

# Beth Israel Religious School Parents' Handbook



*Inspiring love for lifelong Jewish learning*

2016-2017



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## Welcome from Rabbi Kassoff

Whether you are a returning Beth Israel Religious School family or registering for the very first time, *bruchim haba'im*: blessings, and welcome.

How shall we fulfill our sacred communal obligation, repeated in the words of the Ve'ahavta prayer and elsewhere, *veshinantam levanekha*, “you must teach your children”? As the educator at Beth Israel Congregation, I have the privilege and the challenge of contemplating this question every day.

Will we approach our task with words of prayer or poetry, or ancient stories? With the pictures painted for us by the art, music, or dance of our tradition? Will we learn in the classroom or on the playground or at home? What will capture our children’s minds and hearts? The crunch and the aroma of a freshly-cooked latke? The velvety touch of the Torah mantle, the warm glow of a havdallah candle?

No two children learn in just the same way, and in fact no child is just the same on two different days. We try all of these methods, settings, resources, and experiences in turn and in this way approach our vision of inspiring a love of Jewish learning to last a lifetime.

And yet we—our wonderful volunteer teachers and I—can do only so much in the few hours we have with your child(ren) each week. You, our students’ parents, are truly our partners, because we will succeed only by working together. This handbook contains information that will help us in our partnership, whether new or renewing. It is the beginning of an ongoing conversation, a mutual exchange of ideas and insights as we work toward our shared goal of teaching our children.

Please read through it, and then be in touch. My door (phone line, email inbox) is open to you. Let’s make this our best year ever at Beth Israel Religious School!

L’shalom,

Debra Kassoff  
Director of Religious Education

## Goals

Beth Israel Religious School strives to inspire a love for lifelong Jewish learning, and to help students:

- Find joy, meaning, and pride in living Jewish lives.
- Identify with the Jewish community in the United States, in Israel, and throughout the world.
- Make connections between the Jewish learning and living that takes place at the synagogue and at home.
- Celebrate Shabbat, Jewish holidays, and life cycle events.
- Study *Tanach* (Hebrew Bible) and interpretive literature about Jewish values and history.
- Know Hebrew both as a living and as a liturgical language.
- Become familiar with the Siddur (prayer book) in order to participate fully in Jewish life.
- Translate Jewish values into actions and decisions that promote justice, freedom, and peace.
- Support and participate in the life of the synagogue, strengthening the fabric of Jewish life now and for future generations.

## Schedule

<b>Program</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Hours</b>
PreK–8 <sup>th</sup> grade Religious School	Sunday	9:30 a.m.–noon; tefillah (prayer time) 11:40-noon, <i>parents welcome.</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> grade Hebrew School	Wednesday	5:00 p.m. Hebrew Hangout; 5:30-6:30 p.m. Hebrew class
High School—Confirmation	Wednesday	5:30–6:30 p.m.

## **Parents' Role in Religious Education**

Success depends on students' receiving positive reinforcement and support for their Jewish learning and living at home. You can contribute to your child's experience at Beth Israel in many ways. Here are some ideas. Have others? Let us know!

- *Volunteer.* We need room parents, door monitors, specialists, shoppers, and substitute teachers. Subbing is a great way to taste the rewards of teaching without the long-term commitment. Join the faculty, if you can. It is a huge gift to your child and the Jewish community. You will learn something, too!
- Show interest in Religious School and Hebrew school in conversation with your child both before and after class.
- Demonstrate your commitment to the value of religious education by participating in Sunday *t'fillah* (prayer time), special events, and Family Education Programs.
- Help your child attend class regularly by arranging prompt, reliable transportation to and from Religious School.
- Make formal religious education relevant to your child by celebrating Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Encourage your child's active participation in rituals and ceremonies at home.
- Supplement the classroom experience by reading Jewish books. If your child is eight or younger, enroll in the PJ Library, which sends free Jewish books monthly to your door. See Rabbi Kassoff for information and suggestions.
- Read classroom updates (delivered by email) and discuss topics and activities covered in the classroom with your child at home.
- Provide feedback to the teachers and to Rabbi Kassoff.
- Attend Friday night or Saturday morning services with your children.

## **Attendance**

Jewish education happens best in community, and our teachers work hard to make class time rich in learning experiences. They will succeed only if parents and students work together to avoid excessive absences.

Teachers keep attendance records. Please have your child attend no less than 75% of class meetings—more if possible. When an absence can't be avoided, please contact Rabbi Kassoff or your child's teacher—it helps us plan ahead, and allows us to make arrangements for your child to keep up with the class.

In the event of excessive absences, the Religious School Director may recommend that a student repeat a grade.

## **Early Dismissal**

Early dismissal is *discouraged*. If you have to pick up your child early, you must come into the building. For safety reasons, students will not be allowed to wait outside.

## **Visitors**

Parents and guardians are welcome to visit the classroom at any time.

Students may occasionally bring a friend or relative to class. Advance notice is appreciated. A guest who is a minor must bring an emergency medical release signed by a parent or guardian, which will be kept on file in the Director's office.

## **Tzedakah (Righteous Acts)**

The Torah commands us to help the stranger in our midst. This is among our highest duties. Students are encouraged to bring tzedakah money and canned goods to the synagogue. Teachers collect tzedakah money in the classroom, and the school distributes it to organizations selected by the students. Place canned goods in the barrel outside the religious school office. They will be donated to Stewpot (for more information visit [www.stewpot.org](http://www.stewpot.org)).

## **Special Needs**

Beth Israel Religious School is committed to meeting the individual needs of each student. If your child has a learning disability, a medical condition, or if your family is experiencing any special or significantly stressful circumstances (e.g. birth, illness, death, divorce, change in employment), please inform the school Director. This will help the school be sensitive to and proactive around your child's individual needs.

## **Children of Interfaith Families**

Children of interfaith families (one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent) whose parents are committed to raising their children Jewish are most welcome and are considered Jewish according to the Union for Reform Judaism and our temple.

## **Curriculum**

Beth Israel Congregation partners with the Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) to bring its excellent curriculum to our students. Please visit the [ISJL website](#) for [highlights of the curriculum](#).

## **Classroom Materials**

The Religious School will provide and maintain all necessary learning materials. Donations are always welcome in consultation with the Director. In the event of the loss or destruction of materials, parents may be billed for replacements. At the end of the school year, students may take their books and other materials home with them.

## **School Closing**

If class is cancelled because of severe weather the information will be sent out by email and posted on the Beth Israel Facebook page. We will also make every attempt to reach our families by phone. Please provide the school with the number(s) where you can be reached immediately before and during school hours (Sunday and/or Wednesday).

## **Discipline**

The Religious School is both a school and a religious experience. Attendance is a privilege, and a certain amount of decorum is necessary.

Each classroom has posted rules. Parents will be informed of these rules and the consequences of rule violations during the first week of school. Family support in this matter is essential.

If a student misbehaves in class, the teacher will issue a verbal warning. If the student fails to respond to the warning, the teacher may send that student to the school Director's office. Then:

*First time:* the school Director will work with the student to make *tshuvah* (repentance) and return to class.

*Second time:* the teacher or Director will contact the parent or guardian to discuss the issue and possible solutions.

*Third time:* The Director will call the parent or guardian, and the student will not be permitted to return to class unless accompanied by a parent or guardian, who must remain in class with student for one complete session.

We are committed to every one of our students. In the rare circumstance when discipline problems occur, we will work them out with the student and parents. Our philosophy is to never give up and to ultimately achieve a positive learning situation for everyone.

Please contact Rabbi Kassoff any time for guidance, support, or answers to your questions.

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