



## GUIDE

# Cheshbon Hanefesh / Organizational Reflection

Aleinu provides your Jewish youth-serving organization with critical resources to help safeguard children. Getting started on safeguarding is not only about the future. The strongest prevention efforts still cannot sufficiently protect children if your organization has known risks or unresolved cases. Even if a risk is no longer current, prior mishandling can lead to deep pain and a sense of betrayal, hindering your current efforts. Before jumping into Aleinu's Best Practices, it is of paramount importance that you review your organization's history and take responsibility for any maltreatment that has occurred in the past. Sometimes, even decades later, organizations can still take corrective action to mitigate risk or do right by victim-survivors. This process of *cheshbon hanefesh*, holding oneself and one's community morally accountable, is a necessary precursor to the proactive work ahead. Though it is never easy to take responsibility for past mistakes, doing so with humility and sincerity can help your community to heal, connect, and build a foundation on which to move forward.

### How do we know if we have a history that needs *tikkun*/corrective action?

Sometimes an organization's history is obviously marred by mishandling of abuse. These instances are recognizable because of media coverage, social media or other advocacy efforts, or a fissure in the community. Other times, someone comes forward privately and alerts the organization of potential concerns. The organization may or may not handle the concern responsibly, and the individual or others may vocalize their dissatisfaction.

## Getting Started

### OBJECTIVES

- Reflect on your organization's current and past approach to safeguarding children, including how instances of abuse have been handled in the past.
- Seek outside consultation and take corrective action where necessary and possible.

### AUDIENCE

Organizational head(s); Board of Directors; Child Safety Committee

### TIME

Time will vary greatly depending on organizational history.

Unlike an individual *cheshbon hanefesh*, where a person need only search his or her own soul, for organizational *cheshbon hanefesh*, you'll need to check with multiple stakeholders and leaders. As you work through the Best Practices, you'll receive tools for broader self-assessments and ongoing dialogue with the community at large, including a climate survey and guide for facilitated conversations. In addition, individuals within your community might approach the organization's leadership or a member of the Child Safety Committee to share concerns that were previously unknown. Aleinu will also provide you with resources for responsible handling of these concerns and ways to offer support to victim-survivors. For now, though, we simply ask that you check in with yourself and others involved in this initiative and your organization's leadership to explore whether there are known issues that need to be addressed.

**CONSIDER CHECKING IN WITH THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS:**

- Board President .....
- Organizational Head .....
- Mental health professional (e.g. Director of Camper Care, school guidance counselor) .....
- Ombudsperson .....
- Other .....

**We know that our organization had a prior case of child maltreatment that deeply impacted our community. What should we do about it?**

The facts surrounding individual cases and their handling vary greatly, and so will the answer to this question. For instance, if suspicions or knowledge of child maltreatment have not been reported to the proper agencies, they should be reported now, even if the case is from long in the past. If an individual who has maltreated children holds a prominent position of honor in your community, you'll want to rethink that individual's role. If victim-survivors have been publicly shamed or ostracized, a proper *tikkun*, corrective action, will include a public apology. Though some wrongs can never be undone, they can often be mitigated. In the case of child protection, such mitigation typically involves assessing safety, opening a brave and honest dialogue, and apologizing to individuals or sometimes even to an entire community.

**Sample Questions to Prompt Reflection:**

Have you received complaints — formal or informal — about the culture of your organization? If yes, how did your organization respond?

Has your organization dealt with instances of child maltreatment or abuse in the past? If so, how do you feel it was handled? In what ways could it have been handled better?

Are you unsure about how any cases or instances were handled by your organization? To whom could you speak who would know how those cases were handled?

## Where can we turn for advice?

Some of the later Best Practices in Aleinu will provide you with useful guidance in navigating complex cases, and will be helpful if new cases arise. We recognize that we have asked you to engage in this *cheshbon hanefesh* before you have even begun the first Best Practice and before you have access to these later resources. If you are uncertain whether your organization's response to a specific incident or issue was consistent with best practices in child protection, or if you know it wasn't but are unsure of how to begin repairing the damage, it is wise to seek outside counsel. Sacred Spaces provides such [consultations](#) on a weekly basis to Jewish organizations across North America. If you prefer advice from outside the Jewish community, we recommend reaching out to our field partners, the [Zero Abuse Project](#) or [GRACE](#).

## We now know what needs to be done, but properly implementing these steps will take a long time. Can we still participate in Aleinu?

While we, and other professionals in the field, are here to advise, the real work of *tikkun*, corrective action, will be shouldered by you. Only you and the members of your community will know whether you are following the advice you were given and how much work there is to be done. In some cases, past pain may be so deeply held, so widespread in the community, or so close to the surface that no proactive or future-focused efforts will be able to take root, let alone succeed, until the past has been dealt with responsibly and people are given time to heal. Too often, organizations with a current or past case of child maltreatment want assistance developing new policies or implementing training but strongly resist efforts to address known concerns. New efforts will not be meaningful if you don't genuinely reckon with past mistakes.

At the same time, there are children in your organizations who need protecting now, even as you simultaneously work to repair past damage. For this reason, Aleinu is open to all organizations, whatever their history and wherever they may be in the process of redressing past wrongs. It is our firm belief — one we know you share — that all children deserve to be protected, perhaps none more so than those who have been harmed in the past. Organizations that, admirably, aim to move forward with child protection must also pledge to hold themselves and their organizations accountable, taking responsibility for pain they have caused, whether past or present, inherited from previous generations or caused by those still involved in the organization. We support you in your efforts to improve but also spur you to acknowledge and respond to the full measure of your actions so that honest progress can be made.