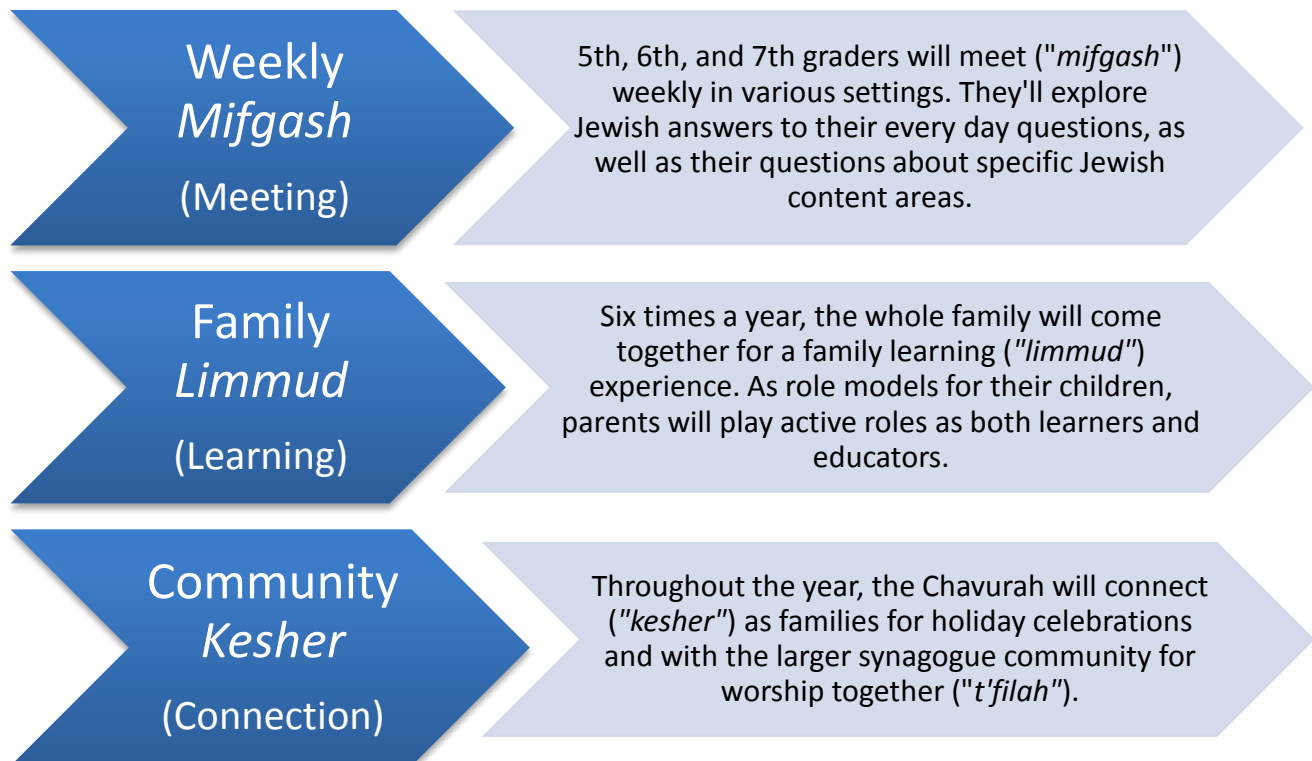


# Chavurah

## An Alternative Model for 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Families

Building Community through Meaningful  
Jewish Learning and Living Experiences

### What are the building blocks of the Chavurah model?



### **Who are the learners in the Chavurah?**

The Chavurah model sees the whole family as learners on a journey together. While some members of the family will meet more often than others – 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders meet every week, parents and siblings as scheduled – the whole family is committing themselves to being a part of this exciting new way to experience Jewish learning and living.

### **Who is the teacher of the Chavurah?**

Each Chavurah will have a *morah derech* (guide), who will coordinate and facilitate learning experiences. Candidates for a *morah derech* position need to be able to relate well to children and have a strong background in Jewish knowledge. *Morei derech* (plural) meet regularly to share ideas and learn from one another.

### **When and where does the Chavurah meet?**

Learning with the Chavurah can happen in any number of places – in the homes of the Chavurah members, Community Synagogue, a local park, a museum, or other appropriate destinations. The Chavurah will ground Jewish learning and living in real-life settings. The Chavurah, in coordination with their *morah derech*, will decide together which afternoon the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders will meet. When the Chavurah comes together as full families, these meetings will sometimes take place over Shabbat (Friday evening, Saturday morning or Saturday evening) or other times on a Sunday. There will be a maximum of three times in any home where a parent or adult needs to be present.

### **When do 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders learn Hebrew?**

While Hebrew can be integrated into Weekly *Mifgash* as appropriate, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders will also receive one-on-one Hebrew tutoring remotely, with a dedicated Chavurah Hebrew tutor. Each family coordinates with the Hebrew tutor to find a time to “meet” online weekly for a short tutoring session. They may also have the opportunity to supplement their Hebrew practice through online resources. There is also the option for students to meet weekly in-person with a tutor at Community Synagogue. The 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders will meet the Chavurah Hebrew tutor early in the year or over the summer. It has been noted that Chavurah students have been well prepared for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service.

### **How will the Chavurah groups be chosen?**

Our goal is to bring together families who can work well as a team, are open to trying new things, and who will contribute to the group in a way that strengthens learning and builds community.

### **What is the time commitment for students and families?**

Students meet once a week for 2 hours with their *morah derech*. They have a Hebrew appointment once a week with the Hebrew tutor, and are expected to complete their Hebrew practice and homework before their next session. Families reconnect with the synagogue community by participating in 6 family learning sessions and monthly worship. Chavurah families celebrate selecting holidays throughout the year.

**Will everyone who is interested in the Chavurah be able to participate?**

Our goal is to create groups that are large enough to accommodate many families, but small enough to encourage community-building. We hope to be able to include everyone but we cannot guarantee admission.

**How do I apply for admission to the Chavurah?**

An online application will be emailed to all incoming 5<sup>th</sup> grade families.

**Should I still submit a CJL registration form?**

Yes. All students need to have a CJL registration form no matter which learning track they choose.

**Can my child decide to go back to the classroom model if we sign up for the Chavurah?**

Yes. Kids, and their families, should be willing to commit to being open-minded in trying this new model, but we understand if students and/or families find that this isn't right for them. Those students can rejoin the classroom model.

**What is the cost of the Chavurah?**

Tuition for the Chavurah is slightly higher than the classroom school model. This is to accommodate the additional trips and experiential programs, as well as the individualized Hebrew instruction.

**Why were 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students chosen for the Chavurah?**

Developmentally, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders:

- Possess a broad range of interests
- Are capable of increasing independence
- Are truthful and dependable
- Are beginning to think about their own identities
- Are able to form good relationships with teachers and counselors
- Show more self assertion and curiosity
- Are socially expansive and aware
- Have the ability to relate feelings
- Still enjoy spending time with their parents

As Jewish children, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders...

- Have basic Hebrew decoding skills
- Have established a connection to Community Synagogue as a spiritual home

## *What kinds of experiences will children and families have as participants in the Chavurah?*

### **Weekly *Mifgash* (Meeting) for 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> graders**

The Weekly *Mifgash* may begin with an opening ritual, developed by the learners and their *morah derech*. Because the Chavurah will meet in different places throughout the year, the opening ritual will serve an important role in uniting the group each week. After the ritual, the group will enjoy a snack while discussing a “connection question,” like “What’s the best thing that happened to you this week?” Next, one of two types of learning will take place: exploring Jewish answers based on learners’ real-life, every day questions (“What does it mean to be a good friend?”), or exploring the learners’ questions about Jewish content areas (God, Torah, ritual, Israel, etc.). Instead of deciding in advance what’s important to teach, the *morah derech* will engage the learners in a process that uncovers their questions and then create learning to address those questions.

There are two types of *Mifgash* – *Mifgash Ba’Bayit* (in the home) and *Mifgash Ba’Derech* (on the road). *Mifgash Ba’Derech* can meet anywhere from Starbucks to the mall to a yoga studio. Different locations allow for different kinds of learning to take place. See the next page for examples of *Mifgash Ba’Derech*.

### **Chavurah requests 3 types of Family Involvement *Limmud* (Learning) Keshet (Connection) & *T’filah* (Worship)**

The Family *Limmud* is an opportunity for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Chavurah groups to come together to learn with the greater CSR community in the new *I-Select* program. Based upon the Chavurah model of selecting your course of study, families will choose from a list of family learning options ranging from Cooking for a Shelter/Soup Kitchen to learning about and creating Jewish Ritual arts, researching your family’s genealogy and learning how to record it.

Family *Keshet* is the opportunity for the whole Chavurah to come together periodically to build community and share in Jewish rituals and learning in authentic Jewish moments. These could include Shabbat dinners, Saturday night Havdalah and pizza parties, and holiday celebrations. These moments allow families to build meaningful relationships with each other as they open their homes in the value of *Hachnasat Orchim* (Welcoming Guests) and encourage children to see their parents as Jewish role models. Parents are supported by the *morah derech*, who helps brainstorm ideas and work with each family to determine what role they’ll play in Family *Keshet*.

Family *T’filah* encourages each Chavurah family to attend either one Friday night or Saturday *minyán* Shabbat service totaling 9 times from September 2014- May 2015. This experience strengthens spiritual connection, re-enforces prayer skills, and helps to build relationships with the clergy.

*Mifgash Ba'Derech examples,  
experienced by this year's Chavurah groups*

**Inspiration Gallery (Judaica Store)**

As a part of our **Jewish culture unit**, the students will have a chance to visit one of two Judaica stores in their area. The owner of the Gallery has offered to show us around the store, using the opportunity to form a unique program experiencing ritual objects, holiday celebrations, music and books. Students will also be learning about the concept of "*Hiddur Mitzvah*", making our rituals even more beautiful with our own hands.

**Starbucks**

As part of our **Tikkun Olam unit**, students will be learning about the various programs that Starbucks runs to help people throughout the world. Alongside a Starbucks site manager, a unique program has been prepared for the students explaining Starbucks programs such as Starbucks (red), Global Month of Service and Creating Jobs for USA. Through this program, students will have a different perspective on their favorite Starbucks drink!

**Whole Foods Market**

When learning about the value of *Tzaar Baalei Chayim* (Caring for Animals and Living Creatures) we visited Whole Foods Market in Port Chester. There we saw how a large and growing company is staying true to its values of selling the "highest quality natural and organic products available" while "promoting environmental stewardship" providing healthy produce and meat.

**Kosher Food Pantry Donation and Program**

Stamford, CT has the only Kosher food pantry in the area and our students will have the opportunity to meet with a representative after we donate needed items. As part of our **Tikkun Olam unit** we will first learn the needs of the food pantry and purchase the food at a nearby supermarket. We will then head to the food pantry and speak to one of the coordinators. This is a beautiful opportunity for students to do something on their own and see the journey of their good deeds.

**Mikvah**

As part of our "**Jews Today**" unit, students will be visiting a newly developed Mikvah in Stamford, CT and speak with the founders of the Mikvah Building. During this class, we will talk about Mikvah rituals and create some of our own.

**Krav-Maga Class**

As part of our **Israel unit**, the students will participate in an authentic Krav-Maga class. Learning basic steps of the greatest self-defense in the world, students will learn pride for their Jewish country.

Highlights of Models For 2014-15	Chavurah Model	Classroom Model
Family Involvement	Parents play an active role as partners in Jewish learning. The whole family comes together for experiential celebratory opportunities. Families also take part in the new <i>I-Select</i> programs at CSR to make connections with the greater community.	5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> graders and their parents participate in J-Life <i>I-Select</i> electing their topics of study
Time and Place	Learning takes place in various settings, on days and times determined by the Chavurah.	Learning takes place on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings at Community Synagogue.
Curriculum	Learning is guided by the questions of the learners.**  Hebrew learning is integrated into Weekly <i>Mifgash</i> , and learners meet one-on-one with a Hebrew tutor through weekly remote or in person sessions.	The 5th grade curriculum covers Prayer, Lifecycle, Holidays, and an introduction to the Holocaust through the lens of the mitzvah of saving a life.  The 6th grade curriculum covers Prayer, Jewish American History, History, and Prophets through the lens of social action.  The 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade curriculum focuses on Prayer, Hebrew proficiency, and the values of Torah (Learning), <i>Avodah</i> (Spiritual development) and <i>G'milut Chasadim</i> (acts of loving kindness)
Students and Teachers	Learning is facilitated by a <i>morah derech</i> (guide), a "Jewish personal trainer" for the whole family.  Learning takes place in small cohorts of up to 10 students/families.	Learning is facilitated by experienced and knowledgeable teachers and in 7 <sup>th</sup> grade, the clergy.  There are approximately 15 students in each class.

**\*\*What does it mean that learning is guided by the questions of learners?**

Over the summer and as the school year begins, the *morah derech* will begin to find out what the students are interested in learning about. This will take place through online surveys, in-person focus groups, and "launch lessons," interactive lessons that are designed to open up conversations about what learners are interested in exploring. Once the *morah derech* has a good idea of the learner questions, he or she designs learning around those questions. The learning can include anything from text studies, discussions, games, art projects, role playing, cooking, outside speakers and much more.



Sarah's 5<sup>th</sup> grade group learns about those in need on a visit to the Carver Center.



At our trip to Whole Foods Market, Rick's 6<sup>th</sup> graders were asked to take "selfies" to show examples of how the store cares about the environment.



Learning about *tzedakah*, Hilary's 7<sup>th</sup> graders ended their day downtown at Starbucks — a very charitable organization in its own right. They discussed a little about their Ethos clean water fund.

**What parents say about the Chavurah:**

- The Chavurah has allowed our child a more relaxed experience of religious school and connects more experiences to Jewish learning.-5th grade parent
- The group has bonded and it has been a wonderful experience overall. It went from being a part of our schedule to an important part of our week.-5th grade parent
- We finally feel connected to a group of Jewish kids and adults.-5th grade parent
- It is working well for us because we are able to "live" Judaism.-5th grade parent
- We really love the informal, more hands on aspect of Jewish learning.-6th grade parent

**What young learners say:**

- *We feel like we can tell each other everything.*
- *I love being in the Chavurah because you get to choose what you want to learn about.*
- *I enjoy chavurah because we learn so much by playing games. We once played kickball!! I also enjoy being in a class with less students because there are less distractions.*
- *I love Chavurah because: 1. its fun 2. we come up with cool things to do 3. we go to cool places*
- *I love Chavurah because it is so much fun and also I enjoy learning in many different ways. We play games and talk and do a Jewish version of spectacular games. It is so much fun!*
- *It is very fun, an adventure*
- *You get to do things with your family.*

What did learning look like this year?