

A Personal Narrative helps us define and solve many issues. Narratives unfold best in conversation. Unlike an interview or survey, narrative work is a two-way process that reveals significant, nuanced information for both the individual sharing their story and the person eliciting the narrative.

Narrative work can take shape in both formal projects and informal exchanges. Sofia's excerpt, which we are using today, is part of a formal narrative project. Equally important in our practice as Jewish leaders is the ability to use the principles of Narrative in informal exchanges and discussion with our congregants, students and their families. It will enable you to create safe spaces for people to share important information, sometimes on the fly, and allow you to create a narrative in your mind about this individual and what's important for their Jewish journey.

Here are some of the Principles: The narrative unfolds from the individual whose life we are exploring. While it may be encouraged by questions, the individual determines how their story is told and what's important. **The exercise of telling our own story is empowering;** it enhances our ability to understand ourselves and increases our confidence that we can achieve our aspirations. Thus narrative can be an impetus for change and development. It is essential that as Jewish professionals we have the capacity to ask open and honest questions, which allow someone to feel validated and allows them to share parts of their story with you without fear of judgment.

At the start of this Narrative Project, my colleagues and I knew lots of stories about families where non-Jewish parents were deeply involved in their Jewish communities and the Jewish lives of their children. We believe that Jewish educators, clergy and community professionals all need these **reference points, real knowledge**, about what all families in their own communities may be experiencing. This was our motivation.

We wanted to understand how these non-Jews and their families are living Jewishly and whether we were as we were often told unique. We believe these narratives should become part of our communitywide conversation, available to professionals, friends and family members. They should be the basis for curricula at seminaries and universities, when teaching about religious identity formation.

For our Narrative Project we engaged our participants in guided conversations; with a set of questions to stimulate our conversation. The central question of our work is, how can we help this family make the most of their Jewish journey?