

Welcoming *Hachnasat Orchim*

In Jewish teaching, hospitality is considered a form of compassion, an act of righteousness, and an obligation.

For adults, hospitality is an easy concept to understand:

- Open the door and be inviting as guests arrive.
- Make guests comfortable.
- Generously offer your best food.
- See to the needs of guests.



These behaviors that come naturally to adults are not always easy for children to understand or practice. We have all experienced the embarrassment of our children being unkind to guests during a playdate: refusing to share toys, ignoring someone while playing with someone else, or arguing about what to play.

We need to ask ourselves: are we intentional in teaching our children to welcome others? There are simple things adults can do to prepare children *before guests arrive* in order to encourage them to be welcoming:

- Involve them in choosing foods that guests might enjoy eating.
- Employ your child's help to clean and prepare for guests, showing that we want our home to look nice when guests arrive.
- Talk about why it's important to make others feel comfortable in our home. Ask, "How do you think it would feel if someone was unkind to you when you were visiting their home? How would it feel to be hungry while you were there?"
- Discuss the importance of sharing with our friends. They only have a few hours to play with our toys, while we can play with them anytime. If there is a particular toy that a child does not want to share, it should be put away before the guest arrives.
- Teach children to greet friends as they arrive. As each guest comes to the door, encourage your child to go to the door, make eye contact, smile, and say, "Hi, come in."
- After a play date or a party is over, let children know that it is important to walk each guest to the door and say, "Thank you for coming."

Practicing a new skill may feel awkward and uncomfortable at first, and we shouldn't expect perfection with young children. But with practice, it will soon feel natural to them.

Children also need to understand that there is still work to be done *AFTER* guests leave. Clean up time! Returning toys to their usual places is a job that children of all ages are able to accomplish. Writing a thank you note or drawing a thank you picture is a wonderful practice for children.

This all takes time and effort on the part of adults, but the investment is worthwhile. Make welcoming others a family affair. If we have homes that are open and welcoming, then by example, our children will learn the value of welcoming.

*You may want to read [*Just Enough Room*](#) by Miriam P. Feinberg, a story about a family welcoming others into their home for Shabbat.

For more information go to: [Jewish Values for Everyday Living, Mussar for Children](#)