

**THE UNITED JEWISH CENTER**

**BAR/BAT MITZVAH**  
**HANDBOOK**



**THE UNITED JEWISH CENTER**

**141 Deer Hill Avenue**

**Danbury, Connecticut 06810**

**Telephone: (203) 743-1180**

**Email: [EdDir@unitedjewishcenter.org](mailto:EdDir@unitedjewishcenter.org)**

**[www.unitedjewishcenter.org](http://www.unitedjewishcenter.org)**

# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
A Message from Our Rabbi, Cantor, and Director of Education.....	1
Core Values of the UJC Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program.....	2
Important Administrative Information.....	3
Bar/Bat Mitzvah Shabbat Services.....	5
Requirements for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.....	8
Timeline.....	10
<i>Oneg Shabbat / Kiddush / Extended Kiddush</i> .....	11
Holding a Reception at the UJC / House Rules.....	14

## A Message from Our Rabbi, Cantor, and Director of Education

Celebrating a bar/bat mitzvah is a family journey. We at the United Jewish Center are honored to share this journey with you and your child. Together we will link the sacred act of “going up” to the Torah with the spiritual process of growing in faithfulness to God and community.

Bar/bat mitzvah celebrates the sanctity of family and acknowledges that a child has now ascended to religious adulthood within our tradition. A bar/bat mitzvah binds past and future generations, affirming faith in our tradition and in God.

Our goal at the United Jewish Center is to create a bar/bat mitzvah program that is a spiritual and religious experience, connecting child and family to God, the Jewish people, and to each other.

*Rabbi Stefan Tiwy*

*Cantor Penny M. Kessler*

*Daryl Bain, Director of Education*

# **Core Values of the UJC Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program**

## **1. Nurturing environment**

The goal of our bar/bat mitzvah program is to be nurturing and caring. We strive to be gentle, kind, considerate, patient, and sensitive to our students and parents. We want to create an environment that enhances the spiritual and religious experience of the bar/bat mitzvah.

## **2. Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement is key to the success of our program and the entire bar/bat mitzvah experience. We encourage and nurture the involvement of parents with the students.

## **3. Relationship Development**

The continuous involvement of our professional staff with student and parents afford the opportunity for relationship development. Lasting bonds are created between student, parent, rabbi, cantor, director of education, and teachers during the course of each student's progress through our program.

## **4. Excellence in Preparation**

We want our children to achieve a very high level of excellence. We want them to do the very best they can and encourage each child to participate to the full extent of their ability. The better prepared our b'nei mitzvah, the more positive the experience.

## **5. Putting God on the Guest List**

We emphasize the religious and spiritual significance of bar/bat mitzvah. We want to connect the child to Judaism, family, Israel, and the Jewish people.

## **Important Administrative Information**

### **Scheduling the Bar/Bat Mitzvah**

Each year, the bar/bat mitzvah dates are set for our 5th-grade students. The process begins with a letter from the director of education. Dates are requested/assigned based on the date and month of the student's birthday and the synagogue calendar. If two or more students share the same birthday, a lottery will be held to see who will receive that particular date. No bar/bat mitzvah dates are scheduled during the months of July and August, and other dates may be blocked out for various scheduling purposes.

### **Financial Responsibility**

The family must be current and remain current with all financial obligations to the UJC as per the UJC Board of Trustees policy: "90 days prior to a bar/bat mitzvah or confirmation, a member family must be in good standing with all tuition and fees paid. Should this not occur, training will cease and the event will be removed from the schedule and the student not be allowed to participate." This includes membership dues, religious school fees, and building rental fees (if applicable).

### **The Shofar**

Your child's picture, along with a brief biography of your child, will appear in the UJC newsletter, the Shofar. At the 6th-grade brunch, you will be instructed on the necessary information to email the director of education for inclusion in the Shofar. Picture taking will be arranged by the director of education. If your child misses picture day, you may take a similar photograph at the UJC on your own.

### **Bimah Flowers**

Flowers for the bimah and/or *Oneg Shabbat* and *Kiddush* can be ordered from any florist. All deliveries must be made before 3 pm on Friday afternoon (when the UJC office closes). Do not use fragrant flowers on the bimah, including lilies. Baskets of food or other items to be donated to a non-profit organization may be placed on the bimah in lieu of flowers. The family is responsible for ensuring that bimah decorations are moved to the appropriate bimah for the Shabbat morning service (if applicable) and that the flowers and/or baskets are removed immediately following the Shabbat morning service. It is not our custodians' responsibility to take baskets to the various non-profit organizations.

## **Location of Services**

The family may hold the service in either the Dick Chapel or in the Malino Sanctuary. The Dick Chapel seats a maximum of 125 people. The choice should be made one month before the service in consultation with the director of education.

## **Photography and Videotaping**

Videography and photography may be done only from a static position in the center rear of the sanctuary and back window corner of the chapel. Flash photography is never permitted, and guests may not video or take photographs during any service.

## **Donations and Funds**

In honor of and in gratitude for their assistance in helping your child and family get to this special day, it is appropriate to consider contributions to the rabbi's discretionary fund and cantor's discretionary fund. The UJC also has other funds worthy of your consideration for additional contributions.

There are many other ways to heighten awareness and sensitivity to others in need at this time of great joy for you and your family. A few examples are:

1. Instead of floral centerpieces, place a single flower or balloon with a card reading: "In lieu of flowers, a donation has been made to (your charity/non-profit of choice)."
2. Instead of bimah flowers, baskets can be created with items to be donated to local charities/non-profits.
3. In your invitation, suggest that a can of non-perishable food be brought to the synagogue to be given to the St. James Food Pantry.
4. Donate a certain percentage of monetary gifts to your family's favorite charity/non-profit organization.
5. MAZON, a Jewish organization devoted to feeding hungry people, recommends that 3% of the total cost of your celebration be given to a food bank or social service agency ([www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)).

For further reading material on the bar/bat mitzvah experience, please ask the rabbi or cantor.

## **Bar/Bat Mitzvah Shabbat Services**

### **Erev Shabbat (Shabbat Eve)**

Shabbat evening services begin at 7 pm and conclude around 8 pm.

The bar/bat mitzvah family leads the congregation in the candle blessing, *Kiddush* (blessing over grape juice), and *Motzi* (blessing over challah) during the service. There are alternative readings for parents in interfaith families.

The rabbi and cantor reserve the right to permit an additional honoring event (e.g. baby naming) during any Shabbat evening service.

Please arrive 15 minutes prior to the service to make final arrangements.

### **Shabbat Shacharit (Shabbat Morning)**

Shabbat morning services begin at 10 am and conclude around 12 pm.

The bar/bat mitzvah leads the service with the rabbi and cantor, reads/chants from the Torah and Haftarah, and delivers a *d'var Torah*.

The bar/bat mitzvah should wear a *kippah* (skullcap) and *tallit* (prayer shawl) and dress appropriately for Shabbat. Jewish men and women coming to the *bimah* for an *aliyah* or other honor are strongly encouraged to wear a *kippah* and a *tallit*.

The rabbi and cantor reserve the right to permit an additional honoring event (e.g. baby naming) during any Shabbat morning service.

Please arrive 15 minutes prior to the service and meet the rabbi and cantor in the Conference Room (adjacent to the rabbi's study).

### **Honors at Shabbat Morning Services**

We encourage family members to participate in the service. Jewish parents are encouraged to recite the blessings before and after the Torah reading (*aliyah*). Parents, friends, and other Jewish relatives may also read from the Torah and read passages from the siddur (prayer book).

Four *aliyot* are available to the bar/bat mitzvah family plus a fifth *aliyah* for the bar/bat mitzvah. A maximum of two people may be called to the Torah for each of the four *aliyot*, allowing up to eight people to be so honored.

Other honors for family members may include opening/closing the ark, and lifting/dressing the Torah (for Jewish family members and friends).

Please ask the rabbi or cantor for clarification or assistance with any of these honors.

### **Roles for Interfaith Family Members**

We recognize that many of our families have relatives – including parents, spouses, partners, etc. – who are of different faiths.

During a bar/bat mitzvah, interfaith family members may:

- accompany the Jewish partner on the bimah during the Torah reading
- accompany the Jewish partner during the Torah passing
- open and close the ark
- read appropriate passages from the siddur as chosen in consultation with the rabbi and cantor
- place the *tallit* on their child's shoulders
- read texts prepared for interfaith family members before the evening candle blessing, and before and after the morning Torah blessings.

### **The Parent(s) Speech**

Parents are invited to address their child on the bimah during the Shabbat morning service. This provides an opportunity within the worship service for parents to express their pride, love, and support for their child in terms of this Jewish milestone. It is the time to offer a few words (3 minutes or less) of advice or hope for the child in connection with their Jewish heritage. While we are certainly proud of our children for their secular (i.e., school, extracurricular activities) accomplishments, this speech should focus on the pride in your child's achievement during this Jewish experience.

Your speech should address one or more of these questions:

- Why is this Jewish experience an important day for your family?
- What does this occasion mean in regard to your child's commitment to the Jewish faith, people, heritage, and future?
- How proud are you of your child's bar/bat mitzvah accomplishment?
- What Jewish values or messages do you hope your child will remember from this experience and this day?
- Why is it important that your child continue to learn, grow, and develop as a member of the Jewish community?

If you have any questions, please ask the rabbi or cantor.

### **Shabbat Morning Usher Guidelines**

A lovely way to honor a friend is to invite them to serve as an usher for Shabbat morning services. All ushers must be adults, and at least one usher must be a member of the United Jewish Center.

Ushers must arrive at the UJC at least fifteen minutes prior to the beginning of the service.

Ushers' responsibilities include:

- as worshipers arrive, handing out siddurim (open to the correct page), the bar/bat mitzvah program (if applicable), and the *Chumash* (the book containing the text of the Torah)
- keeping track of the page the service is on (ideally) so they may inform late arriving guests of the correct page
- encouraging guests to sit towards the front
- reminding guests not to take pictures or videos during the service.

The usher should stay at the entrance of the chapel or sanctuary for approximately 30 minutes. The usher may then sit down while keeping an eye on the entrance for latecomers.

A basic first-aid kit is available in the office. In the event of serious injury or illness, call 911, and request assistance from any physicians in the congregation.



## **Requirements for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah**

We expect our students to work their hardest and do the best they can. The UJC is not a “cookie cutter,” one-size-fits-all program, and the rabbi and cantor reserve the right to adjust students’ participation in the Shabbat morning service when they become a bar/bat mitzvah. This includes length of Torah and Haftarah, whether they are chanted or read, and whether they are read in Hebrew or English.

### **The Role of the Rabbi, Cantor, and Director of Education**

The rabbi, cantor, and director of education work as a team to support our students and families as they go through the bar/bat mitzvah program.

The rabbi helps the student understand his/her Torah portion. Under the rabbi’s guidance, the student will write a *d’var Torah*, a lesson about the Torah portion, how the student understands its teachings, and how those teachings relate to the student’s life and experiences. The rabbi periodically teaches the 7th grade class.

The cantor guides the student through learning to read and sing the prayers and Torah and Haftarah readings. The cantor and student explore the unique experience of becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. The cantor periodically teaches the 7th grade class.

The director of education leads our religious school and helps parents navigate the logistics of the bar/bat mitzvah experience.

### **Participation**

In addition to leading parts of the Shabbat morning service in either Hebrew or English, our students normatively chant a section of the Torah portion as well as a section of the Haftarah (a selection from the one of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible that is read after the Torah reading).

## **Service Attendance Requirements**

Bar/bat mitzvah students are expected to attend a minimum of thirteen Shabbat services prior to the celebration of becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. A minimum of seven must be the Shabbat morning service; the remaining six may be either Friday evening or Saturday morning services.

Attendance at other synagogues' Shabbat services as well as camp services during the summer can be used for up to two of the required Shabbat services.

Students may begin attending services to meet these requirements twelve months prior to the bar/bat mitzvah. It is the family's responsibility to keep track of service attendance.

We urge parents, older siblings, grandparents, or adult relatives to accompany bar/bat mitzvah students to Shabbat services. A child's becoming a bar/bat mitzvah is a family experience. Attending our Shabbat services prepares parents for the Shabbat worship that their children will be leading. Also, attendance signals your belief that this process is important and that you are equally invested in this experience.

## **The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Project**

With the guidance of the rabbi, cantor, and director of education, families take on a mitzvah project during the student's 7th grade. In addition to regularly performing home *mitzvot* (e.g. committing to lighting Shabbat candles on Friday evenings), choices for mitzvah projects may include working on a project with a non-profit organization (such as a local homeless shelter, a nursing home, an animal welfare organization). Students will present a brief explanation of their mitzvah projects as part of their *d'var Torah* during the Shabbat morning service.

## **Post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program**

Lifelong Jewish learning is a deeply held value of the Reform Movement. We expect our students to continue their Jewish studies through confirmation (10th grade), when they will confirm their faith and their status as adult Jews. Continuing through 10th grade (and beyond in private study with the rabbi and/or cantor should they wish) helps students develop a moral compass based on Jewish values as they move through adolescence.

## Timeline

### **12 months before the bar/bat mitzvah:**

- students and parents start attending seven Shabbat morning and six Shabbat evening services
- students and parents choose their family's mitzvah project
- ensure all synagogue fees are current

### **9-12 months before the bar/bat mitzvah:**

- family meets with the cantor
- student begins studying for the service with the cantor (usually on Sundays)

### **4 months before the bar/bat mitzvah:**

- set up a meeting with the director of education to review details. It is the family's responsibility to ensure that vendors or individuals (photographer, videographer, caterer, party planner/decorator, rental company, etc.) who will work during the evening (or during the preparation and/or clean up) provide the UJC with a certificate of liability insurance one month prior to the event. The UJC must be listed as additional insured on this certificate.
- invite the entire bar/bat mitzvah class

### **6 weeks before the bar/bat mitzvah:**

- the student meets with the rabbi to begin the *d'var Torah* writing process
- the *d'var Torah* should be completed one week prior to the bar/bat mitzvah

### **1 week before the bar/bat mitzvah:**

- confirm *Oneg* and *Kiddush* arrangements with the director of education
- Shabbat service attendance/mitzvah project must be completed

### **Friday of the bar/bat mitzvah:**

- 11 am – service walkthrough with rabbi and cantor
- bimah decorations and food for the *Oneg Shabbat* and *Kiddush* must be delivered and set up before 2 pm on Friday afternoon
- 6:45 pm – Family arrives at the UJC

### **Saturday of the bar/bat mitzvah:**

- 9:45 am – immediate family meets in the Conference Room
- post-service – *Kiddush* in the Rose Dick Social Hall for all service attendees

## **Oneg Shabbat / Kiddush / Extended Kiddush**

**Even if not holding the reception at the UJC, families are held to many of the provisions noted the section below outlining details for holding a reception at the UJC.**

### ***Oneg Shabbat***

The bar/bat mitzvah family is responsible for the *Oneg Shabbat* on the Shabbat evening of the bar/bat mitzvah. Please prepare enough for approximately 30 congregants plus guests (unless there is a special event). The director of education will let you know if there will be another function at the service.

Families are responsible for setting up and breaking down their food platters before and after the *Oneg Shabbat*. Custodians may be hired if desired.

### ***Oneg Shabbat Refreshments in the Rose Dick Social Hall***

These are the basics, you may add other items:

- large challah (long and braided – NOT the round type)
- finger foods: baked goods, trail mix (without nuts), candy
- fresh fruit/veggies and dip
- cheese/crackers
- hummus/pita
- 1 box of Keurig coffee pods
- 1 quart of non-dairy creamer
- 4 half gallons of cold beverages (seltzer, water, iced tea, juice, punch)
- paper goods – cups, napkins, plates, utensils, **AND ALL PLASTIC TABLECLOTHS**

All items must be plattered, covered, and put out on the tables in the Rose Dick Social Hall (or left clearly marked in the refrigerator with direction for the custodian to place on the tables). The custodian will uncover trays and place refrigerated trays on the tables, but will NOT cut cakes or platter items.

Please label all food and drinks to be used for the *Oneg Shabbat*.

The family is responsible for replattering baked goods if they are using them for the next morning's *Kiddush*.

We urge you to arrive at services early enough to review your needs with the custodian.

### ***Kiddush***

The bar/bat mitzvah family is responsible for the *Kiddush* on the Shabbat morning of the bar/bat mitzvah. Please prepare enough for approximately 30 congregants plus guests. Label all food and drinks to be set out for the *Kiddush*.

Families are responsible for setting up and breaking down their food platters and items before and after the *Kiddush*. Custodians may be hired if desired.

Please note: The bar/bat mitzvah and immediate family will lead the Shabbat morning *Kiddush* blessing and *Motzi* over a challah (provided by the family) at the conclusion of the Shabbat morning service.

### ***Kiddush* Refreshments in the Rose Dick Social Hall**

These are the basics, you may add other items:

- large challah (long and braided – NOT the round type)
- 2 large bottles of kosher grape juice – AND – 5-oz. plastic juice cups
- bagels and cream cheese(s)
- tuna salad, whitefish salad, egg salad
- herring (1 jar), either pickled in wine sauce or herring in cream sauce
- fresh fruit
- veggies/dip
- cheese/crackers
- hummus/pita
- baked goods
- 1 box Keurig coffee pods
- 1 quart of non-dairy creamer
- 4 half gallons of cold beverages (seltzer, water, iced tea, juice, punch)
- paper goods as noted for the *Oneg Shabbat*, with new plastic tablecloths

### **Set-Up and Decor for *Oneg Shabbat/Kiddush***

You may use fragrance-free flowers, balloons, etc. in the Rose Dick Social Hall. You may not use mylar confetti or table glitter in any form.

Tables will be set up and set with the plastic tablecloths that the family supplies. If the family wants a set-up other than the standard set-up, this needs to be discussed with the director of education at least two weeks in advance. The family is also responsible for tablecloths for any additional tables that are provided.

A “Use of Facilities Agreement” form must be completed.

### **Extended *Kiddush***

An extended *Kiddush* refers to a *Kiddush* that is more formal and intended to last longer than the standard *Kiddush*. A *Kiddush* that requires additional tables and chairs is also considered an extended *Kiddush*. If a family wants an extended *Kiddush*, the family must discuss this with the director of education at least three months prior to the bar/bat mitzvah. There is a fee for an extended *Kiddush* that is due three months before the bar/bat mitzvah, and a “Use of Facilities Agreement” must be completed.

## **Holding a Reception at the UJC**

### **Use of Facilities**

Contact the UJC to reserve the facility for your reception at least one year before the bar/bat mitzvah.

Custodial help for such events is hired separately from the custodians' regular/usual services.

Approximately six months before the bar/bat mitzvah, the family should meet with the director of education to review details. Fees, set-up times, house rules, and other concerns will be discussed at that meeting. It is the family's responsibility to ensure that vendors or individuals (i.e., photographer, videographer, caterer, party planner/decorator, rental company, etc.) who will work during the event or during the preparation and/or cleanup provide the UJC with a certificate of liability insurance one month before the event. The UJC must be listed as an additional insured on the certificate.

All facility fees are payable in full 90 days prior to the event. A floor plan for the desired set-up must be submitted to the director of education 30 days prior to the event.

The UJC reserves the right to rent its facilities for two events or functions on the same day, and there shall be a separate charge for each event.

If two functions are scheduled for the same day, both parties will be notified by the UJC immediately upon receipt of the second reservation, and each party will be notified of the time and place of the other's scheduled function.

## **House Rules**

### **Proper Decorum**

It is the family's obligation to ensure that proper decorum and a reasonable standard of behavior are maintained while at the UJC premises both in and near the building or its adjacent areas.

- **Smoking:** Smoking is not permitted anywhere in the building at any time.
- **Alcohol:** The serving of alcoholic beverages to adults is permitted in moderation. The sale of such beverages is absolutely prohibited, as is serving such beverages to minors.
- **Gambling:** Gambling for money at any time, anywhere in or about the UJC premises is strictly forbidden.
- **Use of the piano:** The piano may not be used without special permission from the UJC.
- **Games:** No games shall be played using Mylar confetti, glitter, or toilet paper. Smoke machines are expressly forbidden.
- **Food in the sanctuary or chapel:** Guests may not be brought into either the sanctuary or the chapel.

### **Payment of Financial Obligations**

All financial obligations to the UJC (including, but not limited to, dues and Religious School fees) must be current and remain current at least 90 days prior to the event. This includes any rental fees and a refundable security fee that will also be collected at that time.

### **Property Equipment Liability**

The family shall be held responsible for – and charged and billed for – any loss of equipment, breakage, damage to equipment and physical property.

### **Caterer/Kitchen/Food**

The UJC does not have an exclusive caterer. All caterers must carry liability and workers' compensation insurance, inclusive of the date of the event.

Caterers' equipment or rentals may be brought into the UJC no earlier than one day prior to the event. No deliveries are to be made on Shabbat or a holiday.

All caterers' processing of food to be served in the UJC must be done outside of the premises.

If the renter family brings in food and does their own cooking, they must carry and show evidence of liability and, if applicable, workers' compensation insurance.



**The serving of pork and/or shellfish  
and the mixing of meat and dairy products at the same meal  
are prohibited.**

The caterer shall designate an authorized representative to remain on the premises at all times to supervise the use of the facilities during the event.

The kitchen and UJC facilities must be left spotlessly clean and in the same condition as found. The family and/or caterer will be held liable for the cost of remedying any defective condition. This includes, but is not limited to: the stove, refrigerators, sinks, and counter tops. Caterers shall supply their own detergent, paper towels, plastic wrap, coffee, tea, sugar, sweeteners, etc.

All renters must supply their own food and paper products. The UJC will supply coffee urns, dishes, and serving utensils upon request and prior agreement. All renters are responsible for cleaning the dishes and stacking them in the dishwasher area of the kitchen after the event.

Any equipment brought in for a function must be removed immediately after the event. Such equipment cannot be stored in the UJC except by special permission, which must be obtained in advance.

The UJC custodial staff may be hired to set up chairs and tables. Final table arrangements/settings must be done by the family or the caterer.

Any food, empty bottles, garbage, refuse, etc., must be removed immediately after the event. Please provide your own dishes for removing leftover food. No UJC equipment or supplies can be used for this purpose.

The cost of special custodial or cleanup service required after any function will be charged to the family.

**Party Decor**

No decorations or flower arrangements may be used which require attachment to the wall, windows, or woodwork. No form of tape, hooks, tacks, or similar materials may be fastened to walls, windows, curtains, or woodwork. Do not use Mylar confetti or table glitter in any form.

## **United Jewish Center Equipment**

No UJC equipment may be removed from the premises, regardless of purpose.

Audiovisual equipment is not available.

The UJC will not be responsible for failures of operation of its facilities during any function or event, except as to use reasonable efforts to correct the problem.

A representative or employee of the UJC must always be present when the building is open for formal business. This person is responsible for making sure that the premises are secure upon the closing of the facility.

Custodians are under the direct supervision of the superintendent of the building. All policies, work schedules, and assignments are through the UJC. Any request or complaint regarding the above should be referred to the UJC through the main office.

Please refer any other questions to the UJC.