

Congregation Bonai Shalom's WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged) Covenant for Mental Health

We, the Congregation of Bonai Shalom, of Boulder, Colorado, aspire to be a more welcoming community to all, including those who experience mental health challenges. We are enriched by the gifts, stories, and experiences of all our members, including those living with mental health challenges, such as, but not limited to, mental illnesses, addictions, trauma, situational crisis, and brain disorders. Moreover, we value and appreciate the neurodiversity (natural variation in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other brain functions) that exists within our community. We care about the whole person: body, mind, and soul. All of us are created in the image of the Divine and carry a spark of divinity within us.

Approximately one in four people in the U.S. experience mental illness in a given year. The number of family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors touched by those facing mental health challenges is considerably higher. Yet, mental health challenges remain stigmatized.

A core principle of Judaism and one of the tenets of Bonai Shalom is: We are all created *in the image of the divine* - אֱלֹהִים בְּצֶלֶם -- *b'Tzelem Elohim*, and therefore each and every one of us should be treated with loving-kindness, respect and dignity. Through our current actions and our aspiration to educate and overcome the stigma of mental illness, we become closer to realizing our human potential. The Bible teaches us repeatedly that our congregation should be inclusive. Leviticus 19:14 states, "Do not curse a person who is deaf and do not place a stumbling block in front of a person who is blind." Isaiah 56:5 says, "For my house shall be a house of prayer for *all* people." And in Pirkei Avot 4:27 it states, "Do not look at the container, but what is in it."

Sometimes individuals with mental health challenges, such as brain disorders, mental illnesses, addiction, and trauma feel cut off and do not feel included. We aspire to communicate to all individuals that God loves all of us equally; we are all equal in the eyes of God. People with mental health challenges have gifts to offer within our Bonai Shalom community. We want everyone to feel fully welcomed, included, supported and engaged in our congregation's life, work and leadership and feel a sense of belonging.

We, the Congregation of Bonai Shalom, of Boulder, Colorado, enter this covenant to work towards becoming a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE) congregation for mental health.

Call to Action:

We pledge to work towards creating a *welcoming* environment for people with mental health challenges and their loved ones by:

- Educating ourselves regarding various forms of mental health challenges and the issues surrounding those challenges.
- Educating ourselves regarding the mental health effect of the challenges experienced by Jews of Color and/or LGBTQIA+ Jews because of bias, prejudice and systemic oppression.
- Educating ourselves regarding the mental health effect of the challenges experienced by veterans who served in foreign and domestic wars and survivors of the Holocaust and second-generation families.
- Examining our own attitudes about mental illness, the strong stigma still attached to such illness, and how we might reduce that stigma.
- Welcoming those with mental health challenges and their families into our faith community and providing a safe environment in which people can tell their stories, share their journey, and be their authentic selves.

We pledge to work towards *including* people with mental health challenges in the life, work, and leadership of the congregation by:

- Inviting and supporting persons with mental health challenges and/or their family members to be involved in all religious, educational and social community activities.
- Soliciting input from those involved with mental health issues, so that congregants with mental health challenges and/or their family members and those with knowledge thereof have a voice on committees and in the planning of programs and events.
- Being open to hiring persons with mental health challenges.

We pledge to work towards *supporting* people in our congregation who have mental health challenges and their loved ones by:

- Reaching out to those living with brain disorders, mental illnesses, addictions, and trauma in the same way we reach out to those living with other physical disabilities.
- Offering companionship and compassion for individuals and their loved ones living with mental health challenges.
- Encouraging collaboration between various committees to expand education and programming about mental health issues (i.e., Inclusion, Chesed, Response to Racism, and Membership Committees).

- Encouraging congregants to engage in relevant trainings, workshops, and programs offered by Bonai Shalom, other Jewish organizations, and community and national organizations.

We pledge to work towards *engaging* with other organizations that work at the intersection of mental health and Judaism/faith/spirituality by:

- Welcoming and encouraging outside groups who support individuals with mental health challenges, brain disorders, mental illnesses, addictions, and trauma to use Bonai Shalom's facilities.
- Engaging with other organizations to find opportunities to be in shared mission and advocacy together. This includes working with our rabbi, support groups, Boulder JCC, Jewish Family Services, INMI, UCC Mental Health Network, Jewish Disability Advocates, etc.

Entering into this covenant affirms that we join in the process of always becoming more welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged with all of God's people.

Created February, 2021, by the Inclusion Committee of Congregation Bonai Shalom

Approved by Bonai Shalom's Board of Directors on February 16, 2021