



MISSION STATEMENT

The Temple Emanu-El Temple Circles initiative empowers our community by fostering relationships through small groups and building connections within the Temple, the greater Birmingham Jewish community, and Judaism.

The Leaders Handbook

We know that there are many demands on your time and energy, and Temple Emanu-El is honored that you will be dedicating your time to fostering an environment that will live into our Temple Circles Mission Statement.

This guide will offer some “best practices and principles” for leading a Temple Circle. If you have questions or concerns that are not answered here, your Leadership Development & Support Team is here to support you.



The members of your Temple Circles Leadership Development & Support Team are happy to answer your questions, offer resources, help troubleshoot issues that may arise in your group, or simply act as a sounding board as you begin this process. You can contact [Erin Arnold](#), [Nancy Hamric](#), [Billie Marsala](#), [Ami Epstein](#), [Sylvia](#)

[Wright](#), [Sandy Goldman](#), [Marilynn Rothstein](#), or [Alan Davis](#). Temple Emanu-El's Director of Membership and Engagement, [Monika Singletary](#), is also available (Just click on the name of the person with whom you want to communicate.) They will either help you or connect you with the appropriate person.

Leader Training & Review Sessions

All leaders will be asked to attend either a training session (designed for new leaders) or a review session designed for 2nd Time Around Leaders. Multiple dates/times will be offered to ensure that all can attend. Those who have led 3 or more times will be invited to a Pre-Session Roundtable to help our team finalize the training sessions for the others and will share a high-level review designed for experienced leaders.

What does it mean to be a Temple Circle leader?

Being a great Temple Circle Leader doesn't require you to be a teacher or to have specialized Jewish knowledge. What matters most is your willingness to create a warm, engaging space for connection and community.

As a valued member of the Temple Emanu-El family and a Circle Leader, you or your Circle designees will



Offer Hospitality. Create a welcoming environment for your group to meet. This can be at your own home, the home of another member, a member's office, outdoors or anywhere else where you can have a private, uninterrupted conversation or activity. If refreshments are relevant, they can be provided by the host, or participants can be asked to bring them.



Prepare. For each session, you will prepare an outline that should be followed. (See p.4 for Tips on Structuring your get-togethers.)



Bring Supplies. For each session, review the Temple Circles Promise and bring any other materials that might be needed.



Facilitate discussion in addition to your unique activity. Your goal is to encourage lively, meaningful discussion, in which everyone's voice is heard. (See p.5 for tips on how to do so.)



Get Coaching/Support. Members of the Temple Circle's Leadership Development & Support Team are available for one-on-one coaching/support if requested. (See p.5)

Our Temple Circles Sessions usually begin after the High Holy Days (by January at the latest) and conclude before Memorial Day Weekend (or in June at the latest.) Once a Circle begins, best practices tell us that get-togethers should take place at least once each month for at least 6 consecutive months. We encourage our circles to attend at least one (preferably both) pre-scheduled Happy Hour Pre-negs prior to Temple Circles Shabbat Services. New Circles and/or repeating Circles will be established in June and July of each year for the upcoming session.

In addition to the two pre-scheduled Temple Circles Shabbat Services, we strongly encourage Circle members, as a group, to attend other Temple Emanu-El services, celebrations, and programs. We also hope that members will support each other in both good and not-so-good times.

HOW TO BEGIN

1 CREATE A DIVERSE MEMBERSHIP

- Circles of 8 to 12 people (6 min/16 max) are recommended.
- Choose the makeup of your circle: adults, parents, families, young adults, multi-generational, men, women, LGBTQ+, professionals, etc.
- Each Circle can include some people who already know each other. However, the Mission of Temple Circles is to create new friendships and/or to allow people who don't know each other very well to deepen their friendships. Temple Circles are open to members of our temple family, the wider Jewish community, or to those who have a sincere interest in Judaism.
- Temple Emanu-El with the Temple Circles Registration Team will market your Circle to encourage people to register via our small group software, and in various communications with our congregation and the community. They will do their best to ensure a diverse membership for your circle.

2 FIND THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE

- We recommend meeting a minimum of 6 times during the session for a couple of hours each time or however much time you think is needed.
- **In advance**, let your members know when and how long the sessions will be and where they will take place.
- Pre-select all the dates, if possible, but at least 4, before the first Circle get-together, and make sure your members understand that joining your Circle is a commitment for at least 4 of the 6 get-togethers. Once the Circle begins, members, as a group, may opt to change the dates and/or times of future get-togethers.
- For conversational/social Circles, choose a quiet, comfortable, inviting location for your get-togethers. For experiential Circles, make sure there is some private area available for conversation in addition to the relevant venue for your Circle's activity.

3 PREPARE FOR YOUR FIRST CIRCLE GET-TOGETHER

- Check out our tips for structuring your first get-together (p. 4).
- Create your first outline (agenda) and send it to your members in advance.
- Include a CALL TO ACTION in your outline e.g., "Who will host next time?" or "How to do something for or with Temple" or "Come prepared to discuss a specific topic," etc.

4 CREATE A CONVERSATION-CONDUCTIVE SPACE

- Set the tone for a relaxing atmosphere.
- While you enjoy dinner, sip wine or coffee, picnic in the park, or relax together after an activity, try engaging in a "deep conversation" to get to know each other better: questions or short stories/poems designed to spark conversation that goes beyond catching up on your daily lives. Members of your Leadership Development & Support Team are happy to chat with you about conversation starters. Make sure you allocate enough time for the purpose of your Circle.

TIPS FOR STRUCTURING TEMPLE CIRCLE MEETINGS

- **Schedule all your sessions in advance (if possible).** Calendars fill quickly. The key to ensuring regular attendance is to set your calendar well in advance. It is usually easiest to pick one day and time that occurs on a regular basis (e.g., the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m.).

To minimize conflicting Circles with other Circles and/or Temple events, we ask that your schedule be sent to monika@ourtemple.org to add to our Temple Circles calendar. Any updates to your schedule should also be sent to her.

Childcare may be available for programs at Temple Emanu-El. Reach out to monika@ourtemple.org for availability.

- **Create an outline with time allocations**

1. Nosh & Schmooze
2. Review of Mission, Purpose, and Ground Rules
3. Do something Jewish.
4. Have an activity involving the purpose of the Circle.
5. “A Deeper Conversation” and, perhaps, more Noshing
6. Get feedback and plan for the next get-together.

- **Send a reminder of the get-together, the outline, and any prep materials a couple of weeks and then 2 -3 days before each session.**

1 NOSH & SCHMOOZE

- Have everyone introduce themselves, share Good & Welfare, and announce upcoming TEE happenings. (Consider having name tags for the first few get-togethers.)
- Get to know each other better (more info each session).
- Share personal stories and experiences (Checking in & Catching Up).

2 MISSION, PROMISE, AND GROUND RULES

- Review the Temple Circle Mission Statement, at least at the first few get-togethers
- Also review and have everyone agree to the Temple Circles Promise.
- Set the Ground Rules:
 - Confidentiality
 - Respect
 - Commitment
- Let everyone know that if this sort of gathering—in which participants actively share their stories and experiences with one another—is not what they had in mind, they are welcome to opt out with no judgment. Please let your contact on the Leadership Development & Support team know if this occurs.

3 DO SOMETHING JEWISH – D’var Torah, A Poem, A News Article

- Rotate responsibility for doing this.
- Connect this to your activity/purpose and, if possible, to Temple Emanu-El or the greater Jewish community. Your Leadership Development & Support team and Director of Membership & Engagement, Monika Singletary, can help with this.

4 ACTIVITY (This is why everyone joined your Temple Circle.)

- Introduce the activity/purpose of your Circle.
- Think of elements that others can lead each time you get together.

5 “A DEEPER CONVERSATION” AND MORE NOSHING

- Pick an interesting topic/question that may have nothing to do with the purpose of the Circle.
- Keep the conversation relevant to everyone.
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues and steer the conversation accordingly. The following are some examples:
 - Facial expressions
 - Restlessness
 - Side conversations
 - Looking at phones

6 GET FEEDBACK & PLAN FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- GET INSTANT FEEDBACK: What worked well? What to change for the next get-together?
- PICK COMMUNICATIONS STYLE: Make sure everyone agrees on the best way to communicate; email, text, etc.
- CONFIRM: Next get-together date, who will host, who will plan “Doing Something Jewish”, and who will come up with a topic for the “getting to know each other better” deeper conversation?
 - DELEGATE: Delegate for Refreshments, Supplies, Communication, etc.
 - LAST, BUT NOT LEAST: Closing words of thanks.

COACHING/SUPPORT

Before the official start of a Temple Circle, each circle leader will be assigned a coach from the Leadership Development & Support Team (LD&ST). The coach and leader will have an ongoing relationship during the session when support and/or guidance are needed and when information needs to be communicated.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can I encourage people to join my Circle?

- Leave this up to your Temple Circles Advisory Council's (TCAC) Marketing Team.
- **If there is still room in your Circle when registration closes**, feel free to invite people you already know.
- Share stories and **photos** about your Circle with the temple and with other individuals.
 - Please check with your members to make sure it's okay to share photos with Temple Emanu-El
 - High Resolution Photos work best. Here is what we found on Google for smartphones:
 - *Go to Settings > Camera > Formats > Photo Mode, then choose 12 MP or 24 MP or*
 - *To capture resolution at 48 MP, go to Settings > Camera > Formats, then turn on Resolution Control or ProRAW & Resolution Control (depending on your model).*
 - *Please share this information with whomever you delegate as photographer(s) for your get-togethers*
 - Please send your photos to mrobinson@ourtemple.org and billiemarsala@gmail.com.

Can guests be invited to attend a Temple Circle Get-Together?

Guests are welcome to join one time as a way for them to see if Temple Circles are of interest to them for the next session. For the minimum of 6 get-togethers, Circles are really for members only. Best practices & principles tell us that this is the best way to build relationships and live into our Temple Circles Mission.

Of course, if a member has an out-of-town visitor, please have them invite them to join your circle for that get-together. We would rather the members attend than not because of someone visiting.

Where can my Temple Circle meet?

Circles should meet outside the temple building, in places where you like to spend your time like homes, restaurants, parks, coffee shops, office buildings, libraries, etc. If you feel that the best place to meet is at Temple, then it must take place when the temple is open and with the permission of the temple staff. Please discuss this with [Julie Stein](#), the leader of our Recruitment Team or a member of her team.

What if I need help creating the outlines (agendas) for the get-together?

Make sure to attend your training/review session which will take place before the official start of the new session. If additional assistance is needed, your assigned coach will help you or direct you to someone who can.

How often does my Circle need to meet?

We encourage meeting at least once each month for 6 consecutive months to build deep relationships. More often is also acceptable if it better suits the focus of the Circle.

Does Temple Emanu-El offer childcare during Temple Circle meetings?

If childcare is needed, the members of the Circle will have to arrange for it, although childcare may be available for circles taking place at Temple Emanu-El.

[RESOURCES](#)

[Temple Circles Mission Statement](#)

[Temple Circles Promise](#)

[Sample Outline for Circle Get-Togethers](#)

[Sample Blessings](#)

[Doing Jewish Together - Quick Ideas](#)

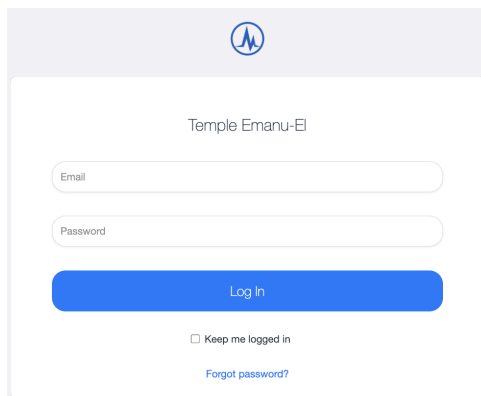
[Introduction, Welcome, and Reminder Emails \(Part 1\)](#)

[Introduction, Welcome, and Reminder Emails \(Part 2\)](#)

[Relationship Building Conversations](#)

NOTE: These resources can also be found when you log into your Circle in the Group Vitals software. You will find a tab at the top of your page that says RESOURCES.

[Login page for Group Vitals](#)

A screenshot of a web login page. At the top center is a circular logo with a stylized 'M' and a heart. Below the logo, the text 'Temple Emanu-El' is centered. There are two input fields: 'Email' and 'Password'. Below these is a blue 'Log In' button. Under the button is a checkbox labeled 'Keep me logged in' and a link that says 'Forgot password?'. The entire login form is enclosed in a light gray border.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR TEMPLE CIRCLE!