**FJMC Imagine Life / Mental Wellness Initiative**

**Parlor Meeting Sample Document**

Purpose: This document is designed to help you conduct an exploratory Parlor Meeting in line with the Imagine Life / Mental Wellness Initiative of the FJMC. The goal of this Parlor Meeting is to solicit information in a discussion-type manner from a group of constituents (synagogue or community members) in an efficient, time-limited meeting. We are looking to obtain information about what your constituents are looking for in terms of destigmatizing, support for, understanding and education of, and increased awareness of, mental health issues.

Preparation: You should plan your Parlor Meetings in advance and publicize them through your typical club and synagogue media including social media, phone calls to target members, and paper handouts. Prior to creating and planning, it is imperative that you, and your men’s club have a discussion and partner with our Rabbi. It may be the most valuable and productive part of any programming. Ideally, these should be launched 6 to 8 weeks prior to the scheduled parlor meeting. Sample publicity documents will be available.

Participants: The Imagine Life / Mental Wellness Initiative target audience are for parents, families, and teenaged children. By participating in these groups, families and individuals can receive support from others who have been in similar situations. Depending upon your own community, it might prove helpful to have homogenous groups of 10 to 12 individuals for each Parlor Meeting (e.g., one group of parents of post-bar/bat mitzvah children; one group of parents with college-age children; one group of parents with children who have mental health challenges). It will be important to emphasize safety and privacy with your groups; some of your attendees may have difficulty sharing these concerns in a near-public forum. By having homogenous groups, we expect that the problem of stigma will be somewhat lessened as the attendees are all aware that others have similar concerns. Deliberate thought and planning should take place prior to involving clergy or other congregational staff – some parents may have concerns that school administrators would now “be aware” that their child may have these mental health issues.

Facilitators: The parlor meeting should be run by two trained individuals. One will be identified as the meeting facilitator, the other as the meeting scribe. Participants should be told before the parlor meeting starts that no identifying information will be recorded by the scribe; rather, this information will be used to shape and develop targeted programs for the Imagine Life / Mental Wellness Initiative. Ideally, no identifying records of WHO attended each group should be retained by the club, facilitator, or scribe. The size (number of individuals) and type of group (e.g., parents with mental health issues) should be recorded. Training of Meeting Facilitator and Scribe will be done by the FJMC. Facilitators are there to promote and initiate discussion NOT to treat or intervene in a mental health issue. You might consider also having a “conversation starter” attend the group – this would be a group attendee that you feel confident would respond to attempts by the meeting facilitator to initiate a discussion.

Setting: Depending upon your community, it may prove helpful to host the parlor meetings in individual family homes. Others may find that a private room at a synagogue (e.g., NOT in the middle of the social hall or in a glass-framed room) might be appropriate. Light food and beverages should be provided. If the meeting is held at a family home, care should be taken to ensure that non-group members (e.g., other individuals living in the home) are not around during the time of the scheduled meeting.

Discussion: The following introduction should be used to set the context for the parlor meeting. It is drawn from the one-page summary of the Imagine Life / Mental Wellness initiative by Gary Smith:

*Because of the unrelenting social problem of Mental Illness in America, the FJMC and the Foundation for Jewish Life are partnering to find ways to help Educate, Prevent, and Create Awareness. We are reaching out with specific initiatives - for our members who are in need of support within their Jewish community; for members who are not in need but who want to understand better so that they can be supportive; for parents; and for teenage kids.*

*It is our hope that by creating innovative programming we can make a difference in the future of our member (and non-member) families’ lives.*

*We are making it a priority to help destigmatize mental illness in our synagogues and our Jewish Community.*

 With that introduction read, here are some proposed discussion prompts:

 For families with a loved one with mental health issues:

1. What is a typical day like for your family? How is your day-to-day life different – in your eyes – from other families that you know?
2. How much do you typically share with members of your community? Are there limits to what you share? How do you know that the rabbi isn’t going to make a sermon out of my child?
3. Many families with a loved one who has mental health issues face considerable challenges but learn to adapt to “the new normal” pretty quickly. Where are your family’s strengths in terms of this adaptation? Where do you think your family would benefit from additional support?
4. What particular community organizations to be helpful in your family’s times of need? How has your synagogue been one of these organizations? How can your synagogue family best help?
5. Often, families with children who struggle are seen as “different or other” – this can be an issue that brings different families a sense of identity and togetherness (e.g., autism support groups). How do you see your family as connected with other families with similar struggles and strengths?

For families who want to understand mental health issues better:

1. With regard to mental health, how would you and your family define “normal?” What criteria might you use?
2. When you see a family with a child with developmental or mental health issues have a struggle in synagogue (in the mall, in a shopping center, at a birthday party)… what are some feelings that go through your mind? What do you do in this situation? How have you helped?
3. What is your experience with others who have mental health challenges? How do you see them?

For teenagers:

1. With regard to mental health, how do you define “normal?”
2. Who do you turn to when you or your friends struggle with sadness, fears, body image problems, or other psychological or emotional concerns? What is your safety net?
3. How have mental health issues impacted your friendships? Your academics? Your social life?