



## A FEW POINTERS FOR TEACHERS

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from

### *A Training Manual For Bikur Cholim Volunteers*

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This does not purport to be a comprehensive guide to leading a Chug Bikkur Cholim. Many schools have Bikkur Cholim programs with dedicated staff who are experienced and knowledgeable in guiding their students. The following pointers, nonetheless, may be a useful contribution to their efforts.

- Bikkur Cholim Chugim are most appropriate for grades 10 through 12.
- However, at holiday times when nursing homes typically invite students to visit, include ninth graders. It is a good opportunity to introduce them to your Chug Bikkur Cholim.
- The group should meet on a regularly scheduled basis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.) and visits should also be on a schedule.
- When scheduling student visits to hospitals or nursing home, establish a contact person at each facility.
- Send students in pairs with a teacher on their first visits.
- As best you can, assign visits so that the student-patient match is compatible.
- "Debrief" students after their visits. Informally assess their experiences to determine if they may be too involved or bored, frustrated, angry, etc.
- Develop a questionnaire for students to fill out at the end of the school year so they can evaluate the program and their experiences. It will help you shape the next year's program.

Visiting the sick is not always a pleasant mitzvah, nor is it one that is highly celebrated. Therefore, it is most important that students be recognized for their efforts. Here are some suggestions:

- Ask the institutions you visit to write letters of appreciation and thanks to the students. Put copies of the letters in students' permanent files.
- Arrange for students to receive extra service credits
- Plan an annual ceremony and award special citations for extraordinary achievements
- Post an honor roll in a well-trafficked area of the school
- Provide students with time and money to attend Bikkur Cholim conferences and workshops outside of school
- Promote a volunteer of the month program
- Nominate your students for volunteer awards
- Plan an issue of your school newsletter featuring your Chug Bikkur Cholim

Re: **The Role of Prayer:** Your group discussions should include the efficacy of prayer. Review the excerpts from the *Shulchan Aruch's Laws a/Visiting the Sick*. In discussing the role of prayer as part of a Bikkur Cholim visit, you can center your discussion on the following questions:

1. What similarities do you see between the rules setdown in the Shulchan Aruch's Laws of Visiting the Sick and what you would consider modern medical practice? Where do common sense and consideration for the patients needs come into play?
2. In what way does the performance of Bikkur Cholim benefit the visitor from a religious point of view?
3. Can you, individually or as a group, compose a Prayer for the Sick with which you would be comfortable?
4. How do you feel about Bikkur Cholim as a religious obligation as contrasted with an act of volunteerism?

Re: **Role Playing:** Students have real concerns about visiting the sick and may be reluctant to air their concerns or to ask questions. Role playing a visitation allows them to express their feelings, confront problems, play out their solutions and feel more confident about facing the real experience.

The following "awareness" exercise is also helpful in preparing students for their Bikkur Cholim visits.

1. Close your eyes and focus your thoughts on a current or former, physical or emotional, personal problem. Imagine discussing or asking someone for advice or help with this problem. Notice your feelings as you play out this scene in your mind. After a minute or two, open your eyes. You may choose to share your feelings with your group. Did you feel relieved? embarrassed? afraid? Have someone record these reactions on the board or on a large pad.
2. Next, close your eyes again and think of someone real or imagined with whom you would feel most comfortable discussing this problem. What are the characteristics of this person? Non-judgmental? Knowledgeable? Able to keep a confidence? Record these responses, also.
3. Look over the two lists. Discuss the insights gained from this exercise into the feelings of asking for and receiving help. How might this affect your reaction to someone asking for your help? Which of the positive characteristics of a helper do you think you have? Which would you like to develop further?

(Adapted from Waters, Guide, pAS)