

# Cultivating a Culture of Belonging: Guidance for Synagogue Greeters

Greeters can make a powerful first impression on visitors and members of your community. **Effective greeters can cultivate a culture of belonging for people from all backgrounds, Jewish or not, who enter your doors.**

Conversely, lack of a greeting, or the wrong kind of greeting, can unintentionally marginalize individuals and families and signal the exact opposite of what we are aiming to communicate. Many of us from underrepresented backgrounds — Jews of Color, Jews who are trans/non-binary/gender expansive, single Jews, working class Jews, Jews with disabilities etc. — are often unintentionally made to feel like we don't belong or are in the wrong place. Adopting some simple language can make a huge difference in building a welcoming and affirming community for all.

As greeters, always keep in mind...

- **Avoid assumptions.** Let people tell you who they are.
- **People coming here belong!** Ask questions, like those detailed below, from this starting place. (If you already have an existing relationship with someone, it is okay to engage in deeper conversations, but greeting on its own does not entitle us to more information about someone.)

## When engaging with a person you don't know who may not appear to be White...

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
Are you Jewish? When did you convert? Let me introduce you to (insert Community Member of Color) How can I help you?	Sorry if we've met before, my name is _____. (And my pronouns are____.) How is/was the service/event for you?	There are Jews of all races & ethnicities. Jews of Color make up at least 12-15% of the Jewish community, yet many Black & Brown congregants in particular experience racism in Jewish communities and are treated like they don't belong. Making assumptions that Jews of Color are not a part of the community, were not born Jewish, or need help because they may be unfamiliar with a service can contribute to this harmful dynamic.



**When engaging with a person whose name you don't remember, or you don't recognize...**

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>Nothing</p> <p>Is this your first time here?</p> <p>Are you new?</p>	<p>I forget names sometimes, I'm ____ (and my pronouns are_____).</p> <p>Sorry if we've met before, my name is_____ (and my pronouns are ____).</p> <p>How is/was the service/event for you?</p>	<p>It is alienating to be ignored or assumed to be new.</p> <p>This person might be a longtime member but may not be someone you've crossed paths with.</p>

**When you don't know what pronouns to use for someone...**

Avoid Saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>Are you a man or a woman?</p> <p>*Using he/she pronouns when you're unsure</p> <p>The women's restroom is that way (assuming the gender of the person in front of you and only directing them to that location)</p>	<p>Sorry if we've met before, my name is ____ and my pronouns are_____ .</p> <p>What are your pronouns? I use (e.g., she/her; they/them)</p> <p>How is/was the service/event for you?</p> <p>The women's restroom is this way, the men's restroom is that way, the all-gender restroom is down the hall. Accessible stalls are available in xyz location.</p>	<p>Approximately 10% of the Jewish community identifies as LGBTQIA+, and up to 20% of Jews ages 18-29 identify as LGBTQIA+.</p> <p>It's important to address people with their correct pronouns, and not to assume or guess someone's gender or pronouns. (Avoid the term "preferred pronouns," since pronouns are not preference, just what you call someone).</p> <p>It is also important to let people make their own decisions about what bathroom they need and which ritual garments (like kippot) they wear, ensuring that everyone knows where everything is located.</p>





**When engaging with someone whom you don't know their relationship status, sexuality, or whether they have/want to have children...**

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>Are you married?</p> <p>When are you going to have children?</p> <p>Do you have a husband/wife?</p>	<p>Sorry if we've met before, my name is _____ (and my pronouns are_____).</p> <p>How is/was the service/event for you?</p>	<p>These questions perpetuate the assumption that being married and having children are expected and something everyone should be working towards. They also assume greeters are entitled to this information, which we are not.</p> <p>It's important to avoid assuming the gender or gendered title (wife/husband) of anyone's partner.</p>

**When engaging with a person you don't know with a visible disability...**

Avoid Saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>How can I help you?</p>	<p>Sorry if we've met before, my name is_____ (and my pronouns are_____.)</p> <p>How is/was the service/event for you?</p>	<p>Many people with disabilities find that people focus on their disability and assume they need help, which they often do not. While the impulse to help is well-intended, it can diminish a person's autonomy. Unless someone specifically asks for support, greet them as you do others.</p> <p>You can also set up the environment to be more accessible by clearly stating access information, doing things like placing kippot, prayer books, etc. at a level anyone can reach, and ensuring that the room setup allows those using walkers and wheelchairs to freely navigate.</p>



**Affirming Greeter Language**

Applying the below terms (in the left-hand column) without knowing people or their families can be hurtful and alienating. To avoid making assumptions, use the alternative options when speaking in general terms or about a person you do not know. When you know what terms someone uses, always use that language

Language That Assumes	Language That Does Not Assume
Men and women	People, congregants, members, supporters
Boys and girls	Children, young people, students, campers
Men, women, and children	Adults and youth
Brothers and sisters	Siblings (use on its own) or list “sisters, brothers, and siblings”
Son and daughter	Child, adult child, my oldest/youngest/middle
Mother and father	Parents, guardians, caregivers
Women who are pregnant or nursing	Those who are pregnant or nursing
Husband and wife	Spouse, partner, co-parent
Aunts and uncles	My parent’s siblings
Sir, Ma’am, and Miss	Use the person’s name, say “excuse me” or “hello” to get someone’s attention
Ladies and gentlemen	All, everyone
Grandmother and grandfather	Grandparents
You guys	Everyone, y’all, folks
S/He	They, the individual
Bar and Bat Mitzvah	B Mitzvah
Dear Sir or Madam	Dear Guests, Dear Members, Dear (person’s name)

**Additional resources:**

- [URJ & Keshet Trans Inclusion Guide](#)
- [Audacious Hospitality Microaggression Resource](#)
- [Creating an Affirming & Inclusive Greeter Training](#) from URJ and Temple Israel of Boston