

Dear OU Parenting,

My elementary school-age child has been talking about his Lag Ba'omer plans. He has started collecting sticks with his friends, and he told me they are planning to build their own bonfire. I am a relatively recent oleh, and we didn't have these types of Lag Ba'omer celebrations in the United States. I am concerned that the kids are making a fire, but I also know that this is something that he and his friends are really excited about. Do you have any tips for how to handle this situation? A. L.

Rabbi Dr. Ethan Eisen, PhD

Dear A. L.,

This column will be printed after the Lag Ba'omer celebrations, and I hope that everything worked out smoothly with whatever bonfire plans your son had. One aspect of your question that deserves its own column is how we as parents, who brought our families on Aliyah, approach the cultural differences that emerge between ourselves and our children. The celebrations associated with Lag Ba'omer here in Israel are largely foreign to olim, who for many, Lag Ba'omer was a day characterized by getting a haircut, and praising their children's school project of paper bows and arrows.

Child-constructed bonfires seem odd to many olim, and it is worth giving more focus in a future column to how to best address these cultural differences.

I want to focus on the specific question of communicating with your son after the fact, when you may use this opportunity to share with your child both concerns and guidance regarding the Lag Ba'omer activities. Children's safety and protection against property damage are often major worries for parents, but kids are typically not thinking about those issues—they are thinking about how much fun they will have with their friends. As such, before he has participated in a bonfire, he may not be able to understand or internalize the messages you are trying to convey.

However, after Lag Ba'omer may be an ideal time to offer guidance for the future, as the experiences of the day are salient in your son's mind. For example, around the Shabbat table, your son will probably be excited to share with you what his Lag Ba'omer was like, which can provide a comfortable opening for you to ask questions that are important to you and relate to your concerns, such as: "what did you use to build the fire?", or "how close were

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you to the fire?”, or “how did you put the fire out?” Hopefully he says they used discarded wood; however, if he says they put in other materials like plastic, or that wood was retrieved from someone else’s property, you can gently instruct him about what materials are safe to put in fires, and from where firewood can be retrieved. Similarly, there can be a discussion about general fire safety, resisting peer pressure to do something unsafe or illegal, and conversation about protecting the environment. Having these conversations with your son in the context of retelling his story will likely feel less “lecture-y,” and can be better received by your son, and any other children around the table.

These valuable opportunities for providing guidance and improving communication are not limited to Lag Ba’omer. Of course,

sometimes engaging your child in conversation before an event is important and the most effective way to prevent something unwanted from happening. But, as parents, it is useful to keep in mind that even if we miss the chance to speak with our kids prior to an event, that doesn’t mean the opportunity to offer guidance and perspective is lost. Indeed, it could be that after the fact is when our input will be most welcome. ■


Dr. Ethan Eisen, PhD is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist (Israel and U.S.) offering Evidence-Based Solutions for Individuals and Couples

Feel free to send in any parenting questions you may have to parenting@ouisrael.org (Details will be changed to preserve anonymity).

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