



Congregation ETZ CHAIM

creating meaningful Jewish experiences

Congregation Etz Chaim Religious School Parent Handbook 2026-2027

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Etz Chaim Religious School

Philosophy

The goal of the Etz Chaim Religious School is to instill a love of Judaism and a working knowledge of Jewish practice. Developing a sense of being a part of a community, a *kehilla*, is incorporated into all we do. We hope that by participating in our pre-kindergarten through 12th grade Religious School program, our students will feel a level of comfort within any synagogue setting throughout their lives and that their positive experiences in Religious School will start them on a path of lifelong Jewish learning.

Etz Chaim Religious School's curriculum teaches Hebrew decoding, *tefillah* (prayer), Torah *parshiot*, the importance of having a relationship with God, love of Israel, holiday rituals and practices. Our curriculum allows for each year to expand upon what was learned in previous years. We strive to provide learning opportunities for our students that are engaging, interactive, developmentally appropriate and meet the needs of every student including those identified with special needs. Family support of their child's religious education is critical to his/her success at Religious School and we encourage family participation through volunteer opportunities and parallel learning.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Our time with your child in Religious School is quite precious and we have a lot to accomplish in each session! We ask that Religious School be given the attention it deserves and please be diligent in being on time and sending your child to every class session. However, if your child is unable to attend class, please notify us by calling the Education Office at 770.977.3384.

TARDINESS

Our Religious School day on Sunday begins **promptly** at 9:15 am on Sunday and at 4:45 pm on Tuesday (see Carpool Drop Off on page 3.) Should you arrive after 4:45 pm on Tuesday or after 9:15 am on Sunday, please walk your child to the Education Office and we will walk him/her to their classroom.

EARLY RELEASE

Although we prefer that your child does not miss any part of the school day, should you need to pick up your child earlier than the scheduled dismissal time of 12:15 pm on Sunday and 6:45 pm, on Tuesday please adhere to the following procedure:

1. Enter the building through the main doors rather than the Education Wing.
2. Go directly to the Education Office to notify us that you will need to pick up your child. (please do not go to the child's classroom)
3. Sign the sign-out form.
4. The office *madrich* will get the child or children from the appropriate classroom.

If early release will occur on a consistent basis, please send in written notification of this change and we will plan to have your child meet you in the office to expedite the dismissal.

ABSENCES

In order for your child to receive the maximum benefit from his/her experience at Religious School – not to mention the investment you are making in their Jewish education – attendance at *every* session is optimal. We ask that you put a top priority on attendance at Religious School; however, we understand that sometimes absences are unavoidable. Please notify the Education Office and, if possible, your child's teacher in advance when you know that your child will not be in attendance, and please let them know when to anticipate your child returning to Religious School.

If the number of absences is such that the teacher and/or Religious School Director deem detrimental to your child's educational experience and progress, we will contact you to discuss the issues, offer our support, and make an action plan together to get them back on track with the class's progress, if necessary. This may include online learning sessions or homework assignments to keep your child current with his/her class.

ILLNESS

In determining whether your child is well enough to attend Religious School please refer to your public or private school's policy regarding illness.

ILLNESS DURING SCHOOL

Should your child report that he/she is not feeling well at school, we will assess the situation as it occurs. We will look for changes in behavior, how long he/she reports feeling poorly and take a temperature reading, if necessary. We will phone you to inform you of the situation and to help us determine if your child needs to be retrieved from school.

DAY TO DAY POLICIES

BAGS, BOOKS AND MATERIALS

PreK, Kindergarten, and First Graders should arrive at school with a school bag and water bottle. All other children should bring a water bottle with them.

CARPOOL

DROP-OFF

SUNDAY - Please circle the building when you arrive and drop off at the portico at the doors to the Education Wing. Classroom instruction begins at 9:15 am; your child should be dropped off no later than 9:10 am.

TUESDAY – Please circle the building and drop off your child at the back door to the Hammer-Tritt Social Hall. The door will be open at 4:15 pm and our security officer will be there to greet everyone. If the back door is not open when you arrive, please drive back to the front door to drop off your child.

PICK UP

SUNDAY – Pick up will take place at the back door of the Radow Sanctuary. Circle the building and form two lines as you approach the back of the building. A teacher or madrich/madricha will be out to assist you and take the names of your child(ren) or carpool members.

TUESDAY – Pick up will take place at the portico at the doors to the Education Wing. Please circle the building and form two lines under the portico.

Pick up time on Sunday is at 12:15 pm and on Tuesday at 6:45 pm. **In an effort to expedite the time it takes to load all cars, we ask that you arrive at least 10 minutes before dismissal and wait in the carpool line for your child.** Arriving this early helps us gather the names of the child(ren) you are picking up and the order in which the children will be released, which in turn helps the process flow more quickly. *Once your car is loaded, remember to follow the lead of the police officer in pulling away from the carpool line. For the safety of all students, we like to send all loaded cars away at the same time, so coordination is necessary. Please be patient while waiting to leave carpool.*

Should you choose **not** to utilize the carpool line for pick up on Sunday morning, please park in the lower parking lot by the Education Wing entrance and come into the synagogue **via the front door**. Join us in the Radow Sanctuary for Havdalah and we will then release your child to you there. ***Note that parking will not be available in the church parking lot (including the spaces adjacent to the soccer field) on Sunday as those spaces are reserved for the church.*** We strongly recommend that families carpool as much as possible and would be happy to connect you to other families who live in your area or whose children go to the same school as yours.

CELL PHONES

Cell phone usage in Religious School will be restricted to classroom activities as directed by the classroom teacher. When your child has his/her phone in school, we will ask that it be put into their pocket, backpack or handbag and set to silent. **Please reinforce this policy with your children and refrain from communicating with them during Religious School hours unless it's an emergency.**

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STUDENTS

At Etz Chaim Religious School, we feel that all students should be committed to learning in a safe environment, while exhibiting respect for each other and all staff members. These reflect the values of Congregation Etz Chaim and *Pirkei Avot*.

Expectations of Etz Chaim Religious School:

- Respect yourself, others, and the environment:
 - Always speak kindly of and to others.
 - Respect others' privacy and property.
 - Include others in play and conversation.
- Do your personal best.
- Be prepared for class.
- Exhibit *Kavod* (respect), *Chesed* (kindness), Collaboration, *Rachmanot* (compassion/ empathy), Perseverance, Curiosity, and Leadership.
- Be truthful with peers and faculty.
- **Congregation Etz Chaim is a *makom kodesh*, a holy place. It is important to act and dress accordingly when in the building and on the grounds. Proper dress reflects our environment. To that end, please help your child make good decisions when dressing for school and use the public school guidelines concerning appropriate clothing. All males will be required to wear a *kippah* when in the building and females may do so if they choose.**

BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES

We are aware that mistakes can be made and will utilize those as teachable moments and as a faculty, our teachers will take the time to teach and demonstrate appropriate behavior. When necessary, teachers will use strategies to redirect, instruct, and help students reflect on more appropriate behavior. We will guide students to repair the harm caused to another student and /or the community.

If a student does not learn to correct their behavior after strategies have been implemented, the teacher will reach out to the Director of the Religious School for further support. Behaviors that would require this contact include, but are not limited to:

- Teasing/bullying (verbal, physical, or cyber)
- Physical aggression
- Inappropriate physical touch
- Endangering the physical and emotional well-being of other students and adults
- Harassment (jokes, threats, demeaning statements)
- Defacing property
- Consistent use of inappropriate language

After the Director of the Religious School has been informed, parents will be notified so they can be a part of the conversation to be a partner to gain any insight they may provide and in determining appropriate and logical consequences.

COMMUNICATION POLICIES

As partners in your child's education, effective communication is extremely important. Connecting with teachers, madrichim and the administrative staff is one of our primary goals of the school. To that end, there are different manners in which communication will take place:

TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Teachers will be communicating with parents around the beginning of each month to inform you of the topics that have been learned and what will be introduced in the coming month. In addition, we will create a WhatsApp group specifically for your class for reminders from the teacher.

DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

At the beginning of the year, you will be asked to join a WhatsApp for your child's class, which includes you in an "announcements" section that will be used by the director for reminders and notifications, such as school closing, one-time carpool changes, inclement weather updates, etc.

Please feel free to contact the Religious School Director at any time regarding questions or concerns you may have about your child's progress and/or the program in general. We also value your input and welcome comments or suggestions that help us identify the things we do well and/or areas we could improve.

FACEBOOK

Etz Chaim Religious School has a Facebook Page for sharing announcements and featuring photos of our students at work. Please "Like" the page and check frequently to catch a glimpse of what is going on each day, for reminders, and announcements on closings for inclement weather. Remember to indicate on your registration form, whether or not you give permission for us to share photos of your child on social media.

WEBSITE

Please note that we are working hard to keep the website information up-to-date. You can use this valuable tool to find all forms, flyers, calendars, etc. that you may need. Please let us know if you ever find something missing or incorrect as we will be happy to update.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

In the case of inclement weather, we may or may not follow the Cobb County Public School closing schedule for inclement weather on Tuesdays and will decide whether to cancel school by 3:00 pm on Tuesdays and 8:00 am on Sunday mornings. Look for a WhatsApp announcement as well as an email for information on our decision. You can also look at the Etz Chaim Religious School Facebook page for confirmation of closing.

SNACKS

To accommodate the various nutritional and health needs of our students we will follow this snack policy: Your family has two options for snack on both Sunday and Tuesday. You may elect to pack a snack for your child(ren) or you may choose to put money on a snack account. At the snack bar, a variety of snacks from fruit and veggies to cheese will be available and pizza will also be made available on Tuesdays. All profits made from snack bar sales will go directly to the Religious School to add to our fundraising efforts.

When sending something from home, we request that all snacks be fresh fruits, veggies or a pre-packaged snack that has a hecksher, if possible and never meat. Feel free to package your own small bag from a larger bag you have at home, but we request that the original bag have a hecksher. **WE ARE A NUT FREE SCHOOL, INCLUDING PEANUTS AND TREE NUTS! PLEASE CHECK ALL LABELS CAREFULLY AND REFRAIN FROM SENDING IN ITEMS (INCLUDING GRANOLA BARS) WITH ANY NUT PRODUCT!** A snack containing nuts will be sent back home and your child will be provided with a snack from the snack bar. We will send home a payment reminder to cover the cost of this snack.

Snack bar is a pre-paid service, you will need to set up an account using the following path: https://etzchaimatl.shulcloud.com/form/RS_Snack_Prepay26.27 The cost per snack continues to be \$1 per snack and snacks will be available both days.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Your partnership is vital to the success of our school and there are many ways you can help. We are always in need of: room parents, snack helpers (pick up pizza, take student information, and pass out snack), and whole school program volunteers. Look for a SignUp Genius request to sign up for snack opportunities. Parents of 6th and 7th graders might also be needed for field trip transportation. Help is also needed in the library on Sunday mornings. If you have a special talent, artist, woodworker, sewing, please consider sharing those skills with us. We appreciate your support.

SHABBAT MORNING

ATTENDANCE AT SHABBAT SERVICES

Having your family at Shabbat morning services fosters both a sense of community and a sense of comfort in knowing how the service runs. Being comfortable with the synagogue service will not only enhance your child's Jewish education but also add to each participant's confidence as a Jew. **Shake It Up Shabbat** will once again take place in the Radow sanctuary from 9:30 am – noon on five Shabbatot throughout the year. These Shabbat services are intended for the whole family. All students will have an opportunity to participate, as they choose, and will sign up during Religious School for prayers in which they would like to participate. The dates for Shake It Up Shabbat are October 17, January 2, February 6, March 27, and April 17.

NEW THIS YEAR! We have created a program specifically for our athletes who can't make it to regular services. Team Shabbat (former name, different program) will be held two Shabbat mornings from 8am – 9 am. Come in your uniform for a quick service and some nourishment before you head out to your games, matches, or practices. Team Shabbat will take place in the chapel on August 8 and February 6.

Religious School students in grades 2 – 6 must attend Shake it up Shabbat or a typical Shabbat morning service each year equal to their grade number. For example, 2nd graders are required to come twice a year on Shabbat morning. Sixth graders must attend at least one more "regular" Shabbat and it's recommended they attend a Bar or Bat Mitzvah service.

Introducing.... The Avodah (Worship) Award. Students who reach the designated number of services throughout their Religious School journey will be honored with a special gift at their Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration. Along the way, we'll track each student's participation, celebrate their commitment to our community, and recognize all participants at the end of every school year.

Join us as we make worship, connection, and community an exciting part of every student's Jewish journey!

We also offer the following programs for families with younger children:

SING-ALONG SHABBAT

Sing-Along Shabbat is our morning program for families with preschool age and younger. This brief service is filled with songs and dances and is the perfect way for families to spend their morning and your children will enjoy this age-appropriate experience. Feel free to stay with your child or drop off if you prefer. Sing-Along Shabbat meets in rooms 5, 7, 9, & 11 on dates to be determined. Refer to the Etz Chaim website calendar for specific dates.

BABYSITTING

Babysitting is available for the youngest children every Shabbat morning when Shake it up Shabbat is not in session. You can find babysitting in rooms 1 & 3. A reservation is not necessary.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

CHALUTZIM, CHAVERIM & GESHER

Children are encouraged to participate in our Chalutzim, Chaverim, and Gesher programs. These youth programs are social opportunities designed to foster relationships between our Etz Chaim youth. They are wonderful complements to the experiences that your child will have in Religious School and will help expand their Etz Chaim community. Chalutzim is designed for children in grades K – 2, Chaverim is designed for children in grades 3 – 5 and Gesher is for students in grades 6 – 8.