



קהילה בית התקווה  
Congregation Beth Hatikvah

# Religious School Handbook

## 2010-2011

The mission of CBH RS is to provide children with an education rich in meaningful experiences that will fill them with pride in their heritage. By engaging children in critical thinking and interactive learning, and by promoting family involvement in rituals and celebrations, we seek to instill not just a spiritual connection to the Jewish people, but a lifelong, joyful connection to the Jewish community as well.

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## **GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS**

Our Religious School is committed to providing a positive and meaningful Jewish learning experience for your child. However, we cannot achieve this goal by ourselves. The education your child receives at our school will be more likely to succeed if it is nurtured by a positive Jewish environment in the home. The impact of our efforts in the classroom depends largely on your commitment. The following guidelines may help you in this regard.

- Please remain aware of what your child is learning throughout the year. Try to incorporate this into your home. Many aspects of Jewish life – especially Shabbat and the holidays – are ideal for celebration in the home. If you have questions in this regard, the Rabbi and/or the Education Director would be happy to offer specific suggestions.
- Please treat your child’s religious education as seriously as his/her secular education. Try to create a set time for religious school homework. Please be prompt and make certain that your child attends on a regular basis. Frequent absences or chronic lateness will undermine your child’s ability to make progress in class. It will also send a signal to him/her that religious school is not important.
- Try to explore your own motives for giving your child a religious education. Some parents may want to give their child the kind of religious school experience that they never had. Others may have wonderful memories of their years in religious school and would like to give their child a similar opportunity. Still others may be ambivalent about the years they spent in religious school and are unsure if religious education is really the right thing for their child.

Whatever your motivation, it is important to keep in mind that you are the one/s who set the tone for your child’s religious school experience. Try to be sensitive to signals you may be sending (consciously or unconsciously) to your child. In the end, if your child senses that Judaism and Jewish education is important to you, he/she will most likely take it seriously.

As a Reconstructionist congregation, we are committed to the educational goals of the movement.

*See Attachment 3 – Educational Goals of the Reconstructionist movement*

Please take a few minutes to review the following information regarding the religious school and the safety and well being of our children.

## **School Schedule**

### **Tuesdays:**

4:15 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.      Grades 4, 5, 6, 7

### **Saturdays:**

9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.      Grades K-6

9:10 a.m. to 9:10 a.m.      Ruach

10:45 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.      Family Torah Service Grades 3-7

11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.      Family Service Grades K-2

Grade 7 will meet one Saturday each month from 9:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m., in addition to attending the full Shabbat morning service whenever there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. This class will also meet on eight Sundays, alternating each month between a class from 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. or scheduled field trips.

Our Saturday morning schedule attempts to provide a very comprehensive program in a short amount of time. Children need to be ready to begin class promptly at their start time. The school program ends at 11:30 a.m. after the service. Parents are encouraged to attend the service with their children. It is essential that students arrive promptly for class, and stay for the entire program.

## **Grades 8-10**

These classes meet once a month, September through May, at a time determined by the students in the class. In addition, there will be two weekend retreats – one in October and one in May. For more information on this program, contact the Education Director.

## **Weekly Torah Service**

We have two worship services each Saturday morning, which are part of our regular school day. For younger children, in Grades K-2, there is a short service that includes music, stories, and prayer. This service is from 11:00 to 11:30.

For students in Grades 3-7, there is a weekly Torah service from 10:45 to 11:30. This service is an integral part of the religious school day. It is an important component of our curriculum, which will help your children to become familiar with the Reconstructionist prayer service. The Torah will be taken out each week, and your children will have the opportunity to participate in the service, as well as to share in the discussion relating to the weekly parsha. There will also be time for music, as well as announcing any pertinent information to our religious school families.

An Oneg for all students and their families will immediately follow the services at 11:30 a.m.. Parents will be contacted by the Oneg coordinator to volunteer for a specific date to supply and set up the Oneg.

Families are both invited and encouraged to attend this service. Parents may sit with their children during the service. For those children who do not have their parents present, they will be supervised by their teacher. It is expected that parents and children will refrain from unnecessary noise, so that we may keep the solemnity of Shabbat. Younger children are welcome, however, the service is geared to older children, and we ask that you take younger children out of the sanctuary if they are making noise.

Parents are invited to play a role in our service. If you have a child in Grades 3-7, you will have the opportunity to deliver the D'var Torah at our older children's service. While this is voluntary, we encourage parents to take advantage of this opportunity to be a role model for their child. Resources, text materials, and guidance on how to deliver a D'var Torah, will be provided, as needed. Parents of our younger students in Grades K-2 will have the opportunity to be part of that service by helping with song leading, delivering the D'var Torah, or leading prayers. There will also be a family each week that will supply challah, and lead the group in Motzi and Kiddush.

## **Drop-off, Pick-up, and Early Dismissal**

Children need a note from home if they will be walking home, or if they will be picked up early from school. While we realize that there may be times for your child to arrive late, or to leave early, please understand that this can be disruptive for the rest of the class, and whenever possible, try to make other arrangements. If your child is leaving early, you will need to send a note telling the teacher the time that you will be picking up your child, and then you should come to your child's class and the teacher will dismiss the child. It is important for your child to come to class on time at the start of class. Since attendance will be taken at the very beginning of the class, if your child arrives late, you will need to come to the office to sign them in so as not to have them counted as absent.

### **Important Information Regarding Early Pick Up on Saturday**

The service is an integral part of our school program, and we ask that you plan to pick up your child when it is over. However, on the exceptional day that you must pick your child up early, please do so before the service begins, in order to keep the sanctity of Shabbat. Children are not allowed to leave early on their own UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. Once the service has begun, if you are picking up your child early, you will need to tell Nancy Hersh, or the child's teacher that you are taking them.

At the end of the morning, children in Grades 3-7 will be dismissed to meet their parents. We encourage parents to park their car and come in to pick up their children at the Oneg. Due to the activity at the end of the morning, we cannot be responsible for watching each child's pick up. If you inform the school of a special arrangement for the day, we can pay special attention to your child and assure that they are safely sent on their way. There is no supervision after school on either Tuesday or Saturday, and therefore it is essential that your children be picked up promptly.

For students in grades K-2, teachers will supervise dismissal. Please pick up your child at 11:30, and join us for the Oneg.

### **Tuesday Parking Lot procedure**

Enter the driveway and drive all the way to the back of the parking lot and turn left. Then turn left twice, and drop your child off by the door. Then make a right turn out of the parking lot onto the driveway to the street. If you are staying, park your car first, and then walk in with your child. If the parking lot is full, you may park on the street. However, please do not enter through the front door. All children coming to school should use the Religious School entrance which is at the back of the building.

## **Absenteeism and Missed Work**

Attendance is an essential component of a successful Jewish education. If you know in advance that your child will be absent, please send a note to the teacher at least a week ahead of time. Your child's teacher can provide you with material and planned lessons to keep your child up to date.

We cannot stress enough the importance of regular attendance to the success of your child's religious education. Since we have limited time to teach your child, consistency and continuity are essential to helping your child advance. If your child falls behind due to excessive absenteeism, our educational director will contact you to discuss ways in which your child can complete their work and advance in education.

*See Attachment 1 – Attendance Policy.*

### **Alternative Educational Plan for students with special needs or extended absenteeism**

We recognize the need to provide for all students, and understand that, at times, children have special learning needs that cannot be addressed within the traditional classroom. We also understand that there are times that children will have a reason for extended absences due to a conflicting activity.. Please consult the Education Director to address these specific needs, so that an alternative arrangement can be made for your child.

*See Attachment 2 – Individualized Learning Contracts*

## **Friday Night Service Attendance**

Attending Shabbat services helps children feel a part of the spiritual community of Beth Hatikvah and the Jewish people, through prayer and celebration. We believe that this is an essential piece of your child's religious education. The first and third Friday of each month is an early service, which is most appropriate for families, though families are welcome at all services.

By sixth and seventh grade, children should attend Friday night services twice a month or more. Prior to that time, we strongly encourage participation at Friday evening services as often as

possible for students in Grades 3 and above. Attendance will be taken at Friday evening services, and each child will receive a “treat” from the rabbi in her office following the service. Children who have attended at least 8 Friday evening services during the school year, will be invited to a party with the rabbi at the end of the year.

## **Emergency Closing**

In the event that school has to be canceled due to weather or some other unforeseen circumstance, we will send an email to parents, or call, depending on the parent’s preference. Decisions about school cancellation will be made with careful consideration of the travel distance for our teachers and students. In the event that you are unsure if school is in session, you may call the office and we will leave a recorded message if school has been closed.

## **Homework**

Like any new skill, the learning of Hebrew requires regular practice. Additionally, a Reconstructionist education emphasizes and assumes family involvement in a student's learning. In order to maximize the students' religious school experience, we offer the following guidelines regarding homework:

- Parents with children in Grades K-2 should discuss religious school activities with their children and work with them on any home assignments
- Students in Grades 3-7 should spend at least 15 minutes a day on their Hebrew studies. As our Hebrew curriculum emphasizes prayer, parents can be particularly involved in working with students in their Beth Hatikvah Prayer Primer.

For parents with little or no Hebrew background, the Rabbi or Education Director will provide support material for you. Please contact them for information.

Generally, we ask that in order to keep a connection between the home and the school, that you ask your child what they have learned in class, and spend time discussing it with them. Teachers will be assigning topics and questions for family discussion, so please encourage your child to share these at home.

## **Opportunities For Family Involvement**

Your participation enriches your child's religious school experience and is a reward for you as well. Parents and other adults are encouraged to attend Shabbat morning services. If your child is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate in the next year it is especially important for you to attend Shabbat morning services with your child to familiarize yourself with the Torah service. (See letter from the Bar Mitzvah committee.)

There are also many other ways to become involved in the religious school from joining the Religious School Committee to organizing or helping with field trips and special events. The Religious School Committee will be meeting regularly, and you are invited to come and share your ideas or concerns, or listen for opportunities to enrich our children's experiences.

## **Class Shabbat Programs**

All students will have the opportunity to celebrate Shabbat with their class and their family as a community. Students in Kindergarten through Grade 2 will have a family Havdalah program. This includes a dairy dinner, family activity, and a short Havdalah service. For students in Grades 3- 10, each class will have their own family Shabbat dinner on a Friday evening, followed by the children participating in the Friday evening service. This also includes some learning about Shabbat rituals. All of these programs are part of the curriculum, and children are expected to attend. Besides the learning component, it is a chance for families to meet each other, and to connect with the Beth Hatikvah community.

Students in Grade 6 will participate in an overnight Shabbaton experience, which is part of their curriculum, and not optional. Parents will be notified of this event, and will be asked to assist in the planning, programming, supervising, and implementation of the program. This is a very well-received annual event, and one that the children look forward to each year.

There will also be an optional Shabbaton program for students in Grades 5 & 6 that will take place in the spring at Camp JRF. This will be a weekend retreat, where the children will have the opportunity to celebrate Shabbat in a fun, experiential learning environment, with children from other Reconstructionist synagogues.

## **Family B'nai Mitzvah Programming**

There will be several programs throughout the school year for parents and children in Grades 5 and up to become involved in the B'nai Mitzvah experience. The purpose of this programming is to inform the parents and students of what to expect as they prepare to take their B'nai Mitzvah journey, and to become spiritually involved in this journey. If you have any questions regarding the B'nai Mitzvah, you may contact Rabbi Small or Nancy Hersh, or Debbie Kafowitz, the B'nai Mitzvah coordinator.

## **Contact Information**

Rabbi Amy Small ([rabbiamy@bethhatikvah.org](mailto:rabbiamy@bethhatikvah.org))

Nancy Hersh, Education Director ([nhersh@bethhatikvah.org](mailto:nhersh@bethhatikvah.org))

Lynne Whitman, Religious School Chairperson, 973-376-0255

Congregation Beth Hatikvah Office, 908-277-0200

## **Attachment 1: Attendance Responsibilities**

Approved by the Religious School Committee, July 2000

A strong and lasting Jewish identity in our secular culture involves an understanding and grasp of the content of Jewish texts, Jewish belief and Jewish practice.

Jewish identity is strongly linked with a meaningful, productive, and positive Jewish education. For this reason, Congregation Beth Hatikvah provides Jewish education toward life-long learning for its members. Religious School is one facet of your child's journey through Jewish education.

Consistent and regular attendance in Religious School is necessary for children to master Hebrew reading skills, learn the texts, traditions, beliefs and historical background of Judaism to establish this Jewish identity.

As a Reconstructionist congregation, our school also trains students to develop critical thinking skills and the philosophical foundations of Reconstructionism to help them grow into Jewish adults who are engaged in Jewish life.

Our congregation understands that our members often live very complicated lives, filled with busy schedules and varied interests and commitments. As a result, timely, consistent and regular attendance may sometimes be challenging for some of our families. In light of the need to provide a balance, we offer here an approach to Religious School attendance that is both sensitive to the needs of the family and the child's learning goals.

1. Students who are absent are required to contact either the teacher or a classmate to determine what material was covered in class. They will be responsible for learning the content of the lesson they miss, in addition to completing all homework that was assigned.
2. Students who are absent on successive weeks may be required to do additional assignments as formulated by the teacher in order to ensure that they are able to understand the content of the learning, or continue toward skill acquisition taught in class. Parents are asked to contact the teacher if their child has missed more than one class in succession.
3. If extended absences are anticipated in advance, the parents must contact the Education Director, who will develop strategies for accomplishing the curricular learning goals for their child. This may include the need for tutoring.

### **Timeliness and Dismissals**

Students are expected to be in class, ready to learn at the stated time. Lateness not only reduces opportunities for learning, but also can be extremely disruptive to the class, and it prevents the child's successful transition into the lesson of the day. Early dismissals have the same impact on the child's quality and quantity of learning and the disruption to the class.

Repeated lateness and early dismissals will be considered attendance problems, and referred to the Education Director for resolution.

**Successful Completion of a School Year**

The basis of our Religious School program is a curriculum that sets forth annual goals for each grade. Within these goals, our teachers establish learning objectives for each class. These goals and objectives build sequentially from week to week and from year to year in order to provide a foundation of Jewish learning for our students. Therefore, a student's successful completion of each year is predicated upon their regular attendance for class and the programs designated for their grade.

In addition, our congregation, like others, has requirements for a minimum number of years before students are eligible for Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We require four years of Religious School education. (In special circumstances an equivalency may be determined for individual students, as defined by the B'nai Mitzvah Committee in consultation with the Rabbi and Education Director.)

As such, each year of Religious School must be successfully completed in order to satisfy this requirement. Successful completion will be defined in part by the child's consistent and timely attendance in their religious school classes.

## **Attachment 2: Guidelines for Establishing Individualized Learning Contracts**

As a Reconstructionist congregation, our educational philosophy is based on the importance of learning, and experiencing Judaism, as a community. In order for our children to get a meaningful and rich Jewish education, and to feel comfortable in the Jewish community, we believe that children need to attend classes on a regular basis. This enables them to connect to their classmates, teachers, and larger congregational community, and to engage in group interactive learning situations. We believe that this is the most effective way for the children to develop a strong Jewish identity, and to form a positive connection to the Jewish people.

While our goal is for our children to attend regularly scheduled classes whenever possible, we do understand that there are certain instances where children need special accommodations. With that said, we feel that defining the parameters for establishing these accommodations will ensure a consistent and uniform quality educational experience for both students and teachers.

### **Guidelines**

Families will be eligible to establish alternative educational arrangements via a CBH Learning Contract under the following circumstances:

1/ Students with identified special learning needs are eligible for a contract that would allow for an individualized program to achieve equivalency, and to enable the student to have an appropriate education that best suits their needs.

2/ Students who enter our religious school after 3<sup>rd</sup> grade may need a contract that would allow them to fulfill equivalency in order to be on target for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah service, as determined by our RS Director.

3/ Students who have scheduling conflicts which prevent them from attending classes for a limited time period, such as a sports activity, may be eligible for a contract that would include assignments, service attendance, tutoring, or other required make up work. This contract is for making up no more than eight consecutive or closely spaced weeks of missed classes throughout the school year.

*Approved by the Religious School Committee and by the CBH Board (May 2007)*

**Attachment 3: Educational Goals of the Reconstructionist Movement**

1. Present Torah as the ongoing, creative and sacred search for meaning in life; a record of human encounters with the divine.
2. Recognize that the Jewish people's experience of God, Torah and peoplehood has changed and grown throughout history.
3. Focus on Hebrew as the language uniting all Jews and provide programs that help develop language skills that allow for enriched connections with Jewish civilizations of the past, present, and future.
4. Recognize praying, participation in ritual and text study as expressive modes of Jewish spirituality that can shape Jewish lives.
5. Encourage active, egalitarian participation with a sense of responsibility for the Jewish community.
6. Draw students of all ages into caring, committed and knowledgeable relationships with the land and people of Israel.
7. Seek to understand the human spirit that lies behind diverse Jewish understandings of God and encourage individuals to reflect on the meaning of godliness in their own lives.
8. Understand the concept of mitzvah as obligation and perpetuate Jewish values reflected in deeds of social justice and acts of loving-kindness.

We are dedicated to intellectually honest inquiry combined with faithfulness to our tradition and commitment to the continuity of the Jewish people. We believe this happens best with challenging, caring and supportive learning environments.