

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENT

Stephen Wise Free Synagogue hopes to share the joy, excitement, and reward of lifelong Jewish living with all those who enter its doors. We share in the challenge that Judaism presents, and strive to act as a partner with our students, families, and faculty members in creating a joyous, meaningful, and rich Jewish life.

Through an engaging and interactive curriculum, students forge a lifelong connection and commitment to the continuum of the Jewish experience through an understanding of Jewish history, faith, and tradition. Adults and children will strengthen their Jewish identity, further integrate the teachings of Torah into their daily lives, become more intimate with the liturgy and rituals of Shabbat and Jewish holidays, and solidify their relationship with God. They will actively participate in the life of our congregation, the building of our community, *am Yisrael* (the people of Israel), and *tikkun olam* (the healing of the world).

CONTACT THE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

The Religious School office is located on the second floor of the synagogue building. Office hours are 10:00 a.m.- 6:30 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and 9:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. Sundays. Please do not hesitate to call or email at any time.

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RELIGIOUS SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Our students:

- Develop a personal connection to **God** and strengthen their **Jewish identities**.
- Express the **Jewish values** they learn in their personal and communal behavior as we confront the task of repairing our world through acts of loving-kindness (*g'milut chasadim*).
- Learn **Hebrew** as the language of the Jewish people while developing reading skills, so that they are comfortable with our community and our prayerbook.
- Participate in **prayer experiences** through educational *tefila* (community prayer service) and Shabbat services and studies of the meaning underlying Jewish ritual and prayer.
- Experience **holiday celebrations and lifecycle events**.
- Discover the meaning of **community** by becoming active participants in the life of our synagogue, the New York City population, Israel, and the world.

For more in-depth information about the curriculum for each grade, please visit swfs.org/rs.

SHARING INFORMATION WITH US

Our Religious School Registration form includes space for you to share with us information to ensure that your child has a safe and successful year. If any of your information changes, please contact the Religious School office at any point during the year with the updated information. *Please keep in mind that our registration information is confidential!*

Medication: It is imperative that you include under the appropriate section on the back of our form any and all medications your child takes. This information is vital because it affects your child's learning and experiences in our school. *Please note that by law we are unable to assist in administering medication to students. If medication must be administered during Religious School, we are happy to work with you to find an alternative means to do so.*

Allergies: Parents of children with allergies are encouraged to disclose detailed information about any life-threatening or even dangerous allergies. We serve food in our school, and want to be sensitive to any allergies or medical conditions that may affect our students

Your Child's Learning Style: Please help us to make this experience successful for your child by completing this section as fully as possible. We also encourage you to contact the Religious School Director to talk about your child's learning style.

SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Stephen Wise Free Synagogue Religious School strives to be a holy community. The school's policies and procedures are designed to ensure that students, parents, teachers, and the administration work together to achieve a kind, caring, and safe space for learning.

OUR BRIT KAVOD

Our Religious School upholds Jewish values. The school must be a place where students, teachers, and families feel safe and supported. We expect that students, teachers, and families honor each other and act with dignity and respect at all times.

We are a

House of gathering - *Beit Kneset*:

I will be respectful of others, their things, and their bodies.

I will listen to my fellow students, my teachers, and my parents.

House of prayer - *Beit Tefila*:

I will remember that when I am in my synagogue I am in God's house.

I will use language appropriate for a guest in God's house.

House of study - *Beit Midrash*:

I will be respectful of others' opinions and ideas.

I will act in ways that encourage learning for everyone.

All students are asked to sign a copy of our *Brit Kavod* during their first year of attendance in our school. Additionally, our entire school community reviews the *Brit Kavod* during the first day of school.

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

The Stephen Wise Free Synagogue Religious School has a ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY for violence, drugs and alcohol, and any item that could harm another individual or represents something that could harm another individual. There is no smoking at Stephen Wise. If a student is thought to be a threat or danger to him- or herself and/or anyone else in the classroom, the structure, or equipment that constitute our synagogue, he or she will be removed from the classroom immediately. Any student bringing a potentially illegal substance, gun, knife, or any toy weapons into Stephen Wise will be immediately removed from the classroom and may be asked to leave the Religious School. Bullying and inappropriate language may also result in removal of the student from the classroom for the duration of the class day.

ENROLLMENT

Synagogue membership is a prerequisite for enrollment in our Religious School. Each spring, families already enrolled in the school will receive their registration materials for the following year. We ask that all families turn in their registration form by June 30th with a non-refundable deposit. New families registering after Labor Day will be charged an additional \$150.00 administrative fee. Options for class times are dependent upon enrollment. In order to create an educationally sound learning environment, class availability is contingent upon enrollment and a minimum of 6 students is required.

GUEST POLICY

Guests are welcome to come and try out our school program. The Stephen Wise student's parent and the guest's parent must provide written permission for the child to attend along with emergency contact information for the day of the visit. Any visit must be confirmed with the director of education at least 24 hours prior to the visit.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

WALKING SERVICE

For weekday Religious School students who attend PS 199, PS 87, and Ethical Culture Fieldston School, we offer a walking service for an additional fee. Students at these schools are met by one of our faculty members and walk as a group to the synagogue. When they arrive, they can join any other students who arrive early. Parents who wish to take advantage of this service must mark it on their child's registration.

ARRIVAL

Students are expected to be in their classroom/first location by the scheduled start of class. Students arriving 15 or more minutes late need to report first to the school office and then to their classrooms.

EARLY ARRIVAL

Because of the varied schedules and locations of secular schools, some students arrive before class begins. Stephen Wise will provide supervision of students up to one hour before the start of class in the main library or designated study hall room. A staff member will be there to sign-in students and ensure a safe environment. All students arriving more than five minutes before the start of class need to report to one of these locations. For safety reasons, students must remain in one of these two locations until the start of classes. Students will not be allowed in the classrooms, the hallways, or stairwells without appropriate supervision.

DISMISSAL

At the end of each class session, teachers will bring their class to the designated "dismissal location" on the main floor. Teachers will remain with their students until a known parent or authorized caregiver arrives and identifies themselves to the teacher. Students may not leave until the class has reached its designated pickup area and the teacher has officially released each student directly to the appropriate parent or caregiver.

In order to avoid traffic jams and chaos, parents and caregivers will be allowed to enter the building via the ramp and door near the guard's desk. After picking up your child, please exit through the main doors, away from the ramp and guard's desk. This will help improve the flow in the lobby and speed and safety of pick up.

It is assumed that families have agreed upon arrangements for traveling to and from Stephen Wise. Please let the school office know if there are special circumstances regarding drop-off and pickup. If parents would like the child to leave the building without an adult, they must notify the school in writing.

EARLY DISMISSAL

Students will not be allowed to leave the building before the scheduled end of class without written permission from the student's parent/guardian. Any student leaving early must sign out in the Religious School office and be accompanied by a parent/guardian unless otherwise discussed with the Religious School office.

LATE DISMISSAL

We kindly ask that parents let us know if they are running late or will be delayed in picking up their child. We will do our best to ensure that one of our staff members is able to stay with your child until you can be here.

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCES

We expect our students and their families to make every effort to attend Religious School on a regular basis in order to foster a sense of community and to solidify the learning that is happening throughout the year.

If your child is going to be absent, you can notify the Religious School office. Students can make up the learning they missed by doing an at-home enrichment project by themselves or with their parents.

Students and families who want to enhance and further their Jewish learning are always welcome to do one of our at-home enrichment projects!

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM

In order to maintain an environment that is conducive to learning, where all students are fully present and paying attention to one another, cellphones and other electronic devices are not allowed to be used when Religious School is in session. During certain programs or activities, teachers may allow students to use their phone or other electronic device but parents would always be notified before an activity like this occurs.

Students and parents who need to contact each other during the school session may do so through the phone in the Religious School office.

TZEDAKAH

There is a strong tradition of social activism and social justice at Stephen Wise. One part of our commitment to the world around us is our willingness to lend financial support to important causes. Students are encouraged to bring in *tzedakah* donations on a regular basis in order to fulfill the obligation to make the world a more just and righteous place. The grade that demonstrates the strongest level of commitment, by having students contribute on a regular basis, will earn a prize at the end of the year.

Additionally, at the end of the school year, our sixth grade students will host a Tzedakah Fair and encourage members of our school community to give to specific organizations. Each grade will determine which organization(s) they would like to donate their *tzedakah* to.

FOOD AND SNACK

We do our best to be nut-aware and to make sure that there is food for all our students, no matter their dietary restrictions. However, we cannot provide them with the appropriate food if we do not know their dietary needs. Please make sure that all allergies and other dietary restrictions are shared with our Religious School office.

During Sunday Religious School, all students will receive a snack of challah and water. Additionally, we will have a snack cart open before school for weekday students and during a break in the day for Sunday students. At the snack cart, students will be able to purchase one food and one drink for \$1. Parents are welcome to send additional small, nut-free snacks with their child, provided they do not become a distraction in the classroom.

EMERGENCIES AND INCLEMENT WEATHER

The Religious School follows the inclement weather school closing decision of the New York City Public Schools. If the NYC Public School cancels school, we cancel Religious School. If the weather worsens during the day and the NYCPS cancels after school programs, then we will not have Religious School. For programs held on the weekend, decisions about closing the building will be made the night before by 10 pm. When a closing does occur, an email and phone call will be made to all families.

While our school remains open in almost all weather situations, parents should, of course, use their best judgment in deciding whether or not to send children. Please do not hesitate to call the school office if you have a question regarding whether or not school is open.

EVACUATION PLAN

In the event that it is no longer safe to remain in the building, the Religious School has plans in place to guide our students safely to alternative sites in the neighborhood. In the event of an evacuation, the teachers and staff will bring the students to Habonim (44 West 66th Street). If there is a need to evacuate farther away from Stephen Wise, students will be brought to Ethical Culture (2 West 64th Street).

At the beginning of the year, parents are asked to fill out emergency cards that include important emergency contact information including information about authorized people who have permission to pick up their child. In an evacuation situation, our Religious School office will notify parents via email and phone message. Children can be picked up by their parents from Habonim or Ethical or will be released to the people indicated on the emergency information found in our registration materials.