



## Finding Our Shalom

**By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director**

*Shalom*. It's a beautiful Hebrew word with many meanings. Hello and goodbye, definitely but also, **peace**, but even beyond these three individual translations, *Shalom* means so much more. *Shalom* encompasses completeness, well-being, and harmony. It's not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of all that is good. And it's a concept I have been thinking about a great deal, lately.

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### **A Big Idea for Our *Yeladim***

For our kids, we boil this big idea down to something they can grasp and practice every day: **We help make the classroom a calm and happy place**. This isn't just about avoiding arguments; it's about actively building an environment where everyone feels safe, respected and ready to learn. It's about understanding that each of us plays a vital role in creating that feeling of *shalom*.

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### **Building A Peace Corner: A Haven of Calm**

One way to incorporate this idea of *shalom* into your physical space is by creating a **peace corner** (or "calm down corner"). Imagine a cozy nook with soft pillows, calming colors, and quiet activities. This is a dedicated haven where children can go when they feel overwhelmed, frustrated, over-stimulated or just need a moment to themselves.

In your peace corner, you might find things like:

- **Sensory bottles:** These are clear bottles filled with water, glitter and other small objects that slowly float and settle, providing a mesmerizing and calming visual.
- **Soft fidget toys:** Squishy balls or textured objects can help release restless energy and provide a tactile distraction.
- **Picture books about feelings:** Books that help children identify and understand their emotions can be incredibly helpful.
- **Mindfulness cards:** Simple cards with prompts for gentle stretches or breathing exercises.

The calm down or peace corner empowers children to take responsibility for their own emotional regulation, giving them a tool to find their own sense of calm when things feel a little chaotic.

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## **Words as Tools: Solving Problems with *Shalom***

Another key aspect of creating a place full of *shalom*, is teaching children to use their words effectively. It's easy for young children to resort to pushing, grabbing, or yelling when they want something or feel frustrated. We can actively work on replacing those reactions with thoughtful communication.

We can practice phrases like:

- **"Can I have a turn when you're done?"** This teaches patience and respectful requests.
- **"I feel frustrated when..."** This helps children articulate their emotions rather than acting them out.
- **"Let's share this."** Encouraging collaboration and compromise.

It's amazing to see how quickly children pick up on these phrases and begin to use them independently. When they learn to voice their needs and feelings, conflicts diminish, and the overall atmosphere becomes much more harmonious.

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## **The Art of Taking Turns: Patience and Consideration**

Sharing can be a big challenge for young children, especially when a popular toy is involved! But taking turns is a fundamental building block of *shalom* in a group setting. It teaches patience, consideration for others, and the understanding that everyone deserves a chance.

We use various strategies for turn-taking, from simple timers to visual aids. The goal is not just to ensure fairness but to help children internalize the idea that sharing makes everyone happier and contributes to a more peaceful play environment. When children learn to wait their turn gracefully, they're not just practicing patience; they're practicing empathy.

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## **Balloon Breaths: A Simple Path to Inner Peace**

Sometimes, all it takes to bring ourselves back to a place of calm is a few deep breaths. We can teach our children about "balloon breaths" – imagining their belly as a big balloon, slowly filling it with air as they inhale, and gently letting the air out as they exhale.

This simple exercise is a powerful tool for self-regulation. When emotions run high, a few balloon breaths can help reset the nervous system, allowing children to think more clearly and react more calmly. It's a transferable skill they can use anywhere, anytime they feel overwhelmed.



And even the adults in the room can benefit from this strategy!

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### **Beyond the Classroom: Living *Shalom***

These principles of *shalom* – communication, empathy, self-regulation and respect – are not just for school. They are life skills that will help children navigate the world with greater peace and understanding.

I encourage you to practice these ideas at home too! Create your own "calm down corner," encourage "I feel" statements, and practice balloon breaths together. By working in tandem, we can help children build a foundation of *shalom* that extends far beyond classroom walls, creating a more peaceful community for everyone.

How do you cultivate *shalom* in your home? I welcome your ideas!

#Shabbat Shalom