

## Divrei Hokhmah for 5774

# CONVERSATION STARTER I I

**Introduction:** The **Mishpachah: Modern Jewish Family Project** focuses our attention on the diversity of the families that make up our communities. Who are they? What do they look like? How welcoming and inclusive are we no matter the family structure?

The first step in promoting pluralism is to understand the importance of our communication, whether in direct conversation, when speaking about each other, or when we write or email, etc.

Many of these Conversation Starters are from the personal experiences of diverse families in our communities and are found in the August material, “Beginning the Conversation.”

Others were taken from everyday sources such as synagogue bulletins and conversations.

Over the next year, as we become more attuned to the effects of language, we will reinforce the wisdom of Proverbs: *mavet ve-chayyim beyad lashon* (death and life are in the power of the tongue). In other words, language counts!

Thanks to the members of the PAC for creating these discussion questions.



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Read the Conversation Starter before a meeting or event and then open it up for discussion. You will be amazed at the response.

*In the synagogue where I grew up, I was used to my rabbi and other congregants seeking out any newcomers and welcoming them, but I think that does not happen in synagogues any more.*

### Discussion questions

- To whom is the speaker referring when she says *newcomers*?
- What happens if you substitute the word *families* for *newcomers*? What is the effect of that substitution?
- What if you substitute *individuals*? What does that say about the synagogue in which she grew up? What does that say about “other” synagogues?
- What is the primary problem for the speaker? What might be other issues for her?
- How does this statement relate to the Mishpachah project?