



Hosting an Inclusive Seder: A Guide for Grandparents

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Introduction

At your seder, you, the grandparent, will likely host a diverse group of guests — family and friends, neighbors, in-laws, even last-minute visitors — who may be of different religions, races, identities, cultures, and with a wide range of Jewish backgrounds. In this guide you will find ways to create a memorable and loving Passover, led with a spirit of innovation and inclusion, melding your memories of past seders with your hopes for the future.

In Egypt, when the Israelites were enslaved and then left for freedom, elders went with their families — grandparents carrying not just necessities but also wisdom and the collected memories of their families.

Even then, the Israelites did not leave Egypt only with their own tribes. The Torah tells us an *erev rav* (“mixed multitude”) also went up with them. The *erev rav* weren’t of the Israelites but were certainly *with* them, carrying their own stories and history while sharing a hope for freedom.

Today, many of our families are a mixed multitude — we are multigenerational, multicultural, and multiracial. This guide is designed to celebrate that diversity because, like the ancient Israelites and the *erev rav*, we journey together, our destinies entwined.

This is *not* a comprehensive guide to running a seder. Its purpose is to provide ideas that motivate you to think broadly about possibilities for inclusion at your own seder. You know your family and guests best. Let your relationship with them, and the traditions, rituals, and experiences you each carry with you, guide you in creating a Passover experience that will be comfortable and welcoming — and enrich the seder experience for all.

Why is Passover the perfect time to welcome everyone to your table?

The haggadah says, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” As part of the seder, we are asked to open our table and hearts to others. There are many kinds of hunger beyond the physical — for connection, love, and meaning. As grandparents, you can provide that sustenance.

- ***Decide who to include and let them know they are welcome to bring their full selves to your seder.*** You might invite them this way: “Please join us for our Passover seder, an evening of rituals, storytelling, and good food. It would mean so much to have you celebrate with us. We value your perspective and your questions and thoughts.” Gently tell first-time guests what your Passover food observance is. For example, you may welcome a gift of a bottle of red wine or Passover chocolates but prefer they not bring beer or pastries.
- ***Plan a seder that is right for your family.*** Seders can be long or short, include a lot of blessings and a puppet show, be intellectual and include fits of laughter. Decide on one or two goals you have for the seder and focus your efforts there. For example, you might want to make it a fully engaging — and much-shortened — hands-on experience for the children, with costumes and props and a great afikoman hunt. Or perhaps you want to focus on social justice issues and adult discussion. Keep your audience in mind while remaining true to your own vision for the seder.
- ***Plan the logistics.*** Arrange the seating so guests feel comfortable. Decide who will sit next to whom and consider having the grandchildren make pretty place cards. Choose an appropriate haggadah with some of the following features: print that is big enough to read, transliteration and English translation if you plan to use any Hebrew, and explanatory notes or graphics so your guests can learn about unfamiliar rituals. Look for a haggadah that uses inclusive and welcoming language — perhaps with quotes from secular sources and non-gendered God language. If necessary, adapt the language as you read aloud. And choose a haggadah that is bright and cheerful to look at!
- ***Give a hearty welcome to your guests.*** If you have people of diverse traditions with you, you can respectfully acknowledge those differences and invite guests to share their traditions, as they choose, throughout the seder.

Reading

Share this reading when you recite the Shehecheyanu blessing at the beginning of the seder.

We give thanks for the blessing of this moment and being here with all of you. We bring our full selves to this moment to learn, love, and laugh together. As we explore the Jewish story, we embrace our commonalities and differences, all part of our collective story. We thank the Source of Life for this time of togetherness.

Which seder rituals are especially appropriate to embrace other religions and traditions?

Passover is a holiday that joins our particular Jewish story of the Exodus with recognition of the universal experience of spring and renewal. This opens many possibilities for including guests from different traditions. Well in advance of the seder, go through your haggadah and plan which activities and discussions you will use. Below are two examples: egg and *karpas* (green vegetable).

Egg: We have a roasted egg on the seder plate (representing the cycle of rebirth and renewal and, some say, the ancient sacrificial offerings), yet we never mention the egg during the seder. You can acknowledge this symbol and invite your guests into the discussion.

Discussion: There is a roasted egg on the seder plate, but we don't mention it during the seder. (You may choose to explain its symbolism.) Eggs are included in many traditions. What does an egg represent to you? Why do *you* imagine we include it on the seder plate? Are eggs part of any rituals in your tradition?

Activity: Play "Pass the Egg." Using a hardboiled or plastic egg, pass or toss the egg from participant to participant. This can be as silly or as serious as you wish. The person holding the egg says one hope they have for this upcoming year.