



Stephen Wise Free Synagogue  
Religious School

# Parent Handbook

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## **School Brit**

Stephen Wise Free Synagogue's Religious School is committed to being a safe, inclusive, supportive, and positive learning environment where students, parents, teachers, and staff can build upon their Jewish identities. Our *kehilah kedoshah* (holy community) is built upon the values of *kavod* (respect and honor), *derech eretz* (common decency), *achriyut* (responsibility), *chesed* (compassion and kindness), and *talmud torah* (Jewish text study). We commit to living these values whenever we are with our Religious School community.

To that end, our students, parents, and staff agree to the following:

### **As a student, I agree to....**

- Participate in classroom discussions and activities in a way that enhances everyone's learning.
- Pay attention to teachers and classmates when they are speaking.
- Use kind language and maintain a positive attitude.
- Encourage everyone to learn and allow everyone the opportunity to share and ask questions.
- Keep our bodies to ourselves.
- Treat others in a way that I would like to be treated.

### **As a parent, I agree to...**

- Welcome other families and students into the Stephen Wise community.
- Continue my Jewish learning by engaging in thoughtful conversation with my children.
- Read materials sent home (via paper or email) in a timely manner.
- Treat all staff and teachers in a professional and respectful manner.
- Strive to have my children at school in a timely and consistent manner.

### **As a teacher or member of the school staff, I agree to...**

- Create a safe and engaging learning environment in the classroom.
- Incorporate a variety of learning styles and teaching methodologies in the classroom to accommodate various learning needs.
- Treat each child and parent with respect through compassion and active interest.
- Strive to get to know each child and help them to grow into a more knowledgeable and confident Jew.
- Listen carefully to the concerns and needs of parents and students and endeavor to address them to the extent possible.

It is the responsibility of every member of this community to create a respectful environment where families can connect to one another and learn together. By signing this document, we agree to do our part to uphold the ideals of this *brit* and strive to make our Religious School community holy.

## **RELIGIOUS SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

### **Religious School:**

Taste of Religious School (for pre-K students) meets on Sundays (9 a.m.-11 a.m.), twice per month  
Kindergarten, 1st & 2nd grades meet on Sundays (9 a.m.-11 a.m.) OR Tuesdays (4 p.m.-6 p.m.)  
Grades 3-5 meet on Sundays (9 a.m.-11:30 a.m.) OR Mondays (4 p.m.-6:30 p.m.)  
Grades 6 & 7 meet on Sundays (11 a.m.-1 p.m.) OR Wednesdays (4 p.m.-6 p.m.)\*

Portals is an option for students (grades 3-7) who want one-on-one learning. These students get 18 sessions (90 minutes each) to be scheduled by the families and the teacher during the school year.

\*B'nai mitzvah tutoring begins one year prior to the child's bar or bat mitzvah service. Students have one session each week for 30 minutes with one of our tutors here at Stephen Wise.

### **Additional Programs:**

Independent Study – one-on-one sessions with our clergy on a topic of the child's choosing  
Ulpan Katan – modern Hebrew exposure class (Tuesdays, 4 p.m.-5 p.m.)  
Challah Club – introduction to Religious School, focused on Shabbat (Fridays, 4:30 p.m.-5:15 p.m.)  
Family Experiences and Family Shabbat Programs

*For more information about each of these programs, please visit our website.*

## **CURRICULUM**

Our Religious School curriculum covers a variety of topics in Judaism, including (but not limited to) holidays, *middot* (Jewish values), Torah, Israel, prayer, theology, and lifecycle. Each year has a different focus and covers different topics based upon what is developmentally appropriate for the students. All of our students explore the Jewish holidays as they occur throughout the year; however, older grades spend less time on this than the younger grades.

We begin our formal Hebrew program in the third grade by studying the letters and vowels. Our goal is that each year students will improve their Hebrew reading skills and feel more comfortable reading any Hebrew text that is shown to them. Our pre-K to second grade students are exposed to Hebrew in games and activities in order to prepare them to be comfortable with the language before they even know the *aleph-bet*.

*For more in-depth information about the curriculum for each grade, please visit our website.*

## **TEFILAH**

We have weekly *tefilah* for our students in pre-K through fifth grade, while sixth and seventh grade students have *tefilah* a few times throughout the year.

During pre-K to second grade *tefilah*, we build community among our students, teachers and parents. We explore the *parshat hashavua* (weekly Torah portion), learn about the sanctuary, engage in Hebrew games, and spend time praying together. Our goal is for students to learn how to behave in a sanctuary and for them to feel comfortable in this space. Additionally, we want our youngest students to become familiar with the essential prayers of our service.

Grade 3-5 *tefilah* is also a time for community building and teaching appropriate behavior in the sanctuary. During this prayer service, students will learn the prayers and reinforce their Hebrew-reading skills. As we learn about the meaning and themes of each prayer, we encourage students to find something to connect to in each prayer and to make *tefilah* meaningful for them. During this time students will not only learn about the prayers but also find time to feel prayerful.

Grade 6-7 *tefilah* continues our learning about the prayers, however we begin to look at more mature concepts and more complicated prayers. As students are preparing to become bar or bat mitzvah, we see an opportunity to reinforce their reading skills and focus on prayers that they are learning for their big day.

### **TZEDAKAH**

Stephen Wise has a strong tradition of social activism and social justice. One part of our commitment to the world around us is our willingness to lend financial support to important causes. *Tzedakah* collection is one way we work to make the world a more just and righteous place. Students are encouraged to bring in *tzedakah* donations on a regular basis in order to achieve this goal. The grade that demonstrates the strongest level of commitment to bringing *tzedakah* earns a prize at the end of the year.

### **COMMUNICATION**

We strive to communicate regularly with Religious School families. The majority of our communication is through email. Please make sure that you notify the Religious School Office if your email address changes. We will not share your information with anyone else unless you give us explicit permission. (Note: sixth and seventh grade families can opt into us sharing information only for the purpose of b'nai mitzvah invitations.)

You can expect to receive the following emails from the Religious School throughout the year:

- Monthly grade-level newsletters, which share news from the classroom, pictures, and upcoming events.
- Reminders for grade-level Family Experiences programs and Emergency Food program dates.
- Reminders for Religious School closings.
- Assessments and sign-ups for parent/teacher phone calls.

At the beginning of the school year, you will receive a back-to-school packet at your home with a yearlong calendar and curriculum information for your child's grade. This information is also available on our website year-round.

### **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**

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

### **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. In order to create an educationally sound learning environment, class availability is contingent upon enrollment and friend requests are **not guaranteed if registration is submitted after August 1.**

### **ATTENDANCE**

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. Regularly missing class may negatively impact a child's overall experience and the Religious School cannot guarantee that a child will be able to catch up on all the material they miss.

### **DAY SWITCHES**

We are happy to accommodate day switches between Sunday and weekday programs for multiple weeks or months depending upon capacity. Please contact the Religious School office to discuss when the switch will begin and end. We will let you know in advance who your child's teacher will be on their new day.

### **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.

Students who take advantage of walking service are expected to follow the terms of our school *brit* upon being picked up by a faculty member. Any student who is unable to follow instructions, is consistently unruly, or threatens the safety of our students will no longer be allowed to continue with our walking service with no fee reimbursement.

### **ARRIVAL**

Students are expected to be in their classroom/first location by the scheduled start of class. Students who arrive prior to school starting on a weekday may go to the library to do homework or other quiet activities. Students who arrive early with an adult may stay in the lobby until the start of Religious School.

### **DISMISSAL**

At the end of each class session, teachers will bring students to their grade's designated "dismissal location" in the sanctuary. 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.

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 are not allowed to leave early without written permission from the student's parent or guardian. If a parent would like their child to leave early, they may either:

1. Go to the Religious School office outside of the library and sign their child out at the time they wish to leave. They will meet their child on the second floor and accompany them out of the building.
2. Send an email to the Religious School at least 30 minutes before the child's early dismissal time with the time the child will be leaving and the name of the person who will be picking them up. In this case, students will meet their adult in the lobby. (Younger students will be escorted by a staff member or one of the *madrachim*.) Students who have permission to self-dismiss will have this noted, and their Early Dismissal Pass will reflect this so that they can hand their pass to the guard and leave on their own.

## LATE DISMISSAL

We kindly ask that parents let us know if they are running late or will be delayed in picking up their child. If we have not heard from you by 10 minutes after dismissal, we will call the parent or guardian's cellphone. One of our staff members will stay with your child until you can be here.

## FOOD AND SNACK

Our synagogue building is nut-free and kosher. Any food in our building (whether provided by parents or by the Religious School) must be nut-free and dairy.

During Religious School, we will have a snack cart where students can get food and drinks. The fee for the snack cart is included in the materials fee and allows us to give each child two items per week. Students are welcome to buy any additional item for 50 cents per item.

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.

## GUEST POLICY

We recognize that students want to share their wonderful experience with friends. Guests are welcome to come and try out our school program **one time with permission from the Religious School director**. The Stephen Wise student's parent and the guest's parent must provide written permission for the guest child to attend along with emergency contact information for the day of the visit at least **48 hours in advance**. If a guest arrives without prior approval, the guest and the child with whom they have come will not be allowed to go to class and a parent will have to come pick them up.

## BEHAVIOR AND DISCIPLINE POLICY

Our ultimate goal is to ensure a safe and sacred community where every student has the opportunity to learn. We expect all our students, parents and staff to work to uphold our Religious School *brit*. In the event that a student struggles to uphold their end of the *brit*, they may be asked to leave the classroom and speak with Rabbi Rifkin, Kayla Kirshenbaum, or Debra Fricano. If a student is asked to leave the classroom multiple times, we will call the family to discuss how we can all work together to ensure better behavior going forward.

If negative behavior continues, we will create a behavior contract and then set up additional steps to ensure that a student's behavior doesn't take away from a positive learning environment for themselves or others. This will be created in discussion with Rabbi Rifkin, the student and his or her parents. In extreme cases, students may need additional support or time away from the classroom.

#### **ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY**

The Stephen Wise Free Synagogue Religious School has a ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY for violence, drugs and alcohol, and any item or conduct that could harm another individual or represents something that could harm another individual. There is no smoking at Stephen Wise. If a student is believed to be a threat or danger to him- or herself and/or anyone else in the school or any of the synagogue property, he or she will be removed from the classroom immediately. Any student bringing a potentially illegal substance, gun, knife, or any toy weapon 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 or other consequences deemed appropriate by the Religious School director.

#### **INCLEMENT WEATHER AND EMERGENCIES**

The Religious School follows the inclement weather school closing decision of the New York City Public Schools. If the Department of Education cancels school, we cancel Religious School. If the weather worsens during the day and the Department of Education cancels after-school programs, Religious School will also be cancelled. For programs held on the weekend, decisions about closing the building will be made by 10 p.m. on the prior evening. When a closing does occur, an email will be sent and a 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 their children. Please do not hesitate to call the school office if you have a question regarding whether or not school is open.

In the event of an emergency during school hours, our school will follow the appropriate emergency plan (sheltering in place or evacuating as necessary). Students will always be accompanied by an adult. Parents will be notified via email or phone message in the event of an evacuation. Only authorized adults listed on the registration form will be allowed to pick up the child.