

Developing a Madrichim Program in Your School

By Lisa Bob Howard

Reasons to implement a madrichim program in your school, techniques for using madrichim's talents, how to define their responsibilities, and ways to involve them in classroom activities.

The second-graders used to trickle into class late, but no longer. The teacher asked Michael, a madrich—teenage aide—in her second-grade class, to begin a game about ten minutes before each class. In this time, the teacher finished setting up the room and talked to parents when they dropped off their children. The students were so eager to participate in Michael's games that tardiness soon ceased.

Because of experiences like these, I strongly recommend having madrichim in your classes. Madrichim programs are important for keeping teenagers involved in religious school. Working as a madrich (boy) or madrichah (girl) can help teens build leadership skills and may even influence them to become teachers when they are older.

Some schools allow all interested students to become madrichim; others select eligible students among the 8–12th graders, or sometimes even 7th graders. Future madrichim usually fill out a brief application, then, after a training session, begin work in the classroom. Schools offer ongoing training throughout the semester or school year. Madrichim may earn a nominal wage or accrue community service hours required by many high schools.

Madrichim can be a wonderful asset to the classroom if they are used effectively. They can work one-on-one with students, set up art projects and snacks, manage administrative tasks, and even teach mini-lessons. The following suggestions will help you work successfully with your madrichim.

1. **Tap into your madrichim's talents.** At an orientation meeting, ask your madrichim about their extracurricular activities and hobbies. They may have artistic, musical, or athletic talents that you can put to use in the classroom. Madrichim who are active in drama may be able to direct the students in a short play. Artistic madrichim could create bulletin boards, develop holiday art projects, or add creative illustrations to handouts. Madrichim who play musical instruments might bring their instruments to class in order to accompany the students while they practice chanting prayers.

2. **Define responsibilities.** Determine what tasks your madrichim will regularly be responsible for each class session (for example, collecting tzedakah, taking attendance) and what tasks they will be responsible for as needed (for example, leading small groups, creating bulletin boards).

The following is a list of suggested tasks for madrichim.

Administrative Tasks

- Set up the classroom
- Take attendance
- Collect tzedakah
- Pass out papers
- Set up snack
- Correct student work
- Manage incentive charts
- Prepare supplies for future activities
- Reset room at end of day

Interactive Tasks

- Greet students as they enter the classroom
- Accompany students to the office
- Escort younger students on bathroom trips
- Help students with art projects
- Help students with class work
- Lead groups during small-group activities
- Lead transitions between activities
- Plan (with teacher), create, and teach mini-lessons
- Read stories
- Work one-on-one with students who need extra help

Creative Tasks

- Create bulletin boards
- Create samples for future art projects

3. **Provide a copy of the lesson plan.** Madrichim should read over the teacher's lesson plan before the start of each class. Studying the lesson plan will allow the madrichim to:

- Understand the objectives of the lesson. They will be better able to assist students with their work if they know the purpose of each activity.
- Help the teacher prepare for the day's activities. For example, if there will be an art project, the madrichim can double check that there are enough scissors, markers, and other supplies for all of the students.
- Anticipate when they will be needed to lead small groups or help students with individual work.

4. **Allow madrichim to teach.** When madrichim teach mini-lessons, they are training to be the next generation of Jewish educators. Teaching will help your madrichim develop leadership and classroom management skills. While it may be hard for the teacher to give up control of an activity, having madrichim teach affords the teacher a wonderful opportunity to observe how the students learn.

Sarah, a senior in high school, had worked as a madrichah for four years in a fifth-grade class. When the regular teacher missed a session, Sarah acted as the substitute. She knew the class and the curriculum, and was mature enough to handle the duties of a teacher. Sarah taught the class successfully and has since been hired to sub for other classes. Because of this experience, she will get a job teaching religious school when she goes to college next year.

Here are suggested activities to introduce your madrichim to teaching. Have madrichim:

- Read a story to the class. Reading stories aloud will allow your madrichim to gain comfort in the role of teacher. Those who are already at ease in front of the class can also lead the students in an activity relating to the story. For example, they might have the students design new covers for the book or illustrate their favorite scene.
- Lead a game. Madrichim can run an educational game that they have seen the teacher lead. Since the students are already familiar with the game, the activity is likely to be a success.
- Present a “how-to” lesson. Madrichim can break a skill into manageable pieces and demonstrate the pieces one step at a time. They could, for example, teach students to write Hebrew letters, light Hanukkah candles, or braid a hallah.

5. **Create a contract.** A contract between the teacher and the madrich or madrichah will ensure that they share the same expectations and understanding of their responsibilities. The following sample contract will help get them started.

Madrachim Contract

Class: _____ Day: _____

Time: _____

Teacher: _____

Madrich/Madrichah: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

The madrich/madrichah's daily responsibilities will include:

Other tasks that the madrich/madrichah will perform during the year include:

Teacher's Signature _____

Madrich/Madrichah's Signature _____

Date: _____