



BAR/BAT MITZVAH HANDBOOK



CONGREGATION ETZ HAYIM BAR/BAT MITZVAH HANDBOOK

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WHAT IS A BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

When a child turns 13 years old, he/she becomes a Bar Mitzvah (masculine) or a Bat Mitzvah (feminine). Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah means that the child is considered a Jewish adult and becomes a member of the Jewish community in his/her own accord. It means that the child acquires responsibility for his/her Jewish identity and practice. The child is presented with both the opportunity to grow spiritually and the responsibility to work towards a better world for all. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony is the ritual for this significant transition.

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is fully responsible for keeping the Mitzvot (commandments) outlined in the Torah and interpreted by our rabbis including ritual and social mitzvot. Among the rights acquired, he/she can now lead prayer services and be counted for the quorum of ten Jewish adults that is sometimes required. He/she is responsible for giving Tzedakah, taking care of the most vulnerable in our society, and continuously working for justice and harmony.

Because Hebrew is a gendered language, the traditional terms for the ceremony are Bar Mitzvah for male-identifying individuals and Bat Mitzvah for female-identifying individuals. For those who do not identify with binary terms there are many other options. We are happy to work with you and your family to find the option that best matches your child's identity and this moment of transition. This handbook uses the phrase "Bar/Bat Mitzvah" as inclusive of all children. CEH is an egalitarian and inclusive congregation. Children of all gender identifications may fully participate in the service and traditions of the ceremony.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

You came to the right place!

In this handbook you will find a lot of valuable information. Here is a snapshot of the entire process. You'll find more details in the upcoming pages.

Preparing to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah requires a substantial amount of time and effort by the child and by the parents. Although the child will work on Hebrew, Trope (chanting), and prayers in Religious School, much of the B'nai Mitzvah preparation takes place outside of Religious School hours. Individual tutoring begins up to a year in advance of the assigned date but more often 8-9 months in advance. Children will work with their tutors to learn the religious service (prayers), Torah, and possibly Haftarah readings. Children receive a minimum of 20 hours of private tutoring. The tutor is assigned by the Director of Religious Education in consultation with the Rabbi.

The Rabbi meets with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child and family several times during the year prior to the ceremony. The child will learn how to write a Dvar Torah during Religious School; the Rabbi will help with the final version and arrange for at least one service rehearsal in the sanctuary. A date for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah should be scheduled with the Rabbi at least one year to 18 months in advance.

A particularly important part of preparation is engaging in social action and learning about the Jewish responsibility of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world). This part of the process is called a "Mitzvah Project." Children will work in Religious School to identify their passions and translate them into action. Our Religious School works together with CEH's Social Action Committee to teach about this communal responsibility and to help children find ways to make a difference in the world.

This year of preparation is an excellent opportunity to reinforce your family's traditions, customs, and values which your child will acknowledge as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This may include the observance of kashrut, Shabbat and holidays, a Jewish bookshelf in your home library, mezzuzot on doorposts, social and civic engagement, and the possession and use of Jewish ritual items.

EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR A BAR/BAT MITZVAH AT CONGREGATION ETZ HAYIM

1. Children must be enrolled in Religious School from Grades 3-7 or have attended Jewish Day School for those grades. If a child has not met this requirement, the Rabbi and the Director of Religious Education will consider each situation individually.
2. We are a congregation of life-long learners. As such, the celebration of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not the end of your child's formal religious education but is a milestone to be celebrated. We expect our Bar/Bat Mitzvah children to continue their education throughout their lives, through the 8th & 9th Grade Religious School class, Madrichim program, and/or by participating in congregation and community life.
3. A child whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah falls from September to May of Kitah Zayin (Grade 7) is expected to finish the Religious School year.
4. At the onset of training, children should obtain:
 - Tallit
 - Tefillin
 - Kippah
 - Siddur (provided by CEH)



BAR/BAT MITZVAH STANDARDS

Our goal at CEH is to create a meaningful experience for children and their families. We want them to develop skills that support them on their Jewish journey including the ability to confidently read Hebrew.

We are reframing our language about standards. We do not want to focus on minimum standards; instead, we want to focus on what is meaningful to the child and family.

To create a meaningful Jewish experience, our children should be able to:

1. Demonstrate acceptable Hebrew reading ability (as determined by the Rabbi and the Director of Religious Education).
2. Be familiar with the Kabbalat Shabbat and morning Shabbat services.
3. Be able to chant his/her parashah (Torah portion) and possibly Haftarah.
4. Know the purpose of and how to put on tallit and tefillin.
5. Write a Dvar Torah based on either the appropriate Torah portion, Haftarah, or other appropriate subject. Children will practice this skill during Religious School. A Dvar Torah is a meaningful lesson delivered during the service. Completion of a Mitzvah Project (see next page).

To accomplish the learning process outlined here, we expect the child and parents to attend Shabbat morning services once per month starting two years before the ceremony (usually during Kitah Hey or Vav – 5th or 6th Grade) and twice per month during the year before the ceremony (usually during Kitah Vav or Kitah Zayin – 6th or 7th Grade). If a child wishes to lead the Kabbalat Shabbat service, the same standard applies for Friday night. The family is expected to attend Shabbat services on the Friday night of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah weekend. Families are encouraged to attend the Thursday minyan service that same week. This allows the child to read Torah before a small group of congregants and photography is permitted (after the service).

Positive parental support is a key element for successful achievement of the child's goals. In the two years before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, we expect the child to practice Hebrew at home weekly. It is impossible to learn Trope and the prayers by just attending Religious School. We will provide all the materials needed to learn these skills but success rests on home practice. We encourage 15 minutes of study per day (with Shabbat off, of course!).

Here are the elements of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony we will prioritize in their learning. Based on the principle of making this a meaningful experience, this is not a set of minimum requirements but a guide that will be adjusted to each child depending on his/her passions, abilities, and family preferences.

- Torah reading
- Shabbat morning Shacharit service
- Torah service
- Shabbat morning Musaf
- Haftarah

From Rav Natan about Haftarah: *When I think about our responsibility to teach our children meaningful skills that they can take with them after their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, I think of skills that can help them develop their spirituality, their participation in communal services and the ability to pray on their own. With this rationale in mind, we are focusing our learning on the religious service and the Torah reading, instead of Haftarah. Don't get me wrong, I love the Haftarah and I look forward to everyone learning it. At the same time, learning the Haftarah takes time that we need to help your child learn more about the religious service. If it is important to you and your family that your child reads the Haftarah, we will work together to make this happen and to be a meaningful experience as well.*

Your child can also lead more of the service if motivated to do so. The child's siblings also are encouraged to have a part in the service. That part is determined based on the sibling's knowledge, age, and ability. Your family may have customs or traditions that you would like to incorporate into the celebrations. Please discuss these elements with the Rabbi.



PRACTICING MITZVOT

Each child should complete a Mitzvah Project during Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. Suggestions for projects can be found in the books Mitzvah Magic by Danny Siegel and Putting God on the Guest List by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin, or by speaking with the Rabbi or Director of Religious Education. We encourage hands-on work by your child. Examples of past projects include repairing bikes to be donated to Project Phoenix, volunteering in the Asperger's program at HB Woodlawn, and landscaping around the CEH building to beautify our premises. If you are collecting goods for donation, please coordinate with CEH Office staff.

In the same way that many families become more connected to Jewish ritual (mitzvot bein adam laMakom – between a person and God) in this phase of their lives, we encourage families to engage in civic and social action (mitzvot bein adam lechavero – between a person and their fellow) as well.

Many families donate to Congregation Etz Hayim in honor of their children reaching religious maturity, and on behalf of their guests who will receive honors. It is our hope that you will decide together as a family how to allocate tzedakah in honor of this occasion. If you want to know more about how you can make an impact at CEH with your donation, please reach out to the CEH Office.



HONORS

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a wonderful opportunity to honor family members or friends during the service. The Rabbi will reach out to your family to coordinate the honors. Some examples:

- Opening and closing of the Ark during the Torah Service
- Up to four aliyot (reciting Torah blessings in Hebrew). Grandparents, aunts, and uncles may have joint aliyot.
- Dressing the Torah
- English readings

All honors other than English readings can only be assigned to Jewish people. Most English readings can be assigned to persons of any faith. Younger sibling(s) can lead some prayers. Please discuss which reading(s) and prayers would be appropriate with the Rabbi.

Family members are encouraged to read Torah as a part of the celebration. Readings must be prepared two weeks prior to the celebration; the family must schedule time with the Rabbi to read from the Torah and show proficiency. Readers must be able to read directly from the Torah scroll. The Rabbi can provide PDF copies and recordings and work individually with each reader.



RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND CEH GUIDELINES

RELIGIOUS ARTICLES

We encourage everyone at the service to wear a kippah although only males are required to. We also encourage all Jewish adults to wear a tallit.

SHEHECHEYANU PRAYER

Parents of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will recite the Shehecheyanu blessing. This blessing celebrates the passage of time and the arrival at this wonderful occasion. Parents are also encouraged to write a short personal blessing (statement) for their child.

SHARING THE SIMCHA

As a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, your child participates for the first time as a Jewish adult in an established, traditional service, which may be on Shabbat morning. If this is the case, other smachot – happy occasions (i.e., baby naming, aufruf, etc.) may also take place. These smachot enhance the service and give the opportunity for members and friends to share in joyous occasions as a community.

INVITATIONS

Families are required to personally invite all the children in their child's Religious School class to the service and all of the celebratory events.

Because our community wants to celebrate with you, please send a written or electronic invitation to the CEH Board, the Rabbi, the Director of Religious Education, your child's Religious School teachers and tutor, as well as anyone who assists in leading the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. Contact the Office for a list of current Board Members. This invitation should be for the service and kiddush lunch. Invitations to other celebratory events are at the discretion of the family.

Everyone attending the Shabbat morning service is invited to the kiddush lunch. When it is safe to serve food in the building, this Handbook will explain the procedure for doing so. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony will be announced in a congregational email.

CANDY

The candy provided by CEH are Sunkist gems.



PROGRAMS

Many families choose to provide programs to explain the services and list the honors on the day of the simcha. CEH will provide a template and language for the program. If you'd like to make any changes, please do so in consultation with the Rabbi. CEH will make up to 50 copies of the basic program for your ceremony.

CELEBRATIONS

We strongly encourage hosting the celebration party after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah in a kosher facility and/or with kosher food and drinks. The Rabbi, our Office Staff and parents who just celebrated their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah can suggest facilities and vendors.

DELIVERIES

All deliveries to CEH must be made by 4:00 PM on Friday afternoon for Shabbat or by 4:00 PM on the day before a Yom Tov. A designated person will be available to check the Kashrut of all items delivered to the kitchen. **Nothing is allowed into the kitchen without supervision.**

FOOD AND LIQUOR

Food brought into Congregation Etz Hayim must be kosher. Our current policy is that all cheese and wine are considered kosher. As a courtesy, we ask that if you are providing wine that is not hechshered (i.e., does not have a Kosher symbol), please provide a kosher wine option for people who would prefer it. If your *simcha* is during Passover, everything must be marked Kosher for Passover.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs and Recording are prohibited on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Arrangements for photographs in the Sanctuary should be made for the week immediately preceding or after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

MOBILE PHONES AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The use of mobile phones and other electronic devices is prohibited in the synagogue on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

SECURITY

Security of our congregants, staff and guests is the highest priority for CEH. Our doors are kept locked at all times and visitors will be admitted by an usher. Your guests may be asked the purpose of their visit. There are additional security measures in place to keep our community safe. Questions about security should be directed to the Rabbi or Facilities Manager.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

GENERAL

- The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family must be a member of Congregation Etz Hayim. All synagogue obligations (dues, tuition, Building Fund Assessment, etc.) must be current. A member who is not in good standing (more than 60 days in arrears) will be contacted at 6 months and again at 3 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to allow the family to attain good standing or to make special arrangements. If special arrangements are requested, they must be in place at least four months before the simcha date.
- All Bar/Bat Mitzvah fees must be paid in full no later than the week before the service.
- The host family is responsible for any damages to the synagogue or its facilities by any of their guests or agents.

BAR OR BAT MITZVAH FEES

- The Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee of \$1000 is billed to members in the fall of the school year of the child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It includes books and materials, tutoring, and the simcha candy.
- Please coordinate flower arrangements with the Office. CEH will order the flowers; families are responsible for payment. This is in addition to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee.
- *Family Plus* members will also be charged these fees.

SHABBAT ACCOMMODATIONS FOR GUESTS

For guests who don't drive on Shabbat, the following hotels are the closest to the synagogue. Families may also consider using Airbnb or VRBO to find lodging in private homes (www.airbnb.com and www.vrbo.com).

Local hotels:

- Days Inn Arlington/DC (2201 Arlington Blvd, Arlington, VA 22201) . *Note: this is the closest hotel but is low quality.*
- Days Inn Arlington/Pentagon (3030 Columbia Pike, Arlington, VA 22204). *Note: this is the second closest hotel but is low quality.*
- Residence Inn Arlington Ballston (650 N. Quincy Street, Arlington, VA 22203)
- The Westin Arlington Gateway (801 N. Glebe Road, Arlington, VA 22203)
- Hilton Arlington (950 N. Stafford Street, Arlington, VA 22203)
- Holiday Inn Arlington at Ballston (4610 Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203)
- Comfort Inn Ballston (1211 N. Glebe Road, Arlington, VA 22201)

BAR/BAT MITZVAH TIMELINE

Color Code Key:

Professional Staff Responsibility

Parent/Family Responsibility

Child Responsibility

5th Grade year:

- Send letter to parents to begin the discussion of selecting a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

Spring 5th Grade year:

- Parents and professional staff to determine Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

Fall of 6th Grade year:

- Parents attend a Bar/Bat Mitzvah information meeting with the professional staff to learn about the process and timeline for preparation, education/mitzvot requirements, and resources available to families.

6th Grade year:

- Child will begin to learn Trope in Wednesday school.

1 year prior:

- Professional staff to assign a tutor for the child.
- Child begins weekly Bar/Bat mitzvah tutoring.
- Families attend services regularly. There is a 50% requirement of attendance for B'nai Mitzvah children and their families.
- Parents to complete the Facility Rental Application form (etzhayim.net) for celebrations other than kiddush lunch.
- Child discusses and begins working on the Mitzvah Project. All projects must be approved by the Rabbi and Religious Education Director.

6 months prior:

- Parents to purchase Bar/Bat Mitzvah child's tallit and tefillin
- Parents order kippot for guests and congregants (optional).
- Parents to reach out to the Rabbi with names of family members that would like to read Torah in honor of your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Professional staff will then provide copies of text to family members.

3 months prior:

- Child begins work on the Dvar Torah.
- Parents begin preparing the program for their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah (optional). Program must be approved by the professional staff prior to printing. CEH will provide a Template

2 months prior:

- Parents can contact CEH to schedule appointments for pictures in the sanctuary (optional).
- Child to complete the Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the *Chronicle* information sheet

1 month prior:

- Parents to complete the Space Reservation Form (etzhayim.net) for kiddush luncheon setup as well as any other celebrations taking place at the synagogue.

2 weeks prior:

- Child and family to participate in a sanctuary rehearsal.

1 week prior:

Day before Bar/Bat Mitzvah

- Families bring all materials needed (program, kippot, kiddush centerpieces and paper goods (if applicable), etc.) to CEH by 2:00pm on Friday.

Day of Bar/Bat Mitzvah

- Bar/Bat Mitzvah and family arrive by 9:45am for Gabbaim to familiarize themselves with participants.