



Religious School Parent Handbook

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Dear Parents:

Welcome to Kehillah Synagogue Religious School! This handbook contains lots of information for your reference, including our philosophy, general school policies, tefillah (prayer), and the curriculum for each grade.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at ira@kehillahsynagogue.org or 919-942-5817 with any questions you may have. I value your partnership in education and look forward to an exciting year full of learning and fun!

Warmly,

Ira J. Wise
Interim Director of Lifelong Learning

Philosophy

Mission Statement

The mission of the Kehillah Synagogue Religious School is to provide knowledge and experiences that foster a strong and positive Jewish identity and community, and assist students and their families in living joyful and meaningful Jewish lives.

Tenets of Reconstructionist Education

Kehillah Synagogue holds fast to several tenets, including: (1) egalitarian participation in the Jewish community and gender-neutral language; (2) mitzvah both as commandment and as social action; (3) Torah as the ongoing, creative, and sacred story of our people's experience; (4) diversity of the conceptualization of godliness and spirituality; (5) Israel as the Jewish state and the Jewish people; (6) Hebrew as the language that unites all Jews; (7) tradition as meaningful but as something that can be modified as daily life changes; (8) community of members with mutual respect and consensus decision-making; and (9) diversity within the community as accepted and welcomed.

Educational Approach: The Kehillah Synagogue provides a learning environment in which (1) children receive individual attention; (2) classes are small; (3) teachers use a differentiated approach for learning at varying speeds; (4) hands-on activities are an important part of the curriculum; (5) students study significance and meaning and do not simply memorize; (6) activities are child-focused and sometimes child-directed to promote engagement and investment of students; and (7) lifelong Jewish learning and participation is encouraged.

Getting To and From School

School Hours

For children in pre-kindergarten through second grade, religious school is held on Sundays 9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. For children in third through seventh grades, religious school is held on Sundays 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

It is important that children arrive on time, as children who come in late are disruptive to the class, take away from class time, and miss instruction, activities and peer interactions.

Drop-off

All students start their day in the sanctuary. With limited exceptions, please drop off your children (either walking or driving) at the sanctuary doors if arriving between 9-9:20. If you arrive after 9:20, please walk your children to their classrooms and wait for the rest of the class to arrive, if they aren't already there.

Dismissal

Children in second grade and under should be picked up from the classroom. Older children may wait in the courtyard. No students will be allowed into the parking lot without adult supervision. If school has already been dismissed when you arrive, please pull up next to the Education wing and wait behind the car in front of you so that you form one line of traffic. For safety reasons, do not pass the cars in line in front of you. When picking up your child, be aware of the possibility of traffic, and allow plenty of time to get to the Kehillah Synagogue. **Please arrive 5- 10 minutes before dismissal to avoid a late pick-up. Being on time for dismissal makes for happy children and teaching staff.** If chronic lateness occurs, a late fee will be assessed.

General School Policies

Attendance

As part of religious school enrollment, families make a serious commitment that their child(ren) will attend religious school, arrive on time, and miss school only when absolutely necessary. Please let us know in advance, when possible, if your child(ren) will be missing school. If your child is ill, please send a quick e-mail letting us know not to expect them.

Teachers will notify the director and contact you when a child has missed more than two days in a row. Students may be dismissed from school for having more than five unexcused absences in a semester. Excused absences include illness, death in the family, and attendance at out-of-town life cycle events.

B'nei Mitzvah

All students wishing to have a b'nei mitzvah at Kehillah Synagogue are required to attend religious school, services, and to perform volunteer work. The exact guidelines and detailed information can be found in the B'nei Mitzvah Handbook.

Communication

You will receive weekly "Religious School News" emails from the director. If you do not receive the emails, please send a request to ira@kehillahsynagogue.org to be added to the list. These emails include information about the school, what your child is doing in class and Jewish topics of interest. You will also receive an email from your child's teacher about once a month. This email will include more detailed information about what is being covered in class.

Electronics in School

There are no electronics permitted during class or recess. If such items are brought to Religious School, they are expected to be turned off (and stay off) and stored out of sight. Violations of this policy will be considered violations of the Derech Eretz policy of respect. We are not responsible for electronics or other valuables that are brought in.

COVID-19

For the foreseeable future, all students will wear masks while indoors.

We require that all students are vaccinated. If students are not vaccinated, for any reason, please see the Direction of Lifelong Learning to discuss accommodations.

If COVID levels return to low levels, we will reassess our policies.

Enrollment

We plan for each school year in early summer and encourage families to enroll their children early. Although we will attempt to accommodate all students who apply, space is not guaranteed for applications received after June 15. Families may be asked to hire a Hebrew tutor if their children are enrolled after school has started, or if their children are working below grade level in Hebrew.

- If a child enrolls and then withdraws from school prior to the start of school, the tuition will be reimbursed minus a \$50 administrative fee.

- If a returning child enrolls and then withdraws from school within the first two weeks after school begins, tuition will be reimbursed minus a \$100 fee. After the first two weeks of classes, tuition will not be reimbursed.
- If a new student enrolls and then withdraws from school within the first four weeks after school begins, tuition will be reimbursed minus a \$100 fee. After the first four weeks of classes, tuition will not be reimbursed.

Evaluations and Conferences

Student evaluations will be sent out in May. Please speak to your child's teacher if you would like to set up a conference at any time throughout the year.

Food

We follow the Kehillah Synagogue's kosher guidelines; foods need to be made with ingredients that contain NO meat or meat products (i.e., lard, animal fat). Foods must be vegetarian or dairy only. Please see the food allergy policy for additional information regarding allergy sensitivities.

Food Allergy Policy

Recognizing that food allergies are a serious health issue for many children and holding the health and safety of the children of the Kehillah Synagogue as the highest priorities, the following policy has been created:

- 1) Peanuts & tree nuts will not be used in foods served in the religious school. However, we are unable to guarantee that there will not be trace amounts of allergens in foods prepared in volunteers' homes or trace amounts not included on product labels.
- 2) Food prepared by volunteers for religious school celebrations and potlucks should be labeled with the ingredients of the item whenever possible.
- 3) All food allergies must be made known to the director and the student's teachers. Volunteers preparing food for celebrations will be informed of food allergies in the instructions sent out.
- 4) Any special treatments required in the event of accidental ingestion will be explained to the school director and all staff involved in teaching the student. A written copy of these instructions will be kept in the religious school office and posted in the student's classroom.
- 5) The religious school is making every effort to avoid nuts/peanuts, but the school does not guarantee that any food is in fact nut free. In addition, the general *Kehillah Synagogue is not nut free*, and the policies described above do not pertain to non-Religious School communal meals and celebrations.

Grievances

Parents should discuss classroom issues with their child's teacher. If there is no resolution, parents should contact the religious school director. If a parent disagrees with a policy decision made by the director, the parent should write or email the religious school committee chair detailing the grievance within 30 days of the occurrence. The committee will meet with the parent within 14 days of the receipt of the letter to consider an appeal. Within 7 days of this meeting, the committee chair will inform the parent of the committee's decision.

Guests

Given class size and other educational concerns, religious school students should not bring guests to Religious School. For special exceptions, please contact the Religious School Director.

Hosting

Kehillah Synagogue Religious School values and depends on family participation. Each family hosts a holiday celebration during the religious school year. Hosting involves attendance at the holiday program, setting up/cleaning and various other tasks as assigned by the religious school director. Hosting instructions will be sent to you approximately three weeks before the event.

Kippot

All students will receive a kippah on the first day of religious school. These will be decorated on the first day and will be kept by their teachers. Kippot will be handed out during Tefillah and collected at the end of the day.

Inclement Weather

If there is inclement weather, or if the Chapel Hill public schools are closed, it is likely that religious school will be canceled. Please check your email for information; email will be sent by 8:30 a.m. on Sunday. If you do not have access to email, please call 919-942-5817. There will be a voice mail message with school closing information.

Independent Learning

Students are encouraged to participate in Jewish learning and experiences outside the classroom. Some students may be assigned homework. The homework will not be excessive, and will be meaningful to learning that is happening in class. We request that parents ask children if they have homework; participate in the homework as appropriate; and work regularly with their children on Hebrew-reading skills. Your participation and support is important and much appreciated.

Lost and Found

Students often leave items in their classrooms or on the playground. All found items will be placed in the lost & found bin in the religious school director's office. Please claim these items as soon as possible. All unclaimed items will be donated to area shelters or PTA stores.

Parental Involvement

When parents demonstrate the importance of Judaism in their own lives, students react by embracing Jewish learning and values. As part of this, there is a Family Project for each grade level where parents and their children learn together. This is followed by a hands-on project where the learning is put into action. Additionally, Kehillah Synagogue Religious School parents participate in the religious school by hosting a holiday celebration **and** by serving on a committee or volunteering for at least three activities, such as substituting, reading stories, or driving on field trips. If you have a special skill, please contact your child's teacher or the director. Your participation and support is extremely crucial to the success of our program. We value your partnership and thank you.

Raising Children Jewishly

Kehillah Synagogue Religious School believes that children benefit from knowledge of other religions. At the same time, the school feels that raising children in a household that fully celebrates two or more religions can be confusing both to the child and in the context of the classroom. Thus, children will not be allowed to enroll in the school if they attend non-Jewish religious services on a regular basis or if they are enrolled in non-Jewish religious schools.

Room Parents

Each class has one or two parents designated as the Room Parent(s). An important link between the teacher and the parents, room parents coordinate various activities and events. They are responsible for: emailing the class with reminders about class activities; calling the members of the class for school closings when appropriate; helping coordinate drivers for field trips as needed and assisting with special class activities.

Shabbat Services

Kehillah Synagogue offers several types of Shabbat services, which are held throughout the school year. **Students are asked to attend a minimum number of Kehillah Synagogue services per year equal to the number grade of their class;** for example, students in Kitah Hey (Grade 5) are asked to attend a minimum of five services. In addition to regular services, Kehillah Synagogue has

- Tot Shabbat: for children age 0-5. Includes simple prayers, movement, music, and stories.
- Shabbat Shirah: for all ages. A songful, interactive service with guitar and singing.

Inclusion

The school encourages the enrollment of ALL Kehillah Synagogue members' children. Please know that we are here to discuss any challenges your child might have during learning and we will make every effort to accommodate. We will work with you to find the best solution and meaningful options.

Tzedakah

The religious school teaches the importance of tzedakah, or acts of goodwill to those in need. Each class will decide how to distribute the funds they collect.

At various times, the school will also host or support tzedakah projects and will collect canned and non-perishable goods, clothing, and/or other items to be donated to those in need. Students are encouraged to participate in these opportunities.

Behavior/Discipline Policy

Kehillah Synagogue Religious School values the strength and safety of our classroom and school communities. Making our community a place where every student can learn and feel safe is of utmost importance. We ensure that children engage in appropriate behavior while in school and that all students are safe from verbal and physical aggression. Since we are all created *b'tzelem elohim* (in God's image), the way in which we treat each other is central. Our discipline policy reflects mutual respect and responsibility.

It is expected that students will conduct themselves as appropriate in any school. In each classroom at the Kehillah Synagogue we follow these 4 *Derech Eretz* Rules (literally "the way of the land;" signifies "politeness, etiquette, good/respectful behavior"):

1. Exhibit *kavod* (respect) for all people by using appropriate tone of voice and language.
2. Maintain the *kedushah* (holiness) of the Kehillah Synagogue by taking care of all physical property.
3. Be students of *Talmud Torah* (study of Torah) by following directions and positively contributing to the learning atmosphere.
4. Uphold *Shmirat Ha'Guf* (protecting the body) by keeping hands and feet to yourself.

Teachers are responsible for implementing a management plan that responds appropriately to both positive and negative behavior. Children are responsible for following the rules of *Derech Eretz* as listed above. These rules are intended to diminish disruptive, disrespectful and violent behaviors, as such behaviors are detrimental to other children and disturbing to the class as a whole.

If a student breaks rules 1, 2 or 3 during the course of a school day, the consequences are as follows:

- First offense in a day: the teacher reminds the student of the rules and redirects behavior.
- Second offense in a day: the teacher talks to the student and records the event, again redirecting behavior.
- Third offense in a day: the teacher talks to the student, sends a note home to the parents and records the event.
- If a student violates rule 4, the teacher will record the event, and there will be an immediate conference with parents. Students may be removed to the Director's office for violating rule 4.
- If a student has repeated offenses during a two week time period, the Religious School Director will hold a teacher/parent conference, resulting in an action plan for the future, such as instituting a behavior contract.
- If a student has another third offense within two weeks of the conference, the student will have a one-day suspension. During the suspension, s/he will make up all work missed AND will write a paper on the rule violated. S/he may return to school only when the work and paper are completed and when s/he is accompanied by a parent (if requested by the Director). The parent will accompany the child until it is mutually agreed (by teacher, school director, parent and child) that the behavior has changed sufficiently to permit the child to attend without a parent present. If a parent's presence does not ameliorate the situation, or if the parent declines to attend school with the child, a child may be asked to leave the program.
- After two one-day suspensions, the child may be asked to leave the program.

(adapted from *Derech Eretz* Policy from Oseh Shalom, MD.)

Religious School Curriculum

Below is a curriculum overview detailing the cumulative subjects that will have been covered by the end of seventh grade. Each grade level is also listed separately with specific information. Although certain material will be covered in each grade level, it is understood that in each class, students will need to work on many tasks at their own pace. Students' progress will be checked regularly so that appropriate materials will be provided for them. We respect differences in the learning speeds, learning styles and educational backgrounds of our students. We aim for all students to be challenged and for none to be overwhelmed.

Activities: In addition to regular classroom activities, during the year, each grade will participate in Israeli dancing and music sessions. Each grade level has a special family project where parents and children learn together.

Holidays/Celebrations: Students will study (1) Jewish holidays, including Shabbat and Havdallah; (2) Jewish life cycle and rites of passage; (3) the role of the Jewish home; and (4) modern-day and Reconstructionist thoughts about various holidays.

Jewish Values/Ethics: Students will learn about (1) mitzvah both as commandment and as participation in social action; (2) Jewish heroes; (3) modern-day ethical dilemmas; (4) how to make choices based on Jewish values; (5) ethical laws in various Jewish texts; and (6) the importance of family and Jewish community.

Torah/Bible: Students will explore (1) the TaNaKh, including the Torah, Prophets, and Writings; (2) other Jewish texts, such as the Mishna/Pirke Avot; (3) lessons from Jewish texts that pertain to modern-day life; and (4) the role of Godliness in the Torah and in other Jewish texts.

Hebrew: Students will learn (1) Hebrew letters and vowels; (2) Hebrew vocabulary and the meaning of words they read in prayer.

Prayer/Spirituality: Students will explore (1) the people and parts of the synagogue; (2) Hebrew prayers from Shabbat services; (3) the meaning, history, and modern-day relevance of prayers; (4) the difference in prayers among Jewish denominations; (5) diversity of spiritual experience; (6) their own conceptions of God and Godliness; and (7) Reconstructionist thoughts on God.

History/Israel: Students will explore (1) the sacred and secular history of Israel (2) Jewish history; (3) Jewish American history; (4) Jewish historical figures; (5) the modern-day complexities of Israel; and (6) local and international Jewish community and culture.

Electives- Gimel to Zayin (3rd- 7th grades). There are 4 quarters of electives with 6-7 sessions per quarter. The students can choose between 4-5 elective offerings per quarter. The electives are taught by teachers, madrichim, parents and congregants. The classes are multi-aged which enables students to deepen connections with other students that are not in their specific classroom. Students provide input into the topics of study. Electives are offered to connect students to the varied and rich treasures of Judaism beyond the outlined curriculum.

Curriculum by Grade

Gan—Kindergarten

Kindergarten students explore specific mitzvot and Jewish values; learn vocabulary and rituals associated with each holiday; appreciate the Jewish connection to Israel; study the basic geography of Israel; explore stories from all parts of Torah; begin to study Hebrew using Hebrew Through Movement approach; learn Shabbat prayers and what they mean; begin to explore the human connection to God and the divine; and explore the synagogue as the place of worship for the Jewish community. Family Project: Learn about Groggers and make one to bring to the Megillah reading

Kitah Alef—First Grade

For first graders, lessons alternate between hands-on activities, discussions, and reading/writing exercises. First graders investigate the holidays; explore mitzvot that focus on behavior towards people and animals; learn about Torah portions and the lessons they teach; continue to study Hebrew using Hebrew Through Movement approach; learn more Shabbat prayers and explore their meanings; explore godliness and the connection between God and prayer; learn about the people living in Israel; and appreciate the importance of the family and the Jewish home. Family Project: Explore Shabbat and ways to celebrate it that fit your families; learn the blessings and make a challah cover.

Kitah Bet—Second Grade

Second graders expand their holiday understanding and vocabulary; explore several mitzvot through discussion and experiential activities; become familiar with many Torah portions and with the cycle of Torah reading; explore the ethical lessons associated with the Torah stories; study Hebrew using Chevurta Hebrew (Hebrish); learn several more prayers from Shabbat services; explore godliness and human connection to the divine. Family Project: Decorating Siddur covers for the siddurim that they will receive at a special ceremony at the end of the year.

Kitah Gimel—Third Grade

Third graders explore the Jewish calendar and its connection to the timing of holidays; deepen their understanding of Jewish holidays and celebrations; cover ethical, ritual, and observance mitzvot; study readings and explore characters from Genesis and Exodus; deepen their ability to decode simple Hebrew words and phrases; continue to expand their knowledge of Shabbat prayers and parts of the prayer service; consider personal views of godliness; explore prayer as a way to experience holiness; learn about the people and places in Israel; and complete a special unit on the synagogue and prayer. Family Project: Parents and students will learn about Miriam, Elijah & Kiddush cups. They will make one of these together.

Kitah Dalet—Fourth Grade

Fourth grade students explore each of the core areas of bible and holidays through the lens of Israel; compare holiday traditions in Israel vs. American traditions; bible stories are focused on the prophets and their history studies start in the time period of the prophets; focus on godliness and on partnering with God to make a better world; begin to read full blessings and prayers in Hebrew; the classroom learning is supplemented by an at-home computer program; learn several new prayers from the Shabbat services and explore their meanings; continue to examine the role of prayer and spirituality and become familiar with the local Jewish community. Family Project: To reinforce the learning about *Bikkur Cholim*, the students and parents will first study the mitzvah and then make no-sew blankets for Project Linus.

Kitah Hey—Fifth Grade

Fifth grade students will discuss how historical events relate to holiday observance; explore the responsibility of adults in the Jewish community and Jewish responses to ethical dilemmas via Pirkei Avot (teaching of the sages); understand the sections of TaNaKh; know the 5 books of Moses and the general theme of each book; explore selected readings from book of Numbers; contrast the Israeli political system to the US political system and create a mock Israeli election; study the history of the Jewish people from early Israelites to US Jewry 1820-1880.; Holidays will be covered with a broader look at questioning/ skepticisms in general with a view beyond the literal interpretation of the stories; practice and improve Hebrew reading and continue to learn the Shabbat morning services and their structure with a focus on the Amidah. Family Project: Students and parents will learn about Havdallah and then make a Havdallah kit for their home.

Kitah Vav—Sixth Grade

Sixth graders continue to expand their academic abilities and can discuss ethical issues, think abstractly, and accept new ideas and concepts. These students fully explore several “more serious” holidays (i.e., Yom Ha’shoah, Tisha B’Av); appreciate differences in holiday celebrations; study Jewish-American history; relate specific mitzvot and values to Jewish-American immigrants who lived by them; explore the history of multiple people living in Israel (starting after World War Two) and the complexity of peace within Israel, hone Hebrew reading skills by reading prayers; continue to work on prayer competency with a focus on the Torah Service; continue to explore personal conceptions of godliness and how spirituality can fit into everyday life; and complete a special unit on the Holocaust. Family Project: Parents and students will study the old German custom of wimpels. They will make a wimple of their design to use to tie the Torah on their B’nei Mitzvah. The wimpels are to be returned to Director of Lifelong Learning for safe keeping and sent home after their B’nei Mitzvah

Kitah Zayin—Seventh Grade

During this B'nei Mitzvah year, seventh graders learn the importance of being active in Jewish life and of accepting the responsibility of Jewish adulthood. They explore many of the Torah and Haftarah portions with an eye on Midrash type questionings (both pre-existing and our own); appreciate the variety of Jewish sources, including the Mishnah and Talmud; study Jewish law and mitzvot; compare Judaism to other world religions, and Reconstructionist Judaism to other branches of Judaism; understand the meaning of the prayers and the structure of the Shabbat services; understand the role of godliness and spirituality in prayer and study Jewish and Israeli current events. Family Project: To prepare students to take on communal responsibilities, parents and children will learn about *Chiddur Mitzvah* (enhancing a mitzvah) by polishing the silver as we prepare for the High Holidays.

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