



The Small Jewish Communities Project
 Principal Investigator: Sam Richardson, PhD
 Email: info@smalljewishcommunities.org
 Facebook: [smalljewishcommunities](https://www.facebook.com/smalljewishcommunities)
 Twitter: [@JewishStudy](https://twitter.com/JewishStudy)

The Utility and Magic of Thinking Small

The key concept explaining how small Jewish communities thrive for multiple generations I have coined, “thinking small”. The key concepts of thinking small can be classified into four groups and leveraged by parents in a community of virtually any size or tradition:

- Don’t rely heavily on institutions or the professional class.
- Reduce outsourcing.
- Increase parental responsibility.
- Clarify and articulate Jewish values.
- Don’t be afraid to set boundaries.

Specific to small Jewish communities, the lack of resources reduces or eliminates the outsourcing of Jewish education, communal memory, and individual identity growth. Parents must be the teachers and mentors, living out Jewish values in front of the children of the community. Parents must also be the face of the Jewish community, living out Jewish values as they work, play, and engage with their children’s friends, teachers, etc.

The strengths of these small Jewish communities include the following:

- An understanding that the community is not comprised of families, but that the community is the family.
- Parents understand that it is up to them to provide their children with a Jewish education without relying on a local professional class.
- The rabbi is not considered to be an employee of the community but the standard-bearer, the cheerleader for parents (and grandparents), and a permanent member of the community who guides the current and future imagining of the community.

When Jewish values are successfully transmitted from generation to generation, the likelihood of community continuity is increased and its vitality strengthened. My key findings include observations of the mechanisms of the generational transmission of Jewish values:

1. In small Jewish communities, religio-ethnic boundaries are better kept and maintained through family and community than institutional education.
2. Parents in small Jewish communities are *very* aware of the need to provide for the Jewish needs of their children. While they are not always certain what to do, they understand that they *need* to do – including setting boundaries that may be unpopular with teens but vital for the community – and their teen’s Jewish future!
3. There are many 20-somethings in these communities who, having had parents model SJC values, are willing to make life choices which increase the chances of having Jewish children and grandchildren.

It is my belief that *thinking small* is a strategy Jewish communities across the US could use to raise the odds of seeing more Jewish young people around the family Passover Seder table in the decades ahead. It is my intention and goal to place this strategy and its accompanying tools into the hands of as many Jewish parents and grandparents as possible.

- The need for *Thinking Small*.

- How to start *Thinking Small*.

- Domains for *Thinking Small*.
 - At Home

 - The Jewish Community

 - Education

 - Employment

 - Else?

I would like to propose that at least part of the reason we instinctively know that our personal Jewish world will diminish over time has nothing to do with the process of personal aging. Rather, it has to do with our reliance on what is big – big clergy, big buildings, big organizations, and big budgets – rather than relying on what is small. The future of your Jewish world lies not in the hands of your rabbi, or in the family-accessible programming of the JCC, or the fun-factor of the synagogue religious school and B'nei Mitzvah program. The future of *your* Jewish world lies squarely in your hands. How can *you* begin to instill a Jewish vision and grow an intentional Jewish identity in the lives of your Jewish family, friends and community?