

HOW TO PRIORITIZE

Grades 5-7

This group exercise first appeared on "Kemah: Kehillot/Communities Mobilizing Against Hunger," a project of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia and co-sponsored by a grant from MAZON.

1) On a writing board or large poster, copy the "Impossible Choices" box (below). Ask a volunteer to fill in the blanks as you read the following information:

You are the single parent of two children ages three and ten. You work full-time at a job well above minimum wage. Your ex-spouse fails to provide court-ordered child support.

You take home pay from your \$8 an hour job is \$1,232 a month. In the blank next to "Wages," please fill in \$1,232.

2) Have your students guess the average cost for rent and utilities for this family.

3) Next, inform them of the true average cost - \$704 a month. In the blank next to wages, please fill in \$704.

4) Discuss childcare for this family. Where can you, as a single parent, safely leave your three and ten year-olds while you are at work? Lead discussion so that the ten year-old will stay with a neighbor after school and the three year-old will go to daycare. Ask students to guess the cost of childcare for one preschooler. Then have someone write \$425 in the blank next to childcare.

5) The cost of transportation is \$70 for one monthly bus pass. Children under 42 inches tall ride free from Monday to Friday. On Saturday and Sunday, children under 11 years of age pay 75 cents per ride. In the blank next to transportation, write \$110 (1 monthly adult pass, mid-week and weekend rides for your ten year-old, and multiple weekend rides for your three year-old).

6) Now, ask your volunteer to fill in the "Subtotal" blank. This subtotal should be \$1,239.

By comparing the wages and the subtotal, students will see that this family has no money left for food and other needs. Since working low-income parents generally pay for their housing, childcare and transportation before they purchase food, they often must rely on Food Stamps, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children supplemental food program) and soup kitchens or food pantries to feed themselves and their children.

7) Finally, ask students to estimate this family's costs for food and other needs. Ask what those other needs might include (e.g., medical costs, clothing, leisure activities, etc.). Ask students how they would prioritize all these needs.

IMPOSSIBLE CHOICES

Income

Wages: \$ _____ / mo

Expenses

Housing: \$ _____ / mo

Childcare: \$ _____ / mo

Transportation: \$ _____ / mo

Subtotal: \$ _____ / mo

Food: \$ _____ / mo

Synagogue \$ _____ / mo

Hebrew School: \$ _____ / mo

Other: \$ _____ / mo

Total: \$ _____ / mo