



Yom Kippur 2021 Family and Youth Engagement Guide

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Shifts in our community in response to COVID-19 have prevented us from offering the parallel youth programming that we usually run for children in Kindergarten through 6th grade. We created this family and youth engagement guide to provide parents with ideas for including their children in the celebration of Yom Kippur. Our hope is that this guide can help you make these unusual high holy days meaningful for every member of your family. It includes:

- [Background on the High Holy Days](#)
- [Recognizing the Sanctity of the High Holy Days](#)
- [Activity suggestions based on children's age](#) (independent activities for children to do on their own and activities for families to do together)
- Service engagement suggestions based on our community's practices, including prompts for [textual engagement with specific sections of the prayer book](#) (ideal for using for discussion with older children)
- [Coloring pages and worksheets](#) (at the end)

The guide is compiled from various sources including PJ Library and the Union for Reform Judaism. If you want to go deeper or explore specific themes such as interfaith family practices, messaging for children around services, foods and objects related to Yom Kippur, prayer interpretations, and more, please check out the [credits section](#) to peruse the resources directly. Please use headings to browse this guide more easily.

*G'mar chatima tova—
may you and your family be inscribed for a good year in the book of life!*

What are the “High Holy Days”?

The Jewish calendar is based on the cycle of the moon, which grows into a full moon and then disappears about every 30 days. The Jewish New Year begins in the fall with the transition from the Hebrew month named *Elul* to the Hebrew month of *Tishrei* (typically sometime in September). In Jewish tradition, people gather during *Elul* in the pre-dawn darkness to sing songs called **Selichot** (Hebrew for “forgiveness”). Then **Rosh Hashanah** begins on the first of *Tishrei*, when a small sliver of the new moon appears in the evening sky. The Jewish New Year is called Rosh Hashanah—rosh is “head” and hashanah is “the year.” In Hebrew the word “year” (shanah) comes from a root meaning “to change.” Each new year is an opportunity for change and growth. How will the world change this year? How will you change this year?

Rosh Hashanah is often referred to as the birthday of the world. It’s a time to reflect, sing, pray, gather with loved ones, and eat delicious apple treats and round challah.

Ten days after Rosh Hashanah comes **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement, a time focused entirely on apologizing for our actions over the past year. On Yom Kippur adults do not eat in order to focus on apologizing for past mistakes and preparing for the year ahead. Yom Kippur means the “day of covering over.” The image is of both covering up our bad actions from the previous year and of planting seeds beneath the soil. With the rainy season coming, we plant our actions from the previous year and hope they will grow into nurturing fruits and plants.

Four days later comes **Sukkot**, which literally means “small huts.” For the week of Sukkot, it is a tradition to build a *sukkah* (hut) outdoors to relive experiences from the Jewish past. These include the desert encampments of the Israelites fleeing slavery in Egypt, the field tents used by farmers in ancient Israel during the fall harvest, and the tents of pilgrims visiting the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. For seven days, the *sukkah* becomes our temporary home for eating, relaxing, and even sleeping. We hang fruits and vegetables in the *sukkah* and are grateful for the plenty in our lives. We gaze at the stars and think about our connection with our beautiful world. Sitting outside of our home (and all the stuff it holds) helps us focus on the blessing of being together with family, friends, and community.

The Jewish fall holidays end with one last celebration: **Simchat Torah** or “rejoicing with the *Torah*.” *Torah* means “teaching” in Hebrew. The word is used to describe the first five books of the Bible that tell the story of the Jewish people. The *Torah* story is read over the course of an entire year. On Simchat Torah, we finish reading the very last part of the Torah scroll and then roll it all the way back to read the beginning. On this holiday we even dance with the *Torah* because its words are so important to us. The *Torah* is sometimes described as a “tree of life for those who take care of it”—like a tree giving people what they need to grow. Throughout the year, studying the *Torah* can provide us with new inspiration and ideas.

Recognizing the Sanctity of the High Holy Days

During the High Holy Days, we come together as a community to pray, reflect, repent, and forgive. **These observances are special and we urge you to decide as a family how you will recognize their importance in your lives by stepping outside of your usual routines.**

Having children stay out of school—and adults stay out of work—on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can be an important part of Jewish identity formation. It is also a sign of Jewish self-respect and solidarity. But as a tiny minority, it can be a challenge to help the larger world honor our differences. Many well-meaning schools, teachers, coaches, colleagues, and bosses do not know very much about Judaism, so each of us needs to be “out and proud!”

Here are some guidelines for advocating for your child to your school, teacher, or coach:

- Advocate early by politely explaining to the teacher or coach directly that these are solemn holy days. Ask if the program can be rescheduled, which is often surprisingly easy. If not, ask them how they will accommodate your child’s absence without penalty or negative consequence.
- The goal is to communicate the importance of the holiday. Assure them that you know how sensitive they are to issues of religious and cultural diversity, and that you are confident that they will handle the situation appropriately.
- In the unusual case that you meet unyielding or even confrontational reactions, the local JCRC (Jewish Community Relations Council) exists for this reason. Call the director, Shir Hadash member Diane Fisher, at (408) 357-7504, and ask for her help. Absolutely no penalty should accrue to your child for a religious absence.
- It is vital that we follow through. If, after all these conversations, you end up bringing your child in for the group presentation in the morning and then to the Yom Kippur service in the afternoon, the teacher might be justified in concluding that it wasn’t that important to you after all.

It is sometimes uncomfortable to dwell on the places where Jewish life diverges from the world around us. This is a time to clarify your values as a family. By acting on your convictions, you will foster tolerance and respect in the school system and workplace as well as teaching your children pride in their identity. Please contact Rabbi Schwartz if you would like to talk about the decision to stay home from school or work.

There are many options for families to honor the sanctity and significance of the day:

- Attend virtual, streamed services and/or study programs together (teens can also attend the SALTY youth group program)
- Prepare special foods for the holiday
- Go for a walk and talk about your favorite parts of the high holy days
- Have a backyard meal with a small group of family members or friends
- Schedule a Zoom call with friends or family that you can not be with in person

Families should plan their day around what everyone in the household wants to get out of it. If adults want to watch services, see **our suggestions below (in green font) on ways to engage the children independently or have them occupied with other topical activities**. If families want to do activities together, we also provide **options that require facilitation or discussion**.

We hope you find something that works for you, and makes the day impactful for every member of your family—no matter their age!



Activity suggestions by age

Service Scavenger Hunts - For all ages!

Try to find the following things or answer these questions during our Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur Morning services:

Kol Nidre

- Two reasons someone might not fast
- A choir member with white hair
- A choir member who is a teenager
- Someone talking about forgiveness
- The ner tamid
- A prayerbook
- Cantor Felder-Levy singing with the choir
- Words that makes you feel happy

Yom Kippur Morning

- A shofar that is not being blown
- A choir member with a deep voice
- A choir member with a high voice
- Someone talking about saying “Sorry”
- The ark
- A Torah
- Rabbi PJ making a joke
- Words that teach you something

Kids Under Age 5

Make Plans:

Draw things that make you happy and give drawings to others. [Role play](#) with stuffies how you will solve problems with your friends or family.

Say Sorry:

Read stories about apologizing, and tell people you love things you are sorry for doing.

Do Without:

Give up shows, favorite toys, or foods for the day.

Do Some Good:

Help clean-up your home or even a local park.

Listen to some holy day playlists: [Spirit of Prayer](#) or [Yom Kippur Mix](#).

Watch the [story of Jonah](#).

Kids Ages 5+

Make Plans:

Take some time to go outside/in your backyard and reflect upon your misgivings this year. What will you do differently? Who do you think you might need to apologize to and why?

Say Sorry:

Draw/write/journal about your misgivings and choose someone to write an apology letter or email to.

Do Without:

Turn off the television, tablets, and/or consoles. Enjoy your family and rejoice in simple activities for the day. While adults around you might be fasting, consider eating simpler foods or only very healthy foods.

Do Some Good:

Think about ways you could improve a relationship with someone in your life and work towards that goal. Be helpful to those around you, by cleaning up, helping out, and trying your best.

Parents can print out for kids to try these fun [Yom Kippur Independent Activity pages](#)

Listen to some holy day playlists: [Spirit of Prayer](#) or [Yom Kippur Mix](#).

Watch the [story of Jonah](#).

Make a [wheel of choices or write out the next page](#) to practice conflict resolution.

Set some new goals for the year with a [Kindness Wheel](#), [Sticky Note Wall](#), [Encouragement Stones](#), or [Vision Board](#).

Tweens

Make Plans:

Think about why people might wear white clothing, might not brush their teeth or look in a mirror, and might not wear leather shoes. What do you think these things have in common or not in common? How could they be helpful for the day of atonement? Are these things you might do? Why or why not?

Say Sorry:

Consider having a face-to-face (socially distant) conversation with someone you may have wronged. Think about their feelings. Write letters of apology to someone whose feelings you may have hurt.

Do Without:

Put down the phone, and try to put homework aside. If you are not yet fasting, skip the treats or junk food, and try to eat smaller or simpler meals. Try to avoid focusing your day around technology and food.

Do Some Good:

Help prepare for break fast or an evening meal, and be kind and gentle with siblings. Clean your room or common household areas. Help everyone in your home have a fresh new year.

Parents can print out for kids to try these fun [Yom Kippur Independent Activity pages](#)



Engaging With The Prayer Book

We suggest some of the following questions to prompt discussion and reflection for children of all ages. See the [worksheets](#) at the end of this guide for children to do independently and then discuss with you later, or simply use these for prompting family conversations related to the service as it unfolds.

Kol Nidre

Beginning of Service

- ❖ At the beginning of Kol Nidrei, we stand before the ark and tell God “Hin’ni” or “I am here.” What do you think God would ask of you today? Would you be ready to say “Hin’ni?”
- ❖ In the Kol Nidrei prayer, we ask God to release us from promises we have made. Why is it so important to keep promises that you make? What kind of promises might we need to break? Should we make promises that we might not be able to keep?
- ❖ On Yom Kippur we pray many of the prayers together as a community, including Kol Nidrei. Why do you think it’s important that we pray together?

Amidah

- ❖ A “cheit/ חַטָּה” in Hebrew is a sin, or something that we did wrong. Can you think of some things you did wrong this past year? How can you do better in the new year?

Yom Kippur

Haftarah

- ❖ When have you run away from responsibility? When have you called someone out for acting badly? When have you forgiven someone?

Concluding

- ❖ In this new year, what will give you joy? What are you thankful for?

Credits

<https://pjlibrary.org/highholidays>

<https://18doors.org/when-is-rosh-hashanah-this-year/>

<https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/rosh-hashanah/parents-must-have-guide-handling-high-holidays>

<https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/yom-kippur>

<https://highholidaysathome.com/>

<https://highholidaysathome.com/booklet/guide-to-making-sacred-space-at-home>

<https://highholidaysathome.com/yom-kippur-rituals>

Families with children with special needs can find resources at JGateways.org and JKidAccess.org

<http://inspired5781.art>

MISHKAN HANEFESH FOR YOUTH: A MACHZOR FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES.
Edited by Rabbi Melissa Buyer-Witman. Illustrated by Mark Podwal. CCAR Press, 2018.

Coloring pages and worksheets

[Coloring pages](#)

[Family conversations guide](#)

Confess/Thorns

We have behaved arrogantly
 We have betrayed ourselves and others
 We have acted out of contempt
 We have been dishonest
 We have erred out of ignorance
 We have forgotten who we are
 We have gossiped
 We have been hypocritical
 We have been insensitive
 We have justified bad decisions
 We have killed our impulse to do good
 We have looked the other way
 We have been mean
 We have been neglectful
 We have acted out of fear instead of love
 We have pushed too much
 We have been quiet
 when we should have spoken up
 We have refused to help
 when we had the ability
 We have slandered
 We have taken from others
 when we had enough for ourselves
 We have been untrue
 We have behaved violently
 We have withheld
 what could have been given freely
 We have been xenophobic
 We have yielded to our worst impulses
 We have zealously protected evil-doers

Appreciate/Roses

We have adored
 We have blessed ourselves and others
 We have comforted
 We have directed our energies toward truth
 We have been empathetic
 We have forgiven past wrongs
 We have grown
 We have helped even when we weren't asked
 We have insisted on loving each other
 We have been just
 We have been kind
 We have learned
 We have been merciful
 We have nursed compassion from scorn
 We have been open-minded
 We have spoken positively
 We have questioned in a healthy way
 We have respected our friends and family
 We have supported strangers
 We have cultivated truth
 We have unlearned falsehoods
 We have validated each others' feelings
 We have been willing to change
 We have experienced pure joy
 We have yearned for a better future
 We have zestily given our best

Now write your own...

Confessions (Thorns)	Appreciations (Roses)

Notice: What do you want to occupy your attention during the new year?

Nurture: What values and intentions do you want to cultivate?

Nearness: What do you want to bring closer to you in the year ahead?

Next steps: How will you achieve these goals?

Let's Confess

The traditional confessional prayer, the *Vidui*, is composed of two parts, the *Ashamnu* and the *Al Chet*, that we read aloud on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The *Ashamnu* (translated as “we have trespassed” or “we are guilty”) is an abbreviated confession, an alphabetic acrostic, and written in first person plural. We recite this confessional in the plural to represent our shared responsibility and culpability in all of our lives and missteps. We also share this confessional as a reminder that forgiveness is also shared.

Use the modern interpretation of the *Ashamnu* below using the English alphabet and add in your missteps for each letter of the alphabet:

We have behaved **arrogantly**, _____

We have **betrayed** ourselves and our families, _____

We have acted out of **contempt**, _____

We have been **dishonest**, _____

We have **erred** out of ignorance, _____

We have **forgotten** who we are, _____

We have **gossiped**, _____

We have been **hypocritical**, _____

We have been **insensitive**, _____

We have **justified** bad decisions, _____

We have **killed** our impulse to do good, _____

We have **looked** the other way, _____

We have been **mean**, _____

We have been **neglectful**, _____

We have acted **out of fear** instead of love, _____

We have **pushed** too much, _____

We have been **quiet** when we should have spoken up, _____

We have been **rageful**, _____

We have **stolen**, _____

We have **tried to teach** when we should have tried to learn, _____

We have been **untrue**, _____

We have behaved **violently**, _____

We have **withheld** that which could have been given freely, _____

We have held others to **unrealistic expectations**, _____

We have **yielded** instead of moving forward, _____

We have **zoomed too narrowly** into challenges, _____

You can do this worksheet while watching the live-streamed virtual services.

Kol Nidre

At the beginning of Kol Nidrei, we stand before the ark and tell God “Hin’ni” or “I am here.” What do you think God would ask of you today? Would you be ready to say “Hin’ni?”

In the Kol Nidrei prayer, we ask God to release us from promises we have made. Why is it so important to keep promises that you make? What kind of promises might we need to break? Should we make promises that we might not be able to keep?

On Yom Kippur we pray many of the prayers together as a community, including Kol Nidrei. Why do you think it's important that we pray together?

A "cheit/ חטָה" in Hebrew is a sin, or something that we did wrong. Can you think of some things you did wrong this past year? How can you do better in the new year?

Yom Kippur

When have you run away from responsibility? When have you called someone out for acting badly? When have you forgiven someone?

In this new year, what will give you joy? What are you thankful for?

Please accept my apology

Forgive Yourself!

YOU DESERVE A BREAK, TOO

Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is your own self. So why not write yourself an apology?

We thought we'd give you a space to make a note to yourself asking forgiveness.

Maybe you can stop beating yourself up over whatever it is that you did this year, ok?

(See the worksheets from Rosh Hashanah [here!](#))