

Growing Today's Jewish Teens: Teen Outcomes for Educators and Engagers

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Traditional ways in which the Jewish community has measured teen learning and growth no longer resonate for today's teens. Over a two year period (2013–2015), a team of researchers led by Dr. David Bryfman at The Jewish Education Project in New York conducted a comprehensive qualitative research project (that included digital ethnographies and 16 in-person focus groups with an array of 139 teens around the country) to explore Jewish teen identity today. This work culminated with the identification of 14 educational and engagement outcomes for today's Jewish teens¹:

1. Jewish teens have a strong sense of self.
2. Jewish teens feel a sense of pride about being Jewish.
3. Jewish teens have learning experiences that are both challenging and valuable.
4. Jewish teens engage in learning that enables them to be more active participants in various Jewish communities.
5. Jewish teens learn about and positively experience Jewish holidays and Shabbat.
6. Jewish teens establish strong friendships.
7. Jewish teens develop strong and healthy relationships with their families.
8. Jewish teens develop significant relationships with mentors, role models, and educators.
9. Jewish teens are able to express their values and ethics in relation to Jewish principles and wisdom.
10. Jewish teens develop the capacity (skills and language) that allows them to grapple with and express their spiritual journeys.
11. Jewish teens feel connected to various communities.
12. Jewish teens develop the desire and commitment to be part of the Jewish people now and in the future.
13. Jewish teens develop a positive relationship to the land, people, and state of Israel.
14. Jewish teens are inspired and empowered to make a positive difference in the various communities and world in which they live.

These new outcomes are coming to be accepted by a broader array of youth serving programs and organizations. An effort is now underway to support professionals and volunteers working with Jewish teens to educate and engage toward these outcomes with the primary objective of empowering Jewish teens to flourish in today's world.

Following the identification of the 14 outcomes, a team of social scientists from The Jewish Education Project, Rosov Consulting, and the American Institutes for Research conducted a systematic and full review of the literature to support the development of indicators for these outcomes. Indicators provide evidence that certain results have or have not been achieved.

Over the past year, these 22 indicators were incorporated into the Teen Jewish Learning and Engagement Scales (TJLES) – A set of measures to assess progress toward the outcomes. The instrument (aka “teen survey”) went through three rounds of expert reviews and revisions, followed by extensive testing with over 5,000 teens across the country, to establish its reliability and validity. These indicators fall within a broader conceptual framework as follows:

PERSONAL Feeling Good about Self and Relations	TRIBAL Connection to Jewish Peoplehood and Israel	UNIVERSAL Social Action	SACRED Jewish Life and Heritage
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¹ The Jewish Education Project, “Generation Now – Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today” (2016). <http://www.jewishedproject.org/generationnow>

TEEN EDUCATION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Factors	Outcomes	Indicators
PERSONAL Feeling Good about Self and Relations	Jewish teens have a stronger sense of self.	Participating in Jewish activities makes teen feel good about themselves.
	Jewish teens feel a sense of pride about being Jewish.	Jewish programs are among teen's most favorite activities.
	Jewish teens have experienced learning that has been both challenging and valuable.	The things learned about Jewish life make teen want to learn much more.
		Participation in Jewish activities has helped teen develop skills that they can use in their life.
	Jewish teens establish strong friendships.	Made some really good friends in Jewish activities.
	Jewish teens are able to express their values and ethics in relation to Jewish principles and wisdom.	Participating in Jewish activities has helped teen become a more caring person.
	Jewish teens develop significant relationships with mentors, role models, and educators.	Has close supportive conversations with counselors or other staff whom teen met at Jewish activities.
	Jewish teens feel connected to their various communities.	Going to a Jewish program/activity makes teen feel that they belong somewhere.
TRIBAL Connection to Jewish Peoplehood and Israel	Jewish teens develop the desire and commitment to be part of the Jewish people now and in the future.	Feels very close to the Jewish people worldwide.
		Has a special responsibility to take care of Jews in need around the world.
	Jewish teens develop a positive relationship to the land, people and State of Israel.	Feels a strong sense of connection to Israel.
		Knows about Israel's achievements and challenges.
UNIVERSAL Social Action	Jewish teens have learned things that enable them to be more active participants in Jewish communities	Learned from Jewish activities how teen can work or volunteer in similar programs in the future.
	Jewish teens are able to express their values and ethics in relation to Jewish principles and wisdom.	Jewish concepts of contributing to the world (for example, Tikkun Olam) inspire teen to make the world a better place.
	Jewish teens are inspired and empowered to make a positive difference in the various communities and world in which they live.	Sees community service and volunteering as part of teen's Jewish life.
		Doing volunteer work is important to teen.
SACRED Jewish Life and Heritage	Jewish teens feel a sense of pride about being Jewish.	Feels a strong connection to their Jewish heritage
	Jewish teens develop the capacity (skills and language) that allows them to grapple with and express their spiritual journeys.	Believes in God or a universal spirit.
		Often reflects on what being Jewish means.
	Jewish teens learn about and positively experience Jewish holidays and Shabbat.	Important to teen to make Shabbat feel different than the rest of the week.
	Jewish teens develop strong and healthy relationships with their families.	Likes spending time with family around the Jewish holidays.
Asks parents questions about Jewish life.		