>> Debbie Fink: Welcome to our webinar in honor of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month commonly known as JDAIM. With that said, every month should be JDAIM. My name is Debbie Fink, I'm a white woman, with long brown hair and glasses, and I use the pronouns she, her and hers. I'm the director of community outreach and impact at RespectAbility. RespectAbility is a national nonprofit that fights stigmas and advances opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. I want to say how pleased we are to partner with the JCC of metropolitan Detroit and the Detroit Federation to bring this panel to discuss From Isolation to Elevation: Tips to Disability Inclusion and Belonging. The name which appears on our virtual backdrop, along with the logos of the organizations that made tonight possible. They are RespectAbility, JCC of metropolitan Detroit the Jewish Federation of metropolitan Detroit the Opening Doors program and the Dresner foundation. Thanks to all. As I like to say, it takes a shtetl. I invite each of you to think about through a disability lens why I took the time to describe myself and the backdrop. To whom in the disability community might such audio descriptions benefit? Feel free to throw your responses in the chat box to make tonight a little bit more interactive. Your host, this eve will be Ellen Maiseloff who is the JCCs vision behind this evening's event along with her team. She will introduce our fabulous moderator who will introduce our awesome panelists. Before the mic is turned over to your host, I will now cover some accessibility tips. We will add these tips to the chat box and periodically throughout the eve for those who arrived late. First, today we have live captioning and ASL interpreters to maximize this experience for everyone. To view ASL interpreters, use the gallery view. Click the grid icon in the upper right corner of your zoom window. To view the interpreters during the PowerPoint, watch side by side. For captions, click at the bottom of your screen on the CC. At this point, I'm gonna turn the zoom room over to Ellen and enjoy your eve. Have a good one.

>> Ellen Maiseloff: It is my pleasure to introduce this evening's moderator Rabbi Mitch Parker. As a Rabbi and psychologist, he serves as the Rabbi of B'nai Israel synagogue in West Bloomfield and as the head psychologist at Keller clinic. His focus is working with families of individuals with developmental and learning challenges. As Mitch says, psychology and the Rabbinate are a natural blend. Mitch, with your background, you are the perfect moderator for our evening tonight. To learn more about Rabbi Parker, his bio is in the chat box. Even though Rabbi Parker carries the titles of Dr. and Rabbi he still prefers to be going on by his first name basis with his students, patients and congregants. So Mitch wearing both of your hats, welcome to this evening as our esteemed moderator

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Ellen, thank you very, very much. I am an older white male with graying hair and facial hair and glasses. It is my pleasure to be here and to introduce our two panelists, both of whom are speakers in RespectAbility's new and growing National Disability Speakers Bureau, Jewish division. Check out this amazing resource, to the Jewish community and to the community at large it should be in the chat box right now. So welcome to our two amazing panelists. While our panelists speak, feel free to ask your questions via the Q and A at the bottom of your computer screen. If you called in by phone and you have questions you can email your questions to sbaruch@jccdet.org I'll do that a little bit more slowly, s-b-a-r-u-c-h @ j-c-c-d-e-t dot o-r-g. I'm honored now to introduce our first panelist Dr. Arielle Silverman. Dr. Silverman, which do you prefer? Dr. Or Arielle?

>> Dr. Arielle Silverman: You can call me Arielle.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Okay, so Arielle has a PhD in social psychology from the university of Colorado at Boulder. As a disabled activist and social scientist, she is passionate about improving public understandings of disability. Arielle, would you please do your own introduction and share your live experience and professional expertise with all of us?

>> Dr. Arielle Silverman: Hello everyone and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Arielle Silverman. As Mitch mentioned, I got my doctorate in social psychology from the university of Colorado Boulder. I would describe myself as a white woman with curly brown hair and the pronouns that I use are she, her and I also self identify as both Jewish and blind since birth. And that is actually highly relevant to the topics that I'm going to be talking about this evening because I'm going to be talking about belonging and identities as we think about the transition from isolation to elevation. So when I think about my two identities of both being blind since birth and being Jewish since birth, I think about how in some ways there's some similarities because both of those things are kind of minority identities. They're unusual if we think about 2% of Americans identify as being Jewish and depending on your definition, maybe .5 to 1% of Americans identify as being blind or being legally blind. But there's one important difference that I wanna highlight tonight. And that is the idea that although sometimes there can be a loneliness about being Jewish in America, most kids who grow up Jewish will have Jewish siblings at least one parent will be Jewish, will have Jewish extended family, and usually some sort of Jewish community that they see and interact with on a regular basis. On the other hand, having a disability such as blindness, one can grow up as the only blind person in their school, in their neighborhood, in their family in their local community, or even they might grow up having never met another person who was also blind. And it gets even more complicated when you consider what we might call invisible disabilities. So things like learning disabilities, dyslexia, ADHD autism, those kinds of things, where it's not obvious whether or not someone has this disability. And so you might not even know if other people in your class have similar kind of learning style and neurology to what you have and it can be a very isolating and very lonely experience and can make you feel like you don't belong if everyone else is kind of learning and sensing and moving in a different way than you are including your parents and your siblings and other people who are very close to you. When I look back on my background in Judaism I think about how in some ways I was very much included. I was included in secular secular public school and then also in Hebrew school. And I was able to participate in all of the typical rites of passage, but on the other hand there was also a sense of isolation. And so, as an example, when I was in high school we had this program called Hebrew high that would meet on Tuesday nights for two hours. And we would take some Jewish classes which pretty much I liked. I found them informative and interesting but then we would have this break in the middle of the evening. And everyone would gather in this courtyard. At our synagogue, there were two main buildings. And there was this big courtyard between the two buildings and all these kids, like maybe a hundred or so high school kids would gather in this courtyard and it was just like this maze of voices and people of screaming and laughing and being silly. And for me as a blind person, it was really hard for me to find my friends, to talk to them or even to like figure out what was going on or to get through this crowd of people. And so it made me feel very isolated even among my peers who share my other identity, my Jewish identity. So I wanna talk a little bit about the importance of helping kids with disabilities and really people of all ages with disabilities to find other people who are like us. And so when I think again about high school and I remember at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when we were all kind of dreading this whole lockdown thing and going into quarantines where we could only talk to people over zoom or on the phone or on social media. And the first thing that I though of was the days when I was a teenager and I was fortunate enough that we had an organization in my city that had programs for kids who were blind including a summer camp, a day camp and some programs that met over weekends during the school year, we would go on trips, we would go camping and rock climbing and do all kinds of activities together. And I met a bunch of kids who became my closest friends when I was in middle school and high school who were all blind or had low vision. And none of those kids went to my school. So all of our interaction or not all of our interaction we tried to see each other as often as we could but for practical reasons sometimes we didn't see each other in person for a while. And so we had a lot of our interaction was remote over the phone specifically. And I'm sure it drove my family crazy because this was the late 90s in the dial up internet days. And I was spending, you know, long hours on the landline hogging the phone, but I needed that time to interact with my friends who were also blind. And we didn't necessarily talk about things related to our disability. We would just have kind of age appropriate teen conversations, but it was the only place where I really truly felt included. And if you think about it on the phone if you can't see, everything is a hundred percent accessible over the phone, there's no missing information. And it's kind of the same way for people with other types of disabilities, maybe texting or talking online. And you don't have to worry about social cues, nonverbal cues, or oral speech depending on the particular type of disability you have. Those kinds of environments can have the same benefits as what I gained from my phone conversations. And I think sometimes there's this belief that people with disabilities need to be mainstreamed. We need to be fully included in the world and not separated by being with other people who share our disability. But research is now starting to suggest that there's something really powerful and really protective about having meaningful connections with other people who share a disability identity as well as feeling proud and positive about who you are as a person with a disability instead of trying to hide it or overcome it or minimize it. And so the tips that I wrote up for families, a lot of them focus on ways to kind of proactively find peer groups for your kids whether that be going to summer camps or looking for members of a local chapter of a disability organization. And I'm happy to get with people offline at the end or afterwards and help you find specific organizations that cater to particular disability groups that you can find members of the community. But it's so important to provide kids with communities of people who are like them just as it is important for Jews to be able to get together and interact with one another. I also included a couple of tips that are in a little bit of a different focus, but helping to reduce some of the isolation in terms of setting up one-on-one kinds of get-togethers for your kids, where they can lead and they can play host, and they can have more control over the environment because a lot of times the isolation that we experience isn't necessarily a direct consequence of our disabilities but it's a consequence of environments not being accessible like the courtyard, for example where all these kids were just chaotically kind of gathered in this big mass that I couldn't navigate. So helping your kids to overcome some of these accessibility barriers in the built environment and creating their own accessible environments where they can socialize with their peers is really important as well as recognizing that as your kids reach adulthood they will need to develop more autonomy and make their own choices about how they want to identify in terms of their disability identities. And lastly, we can present some of the tips for educators and leaders to make environments more inclusive. So I look at inclusion as kind of a duality where on one hand, we all need to have that kind of safe space with other people who share our disability identity. And it's something that I still need as adult and I still seek out as an adult even though I'm married to someone without a disability and I have friends who don't share my disability identity I still need that regular kind of interaction with people who share my disability identity. But then the second part of it is the work that people in the majority group can do to help people with disabilities, disabled people be more included. And again, this kind of boils down to fixing problems in the built environment so that everyone can access the environment in their own ways. And so one thing that immediately comes to mind when I think back to activities that I would attend with my synagogue when I was growing up. And again, there were certain activities that were great that I love because there were no access barriers at all. I loved it when we had song sessions I donno, I would memorize all the songs and sing along with everyone and it was great. And then there would be sports time and I would just kind of sit on a bench or I would sit with the chaperone and I would feel very excluded. And what I liked is sometimes they would give the students a choice of activities. And so I could decide which of maybe four or five different activities played most to my strengths. And so if there was a music group, I could go there or if there was a prayer group, I could go there and I didn't ever have to deal with that sense of exclusion. And some of these tips really emerged from the idea that we're all different and we all have different ways of learning and we all have different ways of excelling. And so if we create different activities for people who are strongest kinesthetically or strongest visually or strongest intellectually we can really find ways to include everyone. Some of the other tips also relate to that, for example presenting information and multiple ways. So you'll see on this webinar, there is spoken material. There's also material appearing periodically in the chat box. There is also material appearing in captions. People have different ways of accessing this content. And similarly in classroom environments and group environments, you can make things accessible by providing visual content and auditory content and maybe even kinesthetic content once we're all back in person,. Also recognizing that sometimes people have different sensory needs and sometimes people need a break or they need a quiet space that they can go to. Sometimes people have movement-related needs where they can't process very well if they sit still for two hours and there's nothing wrong with needing to get up or needing to play with a fidget item while you're listening to something. In fact, sometimes people process better that way. And so if we recognize that there is no one way to be we can recognize that all of us belong and we can create space for everyone so that no one is left sitting on the sidelines. I believe I left some time open at the end of my presentation. If others would like to ask questions before we move on to the next presentation, that would be great. Otherwise we can move on.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Arielle, you're provided us with a lot of things to think about. And as someone who's had many years teaching students with disabilities, I really appreciate all the knowledge that you shared with everyone. Just wanted to share with you a couple of personal stories. You know, I've been doing this for a long, long time and 30 years ago when I started first started working with Jewish kids, I had a mother come to me and say, "The Rabbi said my child can't have a bar mitzvah because the only reason my child's with down syndrome would have a bar mitzvah and people would come with so that they could see what he couldn't do." Or when we started the program at camp Ramah I had campers coming to me saying "Why are you bringing students with disabilities into camp? You're going to ruin this camp. This is gonna be terrible." Within a couple of days they realized that the diversity was important. So we really made a lot of progress, we're really moving forward. And just another comment I want to offer from my psychology practice and I'm glad you made this comment is I'm working with a lot of kids who have autism and they don't have any friends in school, because their interest is so different than the other kids and social skills are difficult. And I keep recommending to parents that they have to find groups of other kids with similar interests, with similar behaviors, other kids who have high functioning autism so they can learn to communicate and have a a sense of belonging. So now those comments on your part were really important. So thank you very much. I truly feel like we're moving from isolation to elevation with all the simple, doable meaningful tips to advance inclusion and belonging. I'm pleased to introduce our second speaker, Jen Fink, whose full bio can be found in the chat box. Jen's background is as a management consultant and social entrepreneur. Before she begins she wants to note that she is not a mental health professional. As such RespectAbility is providing resources in the chat box for anyone who is currently experiencing mental health challenges or who knows someone who is. Jen, your story is a compelling one. Please do share your story, help us move from isolation elevation with tips for inclusion and belonging. So again, why don't you also introduce yourself briefly to the audience?

>> Jennifer Fink: Thank you so much. And I wanna start off by saying Arielle thank you for sharing everything you did. I had a chance as you were speaking to reflect on so much of my childhood, and I feel like I gained so much of self-awareness in an introspection as you spoke. So hopefully I'll be able to add that into this and we'll be able to engage in some interesting discussions later. So I really really appreciate you sharing your story and your insight. So hello everyone, I'm Jen Fink and I am a white, young professional. Well, I'm definitely a young professional but a young female with long brown hair and brown eyes. And I'm wearing a gray turtleneck with the event backdrop and my preferred pronouns are she and her. And I'm really excited to be here today to discuss the uncomfortable, totally stigmatized, which I believe it we've made a lot of progress in this department of mental health. And I came out of the womb, anxious. I have struggled with anxiety and depression, my entire life I would say, but anxiety really drove me to be a better version of myself, kinda the best most successful version of myself that I could be until I hit my mid twenties and experienced a series of traumas. And so I'm really excited to talk to you about kind of the importance of taking care of ourselves and addressing mental health and dealing with our uncomfortable emotions because when we're predisposed for anything, right or when we deal with any sort of uncomfortable emotions it's really important that we learn to deal with them because when we deal with any sort of trauma, like, I don't know, a global pandemic things can go from manageable to unmanageable or crippling pretty quickly. So I wanna back up and tell you a little bit about my Jewish journey. I apparently went to JCC preschool. I grew up going to a conservative Jewish synagogue. I was the youngest founding member of a Jewish acapella group called Moraca Yong. I did high school in Israel. I went off to University of Maryland and was very involved in the Hillel, I did three university of Maryland Hillel alternative breaks very service oriented, I always loved that. I went off to beyond the university of Maryland a Hillel board of directors, as the student representative. I then moved on to live in a Moishe house. I was part of their international Moishe house ignite fellowship program for social impact young professionals. And the reason why I share all this again is because I really, I took my anxiety and I used it to drive me to be a better or a more accomplished person. With that, I also didn't know what anxiety was. Growing up, it was called worrying in my house. We didn't have the terminology and all the symptoms you know, I bit my nails looking back, right. My family and I can look back and be like how did we not know? But back then, we didn't know what these things were, right? I bit my nails, I threw temper tantrums to get out of going to social events. I would bounce my leg all the time. I would have serious social anxiety. I would always fear that my teachers and my friends were mad at me or hated me. I ruminated on like I swipe everything I would say, I would think that I misspoke or that I hurt someone's feelings, tests and quizzes. I couldn't sleep the night before and I would study and study and study and I just never could be good enough for myself. I could never be prepared enough. And it manifested in all these different ways, but yet again, like it it pushed me to strive to be the best version of myself yet I was never good enough for myself, right? And all that time I had no idea that this thing was called anxiety, right? So flash forward, I hit my mid twenties. I have a series of traumas I have an accident, illness, sexual assault. The list can go on and needless to say my well-managed anxiety went from managed to extremely debilitating and then manifested in depression and caused depression. And I now live with non-visible disabilities non substantial, right? So I have learned to navigate life with managing debilitating anxiety and the flourish of depression. And the reason why I want to again bring this up is because just like COVID 19, we all put on our masks to protect ourselves and protect others. I believe it's so important that we talk about the importance of mental health and talk about and open these channels of communication to have difficult conversations and share knowledge about things we can actually do, right, to help ensure that we're taking care of our mental health. So I believe we're gonna put if they're not already in the chat box, yep, they should be in the chat box, a number of mental health resources, psychologists, psychiatrists, others type of licensed mental health practitioners. They all exist- (indistinct chattering) We'll also say that- (indistinct chattering) What I will also say is that, you know it's really important to me as I do these talks to try and give some, give an actionable takeaway, right? So this activity is something that I actually was given from my psychologist one time. And now I try and share it with all friends, family you know, my significant other like whoever I can because I think it was one of the most beneficial things that I was ever given. So I strongly urge you all to actually have a pen and paper or have your phone out and please, I invite you to share in the chat box because it's much more fun if it's actually dynamic. Whoever's dealing with the PowerPoint, we can't quite see the deck pretty clearly. But on out screen, there's a smiley face emoji and it says, what makes you feel happy? So please share in the chat box. What makes you feel happy? For me, what makes me feel happy is snuggling up with my dog cooking, chocolate, chocolate totally makes me feel happy. I actually really love Nutella. Sunshine, Sunshine is a great blend. So, and also please share, continue to share these ideas because it might spark something in others toddlers, singing, dancing, music, rollerblading. These are all great. So the reason why I encourage people to do this is because what happened... Grandchildren, I don't have grandchildren yet but I'm sure they are totally, totally something that can't possibly bring anything other than happiness. So they could probably bring exhaustion actually. Now that I think about it, but the reason why we do this right is success. Yes and with success, you have to fail at some point in order to be successful. That is what I'm learning. But the reason why I bring this up is because we all experienced uncomfortable emotions, right? Sadness, anger, shame, embarrassment, right, frustration. It's not a matter of what, it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when, right? It's a matter of duration, it's a matter of frequency, it's a matter of intensity and it's normal, whether you feel nothing, whether you feel one emotion whether you feel so many emotions, you're gonna feel these emotions. It's how we deal with them and what we do with them, right? What we do with them, that kind of determines how the rest of that trajectory looks, right? So when we're feeling really sad or hopeless or one of those uncomfortable emotions oftentimes we can't really access that part of our brain that says, how can I make myself happy? Right? So if you write down things that actually make you happy, like rollerblading, your grandkids, zooming with a grandparent or playing guitar, right, then you truly can go to that list and if you start going down that list you are going to go from that current state of uncomfortable emotion to at least a little bit better. So what makes you feel worried? Can we put them in the chat? Put some things in the chat. I know, not seeing my family makes me feel worried. Not being able to see my friends. I know actually I get worried just communicating sometimes with my anxiety. Yep, deadlines definitely. So the reason why why don't we do this also is... Cogras, I like that one, that definitely would make me nervous. I don't think in Washington DC I have to be worried about those actually. Don't tell me otherwise actually if I have to worry about. Fear of failure. These are very real worries, right? And so now we talk about what makes you feel calm. So write in there, what makes you feel calm? For me, well going on a walk, talking to a loved one, petting my dog, meditating, Those things, bring me calm. So writing those down, when I'm in a state of distress or worry, I can go to that list and go through one by one and I'm able to get to a better emotional place. So the reason, you know, why I try to do this is because if you can have one takeaway from this, it's, you know I hope you're able to think of kind of what makes you happy? What makes you sad? What makes you calm and worried? And if you're able to do that then sometimes we are able to feel a little more in control because our emotions are just a part of us. They don't define us. And sometimes we feel really out of control when there's a global pandemic and when the world is, there's so much unknown, right? Yeah, worry not seeing my parents? Like this is, these are very real. So I really urge you to continue exploring this activity, put it somewhere visible, put it on your phone, talk to your loved ones about it so that they can remind you. And then the other kind of key takeaway I would say is my disabilities are non-visible, you know, remnants from car accident and anxiety and depression, looking at me, not many people would expect or think of me as someone with a disability. And I think that, you know, what Arielle was saying is you know, the loneliness and the sense of belonging, I never felt a sense of belonging growing up. I never felt, I always felt on edge socially. I never felt at peace. And I think that understanding that, you know, kind of you never know, we never know what's going on in somebody's mind or in in what challenges people are facing. So we treat everyone with respect and kindness. Like everyone deserves the benefit of the doubt. So, you know I really appreciate you taking the time to have this you know, to listen to me. And I have one more thing and I really hope that you'll ask questions for the question and answer. I'm happy to answer any questions. So don't be afraid to ask anything. I know I didn't share much about my story but it doesn't mean I'm not willing to. So the last thing I'm gonna do is I'm gonna share with you a song I wrote in the depths of my depression. And it's based off of a poem that my good friend at the time now boyfriend sent me one morning to try and give me inspiration or motivation to get up that morning because sometimes I just need motivation to get out of bed. So here it is and I hope that maybe something resonates. (guitar music) ♪ The sun is up ♪ ♪ Soon you will be too ♪ ♪ You got many great things to do today. ♪ ♪ Start by putting on your shoes ♪ ♪ Start by putting on your shoes ♪ ♪ Today could be your day or maybe an off day ♪ ♪ They rain go away and comeback another day ♪ ♪ I hope you see yourself how I see you someday ♪ ♪ Today could be that day ♪ ♪ The world turned upside down ♪ ♪ Runs where the clouds should be ♪ ♪ Worry not you will find your way ♪ ♪ To ease your mind ♪ ♪ Today can be the day or maybe an off day ♪ ♪ They rain go away and comeback another day ♪ ♪ I hope you see yourself how I see you someday ♪ ♪ Today could be that day ♪ ♪ Adventure behind that door ♪ ♪ Just waiting to be explored ♪ ♪ Worry not soon you will find ♪ ♪ Confidence to ease your mind ♪ ♪ Today can be the day or maybe an off day ♪ ♪ They rain go away and comeback another day ♪ ♪ I hope you see yourself how I see you someday ♪ ♪ Today could be that day ♪ ♪ Today can be the day or maybe an off day ♪ ♪ They rain go away and comeback another day ♪ ♪ I hope you see yourself how I see you someday ♪ ♪ Today could be that day ♪ ♪ Sun is up ♪ ♪ So are you ♪ ♪ You have many great things to do today ♪ ♪ Start by putting on your shoes ♪ ♪ Start by putting on your shoes ♪ Thanks everyone, we'll get through this together, apart, six feet apart and we'll get through it.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Oh, thank you so so much for sharing. Thank you for your words. I know how hard it is to talk about personal experience. So thank you for doing that and thank you for your song. And it's incredible, Jason wrote such a beautiful poem. It was so nice that he was able to support you through the poem. So I wanna pick your brain for a second. Anxiety, a significant anxiety is almost becoming the new normal in this COVID world, especially in high school student. A tremendous amount of anxiety about what's gonna happen where it's gonna be. So I have a high school client who is anxious mostly about schoolwork and what's gonna happen with college and maybe like, he/she thinks she has to be the number one person in class. And has to study and study and study and study and 98 is not enough. But my question for you is she has a friend overseas who she feels very close to, hasn't met her yet but this friend has periodic bouts of serious depression. And she doesn't know what to say to her friend over the phone. So do you have any suggestions on like do's and don'ts things that she should say and shouldn't say to this friend of hers?

>> Jennifer Fink: Yeah, that's a great question. So I always turn back to just one question and it's how can I best support you though? Or how can I help? I think that everybody is different. And I think that sometimes some people don't know what they need and sometimes you can't say the right thing. So I think that saying, how can I help? Or how can I best be a supportive friend to you? is really helpful. You know, I know that my friends had to act, they felt reaching out was annoying to me because I would never respond but reaching out really, I appreciated it. I just, the anxiety of responding was too much for me. So the ones who asked me and then I started volunteering that information I think it was really helpful. So I don't know if that answered your question.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: No, it definitely does. And from your experience, what's the don't? What should you not do?

>> Jennifer Fink: Don't say happiness is a choice. It's not always, it's really not always. (Jen and Mitch laughing) For some of us it's just not. I really did believe it was until I realized it wasn't. That's one definitely not. And secondly, I think really trying to give advice and problem solve is not always received well. I think that's why I always start with kind of how can I help? How can I best support you? Because oftentimes people need support. They know what they need and problem solving or trying to compare your challenges or trying to provide solutions or solve problems that are more psychological things that need to be worked out with a mental health professional, right? You know, friends can't always do that. So I think being able to communicate that you're there to support them and love them through it and help however you can and that they, you know, that they'll get through this and that they can't see it right now. And reiterate kind of what you love about that. I think that's another thing is reiterating what you love about them and the good, because your perception s when one is going through depression or anxiety, you know, when stuff perceptions get so distorted, right. So being able to really reiterate kind of what you, you know, if they cook something like this is so delicious, you're such a great cook. I always love when you cook these meals, right? Like, cause I know I'm a great cook but I would question every meal, right? Like so these things that we've assumed they know kind of making sure we give that positive reinforcement and that validation is extra important in those times.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: So to be supportive but not prescriptive is --

>> Jennifer Fink: Exactly, exactly --

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: So that's-

>> Jennifer Fink: You must be a psychologist. (Mitch and Jen laughing)

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: The Rabbi in me and maybe the other side of me has been experimenting, I've been quoting Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel to my clients. And I've been saying to those who are anxious and depressed I'm saying you have to look for what's the wonders in the world. You have to look for the amazing things in the world and start your day. So I hope that's helpful too as I do it that way.

>> Jennifer Fink: I'll say one more thing as a friend who's gone through it as well and I have to say this pandemic, I have four friends now who are seeking serious who are like incredibly successful, amazing, like would have never guessed that they would have mental breakdowns ever in their future. Right, cause I just never would have assumed. They are seeking emergency treatment right now, right, because this pandemic has just it's impacting people so dramatically. And so one thing that I've realized that has been kind of a constant in my support for them is coming back to facts, right? Because when perceptions are so distorted the facts speak for themselves, right? I kind of think about journalism and people can't fight the facts, right? You have a job because you're competent. You wouldn't have gotten the job because if you weren't deserving of the job, right? So being able to bring them back to the facts and not the way their perception, perceiving kind of their reality it has been really helpful, I think to them.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Great, thank you. Okay, I wanna pull Arielle into the conversation again. So thank you. And we'll come back to you again in a second but Arielle, what are your thought about using the terms special needs versus disability or challenges? What do you think about that?

>> Dr. Arielle Silverman: Oh, I'm so glad you asked this question. Can you hear me?

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Yeah.

>> Dr. Arielle Silverman: Great. So when I was growing up, I would intermittently hear the phrase special needs and I never liked it and I couldn't really put my finger on why I didn't like it except maybe that it was usually used in the context of segregation or different treatment. And when I was growing up, even though I was proud to be a blind person I didn't hide that from anyone, what I hated the most was being treated like I was less than or being given different treatment than everybody else especially if it was treatment that I didn't ask for. So I never liked the term special needs. And then as I got into disability advocacy more recently I started talking to other people who also hated the term special needs. And I realized that I wasn't alone in that. And I read this fascinating study about three years ago that was published, I think around 2014 and they actually asked people to read these vignettes where they would read about these different fictitious individuals and they would have to choose which one of these individuals they would invite to do some sort of thing like being their roommate or being their partner in a class or working with them on a project like those just kinds of peer interactions. And the researchers actually varied whether the person was called a person with special needs or a person with a disability or they would say a specific disability label like this person is blind or autistic or has ADHD or whatever. And they found across these different scenarios when they've held everything else constant, when the person was described as having special needs, they were discriminated against more than when the person was described as having a disability. So people were less likely to pick someone to be their partner if they were called special needs than if they were called disabled or given a specific disability label. And there was a couple of theories for why that is. And this would be a whole other workshop to talk about kind of language preferences, but really the bottom line is presently in 2021, most people who are kind of identified with the community will prefer the term disability. And some of the arguments that they give are that our needs are not special. We have the same needs as everybody else. We need belonging, we need companionship, we need a sense of meaning in our lives we need participation, everybody needs that. We might have slightly different ways of accessing the world, but that doesn't mean that our needs are special or different. And I think also the term special, again, points to this like separateness and segregation, whereas disability, even though you could say maybe disability is also offensive because it's saying we can't do something. It has been given kind of a political positive valence so people are proud to identify as part of the disability community and be protected by civil rights laws like the Americans with disabilities Act and so on. So I would say in this current culture the term special needs really is falling out of favor. And it really kind of brings up connotations again of this otherness whereas the term disability is kind of an insider term. It brings up positive political capital and social capital. And those preferences will probably change at some point in the next few generations. And so if you're working in the disability space I would encourage you to just listen to the language that's being used around you and read the language that members of the community are using. Not parents, not teachers, not outsiders, but actual people who are affected as part of the community and do your best to adopt the language that they use.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: So I've been using the word challenge in my reports and in my talks, is that any better or worse or is it the same as the term disability today?

>> Dr. Arielle Silverman: So my gut reaction personally is the word challenge is kind of covering up disability, is like a euphemism. I would use the word challenge to describe like more specific impairment that somebody has. Like, you know, they have challenges with communication. I think that that might be valid, but when you talk about kind of the global identity of being blind being deaf, being dyslexic, whatever, I think disability is a more appropriate way of describing the group as a whole. And I imagine that most people I know would probably agree with that but again, there might be differences of opinion there, and I would welcome that.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Okay, so another question I have for you, you know for the past year or so, we've been heavily dependent upon zoom and on computers in doing our presentations. I have a woman who is almost (indistinct) in my congregation and she said to me the other day that, "Well they told us that in order to get onto this site I had to click on the picture. She said, 'I can't even see the pictures. So how am I going to click on the picture?'" What kind of accommodations if any do you think are the most important things for us to keep in mind as we continue to be computer-based?

>> Dr. Arielle Silverman: Well, that's a good question. In that specific instance I would say you can say click on the picture or and then provide the text label that was given for the link because I would hope that the picture would not just be a picture that it would also have a text label. And if it doesn't, that would be something to fix. I think everyone here did an excellent job with this webinar in terms of providing captioning, ASL access to content in the chat box as well as spoken content. I think describing particularly like again in the community there's diversity of opinion here. I don't personally care that much about whether someone has brown hair. What I want to know is if you're showing a graph on the screen, what is the point of the graph? What is it telling us? So I think providing access to visual information like in charts and graphs and tables, when you screen-share on zoom that material is not accessible to a blind person. So if you have a lot of content that you need to screen-share perhaps send it out as an attachment to everyone is probably a good strategy. And then, I mean, we can get into more technical kind of web accessibility guidelines but those are just the main things to keep in mind.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: All right. There's so many good questions and we're starting to run out of time. Jen, I have another question for you again kind of COVID related, I'd mentioned before there's so much anxiety related to getting sick and getting the vaccines and getting out of the house and not getting the house. Jen, do you have any suggestions on alleviating the anxiety during this difficult time?

>> Jennifer Fink: When you say alleviating the anxiety do you mean from coping strategies or do you-

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: Yeah, I'm talking about coping strategies primarily. People wake up in the morning and they're just really tense.

>> Jennifer Fink: Yeah, so I think mindfulness just in general is really a valuable practice to start exploring. I think that I recently got into it the last year and a half and mindfulness, it sounds pretty ambiguous but it really is kind of, it can include meditation, it can include art, it can include music, you know it's really anything that kind of brings you into the present moment and helps remind, helps ground you and remind you kind of what, or the way I interpret it, it brings you into the present moment and helps you not judge yourself and kind of brings, I think, a sense of control in a world that I often feel I don't have a lot of control in. And so I've done a lot of simple meditation. There's a lot of really great apps out there like you can start with like a one minute meditation but I think being able to really just kind of take the time and they have a lot of COVID related like meditations and meditation also, let me be very clear about something. It's not like clearing your brain and all this stuff that I thought it was because that is very impossible for me but it really is just it can bring you a sense of calm that I think is really valuable in this time. I think also recognizing that we are not defined by our emotions and that's a really clear distinction I think that I work to remind myself every day and that the anxiety or the worry or the hopelessness that I sometimes feel like that those are a part of me or those are what I'm experiencing at that moment. But it's that moment. And that moment can maybe last an hour, but you know I could be feeling very differently later that evening. So sometimes I try and change my, you know I break the frame where I change my environment. So I'll go on a walk or I'll take a shower. Those are other things, just making sure you're really doing the basic things to take care of yourself-

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: I'm sorry, I'm gonna have to cut you off. I'm getting the hook. Thank you, thank you. I mean, those are really great ideas. Thank you so, so much.

>> Jennifer Fink: Of course.

>> Rabbi Mitch Parker: So thank you both Jen and Arielle for sharing with us tonight for helping us all to move from isolation to elevation and with your tips for inclusion and belonging. Once again, we're posting the mental health resources from RespectAbility in the chat box. And I am going to turn it over again to Ellen to just close up for the evening.

>> Ellen Maiseloff: Well, thank you Mitch, for wearing both of your hats tonight as Rabbi and therapist, and a huge thanks to Jen Fink and Dr. Silverman for sharing your stories, your knowledge, tips, music and wisdom. I think we need a part two. I think there's a lots more we can talk about together. Thank you very much. Thanks again to RespectAbility for all your support in bringing these amazing panelists to our community and the behind the scene work you provided to make this evening happen. A special shout out to the behind the scene workers, tonight's director, producer Debbie Fink and Jake Stimell, Maya Cohen-Shields and Josh Steinberg of RespectAbility. We really value your role in doing the work of JDAIM all year round as do we. thanks to Emily Kimmel Kurtz, our ASL interpreter, Christine Joseph, our live captioner, my hometown dream team, my colleagues, Helene Cone, Shoshana Brooke and Debbie Stable. Thank you again to all of our sponsors who made this evening possible. Most important, we thank you. Those of you who participated in this evening we hope you found it as fulfilling as we did. We are placing in the chat, a link to an evaluation form. Please take a few minutes to complete it so we can learn from you, from your feedback and know if this program met or surpassed your expectations. I also am excited to announce that Opening the Doors will be celebrating its 25th anniversary, Tuesday May 11th at 7:30 pm. We will be honoring Susie Citrin, Peggy Frank and Anita Naphtali. And there will be an amazing virtual evening. I hope you'll join us. I now along with everyone here wish everyone a safe and good evening. And thanks again for completing the evaluation form -- just a hint. Thanks everyone.