

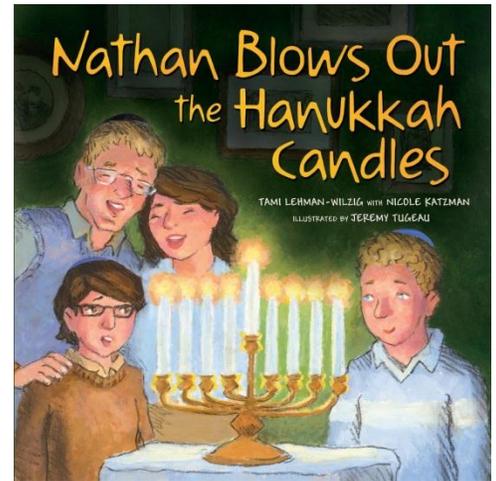


Nathan Blows out the Hanukkah Candles

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Illustrated by Jeremy Tugeau

Program Focus

Age group: Age 5 and older
Time frame: 1 hour
Central value: Accepting children who act and learn differently



Synopsis

This story is centered around Nathan, a child who has high-functioning autism. Nathan's younger brother, Jacob, observed years before the event in the story that Nathan's brain is "wired differently" from his own. Based on an event that actually occurred to a real family, the story introduces young children to autism in general, and by extension to other developmental disorders. Told through the eyes of younger brother Jacob, the book's characters learn an important Jewish value – how to accept the "other" within their midst. ***Nathan Blows out the Hanukkah Candles*** is a perfect book to open a conversation on how important it is to love, understand and respect children who act different.

Goals

This program introduces families to consider how children differ and how all children deserve not just tolerance but also acceptance. Below are some activities based on accepting individuals who have autism. Many more great and simple activities for children may be found in ***The Autism Acceptance Book***, referenced in the bibliography.

- Helping families understand how brains are wired differently
- Engaging in Hanukkah learning in a way helpful to children with autism

Plan in advance

Materials Needed

To Blow Out or Not to Blow Out Activity

- Two of each of as many kinds of candles as possible
 - Shabbat candles and holders
 - Birthday (and cupcake for a holder)
 - Hanukkah candles and Menorah
 - Yarzeit candle
 - Havdallah candle
 - Yankee candle
 - Pillar candle
 - Funny shaped candle
- Two tables for displaying the candles
- Writing utensils
- “To Blow or Not to Blow Candle” sheet (see attached)
- Answers for “blow or not to blow” for selected candles, printed on a tented index card
- Card decks of the various candles to play “concentration” matching games.

Introduce with an activity

To Blow Out or Not to Blow Out

Just like with candles, our differences are what make us unique, interesting and special. First take a look at the differences between candles, and then we'll be reading a book about Nathan, a boy who is interesting and unique in his own special way.



When families arrive and are welcomed, they are given a “blowing candle” sheet and instructed to visit the candle tables to:

- Mark up the “blowing candle” sheets
- Read about “blowing candle” answers that expand their knowledge
- Additionally, families can play concentration memory game with a deck of cards.



Introduce the Story

*It's not easy having an older brother who is challenged and does embarrassing things. In this book, **Nathan Blows Out the Hanukkah Candles**, Jacob tells us all about life with his older brother Nathan. Nathan looks just like any other boy his age from the outside. But inside, Nathan is different. Nathan has autism and his brain wired differently, leading him to do things that cause his brother Jacob just a bit of embarrassment. Let's get to know Nathan and Jacob.*

Read the story

Follow Up Discussion

When do we blow out candles? When do we let candles burn?

Jacob says that “Nathan’s brain is wired differently”

- What did Nathan and Jacob have in common?
- What is different about Nathan?
- What is he good at?
- What is he not so good at?
- Did you think that Jacob was sometimes upset with his brother? Why?

Some children with autism prefer to be alone and stay to themselves.

- Did you see this with Nathan in the book?

Were there people who acted meanly or insensitively towards Nathan?

- What did they do?
- If you were Jacob, how would you feel when his new friend made fun of Nathan?

Sometimes children with autism do not have many friends.

- Did we meet any of Nathan’s friends?
- How could you be a good friend to Nathan?
- Why do you think Nathan would have difficulty making friends?

How did people in the book show kavod / respect for Nathan?

How did both of the families figure out how to make Hanukkah special for everyone?

Follow Up activities and resources

Autism Awareness: Social Miscues – Identifying Feelings

Individuals like Nathan often do not pay attention to and often misread social influences and cues. Their faces often don’t express how they feel (they often do not know how they feel), and they cannot read the faces and gestures of others – the nonverbal behavior that is so important in their day to day relationships.

They may not know they are boring one person, angering another, or whether someone’s tap of their shoulder is friendly or aggressive.

- Show pictures of people who are happy, sad, puzzled, worried, etc.
- Discuss what it is about each face that lets you know how they feel.
- What would it be like if you could not tell what these faces were telling you?



Autism Awareness: Senses

People like Nathan may use their senses a bit differently. They may overreact to what they sense (screaming when they hear a loud noise) or they may not react to other things. For example, they may not smell some things well or they may smell them better than anyone else. What smells odd to you might make Nathan sick. Things that don't bother you much may bother them greatly. For instance, they may get very frustrated if their shoes aren't tied "just right."

- Have containers with different smells and have people choose the smells they like the best and the least, emphasizing how we all have a different nose.

Autism Awareness: Filtering – Role Play

People like Nathan may not "filter" their observations before they speak. For example, anyone may notice that another person is overweight or has a crooked nose. Most people keep that information inside, as a thought, and they will not comment aloud for fear of embarrassing someone else. Someone similar to Nathan does not have a "filter" that allows him to know it would be inappropriate to remark out loud on what s/he notices. They do not understand that this is not the "social" thing to do. Nathan might follow his curiosity and ask out loud why that person is fat or has an odd-shaped nose.

- Two people role play the following situation: one person is at school assembly or synagogue wearing a sweater or shirt inside out; the second person has high-functioning autism, and exclaims very innocently but loudly that the sweater or shirt is inside out.
- Group questions:
 - How might people at school or services react upon hearing someone yell such a thing out?
 - How might the person wearing the clothing inside-out feel if someone blurted this out during services or an assembly?
 - How might people in a congregation or school react to the one who made such an exclamation?
 - What would be the best way for people to react in such a situation?

Autism Awareness: Hyperfocusing – Role Play

People with high-functioning autism often hyperfocus on a particular subject. S/he may even be the area's expert on the subject and innocently act as a "smart-ass" or just constantly talk about the subject, or simply rehearse out-loud the capitals of all the states and countries without realizing that s/he is intruding on others or not giving others the opportunity to speak. People with high-functioning autism want to relate to others but do not know how. They can be very aware that they do not fit in. They may talk about their area of interest incessantly because it is their way of trying to have a conversation. In another situation, when hearing someone make a mistake, s/he might blurt out loudly, "You are wrong!!!" instead of offering a gentle correction or even just ignoring the mistake. They are over concerned with facts, and do not understand, socially, how to correct someone. When they do not understand the nuances of relating to people or understanding the world, facts become very important. They can remember the facts, but often not the concept.

Two people role play the following situation : A friend comes over to play with her high functioning autistic friend. The autistic child is fascinated by dinosaurs and eagerly shows her playdate her newest dinosaur book. After 10 minutes of looking at the book, the visiting friend is ready to play a different game or go outside. The autistic child, however, does not want to close the book and does not want to stop sharing dinosaur facts with her friend.

- Group questions:
 - What might the visiting friend do in order to convince her friend to move on to another activity?
 - What might the visiting friend be thinking or feeling as her friend continues to talk about dinosaurs?
 - Are there any actions which the friends (or friends' parents) could have taken before the playdate in order to ensure that the playdate would have proceeded more smoothly?

Resources for parents, teachers, families

Parent / Teacher Role

You are not supposed to “cure” them. Rather, you should be sensitive to their needs, provide an accepting atmosphere, and a willingness to make accommodations for them. For example, individuals like Nathan learn differently. They often cannot notice the important items to remember when someone speaks or when they read. Therefore, it helps if they have an outline at the beginning of a lesson to help them know what information is important to remember or a sample of a finished essay or piece of art so that they know what their final product should resemble. If you are unsure what to do, asking the family directly is a way to become aware and the first step in becoming educated.

Books

Batshaw, M. L. *Children with Disabilities*, 4th ed. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1997.

<http://www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/batshaw-68585/index.htm>

Christensen, Shelly, *Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Minneapolis, 2007. <http://www.jfcsmpls.org/inclusionresources.html>

Nowicki, Stephen and Marshall P. Duke, *Helping the Child Who Doesn’t Fit In*, Peachtree Publishers, 1991.

Sabin, Ellen, *The Autism Acceptance Book: Being a Friend to Someone with Autism*, Watering Can Press, 2006. A book full of activities to sensitize children. Teacher’s Guide available at [wateringcanpress.com. http://www.wateringcanpress.com/html/autismbook.html](http://www.wateringcanpress.com/html/autismbook.html)

Simon, Sara, Linda Forrest and Ellen Fishman, *V’khol Banayikh: Jewish Education for All, A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide*, Torah Aura Publications, 2010.

<http://www.torahaura.com/ItemDetails.aspx?ItemNo=VKORBAN&Row=60>

Wolf, Linda Shapiro, *Derech Tzlecha! The Path to Success: A Manual for Teachers and Parents of Special Needs Students*, EKS Publishing, 2007. <http://www.ekspublishing.com/classroom-materials/derech-tzlecha-the-path-to-success>

DVDs

Autistic License, A Shift Happens Production, 2009. 89 minutes. Video of a critically-acclaimed play. For older students and adults. <http://www.autisticlicenseplay.com/> (DVD no longer available. Contact Stacy Dinner-Levin, playwright for information mslevin4@earthlink.net)

Autism: The Musical, Docudrama Films, 2007. 93 minutes. For older students and adults.

<http://www.autismthemusical.com/index.php?session=myhomepage&id=>

Including Samuel, Dan Habib, 2009. 58 minutes. Primarily about a child with cerebral palsy, but contains an inclusion message that is applicable for people with other concerns. For older students and adults. <http://www.includingsamuel.com/home.aspx>



Candles have deep symbolic meaning in Judaism and are used on a wide variety of religious occasions.

When Jewish Custom Uses Candles

- Candles are lit prior to every Shabbat in Jewish homes and synagogues before sunset on Friday evening.
- At the end of Shabbat a special braided Havdalah candle is lit.
- During Hanukkah candles are lit in the Hannukiyah each night.
- Candles are lit prior to major Jewish holidays such as Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Passover, Sukkot, and Shavuot.
- Memorial candles are lit by Jewish families on the Yahrzeit (anniversary of a death) of close loved ones every year.
- The eternal flame, or Ner Tamid, found in most synagogues above the ark where the Torah scrolls are kept is meant to represent the candle flame of the original Temple's menorah, though most synagogues use electric lamps instead of actual oil lamps today.

The Meaning of Candles in Judaism

Candles have a variety of meanings within Judaism. Candlelight is often thought of as a reminder of God's divine presence. Candles lit during Jewish holidays and on Shabbat serve as reminders that the occasion is holy and distinct from our day-to-day life. The two candles lit on Shabbat also serve as a reminder of the biblical requirements to "remember" (Exodus 20:8) and "keep" (Deuteronomy 5:12) the Sabbath. Candles are also equated with joy in Judaism, drawing upon a passage in the biblical book of Esther that equates light and joy (Esther 8:16).

In Jewish tradition the candle flame is also thought to symbolically represent the human soul and serves as a reminder for the frailty and beauty of life. The connection between candle flames and souls derives originally from the Book of Proverbs (20:27): "The soul of man is the candle of G-d." Like a human soul, flames must breath, change, grow, strive against the darkness and, ultimately, fade away. Thus, the flickering of candlelight helps to remind us of the precious fragility of our life and the lives of our loved ones, life that must be embraced and cherished at all times. Because of this symbolism, Jews light memorial candles on certain holidays and their loved ones' yahrzeits.

<http://judaism.about.com/od/jewishculture/a/What-Do-Candles-Represent-In-Judaism.htm>