



MENSCH ACADEMY

The B'nai Mitzvah Experience at HEA

MAZEL TOV on your journey to becoming a *b'nai mitzvah* at the Hebrew Educational Alliance. We look forward to celebrating with you and your family.

At HEA, we strive to elevate *b'nai mitzvah* into a transformative rite of passage to initiate young adolescents into emerging adulthood better understanding themselves, their roles in their families, their belonging in the Jewish community, and their purpose in the larger world. Our mission is to partner with families in the goal of making *mensch*es out of our children.

We are strongly encouraging all families who plan to celebrate their b'nai mitzvah at HEA to take advantage of the full Mensch Academy program. It is our expectation that all b'nai mitzvah students (whether they receive their Jewish education through HEA, Jewish day school, or elsewhere) will participate in this program. We aim to foster a shared experience of comradery and community among the students and their families.

Through the detailed program we have designed for our families, we think you will find a meaningful and clear process to best prepare you and your student for the launch into the world as an emerging Jewish adolescent.

Jenn Zucker, HEA's B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator, works closely with the clergy to provide individualized attention to our families. If you have any questions or concerns, Jennifer is your first and best point of contact. We look forward to supporting you every step of the way.

With many blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rabbi Salomon Gruenwald".

Rabbi Salomon Gruenwald: SGruenwald@HEAdenver.org

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Zucker".

Jennifer Zucker, Asst. Director of Education & B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator: jenn@HEAdenver.org

What to Expect from HEA Mensch Academy:

Mensch Academy is a multi-year experience that for most students begins in 4th grade. Students are grouped in cohorts by Hebrew year (which in nearly all cases tracks with the school year). If you would prefer your child be in a different cohort, please discuss this with us and we will do our best to accommodate your family.

Year 1: 4th Grade

- B'nai Mitzvah Mini-Retreat to introduce students to their cohort
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date requested and confirmed
- Hebrew level evaluated and Hebrew Learning Plan created
- B'Nai Mitzvah 101 – What to Expect meeting for parents

Year 2: 5th Grade

- Cohort gathering for students and families
- Individual family meetings with the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator
 - Setting an individualized plan for your child and family
 - Help guide family with choices related to Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Year 3: 6th grade

- 8 sessions of Mensch Academy
 - Moving Traditions B'nai Mitzvah curriculum aimed at helping students and their parents reflect on growing into early adulthood. Three sessions will include parents.
- Service-learning volunteer outing
- 6th Grade Retreat with Rabbi Gruenwald
- Hebrew School at HEA (if needed, based on Hebrew Learning Plan)
- Tutoring with HEA approved tutor begins one year before bar/bat mitzvah
- Attendance at 26 Shabbat services over the course of 2 years prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah (including 3 “Taste of Shabbat” cohort gatherings)

Mitzvah Year: 7th grade

- 8 sessions of Mensch Academy (3 family sessions)
- “Taste of Shabbat” (3 required *Shabbatot* at HEA to experience services as a group)
- Individual student meetings with HEA clergy
- Your BIG DAY!
- Support others in the cohort by attending their *b'nai mitzvah* ceremonies

Post-Mitzvah Year: 8th grade

- Debrief of the experience with B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator and creation of Jewish Engagement Plan
- Post Mitzvah 8th grade retreat (tentative).

Key Components of the Mensch Academy Experience:

Individualized Process

- Our B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator, working in conjunction with the clergy and synagogue staff, is dedicated to creating a *b'nai mitzvah* journey for you and your family that meets your individual needs, challenges, hopes, and goals. We are dedicated to walking with you and your family to create a journey to and beyond the *simcha* (happy occasion) in a way that feels appropriate for your student and family.

Cohort Building

- By beginning elements of the program in 4th grade, we hope to build a strong sense of friendship and support amongst students and families. Parent involvement, social gatherings, and the 6th grade retreat are an important element in creating a community experience for our families. We urge you to take advantage of this opportunity to connect with others and build lifelong friendships through your involvement at HEA.

Personal Growth and Development

- At HEA, we aim to partner with you in the goal of raising your child to maturity, equipped to confront the challenges of life. Drawing on the field of positive psychology and Jewish values, this program will help *b'nai mitzvah* develop their core character strengths and virtues with the guidance of their parents and adults in their lives.

Meetings with Clergy

- Clergy meetings will focus on building a relationship with the students, imparting Jewish wisdom about growing up, and discussing Torah portion and writing *divrei Torah* (words of Torah).

Continuity after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah

- After completing an HEA *bar/bat mitzvah*, we will guide our students in remaining connected to Judaism and the community through education, youth group, confirmation, cultivating spirituality, and continuing acts of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).