

## **Overview of Engaging Families with Young Jewish Children**

### **Overview**

Early childhood education represents a unique opportunity to engage both young children and their parents in a rich and meaningful Jewish communal life. The Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (JECEI) transforms preschools into Jewish early childhood centers that ignite a desire and commitment in families to continue Jewish learning and living beyond their preschool experience and inspires increasing numbers of new families to enroll in Jewish early childhood centers of the highest quality.

JECEI places unparalleled emphasis on the importance of serious Jewish inquiry and dialogue on the part of the entire family in the community of the early childhood center. A central goal is to significantly upgrade the Jewish experience and commitment of families who enroll in an early childhood center. Independent of family background, immersion in Jewish values, community and life will transform the face of families with whom we are involved.

- Judaism has a way of informing life that can add depth, meaning and purpose to a family. The wisdom in Judaism can ignite a different journey for each family.
- We at JECEI believe that knowing and growing ourselves will have a direct impact on the well-being of our children.
- At JECEI, we believe that a culture of inquiry is a culture that enhances the potential for developing critical thinking, deeper connections and more meaningful relationships.
- We know that belonging to a community strengthens the family. JECEI's vision is to create communities of learning and belonging - *kehillah kedoshah*.
- JECEI schools believe that parents have essential skills that can be shared with the school community that enhances a strength-based organization.

### **Parenting**

At this stage of their lives, parents of young children are open to considering questions of identity and connection for themselves and their children. The raising of young children offers Jewish communities an unrivaled opportunity to engage young families and deepen their Jewish journeys.

The early years of a child's life have a substantial impact on brain development, social-emotional intelligence and personal identity. The foundations for future learning, personal relationships and communal belonging are laid down in those early childhood experiences. Thus, parents are

seeking the best educational environments available for their children, and the Jewish community needs to be able to offer them excellence.

In meeting this challenge, the Jewish preschool will need to change and grow. It will need to offer children the highest quality education. It will also need to become a center of Jewish life based on learning for the whole family and a community of support and celebration steeped in authentic Jewish values.

To achieve this, JECEI offers a new approach to Jewish education that will embody the best practices in early childhood and adult education.

---

The materials that appear on the JECEI website (except those for which reprint permission must be obtained from the primary sources) may be freely reproduced for educational/training activities. There is no requirement to obtain special permission for such uses. We do, however, ask that the following statement appear on all reproductions:

Copyright © 2011 by Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative