

BIG QUESTION

How necessary is friendship?



Never Say a Mean Word Again

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Bonding with friends – *Di-buk cha-ve-rim* – דבוק חברים



Read

the book for Jewish values

How does this book reflect the theme of pursuing peace?

Meaningful friendships require the work of compromise, empathy, patience, and understanding. In *Never Say a Mean Word Again*, two young boys forge a friendship after an initial conflict between them. As misunderstanding gives way to finding common ground, the boys develop a lasting friendship. They remind us that **meaningful connections to one another** are part of building a more peaceful world.

Three aspects of this value to consider:

- Deep friendships require commitment.
- Seeing a situation from another person's perspective is central to friendship.
- Lasting friendships involve resolving conflicts.

The literal translation of *dibuk chaverim* is “cleaving to friends.” Rabbinic sages felt we should hold onto friendships dearly because they are essential. The spiritual nature of friendship is exemplified in the biblical friendship of Jonathan and David: “And it came to pass that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Samuel 18:1). The description of souls being knitted together hints at the depth of their close bond. Jonathan and David in fact make a *brit*, a holy covenant, in which they promise to serve and protect one another; Jonathan ultimately saves David's life.

Storytelling techniques

1. (*Materials needed: green yarn*) Vines and plants weave throughout the pages of this book. Sit together and ask the students to pass a ball of green yarn to their neighbor each time they see a plant growing on a page. By the time you reach the end of the book, there should be a green vine connecting them as a physical representation of *dibuk chaverim*, holding onto our friends. (You can reuse the yarn in the friendship web in the IMAGINE section.)

2. (*Materials needed: construction paper*) Take note of the many windows and doors in the illustrations. What might they symbolize about friendship? Have each student create a door by folding a piece of construction paper in half. While reading the book, students should open or close their doors when they notice Samuel and Hamza open or closed to each other. Can students think of times when they felt shut off or welcomed in by a friend?



Discuss

Jewish values with one another

After you read

- How does Samuel try to keep Hamza from saying a mean word? How does Hamza interpret those efforts differently than Samuel intended?
- Do you think these two boys should remain friends? Why or why not?
- Why is it important to have friends? How do you solve disagreements?
- One of the beauties of friendship is that while we have things in common, we can learn from our differences. Think about some of your friends and the ways in which they are similar to and different from you.



Imagine

how values will come to life

Building blocks of friendship

Part of building a friendship is discovering what you have in common. Divide students into pairs and give them old Legos or blocks and markers. As they talk to one another about their families and interests, such as sports, food, or favorite movies, have them write commonalities on a block and use the blocks to build a tower or other structure. What did they learn about each other that surprised them?



Friendship web

Form a circle and hold the end of a ball of yarn. Toss the ball to someone, keeping hold of the string, and say, "(Name), you're a great classmate because (reason)." Continue the activity until every student has received and tossed the yarn to a friend. What does it feel like to share and receive kind words with friends? How does this friendship web make us stronger as a class?



Engage

families in conversations about values

The illustrations in this book include lots of budding flowers and vines. Host a family planting or gardening activity and discuss the ways in which friendships grow and need nurturing, just as plants do.



Families love to see their children making new friends. How will you photograph or document these activities to share with families?

More on this topic

PJ Library books

Bitter and Sweet by Sandra V. Feder

Mitzvah Pizza by Sarah Lynn Scheerger

