

MI SHEBERACH SHABBAT

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AT THE
FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER TABLE



Moments for self-care, mindfulness and mental health are embedded in Jewish tradition. We have regular opportunities within Jewish liturgy to say *Mi Sheberach*, a prayer that seeks complete healing for ourselves and others, and this sense of completeness includes both the soul and the body. Judaism acknowledges a distinction between mental and physical health while treating them on an equal plane, recognizing that both a healthy body and a healthy mind are necessary for human beings to be complete.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and there is no better time to bring mental health to the forefront than the Shabbat dinner table, an opportunity to gather with friends old and new for elevated reflection on mental health. According to the National Association of Mental Illness, 1 in 5 adults in the United States experiences a mental health condition over the course of a given year. That's 46.6 million people annually.

This Shabbat dinner supplement is an invitation to turn Shabbat into a time and a dinner table is a place to engage in powerful conversation, connect with others, and create a community of caring and inclusivity. A personal connection can save someone's life. Your outreach, your dinner table, and your kindness may impact someone more than you know.

THIS TEXT IS AVAILABLE FOR ADAPTATION IN COLLABORATION WITH ONETABLE-APPROVED PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS.

Making Connections

How does Shabbat connect to mental health?

Shabbat is a Jewish practice that is thousands of years old, a weekly respite of rest after six days of work. Some experience Shabbat as a time for religious practice, others see it as a time for personal reflection.

No matter what your practice, Shabbat is a valuable opportunity to renew and recharge, a valuable time to talk about mental health, and to focus on our own.

Setting Intentions

Mental health doesn't rest on Shabbat. As you frame your Friday night dinner, we urge you to think about creating safe spaces, where all guests feel comfortable. Some individuals may be more comfortable sharing than others.

This dinner is not a therapy session or training. Your goal is to challenge your guests to recognize that it is beneficial for all of us to talk about mental health and that doing so can help eliminate shame and stigma.

Medical professionals often say that setting intentions is the first step in mental health recovery. This is also a deeply held Jewish value; to make a Shabbat dinner meaningful, welcoming, inclusive, and engaging, you need to cultivate *kavanah* (intention).

There is a dance in Judaism between *kevah* (standard practice) and *kavanah* (personal intention). A practice that is enacted only from a place of *kevah* can feel stagnant. The Jewish sages agree that to have a practice that is deeply personal, lively, and inspiring, each of us needs *kavanah*.



Ritual

1. Light

Officially end the workweek and welcome the weekend with the light of two or more candles.

Use candle lighting to welcome Shabbat into your mind. What do you want to welcome into your life over the week to come? What do you want to work on? Use the light of the candles to illuminate your goals.

2. Sanctify

Wine, grape juice, or another special drink serves as a conduit to sanctify the seventh day of the week, setting apart the time of Shabbat as “other,” different from the daily grind of the other six days.

When thinking about mental health, take time to sanctify Shabbat by leaving behind the past week. As you pick up your glass, imagine what you are putting down in order to welcome the weekend.

3. Cleanse

The formal practice of washing hands recalls an ancient practice during Temple times when Shabbat was accompanied by special offerings.

Take the time to cleanse your mind, your spirit, your soul. Friday night is a clean slate.

4. Nourish

Breaking bread makes a meal, and Shabbat is a time to enjoy a special braided bread called challah that just might steal the show.

When thinking about mental health, nourishing your mind, body, and soul is key. Take time to nourish yourself. Without self-care, you won't be at your best to help others.

5. Appreciate

Friday night is a time when you can end your meal the same way you started it, with intention.

When thinking about mental health, appreciation and gratitude are incredibly important. Take time to be grateful for who you are, the friends and family in your life, your commitment to helping others, and what you bring to the world.

For more ideas to help navigate Shabbat Ritual, check out the OneTable Shabbat Ritual guide, available at onetable.org/resource-library.

Getting Started

You may consider sharing some **mental health statistics** to help individuals understand the severity of the mental health crisis currently in the United States.

START WITH A STORY

If you have a personal story about mental health, this is a perfect time to share it. You may want to consider changing names if your story includes others. You may also want to use this time to honor an individual, or yourself if you're in recovery or treatment.

Invite others to share their stories or something they've learned or know about mental health. The goal is for people to feel comfortable to share and that safe space has been created.

Facing the Stigma

Most people don't talk about mental health openly, whether they are experiencing a mental health crisis or know someone who is.

NAME THIS, AND SEEK CHANGE

People experiencing mental health conditions often face rejection, bullying, and even discrimination. This can make their journey to recovery longer and more difficult. Stigma is when someone, or you yourself, views you in a negative way because you have a mental health condition. Some people describe stigma as shame that can be felt like a judgment from someone else or a feeling that is internal, something that confuses feeling bad with being bad.

Navigating life with a mental health condition can be tough, and the isolation, blame, and secrecy that is often encouraged by stigma can create huge challenges to reaching out, getting needed support, and living well. Learning how to cope with stigma and how to avoid and address stigma are important for all of us.

Jewish Interpretations Relating To Mental Health

A COMPLETE HEALING

The *Mi Sheberach*, the Jewish prayer for healing contains these words: “Godsend to them complete healing — healing of the soul and healing of the body.” Healing of the soul is a direct reference to mental health; it is our responsibility to work in partnership with the Divine to support individuals and families facing mental health challenges with warmth, care, openness, and humanity.

“Judaism has always understood that physical and mental illness are equally deserving of healing, and we are all a key to that healing. We need to make it safer for more people to come out from behind the shadows and find the support and care they need to continue to go on with their lives, both those living with mental illness and their family and friends who care for them.”

— Rabbi Stacy Friedman, Temple Rodef Shalom, San Rafael, CA

JEWISH TEXT FOR REFLECTION

*If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
And when I am for myself alone, what am I?
And if not now, then when?*

— Pirkei Avot, The Ethics of Our Ancestors, 1:14

This famous quote from Rabbi Hillel in *Pirkei Avot* (part of the collection of writings known as the *Mishna*) has implications for those experiencing mental health issues, and for those who support them.



Look at each of the three parts of this saying and think about how each relates to both the individual facing mental illness and the person positioned to be helpful and supportive.

Focusing On Self-Care

We were given the gift of Shabbat. That's twenty-five hours when you can press the pause button and think about yourself. A time to share with the people in your community and to nourish your body and mind. Shabbat may look old-school with nostalgic meals and prayers, or it can be something new and unique that you create. It asks you to add intention to your Friday night, allows you to set aside time in your busy week, and often pushes you to put yourself first. Take this idea of time and intention, and disperse it to other parts of your week. It doesn't matter what you do to care for yourself, as long as it is a boundary you create for yourself and is surrounded by intention.

Self-care practiced routinely can become part of your personal ritual. It can grow from something you attempt to do regularly into something you don't think about doing. And it can change your life before you know it.

Beth Ricanati, MD, FACP, is a physician, mother, and author. She shares her self-care ritual, as adapted from her book *Braided: A Journey of a Thousand Challahs*:

I made challah once because a friend suggested I try it. I have kept making challah for more than ten years now, with 1,000-plus challahs (and have even written a book about my journey!), because I felt better from it. Because the countless demands on my time and energy overwhelmed me, literally and figuratively, and getting my hands sticky in a bowl of dough helped. Because as a physician I know all too well that stress like this makes us sick—not just theoretically sick, but actually sick.

Through this repetitive weekly activity of making homemade bread, either alone or with others, I have come to appreciate a simple way to manage my stress. Making bread has become part of my quest for a healthy lifestyle. I have learned I can stop and breathe while I crack eggs, measure flour, and watch the yeast bubble. I can stop and create something with my own hands. In the process, I reconnect with myself and others. In doing so, I have found how to be present.

Stress management comes in all shapes and sizes. Maybe it's baking, gardening, or knitting that engages you. What matters for a healthy life is that you manage your stress so it doesn't manage you. Something that gets you out of your head, that forces you to stop. To be present. To use your hands. To be accountable.



Question for reflection: How do you manage stress?

Becoming an Ally

How can you **#QuietTheSilence** and continue being an ally for mental health conversations?

You can have the most impact by becoming an ally for your friends, family, and community. Make it known that you are a safe person to talk to, that you are available to listen, that you want to be there throughout the process of seeking help.

Continue to educate yourself by taking educational classes and identifying the different local and **national resources** available to help. The most important thing is not to be a bystander. If you believe someone is struggling, reach out.

Adapted from the Blue Dove Foundation Jewish Mental Wellbeing Toolkit. Additional information is available through NAMI (National Association of Mental Illness) at [NAMI.org](https://www.nami.org) and [medicalamnesty.org](https://www.medicalamnesty.org).

Additional Support

Let the good in me connect with the good in others, until all the world is transformed through the compelling power of love.

— Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Most of us are not mental health professionals. That is not your role at the table. You are guiding an open conversation about a topic that is often overlooked. There are many resources and organizations that dive deeper into talking and learning about mental health. [The National Alliance on Mental Illness \(www.NAMI.org\)](https://www.namialliance.org) is a great place to start.

THE BLUE DOVE FOUNDATION'S RESOURCE PAGE

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, seek professional help. The goal of this dinner is to open the door to talking about mental health and creating a safe space to share thoughts, questions, and experiences with mental health.



Thank You

You spent an evening focusing on mental health. You took the time to create an environment of inclusivity and to ensure that people feel comfortable at your table. Thank you.

Saying goodbye to your guests is one more chance to offer support and allyship to those that may need it. Think about what you and others at the table can do to continue the conversation and who else you can invite to join your Shabbat dinner next time.

ONETABLE

OneTable is an online and in-person community, empowering post-college people in their 20s and 30s to find, enjoy, and share Shabbat dinners to make the most of their Friday night and enjoy the best of life together. OneTable makes it easy for hosts to welcome people to a Shabbat dinner at home, for guests to savor a Friday meal, and for all to experience unique events for Shabbat dinner out. There's nothing better than a great dinner with people you love. Join OneTable to slow down, get together, and share stories.

onetable.org | [@onetablesabbat](https://www.instagram.com/onetablesabbat)



The Blue Dove Foundation was created to help address the issues of mental illness and addiction in the Jewish community and beyond. Based in Atlanta, we work with people and organizations across the United States and around the world.

thebluedovefoundation.org | [@bluedovefoundation](https://www.instagram.com/bluedovefoundation)