



# 8 WAYS TO TEACH KIDS ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE THIS CHANUKAH

*Educational activities for home and the classroom*



*Chanukah provides a trove of lessons about generosity, civic engagement and activism — from standing up for your values to protecting light and freedom wherever it's threatened, to choosing hope and action even in the face of despair. It's the perfect opportunity to teach these lessons to children, so the next generation will grow to build a better world than the one they were born into.*

Here are **eight ideas** from our team at AJWS to nurture budding Jewish changemakers, one candle at a time:

## **1** Shed light on your values.

Chanukah candles represent the Jewish values and traditions that the ancient Syrian Greeks sought to destroy — and that the Maccabees fought to preserve. Every family, school or community has its own unique values. After you light the candles, break out the poster board and markers and ask kids to write or draw the values they're committed to. Hang it on your wall as a guide for the year ahead.

## **2** Give more than you get.

The Chanukah gift-giving tradition can expand kids' understanding of what it means to give and receive. Encourage them to give to others — whether it's wrapping gifts to bring to a shelter or doing an act of kindness for a friend. This is also a perfect moment to talk about *tzedakah*. Give children dollars as Chanukah "gelt," and then designate a portion of that money to a charitable cause.

## **3** Spin (a dreidel) for social change.

Did you know that dreidel wasn't always a children's game? According to popular Jewish legend, it originated as a subversive act of resistance so the persecuted Jews of the Chanukah story could learn Torah under cover without being discovered. When the Greeks came, they found the scholars playing an innocent game of tops. Tell your kids this story and talk about civil disobedience in history and today. Brainstorm ways they could question an unjust rule themselves — through dialogue, advocacy or peaceful protest.

## **4** Let your true self shine.

The Talmud instructs us to "publicize" the miracle of the oil that burned for eight days by putting our menorah — also known as a *channukiah* — in the window for all to see. Putting your menorah on display honors all those who have defended their faith and values despite the risks they faced. Teach kids to be proud of their identity and the principles they stand for.

## 5 Ask important questions.

Use the special time as the candles burn to spark children's critical thinking: What are you grateful for this year? What could our family do to help people who are suffering in our world today? What injustice makes you mad — and what's one way you can commit to making a difference? What gives you hope?

## 6 Rededicate and create.

The Maccabees found the Temple in Jerusalem in shambles after they won the war against the Syrian Greeks. But instead of abandoning the building, they rededicated it anew. Following their example, gather discarded materials and make Chanukah decorations to give these old things new life. Teach your kids to protect the earth and its resources.

## 7 Tell a modern Chanukah story.

With so much fun on Chanukah, it's easy for kids to forget why we're celebrating in the first place. The Maccabees fought off persecution and won their religious freedom. Talk to kids (in an age-appropriate way) about people struggling to overcome prejudice and inequality today — from women fighting for reproductive rights in our own country to citizens living under authoritarian regimes overseas. Visit [www.ajws.org/blog](http://www.ajws.org/blog) for ideas.

## 8 Sing songs of freedom and peace.

The traditional Chanukah song, "Maoz Tzur" ("Rock of Ages"), proclaims how God saved the Jewish people from "raging foes." Ask kids what other freedom songs they know, and sing them together. From Jewish songs for peace like "Oseh Shalom," to civil rights anthems like "This Little Light of Mine," songs of justice are just the light we need this Chanukah.



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