

Home for Dinner: Family Program Launch

Learning Lab #1

The Big Jewish Idea

Home for Dinner Family Learning Labs create a setting in which families can engage with the big idea that Jewish tradition, food, and family life are woven together. The program introduces other big Jewish ideas such as *brachot*: gratitude for what we have, not taking things for granted; *L'Dor va Dor*: Generation to generation: the passing down of recipes, and family stories; *Shmirat haGuf*: caring for your body, health, nutrition; *Shmirat haAdama*: taking care of the earth, sustainability; *G'milut hasadim*: acts of loving kindness like feeding the hungry. These ideas will be further explored in subsequent **Home for Dinner** Family Learning Labs. The Launch also introduces the idea that family meals can be the vehicle for transferring values and ethics and concludes with families signing a Family Meals Pledge to eat together at least one more meal a week than they currently do.

Advance Preparation

Prepare the Families:

- Set the date in advance and let your families know, with lots of advance notice! Use email and the **Home for Dinner** flyer to get the word out and to remind parents.
- Remind each family to bring a can of food for the food bank or pantry – including a food donation with each family learning lab is a strong physical reminder of *tikkun olam*.
- Contact local food banks or soup kitchens in your area. If you need to make a connection with a food bank or pantry in your area, visit AmpleHarvest.org to find an emergency food provider near you.

Materials

For Hors D'oeuvres: Chose from activities described on pages 11-14

- Select and set up some graffiti walls and 2-3 of the Hors D'oeuvre activities, including a healthy snack and name tags

For Appetizer:

- Song Sheets for people to share (optional)

For Main Course:

- Student Thought Cards (pages 37-41): print and cut 1 per student, use a different colored paper for each quote.
- Parent Thought Cards (pages 42-53): print and cut 1 per student, use a different colored paper for each quote, try not to replicate colors used for student thought cards.
- Thought Card Questions (see page 35) – write on large easel paper and hang around the room
- Handout: The Importance of Family Dinner (enough for 2 parents to share 1 copy) (pg 54)
- Family Meal Pledge form – one copy per family (pg 55)
- Journals: use exam “blue books” or the old-fashioned Hebrew “machberet” type notebooks
- Journal decorating materials: construction paper, markers, crayons, paste or tape, pictures of food

For Dessert: Take-home:

- **Home for Dinner: Eating Together** (parent resource book) (1 per family)

I. Hors D'oeuvres

The hors d'oeuvres are designed to provide a transition into the broad themes of the program and provide meaningful activity for people who arrive early or on time so they feel their time is respected and well-used.

In addition to some graffiti walls, select 2-3 Hors D'oeuvres stations depending on how many people you expect to attend the learning lab. At each learning lab, make sure to include healthy snacks and name tags. See pages 11-14 for descriptions of “hors d'oeuvres” activities.

II. Appetizers

These first activities function like the first course of the meal; substantial, yet lighter than the meal itself.

Start the learning lab promptly at 10 minutes after the announced start time. Gather the whole community together as you begin this section.

a) Baruch Haba - Welcoming circle (5 minutes)

As you welcome the families – parents, grandparents, other guardians and the children –provide an overview of **Home for Dinner** and of the day's learning lab.

Here are a few things to point out to everyone about **Home for Dinner**:

- We are starting a program that focuses on Jewish life, Jewish tradition and food – food in general and specifically eating together with your families.
- Students will be learning parallel material in the classroom from *Min Ha'Aretz* (about *brachot* (blessings) before and after we eat, hunger in our community, healthy eating...)
- Today is the first of several special events at which we will bring parents *and* children together..
- Not all the learning will happen at the synagogue. There will be times when you will take what you have thought about during these programs or the students have thought about in the classroom and bring it back to your own kitchen table.
- **Home for Dinner** is part of Hazon. Hazon means vision. Hazon is America's largest Jewish environmental organization. Hazon's vision is to create healthier and more sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond. Hazon designs and implements programs and events that give people a chance to explore their relation to the physical world and to their Jewishness.

b) Singing (2 minutes)

As part of the welcome, bringing everyone's voices together in song can help to bring everyone together as a community. If you don't normally sing as a community, you might want to choose one song to learn and sing at all future family learning labs. If your community is more familiar with singing, select a few songs for the welcome. Make sure to pass out song lyrics for people who are less familiar with the songs. You can also sing a *niggun*, a tune without lyrics that can allow people to learn it on the spot. (see page 80-81 for songs).

c) Introductions (8 minutes)

This activity helps families begin to know one another and warms them up to the theme of the year – Jews, food, and eating together!

Start with a few whips. A “whip” is created when you quickly go around the room and have everyone answer a short, straightforward question or complete a sentence. For example, “tell the group if you are a vegan, vegetarian, or an omnivore, favorite fruit, favorite veggie, or the healthiest food that you really like.” Depending on the size of the group, have one large circle or divide and have smaller (facilitated) circles.

III. Main Course

a) Hand out Thought Cards for Individual Learning Time (5 minutes)

Select from the included options, paying attention to your population. You don’t need to use them all and you can decide to have duplicates. Most kids’ cards come with questions. Adult cards refer to a more general list of reflective questions which you can post or print.

Pass out a Student Thought Card to each student, and a Parent Thought Card to each parent. (The whole batch includes quotations, pictures, advertisements, cartoons.) Select from the included options, paying attention to your population. You don’t need to use them all and you can decide to have duplicates. Most “Kids’ Cards” come with questions. Adults refer to a more general list of more reflective question which you can post or print.

Invite each person to spend a few quiet minutes with their own thought card. Adults can read and consider the following Thought Card questions (post the questions in the room for people to reference). It helps to have a few staff to help kids if they are stuck as this may be a stretch for some of them.

What does it bring to mind for you?

Where does this lead you?

Do you agree or disagree?

What would you ask the author, designer, or cartoonist?

How can you make use of it in your life?

b) Sharing Thought Cards (10-15 minutes)

Direct them to talk with their own family about their thought card and share their personal reactions with their family members.

Then ask each family to join another family and share their reactions to their thought cards again, with these new people.

c) Whole Group Share the Learning (20 minutes)

Reconvene the whole group. Debrief by asking them to share any “ahas” that they had, insights and realizations, and to ask any questions that might have come up for them.¹

Ask the participants to identify the Big (Jewish) Ideas² about food that came up in the various handouts and discussions. List them on an easel paper (or white board, power point) as they are mentioned.

¹ Some groups might chose to split the group at this point, sending the kids off to a parallel program while continuing the discussion of Big Jewish Ideas with the parents.

For curricular purposes the following are the key ideas we hope will be mentioned. You may get more, which is fine. List them, too. If any of these are missing, mention them when the group's list seems to have come to an end and add them to the list.

- *Brachot*: gratitude for what we have, not taking things for granted
- *L'Dor va Dor*: generation to generation: passing down of recipes, family stories
- *Shmirat haGuf*: caring for your body, health, nutrition
- *Shmirat haAdama*: taking care of the earth, sustainability
- *G'milut basadim*: acts of loving kindness like feeding the hungry
- *Tzedakah*: sharing material possessions with those in need
- *Kashrut*: the literal meaning of kosher means "fit"
- *Hakbnassat orbim*: welcoming guests to your home
- Family dinner together builds a strong family
- *Derech erez*: manners
- *Kavod*: respect

Summarize, referring to the centrality of food in our lives and in our families and relate it to **Home for Dinner**.

d) Student & Adult Parallel Learning Sessions (30 minutes)

Split adults and students into separate groups.

Parents

This is your opportunity to:

a) Reinforce the material and ideas presented so far (see list above). Stress the idea of dinner time as potential for family growth and bonding. Your children are home more now than they will be during the teen years, this is a key time to build family connections;

For a family that basically has dinner together most nights – challenge them to “upgrade” that experience by: including kids in the cooking, trying some new foods, choosing special “themes” for dinner (joke night, family story night, invite-a-friend night, vegan night, wheat free night, etc).

Don't be surprised if many of the families report having dinner together often. Fifth graders lives are still substantially home-based. The big changes that challenge family dinner time are just around the corner as school and social activities begin to make a bigger claim on kids' lives. The strengthening of family dinner time now will pay off and become even more important as the kids enter their teen age years.

² Participants may or may not be able to identify the “Jewish” aspect of the ideas , but you can supply the label when they are mentioned. For example, a person might say something like “we should choose foods that help us stay healthy” and you could write down: “shmirat haguf, taking care of our bodies”.

b) Provide a more in-depth overview of **Home for Dinner**, including future family learning labs; *Min Ha'Aretz* classroom curriculum; and any extra-curricular events you have planned;

c) Finally, mention the dinner pledge – one of the goals of the program being for families to have at least one more family dinner a week than is their current practice and to strengthen their family meals so that they will continue throughout the teen years.

Give everyone the handout, “The Importance of Family Dinners” by Elinor Ochs (pg 54). Allow a few minutes for reading. Ask them to talk it over with someone sitting near them (preferably not a spouse).

Focus the group again and ask them what this quote has to teach us about dinner time and the family.

Ask them to think about how many times a week their family sits down together.

Ask if they think that is sufficient to meet the goals that Ochs talks about. How many *more* times a week *could* they convene their family for dinner? How could they make their meals more meaningful?

Hand out the “Family Meal Pledge” form and have them fill it in.

Allow time for parents to ask any questions. You might want to give out “Eating Together” (the parent handbook), one per family, at this time and read through relevant FAQs, if time permits.

Close by returning to the list of big ideas that was gathered from the whole group. Read it over. If anyone has anything to add this is the time. Reinforce the idea that dinner together is rich with possibilities, an “opportunity space,” in Ochs’ words.

Kids (parallel time):

As part of **Home for Dinner**, the families will be asked to keep Family Meals Journals. The journals will also be discussed during classroom time. Remind the students that the journals can include recipes, photos, drawings, essays, etc.

Students will begin the journal today by decorating the cover and copying or pasting in their thought card from earlier in the learning lab.

For students who finish their work on their journals, return to the hors d’oeuvres activities, they can return to the opening activities:

- 1) Do a “gallery walk” of the graffiti walls. Kids can comment and add to what is already there
- 2) Have a “set the table” competition (3 kids in a “race” to be finished and correct)
- 3) Look over the new USDA food labels

IV. Dessert (closing circle)

Have the families reconnect after the parallel activities to sign the pledge the parents have prepared and have kids present the family dinner journal they have begun.

Then, gather everyone in a big circle for a closing “whip” such as: everyone says one word that represents “food and family” to them. Whip around the circle. Allow people to pass.

Any reminders or announcements.

Closing song (either a repeat from the opening song or another familiar song)

Min Ha’Aretz in the Classroom: Lesson 1

In Lesson 1: To Grow, students can be introduced to the idea of that Jewish tradition and food are woven together. This lesson allows students to reflect on where their food comes from. Genesis 1:29 provides an entry point into a discussion about the importance and roles of seeds, human beings, and God in producing food. Students then follow step-by-step instructions in order to sprout seeds.

If you only have 45 minutes...

Here is the outline of the sections you should include for a shorter version of the Family Program Launch. We have noted suggested revisions to fit the shorter time frame.

II. Appetizers – do sections a) and c) (10 minutes)

III. Main Course - a) and b) (20 minutes)

III. Main Course c) - *revised* - help bring together the various groups and very briefly capture the big ideas (5 minutes)

IV. Dessert - *revised* - Introduce the idea that families are making a commitment to have one more meal together or to "upgrade" their meals if they already eat together. Handout pledge cards for families to fill out at home together. Then gather everyone in a big circle for a closing "whip" such as everyone says one word that represents "food and family" to them. Whip around the circle. Allow people to pass. Make any final reminders about upcoming learning labs. Thank everyone for coming and thank those who helped out with the program. (10 minutes)