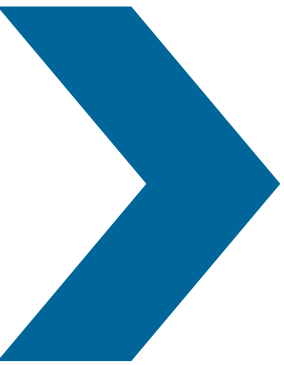


Adoption  
& Jewish  
Identity Project



**12 THINGS**  
JEWISH ADOPTees AND  
THEIR FAMILIES WISH THEIR  
COMMUNITIES KNEW

**USER GUIDE**

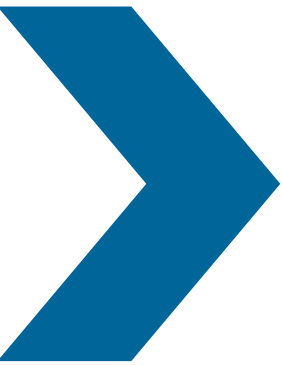


# HOW TO USE “12 THINGS”

American Jews today are engaged in important conversations about how to make the Jewish community more inclusive. To date, many of these conversations have focused on members of interfaith families, Jews of Color, LGBTQ Jews, and Jews with disabilities. Adoption, however, has been largely absent from this communal agenda. Jewish adoptees and their families often feel “invisible in plain sight,” with little attention to their unique issues and concerns.

We hope “12 Things” will help Jewish communal professionals, lay leaders, and the broader community become more sensitive to the experiences of the many adoptive families in their midst. Even more importantly, we hope that it will spark a more in-depth, sustained effort to make the Jewish community a place in which adoptees and their families can bring their whole selves and feel fully at home.

In this User Guide, you’ll find specific ideas for how you might use “12 Things” as a resource if you are a Jewish communal professional who works with adoptees and their families (for example, an educator, youth leader, or rabbi), or if you are an adoptee or member of an adoptive family looking for community and interested in helping to raise awareness about adoption’s myriad issues.



# SOME BASIC DO'S & ONE IMPORTANT DON'T

**DO** use what you learn from “12 Things” to think more sensitively about how adoptees and their families might feel about a question you ask, a comment you make, a lesson plan you design, a sermon you give, or a youth program you offer.

**DO** think *in advance* about how you can best support adoptees if you witness someone challenging their Jewish identity or making them feel they don't belong.

**DO** think about the physical environment in your institution, your classroom, your camp bunk, even your home, and what it conveys about who belongs; make an effort to include images with a diverse array of faces and families.

**DO** be conscious of the diversity in the Jewish community, as well as of any assumptions you may make about who “looks Jewish” or belongs in Jewish spaces.

**DO** think carefully about the language you use to describe not only Jewish identity and belonging, but also adoption and adoptees' birth cultures and families.

**DO** be aware of how Ashkenazi bias (the assumption that Jews came from Eastern Europe and that Jewish and Ashkenazi culture are synonymous) pervades the American Jewish community, making those who don't fit this profile feel marginalized or inauthentic.

**DO** reach out to people who have professional or lived expertise in adoption if and when you have questions or need more information.



**DON'T** put adoptees on the spot by singling them out and asking them to share some aspect of their story or to explain what it's like to be of a different race, converted as a child, or born to non-Jewish parents.

### WAYS TO USE “12 THINGS” IF YOU’RE A JEWISH EDUCATOR:

- Bring your colleagues together and use “12 Things” as a conversation-starter to raise awareness about and sensitivity around adoption in the Jewish community.
- Use “12 Things” as the basis for discussion with your colleagues about how to design curricula and assignments (especially around history, ancestry, and family) that are sensitive to the realities of adoptees without putting them on the spot as individuals. For example:
  - Brainstorm how to conceptualize and present American Jewish history in open-ended ways that don’t make students feel marginalized if their ancestors weren’t Ashkenazi Jews who came through Ellis Island.
  - Find alternatives to the traditional “family tree” that better reflect the complex family structures and histories of adoptees (and many others in today’s Jewish community) and that include placeholders for the unknowns in all our histories.
  - Broaden how we conceptualize Jewish ancestry to make room for those, including many adoptees, whose biological ancestors were not “standing at Sinai.”
- Brainstorm with your colleagues how to anticipate and respond effectively, compassionately, and sensitively if and when one of your students is made to feel marginalized in terms of appearance, Jewish identity, background, family structure, etc.

### WAYS TO USE “12 THINGS” IF YOU’RE A RABBI:

- Provide the professionals and lay leaders in your congregation who interact with adoptees and their families with copies of “12 Things” and this user guide.
- Help us raise awareness about adoption in the Jewish community by forwarding “12 Things” to your colleagues (Federation, JCC, Jewish Family & Children’s Services, etc.) and professional associations (rabbinic listservs, denominational networks, etc.).
- Use the insights you gain from “12 Things” to keep adoption on the communal agenda and included in conversations about diversity and inclusion.
- Consider what the physical and online environments of your institution convey about who “belongs.” For example, are there photographs that include Jews of Color, others who don’t “look Jewish,” and Jews of non-Ashkenazi backgrounds on the walls, on your website, and in your publications?
- Use your bully pulpit (literally and figuratively)! Model inclusive language about who belongs in our community, call out racism in society at large and within the Jewish community, and be aware of the ways in which adoptees can feel “othered” by assumptions and comments about appearance, “Jewish genes,” and Jewish ancestry.

**WAYS TO USE “12 THINGS” IF YOU’RE A YOUTH LEADER:**

- As you plan programs and choose materials for group activities, use “12 Things” to help you think sensitively about issues of inclusion and othering, for adoptees as well as for other young people who may feel marginalized in the Jewish community.
- Use “12 Things” to brainstorm how to anticipate and respond effectively and compassionately if and when adopted kids or others in your group (camp bunk, youth group, high school or college Israel trip, etc.) are made to feel different or marginalized in terms of appearance, Jewish identity, background, family structure, etc.
- Model inclusive language for the kids in your care, especially regarding Jewish identity and who “belongs” in our community.
- Consider how you talk about and relate to people outside the Jewish community, remembering that adoptees and many others in your group may have close familial and/or cultural connections with them.

**WAYS TO USE “12 THINGS” IF YOU’RE AN ADOPTIVE PARENT OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBER:**

- Help us raise awareness about adoption in the Jewish community by:
  - Forwarding “12 Things” and this guide to your rabbi, synagogue educators, youth leaders, Hillel staff, and other Jewish communal professionals and by sharing these resources through social media, communal listservs, etc.
  - Sharing “12 Things” with your extended family and friends.
  - Using the insights from “12 Things” to keep adoption visible in communal conversations about diversity and inclusion.
  - Letting communal professionals know that you’re available to discuss adoption’s complexities and/or to answer their questions
- Invite other Jewish adoptive parents and family members for a one-time discussion or ongoing support group. Use “12 Things” as a prompt for discussion and sharing your stories.
- Brainstorm other “things” you would like the Jewish community to know and share them with the Adoption & Jewish Identity Project!
- We believe in the power of personal stories to create social change. Consider sharing your own story with the Adoption & Jewish Identity Project (anonymously, if you prefer).

## WAYS TO USE “12 THINGS” IF YOU’RE AN ADOPTEE:

- Consider inviting other Jewish adoptees to join you in forming a group for support and community. Use “12 Things” as a prompt for discussion and sharing your stories.
- Brainstorm other “things” you would like the Jewish community to know and share them with the Adoption & Jewish Identity Project!
- Help us raise awareness about adoption in the Jewish community by doing any of the following you feel comfortable with:
  - Forwarding “12 Things” and this guide to your rabbi, synagogue educators, youth leaders, Hillel staff, and other Jewish communal professionals.
  - Sharing these resources through social media, communal listservs, etc.
  - Letting communal professionals know that you’re available to discuss adoption’s complexities and/or to answer their questions.
- We believe in the power of personal stories to create social change. Consider sharing your own story with the Adoption & Jewish Identity Project (anonymously, if you prefer).

Maybe my *neshama* [soul], my spiritual history, is Jewish,  
but my blood, my ancestry, is tied to the Americas.  
(*Latina/Indigenous, transracial adoptee from Honduras*)



**Join us at:**

[adoptionandjewishidentity@gmail.com](mailto:adoptionandjewishidentity@gmail.com)

[www.adoptionandjewishidentity.org](http://www.adoptionandjewishidentity.org)

 [facebook.com/adoptionandjewishidentity](https://facebook.com/adoptionandjewishidentity)