Giving with Dignity and Joy

A Hanukkah and holiday-season giving evening for Moishe House Residents and MHWOW Hosts

At a glance

Element	Details
Format	One complete evening program with a flexible way of giving
Length	About 2 hours. It runs comfortably to 2:15 if the study needs room.
Group	Roughly 15 to 30 young adult peers. It also works for 12 people in a living room.
Led by	The Resident or Host. A JLS can support the text study and the preparation.
Space	A home or similar space, with seating that lets pairs talk
Season	Hanukkah, with the wider December holiday season as the shared backdrop
Fixed in every version	Everyone gives something real. The three study texts and the dignity conversation. Candle lighting and a closing commitment.
Chosen by the Resident or Host	How the group gives (toy drive, baked goods, cards, care kits and more), the hands-on activities, the recipients, and the scale

Goal statement

> *Participants experience giving as a Jewish practice of dignity and joy. Through giving in a way that suits their community and talking openly about what it means to give with dignity, they build language for giving well and leave with one concrete way to act locally this Hanukkah and holiday season.*

What this commits the program to

- The learning is about the *how* of giving: no shaming, cheerfulness, and the dignity of the person receiving. The gift is where that gets practiced.
- Giving is real from the first minute. Every participant gives something, and nobody is turned away for lack of a toy.

- Dignity is spoken about out loud. People leave with their own words for what it means to give well.
- The Hanukkah light is part of the experience. It is enacted at the candle lighting and is not an add-on.

How to make this program yours

This program has fixed content and a flexible way of giving. Choose the means that fit your community, your space and what local organizations will accept.

The commitment	Default	Other ways to do it
Giving	A toy as the entry ticket	Care kits, gift wrapping, a coat or food drive, cookies for first responders or hospital workers, volunteer sign-ups, notes to volunteers, or any mix
Hands-on social time	Cookie baking	A latke or cocoa bar, decorating donation boxes, a gift-wrapping station
Giving practice	Card-making	Decorating boxes, writing notes to volunteers, assembling care kits
Speaking about dignity	Pairs study of two texts, then a group conversation	Keep the three texts. Open the conversation through stories first if your group prefers.
Closing	Candle lighting and a one-sentence commitment	On a non-Hanukkah night, a shared light moment (see the facilitation notes)

Before the evening: local research and preparation

Local research is a core step, not an optional extra. What you give, and to whom, depends on what organizations in your area actually accept and need. This is your decision as the Resident or Host. Start two to three weeks ahead, since organizations often have their own deadlines.

1. Choose and contact recipient organizations

- **Toys:** Look for a children's hospital, a family shelter, a community organization or a local drive. Ask about age ranges, new versus used, wrapped or unwrapped, drop-off times and anything they cannot accept.

- **Food or cards for first responders and hospital workers:** Ask whether they accept homemade baked goods. Many have food-safety policies. If they do not, cards and store-bought items may fit better.
- **Volunteer opportunities:** Look for holiday volunteering such as spending time with patients, helping at a drive, or sorting donations. Collect real names, dates and sign-up links for the closing.
- If you are outside North America, the steps are the same. The organizations and the holiday context will look different.

2. Decide the practical details

- **Date and light:** Confirm whether the evening falls on a Hanukkah night. Confirm that the venue allows open flames, or plan for LED candles.
- **Kashrut and allergens:** Decide which ingredients and kitchen you will use, and which items are nut-free or vegan. Decide how donation-safe items are marked.
- **Access:** Check the route to the space and the seating, and ask about dietary needs when people RSVP.

3. Invite with dignity-first language

Here is a sample invitation. Adapt it to your voice.

> *Join us for an evening of baking, learning and light. We are gathering gifts for [organization], so bring a new toy to get in. If a toy isn't possible this season, a card, something you've baked, or an hour of your time works just as well. Everyone is welcome, with any level of Jewish background. Come, give, and think together about how to give well.*

4. Prepare your next-steps page

Prepare a one-page list of the local organizations, volunteer opportunities and dates, to share at the closing and to post or print for people to take home.

Program outline

Time	Segment	What happens	Why it matters
0:00–0:20	**Arrival and giving**	A greeter welcomes people. Gifts go to the collection point. Anyone without the default item can offer a card, a baked item or time.	Giving is real from the first minute, and cost is not a barrier.
0:20–0:30	**Welcome and framing**	The Host states the intention, names that December feels	This sets the tone and the vocabulary before the study.

Time	Segment	What happens	Why it matters
		different for different people, and introduces the dignity-first language.	
0:30–0:55	**Hands-on activity**	Baking is the default. A conversation prompt sits at each table: *a time someone gave you something in a way that made you feel seen.*	Shared work builds connection and opens the theme through experience.
0:55–1:20	**Text study**	Pairs study the Rambam and Pirkei Avot (12 min). The group discusses what stands out and why dignity and joy matter (8 min). A short bridge connects the texts to the evening's own giving (5 min).	This is the core Jewish content, about how we give.
1:20–1:35	**Giving practice**	Card-making is the default, with a wording guide drawn from the study.	Participants apply the texts in a concrete way.
1:35–1:55	**Candle lighting and closing circle**	The group reads Shabbat 21b:8 (3 min), lights the candles with a choice of how to take part (5 min), and each person finishes a closing sentence (10 min). The Host shares the next steps (2 min).	The teaching about visible light is enacted, and the commitment is made in the open.
1:55–2:00	**Send-off**	Donations are boxed and the drop-off plan is confirmed.	The evening ends with a joyful, visible handoff.

If you are short on time, shorten the hands-on block before the study. If the study runs long, let the evening stretch to 2:15.