



# Congregation ETZ CHAIM

*creating meaningful Jewish experiences*

## **Congregation Etz Chaim Religious School Parent Handbook 2018-2019**

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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 kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> 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 *parashiot*, 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, in the event that your child is unable to attend class, please notify us by calling the Education Office at 770.977.3384.

## ***TARDINESS***

Our religious school day begins **promptly** at 9:15 am on Sunday and 4:45 pm on Tuesday (see Carpool Drop Off on page 3.) Should you arrive after 4:45 pm on Tuesday, please walk your child into the building and sign him/her in on the appropriate forms in the Education Office. This will not be necessary on Sundays, as there will be carpool volunteers who can issue those forms to your child.

## ***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 – his/her 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 Education Director deem it 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' progress, if necessary.

## ***ILLNESS***

In determining whether your child is well enough to attend Religious School please refer to your public school policy regarding illness. A written note should be sent upon your child's return to school.

## ***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***

Every child should arrive at school with a school bag, pencils and any other supplies the teacher has requested. Hebrew workbooks may be sent home periodically for homework and/or as a way for your child to keep you informed of his/her success. Please make sure that this book is returned to school each day.

## ***CARPOOL***

### **DROP OFF**

***SUNDAY*** - Please circle the building when you arrive and drop off under the awning at the end of 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 at the back entrance to the social hall where the police officer will be stationed. The building will be open at 4:15 pm and children who arrive anytime before 4:40 will stay in the social hall where they can take advantage of the snack bar, work on homework or socialize. Madrichim will be monitoring the social hall during this time. Instruction begins at 4:45 pm and children should arrive no later than 4:40 pm.

### **PICK UP**

***BOTH DAYS*** - When picking up your child or your carpool, circle the building and form two lines at the back of the synagogue. An orange cone will be placed where the first car should stop. There will be either a parent volunteer or madrich/madricha to assist you.

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 carpool madrichim 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 on Sunday morning, please park in the lower parking lot by the Education Wing entrance and come into the synagogue **via the front door** to retrieve your child from the lobby. Be sure to let your child know to meet you there and send in a written notification to the teacher as well. ***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.

## **RAINY DAY CARPOOL PROCEDURE**

In the event of rain, we will run pick up under the awning at the end of the Education Wing in a similar manner to the way we release every other day. Please note that carpool may take a little longer when it is raining.

## ***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.

## ***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 at the beginning of each month to inform you of the topics that will be introduced in the coming month. In addition, teachers will begin using

REMIND, a text only method of communication, to reach out to you with quick questions of the day to spark conversation with your child(ren) and/or to send you reminders. You will also be reminded of important upcoming dates in the Religious School. Your teacher will request your cell phone number at the beginning of the year to keep you connected. There is no way to reply to these texts and the teacher is the only holder of the information so you will not be inundated with texts from other parents.

Children in grades Kindergarten through Fifth will be given a two pocket folder that will be used to send home important notes and materials. Parents should also use this folder to send notes to the teacher. **Plan to check this folder daily.** Although we will make every effort to send things electronically for the sake of our environment, we realize that some things will need to be sent home in a paper format, such as assessment notes, conference notes or report cards.

## **DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION COMMUNICATION**

Each week, the Director of Education will send home a brief Mail Chimp email of important reminders for families.

Please feel free to contact the Director of Education 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.

## **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.

## ***DRESS CODE***

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.

## ***INCLEMENT WEATHER***

In the case of inclement weather, tune in to WSB radio (AM 750 and FM 95.5), WSB (channel 2), or WXIA (channel 11) for information regarding school closings, or look for Mail Chimp from the Department of Education. We may follow the Cobb County Public School closing schedule for inclement weather on Tuesdays and will decide whether to cancel school by 8 am on Sunday mornings. You will be notified of a Tuesday cancellation via Mail Chimp or the Religious School Facebook page. If the decision is made to cancel religious school on Sundays, we will update the outgoing voicemail message at the number 770.977.3384 by 8:00 am as well as send out a mass email to notify you of the change.

## ***SNACKS***

In order to accommodate the various nutritional and health needs of our students we will follow the following 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 send them with money to purchase snacks at the snack bar. At the snack bar, a variety of snacks from fruit and veggies to crackers will be available. All profits made from snack bar sales will go directly to the Religious School to add to our fundraising efforts.

When sending in 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.

The snack cart will be available in the Education wing lobby on Sunday mornings and in the Hammer-Chotiner-Tritt Social Hall on Tuesday before Religious School. Students may purchase snacks when they arrive and hold onto it until their designated snack time. Children will be permitted to eat their snacks in the classrooms on Sunday mornings and on Tuesdays at the teacher's discretion.

You may prepay for snacks by sending in a minimum of \$10 that we will hold in an account for your child(ren). Forms will be sent home to you before school starts and can be found on our website ([www.etzchaim.net](http://www.etzchaim.net))

# 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 his/her Jewish education but also add to each participant's confidence as a Jew. ***Religious School students in grades 2 – 6 must attend 40 Shabbat services over their 2-6 grade experiences, in either the main sanctuary or in Junior Congregation.*** When your child arrives at Etz Chaim to attend Jr. Congregation or services in the main sanctuary, go first to the chapel to sign in. There will be a book outside the chapel containing a sign in sheet for each student so we can track attendance. Each student should place a sticker by his/her name for that session. As a last follow up, children are welcome to come to the Education Office on Sunday morning to sign in for the day before. As your family journeys through your child's Religious School education on the way to a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, we encourage you to take advantage of the following options offered for all age groups:

## ***JUNIOR CONGREGATION***

Junior Congregation for 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> graders and is held two Shabbat mornings each month from 10:15 am – 11:45 am in the Levine Chapel. Please refer to the Etz Chaim website for specific dates. Lauren Chernau will coordinate and lead Jr. Congregation along with our USYers. Jr. Congregation will in part, mirror our regular service (at a pace appropriate for this age group,) but will also teach the children songs, share stories and discuss holidays. We recommend that parents attend with their child, so that the family can learn and pray together but that is not a requirement.

## ***CAMP SHABBAT***

Camp Shabbat is our morning program for students who are three years old - Kindergarten. We include age appropriate Jewish games as well as a service that will meet the needs of this age group. Camp Shabbat meets two times per month (on a scheduled basis) from 10:30 am – noon in classrooms 5 & 7. Please refer to the Etz Chaim website for a list of dates that Camp Shabbat will take place. This information will also be included in the weekly eblast, when appropriate.



## ***BABYSITTING***

Babysitting is available for the youngest children every Shabbat morning during services in rooms 10 & 12. Children ages birth – 2 years are welcome for the entire morning and children 3 years - preK are welcome before or after Camp Shabbat.

## ***ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES***

### **CHALUTZIM, ATID & KADIMA**

Children are encouraged to participate in our Chalutzim, ATID and Kadima programs. These youth programs, run by our Youth Director, Steven Resnick ([stevenrobert@etzchaim.net](mailto:stevenrobert@etzchaim.net)) are social, spiritual and recreational. They are wonderful complements to the experiences that your child will have in Religious School and will help to deepen the relationships they have built. The Chalutzim group is designed for children in grades K – 2, ATID is designed for children in grades 3 – 5 and Kadima is for children in grades 6 – 8.