

Welcoming Each Other at Congregation Shaarei Shamayim

Tips for engaging each other with an open heart and mind

Engaging with a person whose name you don't remember or you don't recognize...

Avoid saying...

Nothing.

"Is this your first time here?"

"Are you new?"

Say instead...

"I forget names sometimes. I'm ____."

"Sorry if we've met before. My name is _____."

"What do you think of the service (or program/activity)?"

Why?

It can feel unwelcoming to be ignored or assumed to be new.

This person might come to Shaarei Shamayim regularly but attend different events than you do.

Engaging with a person you don't know who may not appear "white"...

Avoid saying...

"Are you Jewish?" or... "When did you convert?" or ... "Did you grow up Jewish?"

"Let me introduce you to [insert name of CSS member of color]..."

Say instead...

"Sorry if we've met before. My name is _____" (or anything above)

Offer a prayer book and assume the person is Jewish and Jewishly knowledgeable.

Don't pigeonhole with a targeted introduction to people of color who are CSS members.

Why?

There are Jews of all races and ethnicities.

It is alienating to make assumptions about people based on race.

Many people of color have experienced racism in Jewish communities and are often treated like they do not belong.

Engaging a person you don't know with a visible disability...

Avoid saying...

"How can I help you?"

Say instead...

"Sorry if we've met before. My name is _____" and schmooze away without assuming they need your help, trusting they will ask if they do.

Why?

The initial question focuses on a disability. The revised statement focuses on the person.

Making announcements about a social justice issue...

Avoid saying...

"I know we all agree it's vital that _____ happen..."

"If you care about this, you'll..."

Say instead...

"Some CSS folks are doing _____. Would you like to join us?"

"This is important to me because..."

Why?

While we share common community values, the way we interpret those values varies.

Connecting across class differences...

Avoid saying...

"What do you do for a living?"

"Where did you go to college?"

Say instead...

"What kinds of things are you involved in at the congregation/ around town?"

Why?

Not all life trajectories are the same. Do not assume that all CSS members share the same class background or have the same financial capacity as you do.

When you don't know what pronoun to use for someone...

Avoid saying...

"Are you a man or a woman?"

"He's doing _____" (when you are unsure if the person uses "he").

Say instead...

"By the way, what pronouns do you use? I use _____ (she/her, they/them, etc)."

(Also consider if it's important for you to know at all.)

Why?

Do you need to use a pronoun for them, or is it your own discomfort with not knowing someone's gender identity? If you do need to use a pronoun, ask which ones without making it a big deal.

When you use the wrong gender pronoun...

Avoid saying...

"She is leading services...oh my goodness, HE. HE is leading services - Oh I am so sorry, I am really trying, it's just so hard for me..."

Say instead...

"She is leading services, I'm sorry, he is leading services..." and go on using the person's correct pronoun.

Why?

Drawing attention to your error makes it about you, when it's really about respecting the other person. Try to work on it in private with someone who has agreed to help.

Connecting across religious practices...

Avoid...

Assuming someone is or is not Jewish.

Trying to get someone to participate in a religious ritual when they have expressed that they do not wish to do so.

Commenting on a person's choice to participate or not participate in a religious ritual or wear a kippah or tallit.

Telling someone that they should not be doing a particular religious practice or are doing a ritual incorrectly.

Say instead...

"Shabbat shalom/Welcome! I'm _____."

"If you write on Shabbat/this holiday, here's a sign-in form."

If someone indicates that they are new to the congregation: "I've been coming here for quite awhile. Let me know if you have any questions."

If you are sitting next to someone who appears confused during the service: "These services can be hard to follow. Would you any guidance?"

If someone asks whether to take a kippah or tallit: "Everyone is welcome to wear a kippah. Some people do and some people don't. Typically only people who are Jewish wear a tallit."

Why?

CSS members and visitors have a wide variety of religious practices and customs. Greet people as they are and try not to make assumptions, comment on their ritual choices, or correct them. People can be very sensitive about being told that they are doing something wrong.

Sometimes a person might be grateful to receive information about how to participate in the religious life of the congregation or do a ritual correctly, but our first priority is to make them feel welcome. If you have a question or concern, please speak with the rabbi.

Connecting with physical touch...

Avoid...

Hugging an adult or child unless you are certain that they are comfortable with that.

Say instead...

"Can I offer you a hug?"

(It's reasonable for anyone to say "Nope, I'm good" or "No thank you!")

Why?

Asking before physically touching is respectful. We all have different comfort levels around physical touch.

DO: Introduce yourself, Make friends, Be interested, Reach out, Respect boundaries

Adapted from Kol Tzedek Synagogue, Friends General Conference, and the Unitarian Universalist Association