

EZRA HABONIM, the NILES TOWNSHIP JEWISH CONGREGATION (EHNTJC)

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL HANDBOOK

Ezra-Habonim, the Niles Township Jewish Congregation (EHNTJC) is an egalitarian Conservative / Reconstructionist Synagogue affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

The role of Jewish education is to provide students with the fundamental skills, information and values of our tradition that will enable them to create a meaningful place for themselves in the Jewish world and communities. Our teachers offer students a variety of viewpoints and perspectives on important religious issues.

We believe preparation is crucial to any instructional lesson, and require our faculty members to prepare lesson plans to suit the needs of their individual classes. The success of your child's experience depends on a working partnership between the school and the parents, as the family has always been the strength to help reinforce what is taught in the Religious School.

Our school includes children in Kindergarten through grade 10. Students in Kindergarten through grade 2 come one day a week on Shabbat, from 9:00-12:00pm. Students in grades 3-7 attend 2 days a week, Tuesday 4:15-6:15 and Shabbat from 9:00-12:15pm. Our Lehrhaus Program for students in grades 8 through 10 meets on Tuesday evenings from 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. The curriculum includes age appropriate instruction in Hebrew, Jewish values, Torah, prayers, Jewish texts, Israel, holidays and various other Judaic studies topics.

This handbook is designed to provide an overview of our Religious School policies and procedures. We are focused on assisting our students in developing a love for Jewish learning and Jewish identity.

EHNTJC RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

VISION



At EHNTJC Religious School, our students engage in meaningful Jewish learning and living. Students develop a strong Jewish identity, a sense of community, and the skills and knowledge to practice Judaism through the study of Torah, tradition, Mitzvot and the study of Hebrew. We provide a concerned, caring, compassionate community that infuses our children with spirituality and a positive Jewish identity.

MISSION

It is the mission of the EHNTJC Religious School to provide an engaging, nurturing environment for children and their families that fosters a life-long love of Jewish learning, Jewish identity, and spiritual growth.

Committed to excellence in Judaic study, ritual, and responsibility, the EHNTJC Religious School incorporates traditional and innovative educational experiences designed to encourage students to actively participate in Jewish life in the home, synagogue, and community.

EHNTJC RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

POLICIES AND GENERAL INFORMATION

(The policies contained in this handbook have been approved by the Religious Education Committee and are effective as of the date of this publication. The Committee reviews and revises these policies on a regular basis.)

Attendance Requirements

In order to best achieve its goal, a school must function with students who are alert, awake and ready to learn. We would like to encourage parents to ensure that their children get the most out of their learning experience and attend school regularly. Consistent attendance is essential to the success of our program and a primary factor in determining promotion to the next grade. The EHNTJC Religious Education Committee requires that students in Grades 3-7 attend at least 80% of weekdays and Saturdays, in order to advance to the next grade level. Students who are absent for any reason are responsible for making up class work. Irregular attendance interrupts class progress and cohesion.

We do understand that there are activities and circumstances in our students' lives that necessitate them missing school from time to time. When a student misses several classes, the teacher will contact the parents to set up a way that the student can stay current in his/her class. If a student needs to miss a significant number of classes, the parents will need to meet with the School Administrator to set up alternative arrangements for their child. If tutoring is required, tutorial sessions may not take place during regular Religious School hours.

We know that you support your child's Jewish education and will make every effort to bring your child to school. We do understand that there are activities and circumstances in our students' lives that necessitate them missing school from time to time. Please make sure to consult with the School Administrator if any special circumstances occur, and we will be happy to assist you.

Graduation from Religious School is contingent upon successful completion of five consecutive years (or equivalency) of Religious School including attendance in the entire 7th grade year. This policy is intended to promote students' success and confidence, not only at their B'nai Mitzvah, but also as educated Jews.

Late Arrival

Religious School begins at 9:00 a.m. on Shabbat, at 4:15 p.m. on weekdays. Students are required to be in their classrooms at the start of school according to the times listed. Parents are notified when children arrive late to school, and parents and the School Administrator will collectively design measures to correct any persistent problems.

Signing Out Early

We recognize that there may be situations when a student may have to leave school early. Students will need to bring a note from home requesting early dismissal, or a parent may notify a teacher in advance. For their own safety and well-being, students will not be allowed to wait outside. Parents picking up their children early may do so directly from the classroom.

Inclement Weather

In case of inclement weather it may be necessary to cancel school. In the event that school is cancelled, a bulk e-mail announcing the cancellation will be sent to Teachers and Parents. Additionally, it is possible to call the School Administrator. Decisions regarding school cancellations in general will be made by 2:00 PM on weekdays and 8:00 AM on Saturdays.

Emergency and Safety

If your child sustains a minor injury while at school, appropriate first aid treatment will be administered. In a case of a more serious injury, parents or the emergency contact/s listed on your child's religious school registration will be notified immediately. If immediate medical attention is needed at any time, the paramedics will be called. If your child becomes ill at school, we will contact you or the emergency contact/s listed on your Religious School registration form. Please notify the school if your child contracts any contagious diseases, (e.g.: chicken pox, head lice, pink eye). If your child has, or develops, any unique health requirements, it is your responsibility to inform the Religious School and Synagogue office. Please be sure all emergency contact information is up to date and accurate.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT/VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Our school's success stems from open and continuous communication with the parents of our students. The teachers, School Administrator, and members of the Religious Education Committee all look forward to working with parents to enhance our children's Jewish educational experience. We attempt to meet the individual learning needs of every child. Members of the school staff depend on parents to provide us with information that will aid in our task. The faculty will share evaluations of students in a regular and consistent fashion, and will contact parents promptly should any concerns arise.

Parent/Grandparent Volunteers

In addition to the work of the Religious Education Committee, the school benefits from parent volunteers. All parents are encouraged to become involved. There are many opportunities to help out with small projects, fundraisers, programs, and more. If there is a particular way you would like to get involved, don't hesitate to speak to a committee member or the School Administrator. It is precisely this active community involvement that gives our school its vibrant, participatory flavor. To volunteer, contact a Religious Education Committee member or the School Administrator.

Home School Connection

To instill our children with a love of Judaism, we need to help them have a positive Jewish experience outside of the classroom as well as in it. Families making a commitment to send their children to Religious School are also making a commitment as a family to do more than drop off and pick up. We need to help encourage them in Jewish rituals and activities with their families and communities in a stimulating warm way.

Homework Policy

Homework, while minimal, is assigned with two goals in mind: to reinforce material learned in class, and to open a dialogue with children's parents about what they are working on in class. Parents are encouraged to review their child's assignment folder or planner (depending upon the age), and to reinforce the teacher expectations. In addition to short assignments, we encourage all children to practice their Hebrew reading daily for at least ten minutes -- even if it is not explicitly assigned. Your child's teacher may also assign a long-term project that will be worked on both in and out of class. It is expected that all homework assignments will be completed when due. Failure to complete homework assignments will be reflected in a students' report card.

Report Cards

Report cards are a very important form of communication between the school and the home. Student evaluations will be distributed twice during the year – in January and at the end of the school year. Students are evaluated on attendance, class participation, completion of homework assignments, and knowledge of prayers, subject matter, etc. covered in their class. Parents are encouraged to communicate during the school year, and may request a conference with their child's teacher and/or the School Administrator.

Dress, Appearance, and Kippot

As a makom kadosh (holy place) devoted to the values of Torah, EHNTJC Religious School seeks to promote an atmosphere of kavod (respect) throughout our building. A student's attire should reflect respect for both the synagogue and for Jewish learning. Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of tz'niut, or modesty, in one's demeanor and dress.

In keeping with these values, students are required to dress appropriately for school, and are expected to maintain a neat, clean appearance during school hours. In keeping with our tradition, boys are required to wear a kippah (skull cap or head covering) at all times, and girls are also encouraged to wear them. However, **all students** must wear proper head coverings when on the bimah on Shabbat.

Children are expected to dress appropriately for Shabbat. Shorts, mini-skirts (without tights or leggings), blue jeans, flip-flops, and graphic tee shirts including those with messages or inappropriate language are not permitted. Warm weather clothing should be chosen with appropriate religious school attire in mind, and see thru clothing or clothing that exposes a student's midriff should not be worn.

Tzedakah (Righteous Acts)

The giving of Tzedakah is a mitzvah. Each Jew has the obligation to support others less fortunate than ourselves. One way we try to teach our students the importance of Tzedakah is to collect contributions at the beginning of the school day. Children may contribute any amount they choose as often as they choose. Throughout the school year, classes select an organization to receive the proceeds of their Tzedakah collection, and other Tzedakah projects may be initiated.

Tefillah

Tefillah (prayer) offers us an opportunity to connect with ourselves, with the community and with the G-d. Each grade will have an opportunity to participate in communal Tefillah each week. Our goal is to offer students the experience of prayer both as Keva (the established prayers of our tradition and Kavanah (the personal, spontaneous character of prayer). The Tefillah experience will also provide opportunities for our students to practice and experiment with the prayers they are mastering in the classroom.

Kashrut/Snacks

Kashrut represents the attempt to elevate and sanctify life -- a reminder to us to be a holy people, ethical and responsive to our fellow creatures. EHNTJC requires that all foods brought into the synagogue be kosher. Students are not allowed to bring food which was prepared at home. Also, unpackaged cookies, sandwiches, and pre-sliced fruits are **not** allowed in the synagogue. Students are allowed to bring water, however, no other beverages are allowed. Unpeeled fruit and pre-packaged snacks with the appropriate kashrut seal are allowed. The kashrut symbols (U) and (CRC) are acceptable kashrut endorsements. The school will provide a healthy, kosher snack each day of class. Snack time will be utilized to teach the blessings for various foods, as well as Hebrew vocabulary. All food brought into the school must be either dairy or parve and nut-free.

Electronics, Toys & Miscellaneous Equipment

The use of cell phones and other electronic equipment in any form (texting, calling, etc.) is forbidden during school time, unless requested by the teacher for the purpose of learning. Please contact the School Administrator or synagogue office should you need to speak with your child during school hours. No rollerblades, bats, balls, electronic games, MP3 players, toys or other similar equipment are permitted at school. Gum chewing is not permitted in the religious school. Any item extraneous to our purpose may be confiscated by the teacher or School Administrator for the duration of the school day. After the second incident, parents will be required to come in and retrieve the confiscated item.

Discipline

Guidelines have been approved by the Religious Education Committee in order to handle situations in which behavior becomes unmanageable. At the point when a child's behavior becomes too disruptive or destructive enough to impede their learning or the learning of other children, the teacher, parents and administration will take steps to ensure the learning experience is equitable for all students.

Please review the following **Behavior Expectations** policy section with your child. This policy pertains to all students in Kindergarten through grade 10.

BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS

We strive to create an environment in which positive behaviors are encouraged and reinforced. Cooperation between the school and home is an effective method to prevent a difficult disciplinary situation from arising. We ask parents to continually remind their children of proper and expected behavior in a synagogue. While we do not expect that we will encounter inappropriate behavior often, the following procedures have been approved by the Religious Education Committee to support and maintain a strong Jewish learning environment:

- When a teacher feels that a child's behavior is inappropriate (uncooperative, disruptive, bullying, teasing, physical altercation, etc.) and a hindrance to the other children in the class the child will be removed from the classroom. After a discussion among the teacher, student and School Administrator, the student will be allowed to return to class. *Please note that parents will be notified immediately of any type of physical altercation. They will be expected to pick up their child immediately
- If the same student continues to behave inappropriately, or if the behavior becomes worse, the child will again be removed from the class and sent to the School Administrator. Following a discussion with the teacher and student, the parents will be called, advised of the situation and be required to pick up the student at the end of the school day and meet with the School Administrator. At that time, the Brit Kavod (Student Behavior Agreement) will be reviewed and a new copy will be signed by the student and parent.
- Should the behavior persist, the child will again be removed from the classroom and the parents will be required to immediately pick up the student. Prior to being allowed to return to the school the parents will meet with the School Administrator and a member(s) of the Education Committee to discuss the situation and come to a mutual solution to the problem. All efforts will be made to work with the student and his/her family to resolve the behavior issues. However, should a resolution not be achieved the school reserves the right to remove the student from the school.

Each student is required to sign a Brit Kavod, or Behavior Contract. This contract will be used in the event of disruptive or otherwise negative behavior. If it becomes necessary, the School Administrator will review the contract with the child. Often, this is all it takes to have children return to their ordinarily good behavior. While we do not expect that this contract will solve all behavior issues, we do believe that it can be a useful tool to remind students what is expected of them.

BRIT KAVOD (STUDENT BEHAVIOR AGREEMENT)

- I understand that every teacher has the right to teach and that every student has the right to learn.
- I agree that no one has the right to violate this law.
- I understand that every student helps create a positive school environment and agrees to take responsibility for the following behavior:
 - To be in class on time
 - To be courteous and respectful to other students and teachers
 - To always use appropriate language
 - To respect the Synagogue and school property
 - To be prepared for and participate in class
 - To attend Hebrew School programs
 - To leave cell phones turned off and to leave all electronics (video games, CD players, iPods, Kindles, etc.) at home or turned off in my backpack. (The school is not responsible for electronics left in backpacks.)

I have read the EHNTJC Religious School Handbook and agree to abide by the guidelines as stated.

NAME _____ DATE _____
STUDENT

NAME _____ DATE _____
PARENT

NAME _____ DATE _____
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

Please review the Brit Kavod with your child. Space is provided for your child’s signature as well as your signature. Parents should return this document to the Religious School Administrator.