



Conscious Grandparenting

A 3-Session Course for Grandparents

Adapted from the Conscious Leadership Group
by Margie Bogdanow



OVERVIEW

Conscious Grandparenting is a unique approach to grandparenting and leadership adapted by the Jewish Grandparents Network, recognizing that grandparents are often the leaders in their own families. The core of Conscious Leadership: <https://conscious.is>, on which Conscious Grandparenting is based, is a consultancy founded by Jim Dethmer and Diana Chapman that offers a new way to understand ourselves, our relationship to others, and the world around us. It invites us to take ownership and responsibility for how we're leading from moment to moment and offers pathways for shifting from drama, defensiveness, and reactivity to presence, acceptance, and collaboration.

Conscious leaders are aware and tell themselves the truth about how they are being moment to moment. They are curious about themselves and the world around them. They are committed to learning over being right. They engage in an “energetic experience” of living life, using the 15 Commitments: <https://conscious.is/15-commitments>.

This series will introduce you to key Conscious Leadership concepts (especially being “Above and Below the Line”) and will address two of the commitments — Appreciation, and Play and Rest. We will explore ways that participants can adapt these commitments for their own relationships with their children and grandchildren.

Goals of the Course:

Participants will:

- Develop an understanding of their own role as a leader in their family.
- Explore ways to enrich and strengthen their relationships with their children and grandchildren.
- Reflect on the impact of their words and actions on their children and grandchildren.
- Connect the concepts of conscious leadership to Jewish wisdom.

Logistics

Facilitator

We recommend that the facilitator develop a basic understanding of the Conscious Leadership material and concepts before the start of the course. In preparation, we suggest the facilitator watch this video: <https://conscious.is/video/the-4-questions-conscious-leaders-ask-themselves>.

In addition, the Conscious Leadership website is full of resources that are freely available to download and use. For more in-depth learning, the facilitator may want to read *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership* book. This material is applicable to a wide variety of personal and professional situations.

It is helpful if the facilitator is self-aware enough to know when they themselves are below the line and practice acceptance for themselves and others when being below the line.

Timing

We recommend you offer three sessions of 1 to 1½ hours each — in person and/or on Zoom. Each session should allow time for community building and reflection on the previous session. Schedule the gatherings at any intervals that work for your group. Weekly or biweekly is ideal, as the concepts build upon one another.

Materials

You will find a list of materials for each session below.

Suggested Room Setup (in person)

Space should include chairs in a circle or around a table for a feeling of intimacy and connectedness. The space should be large enough to accommodate breakout groups of 2 to 4 people.

Acknowledgments

The Jewish Grandparents Network is grateful to Jim Dethmer, co-founder and principal at the Conscious Leadership Group, for giving us permission to adapt his approach and tools for this course for grandparents. Please note that this is not an official Conscious Leadership program. It informally builds on CL concepts and themes and adapts them for grandparents as leaders in their families.

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CONSCIOUS GRANDPARENTING

Session 1

Session length: 1–1¼ hours

Setup and Materials

In person

- Set out name tags.
- Print Session 1 handouts in Appendix, one copy per participant: “Excerpt from ‘Seven Principles of Jewish Leadership’” by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, and “Locating Yourself: Above or Below?”
- Prepare video for sharing on-screen, or participants can watch in small groups on their own devices.
- Set up room for ease of communication — chairs either in a circle or around tables.

Online

- Download Session 1 handouts for sharing on-screen.

Tip: Email the handouts in advance to participants who will be joining on Zoom.

- Prepare video for sharing on-screen.

Session Goals

1. Connect participants to one another and create an environment for openness and sharing.
2. Introduce participants to the work of the Conscious Leadership Group and the skill of locating yourself.
3. Help participants make the connection between grandparenting and leadership.
4. Connect Jewish wisdom to everyday life as a grandparent.

Welcome and Setting Your Intentions (5 minutes)

Welcome individuals, thank them for participating, and introduce them briefly to the topic of Conscious Grandparenting.

Explain that Conscious Grandparenting is adapted for grandparents from the work of the Conscious Leadership Group: <https://conscious.is/>. The core of that work, a consultancy and leadership support organization, founded by Jim Dethmer and Diana Chapman, offers a new way to understand ourselves, our relationship to others, and the world around us. It invites us to take ownership and responsibility for how we're leading moment to moment and offers pathways for shifting from drama, defensiveness, and reactivity to presence, acceptance, and collaboration.

Grandparents are often the leaders in their own families, and the Jewish Grandparents Network has adapted this work with the goals of strengthening grandparents' self-understanding and enabling them to lead their families in positive ways, building stronger family relationships.

Conscious leaders are aware and tell themselves the truth about how they're being moment to moment. They practice getting curious about themselves and the world around them. They practice a commitment to learning over being right. They practice an "energetic experience" of living life using the 15 Commitments: <https://conscious.is/15-commitments>.

Invite participants to be fully present for the experience. Ask them to put away their cell phones, perhaps to take a few deep breaths. Share that Conscious Grandparenting means that grandparents take radical responsibility for themselves and their actions, and commit to always being curious about their own and their family members' behaviors.

Group introductions (10 minutes)

Help create a safe environment so that participants feel comfortable exploring the concepts and sharing with each other. Ask them to introduce themselves and share their grandparental names (Bubbie, Zayde, Savta, Grandma, Mimi, Pop-Pop). This way of introduction often prompts conversation about participants' relationships with their own grandparents, hopes for their own identity as a grandparent, and shared connections as people reflect on how they acquired these names and what the names mean to them.

Introduction to “Conscious” and “Leadership” (5 minutes)

Share with participants definitions of “conscious” and “leadership” as they relate to this grandparenting discussion.

Conscious: To be conscious is to be here now, to be fully present, to be in this moment, and to be aware.

Leadership: The ability of a person (in this case, a grandparent) to take responsibility for the influence they have in the world.

Jewish Framing (10 minutes)

As the group begins to explore leadership and responsibility, share that Jewish wisdom, both modern and ancient, can serve as a bridge between the present and the past, and can often offer a helpful perspective and new way of thinking about the topic.

Ask a participant to read aloud the excerpt on the handout from “Seven Principles of Jewish Leadership” by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks.

Leadership Begins with Taking Responsibility

Compare the opening of Genesis with the opening of Exodus. The opening chapters of Genesis are about failures of responsibility. Confronted by God with their sin, Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent. Cain says, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Even Noah, “righteous, perfect in his generations,” has no effect on his contemporaries.

By contrast, at the beginning of Exodus, Moses takes responsibility. When he sees an Egyptian beating an Israelite, he intervenes. When he sees two Israelites fighting, he intervenes. In Midian, when he sees shepherds abusing the daughters of Yitro, he intervenes. Moses, an Israelite brought up as an Egyptian, could have avoided each of these confrontations, yet he did not. He is the supreme case of one who says: When I see wrong, if no one else is prepared to act, I will.

At the heart of Judaism are three beliefs about leadership: We are free. We are responsible. And together we can change the world.

Discussion: Ask a few people for their reaction to the selection. Keep this to a relatively quick discussion, a planting of seeds for thought.

You might ask:

1. Does this reading in any way change your understanding of Adam, Eve, Noah, and Moses? If so, in what ways?
2. If one aspect of leadership has to do with taking responsibility for one's actions and influence, can you begin to view your role in your family in that light? Ask for examples. These might include passing down traditions or teaching grandchildren about something that is meaningful to the grandparent, such as living a Jewish value like *tzedakah* or *shomrei adamah* (protecting the environment).
3. If you view yourself as a leader in your family, how might that impact your actions? Answers might focus on being more thoughtful in what and how you present something to children or grandchildren — the language you use, timing of a conversation, and who is in the room.

Introduction to Above and Below the Line (10–15 minutes)

Show the “Locating Yourself” video: <https://conscious.is/video/locating-yourself-a-key-to-conscious-leadership> and share the “Locating Yourself: Above or Below?” handout.

Review the handout together briefly. Explain that when people are above the line, they are in a “by me” state. When people are below the line, they are in a “to me” state. In a “by me” state we see ourselves as the source of our own experiences; in a “to me” state we are at the effect of other people, situations, circumstances, and sometimes even ourselves. When we are above the line, we are open, curious, and committed to learning; when we are below the line, we are closed, defensive, and committed to being right.

Ask participants to circle their go-to statements, behaviors, and beliefs when they are above the line and below the line. Ask participants to share a few examples of what they circled.

Note the observation in the video that we are hardwired to go below the line. Our brain is programmed to go below the line as a reaction to threat — for self-protection. Going below the line is a natural and normal thing for us to do as human beings. Learning to shift to above the line is an opportunity for growth and freedom.