

B'nai Mitzvah Preparation and Celebration Handbook



Students and Families

March 2026

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Preparation

Mazel Tov on beginning this exciting moment of celebration! Becoming a bar or bat mitzvah is a significant milestone in the life of the student and his or her entire family. Preparation begins approximately one year before service date. The program varies from student to student and is intended to help the young person experience the richness and joy of Jewish learning in anticipation of leading the Shabbat service and taking his or her place of responsibility as a Jewish adult. It should be challenging and rewarding, filled with what will become positive memories of the process and result.

No two students are the same, and the only person to whom each student is to be compared is that student's best self.

This handbook is intended to guide you through the preparation necessary to make the whole experience memorable and meaningful.

Building Use and the B'nai Mitzvah Weekend Planning

- All Temple Israel families with memberships in good standing are welcome to use Beit Ha'am for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony and celebration without any rental fee.
- Beit Ha'am is available for the family to host any or all of the following:
 - o Kiddush Luncheon (Saturday)
 - o Afternoon Celebration (Saturday)
 - o Evening Dinner and Delebration (Saturday)
 - o Some families choose to have a private dinner at Beit Ha'am after the service. If you are choosing this option details will need to be discussed with the LLC building manager.
- Your family will be asked to:
 - o Sponsor the Friday Night Oneg Shabbat – 5:30 – 6:15 – the entire congregation as well as your guests are welcome to attend. The family may choose to provide desserts or finger foods for the Oneg Shabbat.
 - o Attend and participate in the Kabbalat Shabbat Service – 6:15 pm. The student and parents will sit on the bimah. The family will lead the blessings (Shabbat candles and wine), and the student will help with the liturgy. The family may choose to bake/bring in a special challah for the end of the service. The family may choose to have flowers or some type of arrangement for the bimah which will be used for Friday night and Saturday.

Sample Preparation Timeline

12-18 Months in Advance

- Select date with guidance from the rabbi. The date can be guided by considerations including the child's birthdate and the cycle of Torah readings.
- Secure date in writing with the LLC – you will want to have use of the entire building for Friday evening and Saturday morning, plus Saturday afternoon and evening depending on celebration plans. It is best to avoid a weekend when there is a large event planned on Sunday that may complicate set-ups and building availability.
- Secure date with soloist in coordination with the rabbi.
- Set up initial tutoring schedule with the rabbi.
- Read *Putting God on the Guest List, Third Edition: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin. This will help frame the entire experience and ensure that all of the details are placed in the context of a Jewish life cycle event. In other words, making sure that the "mitzvah" is more important than what's served at the "bar."

12 Months in Advance

- Draft a guest list to estimate of number of attendees. Please include all of the student's Chadash classmates and teachers. Their information is available from the Temple Office.
- Decide on an event style that will be suitable for your budget, child and family.
- Start investigating price quotes from party planners, caterers, venues (if not using Beit Ha'am) photographers, videographers, and entertainment. Some recommendations are available in this handbook.
- Ask for advice and recommendations from others that have planned B'nai Mitzvah with Temple Israel.

6-9 Months in Advance

- If you are using Beit Ha'am, set up a meeting with the LLC building manager at least 6 months ahead of the event. You can see all of the building policies at the end of this handbook.

3-4 Months in Advance

- Decide on invitations and compile addresses or email addresses and send out invitations at least 8 weeks in advance with replies due at least 2 to 3 weeks in advance for notification to caterer or restaurant. Have a system to track RSVPs.
- Stark Jewish News and Temple Bulletin will print a photo and a biography of the B'nai Mitzvah celebrant. The Temple Office can give the family further instructions.
- Kippot are optional at Temple Israel. If the family would like, you may order custom kippot for the celebration. A recommendation is available in the list of vendors below.
- Tallit – Some families choose to present the student with a tallit (prayer shawl) before the service on Saturday morning. Please make sure that the tallit is not "messianic."

- If you are having any materials printed for your guests – such as what to expect at a B’nai Mitzvah, unique features in a Jewish sanctuary or a guide to the Saturday morning service, this would be the time to gather the information and have it printed.
- Buy decorations – centerpieces, balloons, flowers, signage, party items or DIY options if you are crafty.
- Book décor rentals – photo booth, table linens, special effect lights.
- Plan a candle lighting ceremony if applicable.
- Reserve hotel blocks for out-of-town guests.

2-3 Months in Advance

- Finalize and confirm food menu.
- Order any special cake or dessert.
- Confirm date/time/cost with anyone hired for celebration.
- Decide upon attire and purchase outfit for students.
- Write parent speeches.
- Create a seating plan for the celebration, if applicable.

1 Month in Advance

- Make an appointment with the LLC building manager to go over set-up and when room is available for you to decorate, when vendors may enter building for set up, timing for celebration and any other important information to make the B’nai Mitzvah a success.
- Check set-up plans for the Oneg Shabbat (including the food), Friday and Saturday services, and any other celebrations which are being held at Beit Ha’am.
- Finalize/purchase any necessary clothing items.

1 Week in Advance

- Confirm details with all of your vendors
- Confirm details with LLC building manager

1-2 Days in Advance

- Set up room with décor.
- Set up for Oneg Shabbat.
- Make sure that there is a copy of the student’s service binder on the bimah.
- Pull together any last-minute essentials.

Friday and Saturday

- Enjoy the meaningful milestone with your child, friends, family and our Jewish community!

Preparation for the Service Itself and Becoming B'nai Mitzvah

Choosing a Date – The family will work with the rabbi to choose a date. At Temple Israel, the Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration includes a Friday night service and a Saturday morning service. Please note that Temple Israel is housed at Beit Ha'am (House of the People), a cooperative effort with Shaaray Torah Synagogue and the Canton Jewish Federation. Setups, room usage and calendar needs are all coordinated through this collaboration.

Tutoring – The student will meet with the rabbi to begin a course of study that includes all elements of the service. The course of study will depend on the schedule and needs of each student. As the date approaches, there will be several in-person practices on the bimah.

If the student and family would prefer, arrangements can be made to have an additional tutor work with the student throughout the process

Liturgy – We use a customizable service for Saturday morning. This will be created with the celebrant and family. The family will arrange for printing of the booklets in advance of the service. The Friday night service uses the regular Mishkan T'filah prayerbook. You may choose to use the regular prayerbook instead of a custom book on Saturday morning.

Torah Verses – The rabbi and student will select an appropriate section of Torah verses after studying the Torah portion. It is up to the family whether the student reads or chants the verses.

Haftarah Verses – It is the family's choice to include a Haftarah reading.

D'var Torah – The student will prepare a D'var Torah (lesson on the Torah portion) to share during the service. This will be the student's opportunity to share what he or she has learned and what the process has meant.

Mitzvah Project – The student will select a mitzvah project in consultation with the rabbi. The project should reflect the student's values and identity and adds a hands-on element to the student's b'nai mitzvah preparation.

Friday Night

5:30 p.m. Oneg Shabbat – The family is expected to sponsor the Oneg Shabbat (refreshments before the service). Arrangements can be made through the Temple office. The entire congregation and community is welcome to attend any Friday night Oneg Shabbat and service at Temple Israel.

6:15 p.m. Kabbalat Shabbat Service – The student and his or her parents will sit on the bimah. The family will lead the blessings for the candles and the wine, and the student will help to lead the liturgy. The family may request a specific soloist for the service, in consultation with the rabbi. This service will be recorded and livestreamed via Temple Israel's website and YouTube. The family may choose to provide flowers for the bimah for Friday and Saturday.

Dinner – Some families choose to have a private dinner at Beit Ha'am after the service. This is entirely optional.

Saturday Morning

10:30 a.m. Shabbat Morning Service – While the service is open to every member of the community, generally it is only attended by those that the family invites. The service will be recorded. The livestream can be private or public depending on the family's choice.

Music – Temple Israel has regular soloists for Shabbat evening and for B'nai Mitzvah. If you would like to arrange music with someone else, that must be done in coordination with the rabbi.

Printed Service – The family will arrange to have the service booklet printed and ready for the weekend, unless the regular prayerbook is being used.

Passing the Torah – It is customary to have the Torah passed from one generation to the next during the service. It is the family's choice whom to include in that procession.

Aliyot – The Torah reading can be divided into as many as seven aliyot to honor family and friends. The student will have the final aliyah.

Other Honors – If the family would like to share honors with family members (in addition to the aliyot), there are opportunities to do so during the service. These include opening/closing the ark, lifting/dressing the Torah scroll, leading kiddush/motzi, etc.

Parent Remarks – The parent/s is/are expected to make some remarks to the student during the service.

Kiddush/Lunch – If the family would like to have a kiddush luncheon at Beit Ha'am after the service, that can be arranged. It is customary to invite everyone who is at the service, including those that were not on the original invitation list.

Additional Items to Consider

Stark Jewish News – The SJN will print a photo and biography of the B’nai Mitzvah celebrant. A photo can be shared with the editor at kphillippi@jewishcanton.org.

Invitations – The invitations should be sent at least six weeks in advance. Please invite all of the student’s Chadash classmates and teachers.

Kippot – These are optional at Temple Israel services. If the family would like, you may order custom kippot for the celebration. (Check out www.skullcap.com for some ideas).

Tallit – Some families choose to present the student with a tallit (prayer shawl) before the service on Saturday morning. Please be sure that that the tallit is not “messianic.”

Vendor Suggestions

Caterers

- Dishes by Design – 330-454-6527 – www.dishesbydesign.com
- Mr. Mike’s Catering – 330-452-6825
- That Little Italian Kitchen – 330-499-2248 – www.thatlittleitaliankitchen.com
- Santangelo’s Catering – 330-456-1556 – www.santangelos.net
- Efrat Ohayon (Akron JCC – kosher) - 330-867-7850

Party Planners

- Always Eventful – 330-244-0643 – www.alwayseventful.com
- Designs by Jo Jo’s Creations – 330-419-0537 – www.designsbyjojocreations.com

Entertainment

- An Affordable DJ – 330-495-1922 – www.affordablejohio.com
- Pure Events Group – 330-323-0929 – www.pureeventsgroup.com
- Pro Party DJ – 330-495-1795 – www.propartydj.com
- Black Tie Entertainment – 330-324-6023 – www.blacktieentertainment.us

Florists

- Botanica – 330-494-8488 – www.botanicacanton.com
- Cathy Cowgill Flowers – 330-478-1599 – www.cathycowgillflowers.com

Photographers

- Vicki Lantz Photography – 330-715-9641 – www.vickilantzphotography.com
- Studio 7 Photography – 330-224-0641 – www.studio7photography.com

Printers

- Canton Data Print – 330-454-8288 – www.cantondataprint.com
- USA Quick Print – 330-455-5119 – www.usaqp.com

Kippot

- www.skullcap.com

Beit Ha'am Building Policies

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Building Policy

Updated 12/2023

1. All Temple Israel and Shaaray Torah families with memberships in good standing are welcome to use Beit Ha'am for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony and celebration without any rental fee.
2. All dates must first be scheduled with Rabbi Komerofsky for Temple Israel and Canton Braun for Shaaray Torah. Dates then must be confirmed with Patti Green, LLC Building Manager, pgreen@jewishcanton.org.
3. The Weekend celebration can include special hours when traditionally building is not available. Example: Friday night Shabbat dinner or Saturday night evening party.
4. Building must always be supervised by a LLC Maintenance person and Security Guard. The family is responsible for security guard's and staff's overtime and will be invoiced by the LLC. The LLC is responsible for obtaining the Guard.
5. Shaaray Torah is required to use Kosher Kitchen and Temple Israel may use either kitchen. When using the Kosher Kitchen a Mashgiach must be in attendance.
6. Pork products or shellfish cannot be served.
7. All caterers must be licensed and approved by the LLC and must present certificate of insurance a minimum of 30 days prior to the event.
8. If liquor is being served an additional security guard might be required. The LLC is responsible for obtaining the security guard and the family is responsible for cost. The LLC will invoice the family for expense.
9. Room set-ups are required a week prior to event. Building Staff is responsible for setting up tables and chairs as requested.
10. Decorations cannot be affixed to any walls.
 - a. TEMPLE ISRAEL ADDITIONS:
 - i. No sparkles or glitter.
 - ii. No open flames (other than ritual candles).
11. Usage of projector/screen is permitted with prior approval.
12. Family will be responsible for any damages that occur to premises during usage of the building.

Information to Make Guests Feel Welcome

Some families like to share information with guests ahead of time to let them know what to expect when attending a Jewish service, perhaps for the first time. These resources from 18Doors are helpful.

- An etiquette guide to the Synagogue and at a Bar or Bat Mitzvah:
 - [https://18doors.org/Sample Etiquette Guide for Guests/](https://18doors.org/Sample%20Etiquette%20Guide%20for%20Guests/)
- Two different guides to the unique features in a Jewish Sanctuary:
 - [https://18doors.org/Sample Guide to Sanctuary and Customs 1/](https://18doors.org/Sample%20Guide%20to%20Sanctuary%20and%20Customs%201/)
 - [https://18doors.org/Sample Guide to Sanctuary and Customs 2/](https://18doors.org/Sample%20Guide%20to%20Sanctuary%20and%20Customs%202/)
- A guide to the Saturday Morning Service
 - [https://18doors.org/Sample Guide to Service/](https://18doors.org/Sample%20Guide%20to%20Service/)

This resource from My Jewish Learning is also helpful:

- <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/what-a-barbat-mitzvah-guest-needs-to-know/>