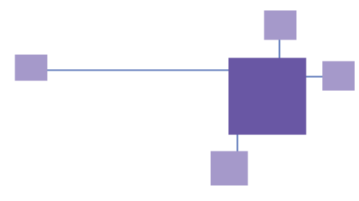




NOTE TAKING:

Part One: Activities Families Enjoy Together

Activity	Characteristics of Activity (e.g. restful, adventure, holidays,)

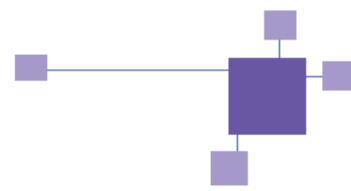


Part Two: Shared Voices

Texts Explored

Parents' Comments





Part Three:

Enabling to Achieve

Getting in the way

Part V Final Words and Images

Words

Images

