



MZ Small Groups Guide for Group Leaders

Welcome!

We're glad you're choosing to lead a MZ Small Group.

MZ Small Groups are part of Mount Zion's vision for the future. We are all creators of this community, together we are sharing moments, building relationships, and ultimately finding meaning for our Jewish lives. MZ Small Groups is a philosophy as well as a set of affinity groups, a philosophy based in belonging. As everyone finds a home base within a group or two, together we will be creating a community in which everyone has meaningful relationships with others and an emotional investment in Mount Zion and the Jewish community.

So thank you for the *mitzvah* of creating connection, and for contributing to this *kehillah kedushah*, this holy community.

Introduction

This Guide will help you get your idea for a group off the ground. It doesn't account for every question or every circumstance, but it will prompt you to consider what you want and help you and Mount Zion think, together, about making each group work well.

Mount Zion staff and leaders are here with you, every step of the way, to help this go smoothly. Your main guide and helper for these groups is Shai Avny, Mount Zion's Congregational Engagement Director. Please be in touch with Shai early and often in your process.

What Is a MZ Small Group?

MZ Small Groups are a way for us to build strong connections with others at Mount Zion. Consisting of anywhere between 3-18 people, groups meet regularly, with the frequency, number, dates and locations of meetings determined by the group.

These groups are designed to inspire us and transform our lives and the world around us, with deeper relationships and a greater experience of joy and meaning.

If you would like to lead a group, Mount Zion will work with you to help make that happen. You'll never be alone in this process. If you want to be a group leader, please be in touch with Shai Avny, Congregational Engagement Director, at savny@mzion.org or 651-698-3881.

Below is more specific information about MZ Small Groups.

Key Considerations

You have a number of basic questions to answer about your group. Use this list to prompt you to consider the “who, what, when, where, and how” of your group.

Who will be in the group?

- ✓ *Is membership in the group restricted by age, gender, geography, or any other factor?*
- ✓ *Is it limited to a certain number?*
- ✓ *Do people need to commit to the whole series of meetings or events?*
- ✓ *Is it open to people whenever they can join in?*
- ✓ *Is it open for a while, and then closed once you get a committed group?*

Each group is different. It’s great to be open to people from throughout the congregation at any time, but there are sensitive topics or times that require building trust and consistency with a committed group. Any arrangement can make sense; what is most important is to be clear what your expectations are for participation.

When and where will you meet?

- ✓ *How often will you meet?*
- ✓ *Where will the meetings take place?*
- ✓ *How long will each meeting be?*

What will your group do, and how will it work?

- ✓ *What is the basic format of your gatherings: activities, discussions, study, etc.?*
- ✓ *How will you help people get to know each other and connect to each other?*
- ✓ *What do you need from the group to make your leadership work well?*
- ✓ *How will you communicate with the group?*

Things You Need To Do

Complete the initial form of interest

Fill out the initial “Interest in Starting a MZ Small Group” form, available on the website. Soon after, expect a call from Shai Avny to talk about your group.

Write blurb

Write a 2-3 sentence invitation to and description of the group. This will be published on Mount Zion’s website and will publicize your group.

Be available for people to contact you

Provide an email address (and maybe a phone number) to Mount Zion, so people can contact you. Respond promptly to people’s interests and questions.

Attend an orientation and training session for MZ Small Group leaders

Shai will let you know when the next session is. These will help make sure everyone is on the same page and that you know where you might get some assistance as your group proceeds, including how to work with different personalities in your group.

Frequently Asked Questions

What kinds of groups are being encouraged?

There are a few types of groups that we envision:

- *Affinity Groups*: Built around a common interest or topic. These can be sharing your love for tennis, cooking, musical theater, or touring old Jewish sites. It could be facing challenges you want company with: empty nesting, bereavement, raising children as a single parent. It could be more explicitly Jewish topics: Mount Zion members who are recent immigrants from Russia or Eastern Europe, interfaith couples considering Judaism in their lives, Mossar reading contemporary Jewish writers.
- *Age or Stage Groups*: Built around a common phase or condition of life, and the challenges and opportunities of living a fulfilled Jewish life.
- *Geography Groups*: Built around proximity to each other, building relationships with Jews in your neighborhood or town. These groups could come together to share events or holidays, or to learn about any aspect or topic from a Jewish perspective. Mount Zion clergy will make materials available for your group to discuss—prior sermons, d’var torah ideas, readings, talks, etc.—as well as discussion questions to get the conversation rolling.

Can Mount Zion refuse to sponsor a group?

Yes. Mount Zion retains the right to refuse to sponsor a group, or to cancel its sponsorship of a group, at any time and for any reason. The authority for making such decisions rests with the Mount Zion leadership, specifically Rabbi Spilker and Executive Director Larry Solomon.

Are non-members allowed to be part of a MZ Small Group?

Yes. However, only members are allowed to initiate or lead a group.

I have an idea but I’m not really sure I can pull this off. Can you help me figure this out?

Absolutely! There’s lots of support:

- Shai Avny, the Congregational Engagement Director, is here for you at any time to answer questions and help you figure out what you want to do and how to do it.
- There is a group of experienced group leaders we are assembling to serve as informal advisors, people who are skilled at organizing groups, leading conversations. You could talk to one of them anywhere along the way to help the group go well.
- The “Resource Guide for Creating and Sustaining Small Groups” is available to you. It has some ideas for starting conversations, tips on how to manage a group, ideas for adding Jewish values and ideas into the mix, and other tools.

I have an idea but I'm not ready to start now. Can I do this later?

Sure. We will be launching MZ Small Groups in clusters—probably every 3-6 months we'll start a new batch. Talk to Shai, get your group lined up, and begin at the next launch date.

Mount Zion Vision and Values, and MZ Small Groups

MZ Small Groups comes directly out of Mount Zion's vision: these groups are meant to extend the **“welcoming and vibrant Jewish spiritual home”** to more and more members, and to more and more settings. And, by doing so, we **“celebrate, comfort, and create meaning in our lives while we seek justice in our world.”**

As an extension of this vision, there are two values we want to keep in mind as we build MZ Small Groups:

- *Inclusivity*: Mount Zion strives to include everyone. This calls on us to try to see people who aren't there but could be, or people on the edges, or people who appear to be estranged from the group. All of us can cultivate the skill of looking for who isn't there, or who is on the fringes, and work to bring those people into our groups and into the center of Mount Zion.
- *Accessibility*: Mount Zion strives to make all our programs and activities accessible to whoever wants to join in. This can be challenging because access can be limited for a wide array of reasons—physical, emotional, cognitive, temporary, visible and invisible. All of us can build our skills of noticing where people are challenged and asking people directly what would be helpful to them.

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