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Counting Our Blessings

Your family's job is to notice. Every stop has something to do, something to count, and a blessing to say.

START A minyan of treasures

YOUR CHOICE Eight stops: do each one wherever you are, in any order. Skip any you like.

THEN Jacob's pillar, by the tent spot

LAST Build our tent at the tent spot.

Four rules of the woods

1. Take only what has already fallen. Leave anything alive, and all mushrooms, where they are.
2. Phones away until a card asks for a photo.
3. At every stop, put a token in your bag to build with.
4. Can't find what a card asks for? Use something else. Any stop can be changed to fit your family.



A minyan of treasures

DO Find ten different things on the forest floor. No two can be alike. A different kind, color, shape, or size all count: your family decides, and everyone has to agree.

COUNT Lay them out and count to ten together, out loud.

SAY Ten is a minyan, the number that turns separate people into a community. *Mah rabu ma'asecha*: "How many are the things You have made!"

TOKEN Put all ten in your bag.

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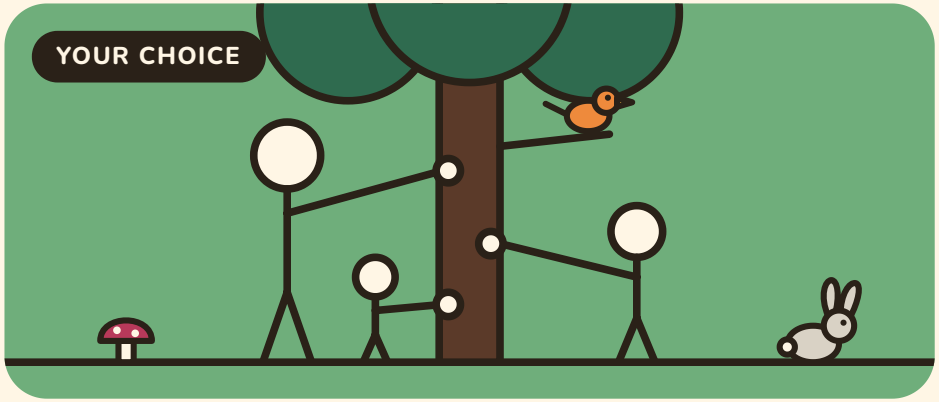


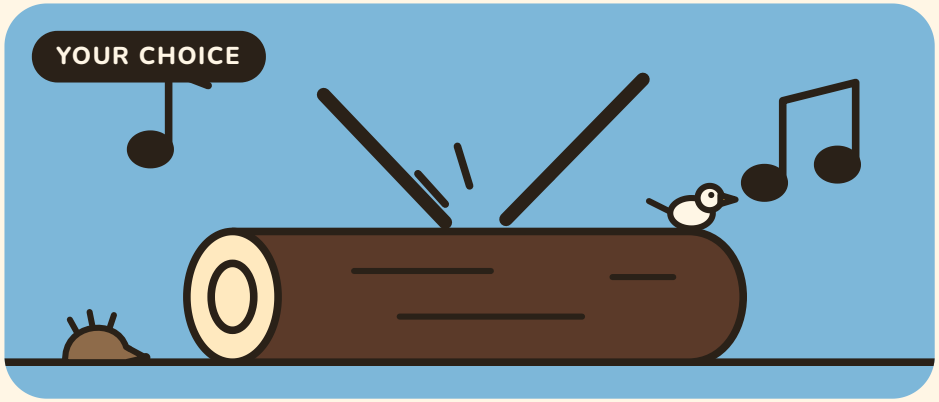
Hold on to the tree

DO Pick one tree for the whole family. Everyone grabs hold of the trunk, hands stacked one above the next. The littlest hands start at the roots. Skip any tree with a fuzzy vine growing up it.

COUNT How many hands high does your family go? A grown-up can lift the smallest person to add the top hand.

SAY Sing it if you know it: *Etz chayim hi lamachazikim bah*. "It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it."

TOKEN A fallen leaf from under your tree.



The forest band

DO Everyone finds two sticks. Tap them on a log, a trunk, a rock, a pile of leaves. Sticks are for tapping things, never people.

COUNT How many different sounds can your family find?

THEN One kid plays a rhythm and everyone echoes it. Give every kid a turn. To finish, everybody plays together, loud, for a count of 10. Stop at once and listen.

SAY On Friday night we sing *az yeranenu kol atzei ya'ar*: "Then all the trees of the forest will sing." You just helped.

TOKEN One of your drumsticks.

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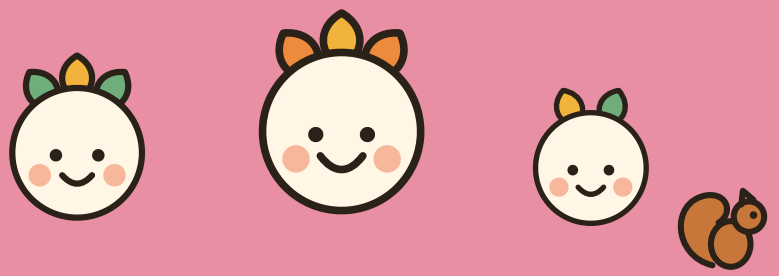
YOUR CHOICE



Family faces

DO Each person secretly picks someone in your family, here this weekend or not, and makes their face on the ground with leaves, sticks, and anything else you find. Little ones can team up with a grown-up.

PLAY Take turns guessing whose face is whose. What gave it away?

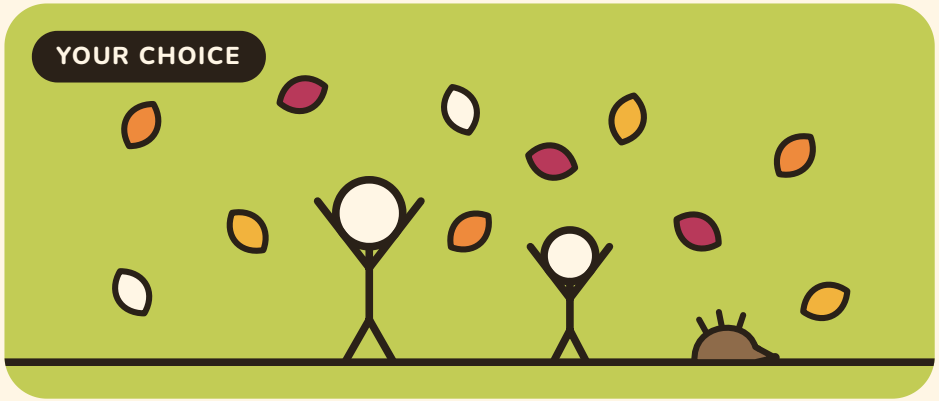
COUNT Line the faces up. How many people are in your row?

SAY Every morning we say *she'asani b'tzelem Elohim*: "who made me in the image of God." Look down the row. Every one of them counts.

PHOTO Phones out. Crouch beside your portraits and take a family selfie.

TOKEN Any small thing from nearby, like an acorn or a pinecone. Leave the faces for the next family to find.

YOUR CHOICE



Leaf rain

DO Everyone gathers a big armful of fallen leaves and stands close together. Leaves only: shake out any sticks first.

SAY First, the blessing for a moment that has never happened before: *Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu lazman hazeh*. "Blessed are You, our God, Ruler of the world, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this moment."

PLAY Count to three out loud and throw them all straight up. Catch as many as you can before they land. Gather them up and throw again, as many times as you like.

COUNT How many leaves did your family catch in the air?

TOKEN One leaf that somebody caught.

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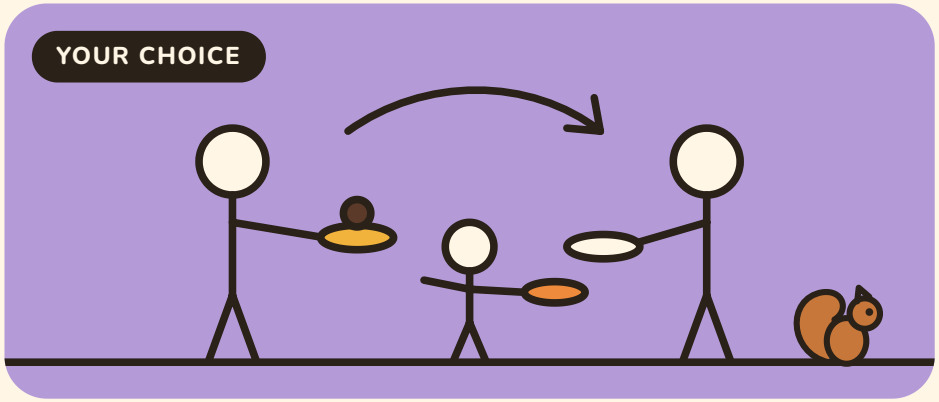


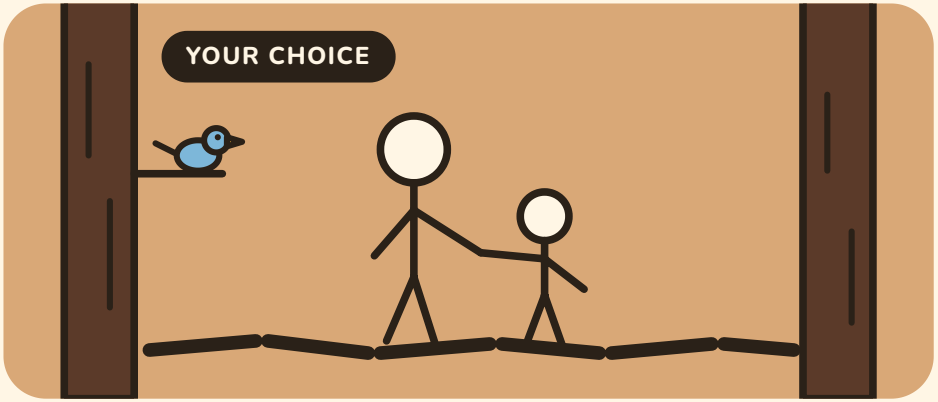
From hand to hand

DO Stand in a circle. (Two people? Pass it back and forth.) Everyone holds a big leaf flat, like a plate. Put an acorn or something similar on one leaf (a pebble or a small pinecone works too) and pass it around, leaf to leaf. No fingers on it.

COUNT How many times can it go all the way around before it drops? When it drops, pick it up and go again.

SAY *L'dor vador*: "from generation to generation." The things we care about most get passed along carefully, hand to hand.

TOKEN The acorn, or whatever you passed.



The narrow bridge

DO Pick two trees a few big steps apart. Lay sticks end to end from one to the other.

COUNT How many sticks does your bridge take?

PLAY Cross it together in a chain, holding hands, heel to toe. If anyone steps off, everyone goes back and starts again, a little slower. Cross as many times as you like, with a new leader each time.

SAY Sing it if you know it: *Kol ha'olam kulo gesher tzar me'od, v'ha'ikar lo l'fached klal*. "The whole world is a narrow bridge, and the main thing is not to be afraid."

TOKEN The last stick of your bridge. Leave the rest for the next family to cross.

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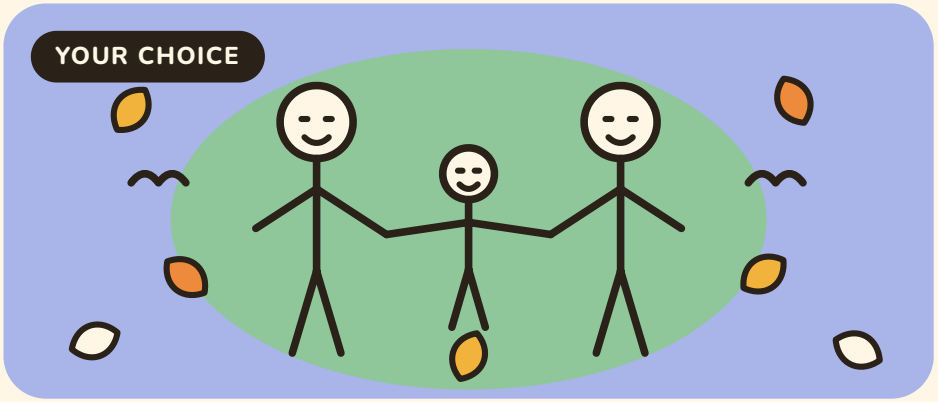


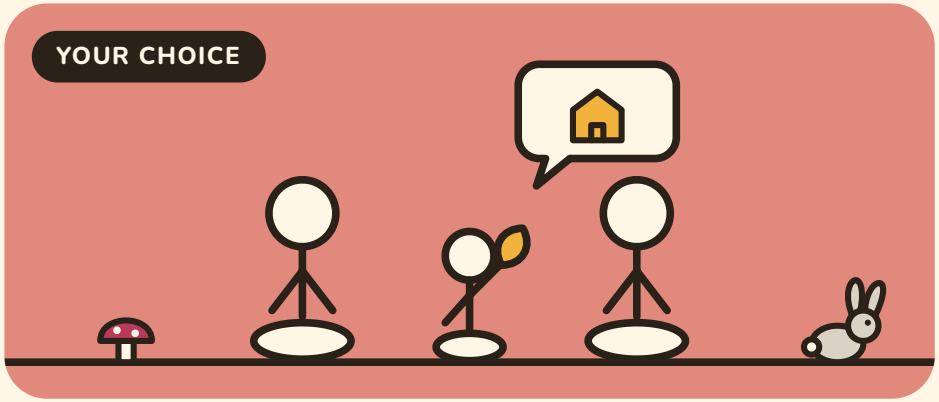
Shabbat rest

DO Lie down side by side anywhere you like: on the leaves, on the grass, wherever looks comfortable. Sitting and leaning back works too. Look up quietly for about a minute. No need to time it.

COUNT How many living things can you spot or hear? Birds, squirrels, bugs, anything that breathes. Count on your fingers.

SAY On Shabbat we rest and notice. The very last line of the Psalms is *kol han'shamah t'hallel Yah*: "Let everything that breathes praise God." Each person names one living thing they found.

PHOTO Phones out. Stay lying down, put your heads together, hold a phone up over your faces, and take a family selfie. This picture is your token.



Blessings close to home

DO Everyone finds one thing out here that reminds them of a blessing in their own life: a person, a place, a pet, something good that happened.

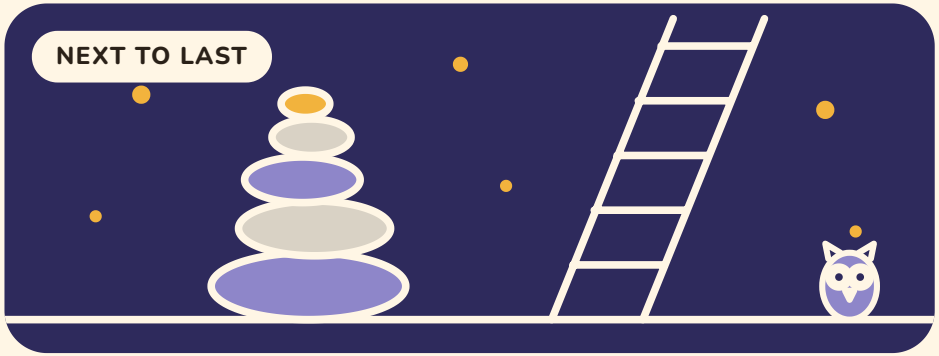
SHARE Sit down together. Take turns holding up what you found: "This reminds me of ___ because ___." Go around as many times as you like.

STUCK? Try someone who loves you, something you're good at, a place you love, or something that made you laugh this week. Little ones can pick anything they like and say why.

COUNT How many blessings did your family name?

SAY In our prayers we give thanks *v'al nisecha sheb'chol yom imanu*: "for Your wonders that are with us every day." The ones you just named count.

TOKEN Everyone's thing goes in the bag. It will be part of your tent.



Jacob's pillar

STORY Jacob slept outside with a stone for a pillow and dreamed of a ladder reaching the sky. He woke up and said: "God was in this place, and I did not know it." He stood his stone up and named the spot Beth El, the house of God. Any place can become a Beth El.
(Genesis 28:10–19)

DO Build a pillar together at the stone pile by the tent spot, one stone per person at a time. Use flat stones you can lift with one hand, and never throw them. With every stone, say one thing from today you're glad about.

COUNT How many stones stand before it tips? If it falls, stack it again. Then give your spot a name.

PHOTO Phones out. Gather around your pillar and take a family selfie.

TOKEN One small stone. Then build your tent.

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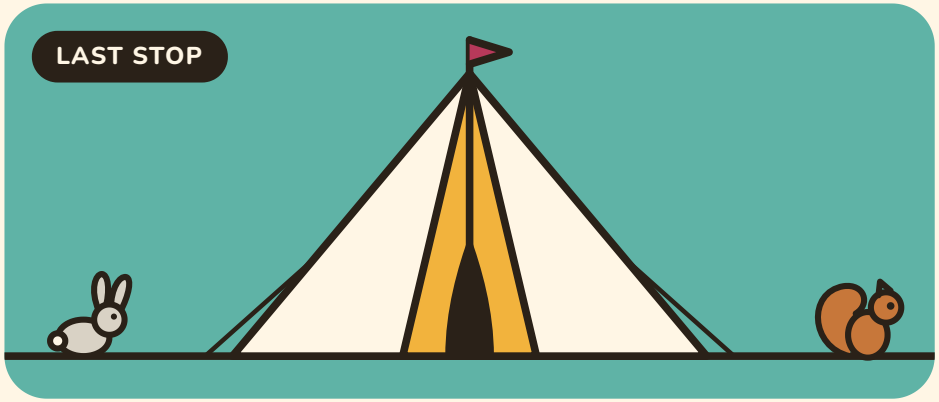

Build our tent

A community isn't a building. It's the people in it. Build your tent however your family builds it.

USE Empty your bag: it's all building material. Add sticks, leaves, bark, and stones from the ground. Take only what has fallen.

DO Build right next to the tents already at the tent spot, about the size of a shoebox. Everyone adds at least one piece. Any tent counts: a lean-to, a teepee, a pile with a doorway.

THEN Look down the row: together, these tents are our community. Sing Mah tovu (or Hinei mah tov), as loud as you like, and give your tent a cheer. Your family just built a temple!

מה טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך ישראל

Mah tovu ohalecha Ya'akov, mishkenotecha Yisrael

"How good are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel."