

CONGREGATION TIKKUN V'OR

(Ithaca Reform Temple)

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RELIGIOUS SCHOOL HANDBOOK



Sundays	10:00 a.m. - 12 p.m.	Gan/Alef (K-1st grade)
Sundays	9:00a.m. - 12 p.m.	Bet-Zayin (2nd - 7th grade)
Wednesdays	4:30- p.m. - 6 p.m.	Vav-Zayin (6th and 7th grade)

Mission of Congregation Tikkun V'Or Religious School

Congregation Tikkun V'Or strives to create an environment in which children and families can learn the practices, beliefs, and traditions which will lead them to life-long Jewish commitment and learning. The school will provide a variety of opportunities to acquire Jewish **knowledge**, experience Jewish **culture**, and demonstrate Jewish **values** as individuals, families, and as a community.

The goals for our school are in agreement with the URJ Goals for Reform Jewish Education. In particular, we seek to help students:

- Affirm their Jewish identity through the celebration of holidays and Shabbat, the study of Torah and history, and the practice of *mitzvot* (commandments) and *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness);
- Celebrate Shabbat and the festivals and observe the Jewish ceremonies marking significant occasions in their lives;
- Develop appreciation of Hebrew as the common language of the Jewish people throughout the world;
- Gain the ability to read and understand Hebrew so that they will be able to participate fully in Jewish *t'fillah* (prayer services);
- Further the causes of justice, freedom, and peace by pursuing *tsedek* (righteousness), *mishpat* (justice) and *chesed* (loving deeds) through social action and social change;
- Appreciate and respect the differences between each individual, family, and community;
- Express kinship with *K'lal Yisrael* (the community of Israel) by actively seeking the welfare of others throughout the world;
- Support and participate in temple activities and community Jewish life;
- Appreciate Jewish culture, art, and literature.

The school will encourage each person to participate in acquiring the knowledge necessary to make informed choices within the spectrum of Reform Jewish life.

We welcome families from diverse backgrounds, interfaith families, LGBTQ families and children, people who are newly discovering Jewish connections, as well as those with a wide range of Jewish experiences. We are pleased to work with many different kinds of learners, including students with special challenges. We will do our best to accommodate and nurture all students “al pi darko” (“according to their ways”).

Curriculum Overview

JEWISH STUDIES

The core of Religious School studies includes holidays, Torah, history, and Jewish ethics. Each grade level approaches these topics at a different level, beginning with basic concepts and advancing to complex interpretations and expressions of Jewish thought. Students have opportunities to build on what they have learned in school and at home and to appreciate their family experiences and backgrounds.

Holidays: The youngest children learn about holidays through ritual objects, songs, and crafts. They will expand their knowledge of the history, interpretations, and variations of customs as they learn the vocabulary associated with each tradition. Older students consider the moral and contemporary lessons of each holiday.

Torah: The stories of our people are rich and varied, beginning with the words “In the beginning.” Students learn the legends and heroes of our history. They explore the values we are meant to learn from the Torah, and the many ways we can read and interpret it. They learn to be active participants in the study of Torah and Jewish commentary and literature. They glean wisdom from the words and stories of the prophets.

History: From biblical to modern times, Jewish history offers cultural and spiritual significance. As students discover the role of Jews in American and world history, they are encouraged to understand and celebrate our heritage. Older students also consider the effects of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust on the world wide Jewish community today.

Israel: Students examine the significance Israel as a geographical, biblical, cultural, and spiritual homeland, and study religious, cultural, and political forces and the diversity of the Israeli population. They will also learn that Israel is home to the Palestinian people, and that there is a conflict between about how to share the land. Students appreciate the role of social justice and Jewish values in the creation of the state of Israel and in current Israeli society.

Mitzvot and Ethics: Through Torah and history, Judaism offers us a code of behavior and moral understanding. Students are encouraged to perform *mitzvot* (commandments) and acts of *gemilut chasadim* (loving kindness), give *zedakah* (charity) and find ways to bring Jewish values into their daily lives.

Spirituality: Students are given opportunities to express feelings and emotions connected with God, to consider the ways in which we act as spiritual Jews, as well as to practice and explore their beliefs through Talmud Torah (study), *tefillah* (prayer), and *gemilut chasadim* (loving kindness).

Our curriculum focuses on the following Enduring Understandings:

Torah:

- Torah is an ongoing dialogue between the text and its students.
- Torah is real in our daily lives; it is with us wherever we are.
- Developing the skills to study Torah is essential to integrating Torah into our lives.

Avodah:

- Avodah is the work we do to find sacred connections to God, community, and self
- Engaging in the work of Avodah can bring order, beauty, meaning and insight to our lives.

G'milut Chasadim (acts of lovingkindness):

- We have a responsibility to do g'milut chasadim to make the world a better, holier place.

Student learning at TVO is experiential and hands-on. We have many resources and texts (like the Torah!) to guide us in creating interactive activities. The topics and themes listed below are addressed in many ways over the course of the two years each child is in the combined-grade classes.

Grades K and 1 / Gan / Kitah Alef:

Introductions to Jewish holidays and stories, the alef-bet, and mitzvot.

Grades 2 and 3/ Kitah Bet/Gimel

The personal relevance of Torah, Avodah, G'milut Chasadim
Thinking about God and k'dusha (holiness) in daily life
Making a difference, giving thanks, taking responsibility

Grades 4 and 5 / Kitah Daled/Hey:

Being part of the community by asking "Jew-cy Questions"
Giving meaning to prayer through kavanah (intentions) and kevah (actions)
Kibud (honor) & tzedakah (righteousness)
Learning from the Prophets

Grades 6 and 7 / Kitah Vav/Zayin:

Making decisions about becoming a Jewish adult
Learning from Torah study, Proverbs and Psalms
Looking at history and contemporary issues of Jewish life
Ethics, values, and middot (character traits)

HEBREW

We teach our students to be skilled, involved members of the synagogue community by embracing Jewish values and installing a sense of belonging to *Am Yisrael* (the people Israel). Part of this connection to Jewish history, spirituality, and to Israel is gained through study of the Hebrew language.

Hebrew is part of Jewish identity. Hebrew provides a common bond linking Jews from around the world. It is the living language of the modern state of Israel.

Hebrew is a holy language, giving us access to sacred texts and allowing us to study them in the original language. It is also the language of prayer and the prayer book, enabling Jews to participate in prayer services in any synagogue in the world.

Hebrew is essential to Jewish traditions. All Jewish life-cycle events and holidays involve Hebrew. With knowledge of Hebrew, students can participate with confidence in these events throughout their lives.

Hebrew expresses Jewish values. For example, the word "tzedakah" does not just mean "charity." It comes

from the root “*tzedek*” which means “*justice*” or “*the right thing to do.*” When students learn the meaning of Hebrew words, they learn the cultural vocabulary of Judaism as well as the literal translation of the Hebrew. **Hebrew helps express spirituality.** Hebrew is the language in which we express notions of God and godliness. We can connect with our ancestors by reciting their names in Hebrew and using Hebrew for ritual observances.

Our Hebrew curriculum focuses on Hebrew for prayers. This method provides a structure with clear goals and measurable progress. At the same time, by learning prayers students also gain a sense of the relevance and importance of Hebrew and prayer in their lives. They also learn the ethical values associated with each prayer. They learn the sources of Hebrew words and connect to contemporary Hebrew as a contemporary, vibrant language.

Children are introduced to Hebrew in the Gan and Alef class. They learn through games using the Hebrew letters. Students learn simple prayers by heart and some letter recognition.

In Kitah Bet (2nd grade) and Kitah Gimel (3rd grade) students learn to decode the letters and vowels and read words and short prayers.

Students in Kitah Daled (4th grade) and Kitah Hey (5th grade) begin to read fluently and focus on prayers.

Students in Kitah Vav (5th grade) and Kitah Zayin (6th grade) learn to read and chant prayers, including preparation to read from the Torah when they begin *bnai mitzvah* instruction.

We are committed to providing Hebrew instruction at a level appropriate for each child. Students who enter the program in the Kitah Daled (grade 4) or higher will need to know the Hebrew consonants and vowels and have some proficiency sounding out words. When necessary, we will attempt to provide some in-class tutoring to help students catch up to their grade level.

SCHEDULE

Grades 2-7 meet from 9 am – 12 pm. Grades K-1 meet from 10 am – 12 pm. Students are expected to arrive on time, ready to learn, and stay for the full morning program.

Class time is usually divided into several sections, which include:

Limud (learning):

- 1) **Judaic Studies** - including history, holidays, mitzvot, and Talmud Torah
- 2) **Hebrew**
- 3) **Tefillah** - a short prayer service to practice what we are learning, with plenty of **ruach** (spirit and singing). Praying together as a community is an important way for children to practice what they are learning in class, build on their knowledge of Hebrew, and experience some aspects of Jewish spirituality.
- 4) **Hafsakah** (break / snack)

We also often include:

- 5) **Chugim** (not “ch” as in “change” but “CH” as in “CHallah.”) Special projects including art, drama, dance, music, and mitzvot, to work on for four weeks in a multi-grade group with a parent, community member, or madrich (assistant) leading the group. Sometimes the whole school participates in chugim together – for Chanukah, Purim, or other holidays and special events.
- Or
- 6) **Ha’asharah** (enrichment from special guests)
- Or
- 7) **Farbrengen** (community gatherings) with Rabbi Brian

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

- **Religious School begins promptly at 9:00 am.** Please arrive early enough to for your child to be in the classroom ready to start at this time. Students who arrive after attendance is taken are considered tardy. If a student has a persistent problem with tardiness, contact will be made with the parents, and together we will attempt to solve the problem.
- **PLEASE NOTE: Pick-up is from 12-12:15 p.m. Please do not pick up your child before dismissal.**
- **If you do need to pick up your child early, you must:**
 1. Check in with the Director;
 2. Check in with the child's teacher, and
 3. **Sign out on the form near the front door.**

ATTENDANCE

It is part of our school mission to not only teach students the history, language, culture, and religious beliefs of the Jewish people, but to guide them toward an understanding of *klal Yisrael*, the community of people with which they learn, study, and celebrate. Participation in the community is a crucial element both in Jewish life and in academic progress. Attendance at Religious School is the link between our Jewish classrooms and community. Please recognize that students who miss classes also place additional burdens on the teachers to provide make-up work, detract from the classroom community experiences, and distract other students from continuing to learn and progress. It is particularly difficult for students to make the transition back to class after a long absence.

IF A STUDENT IS ABSENT:

1. **Parents are expected to email the teacher** to find out about work missed and homework assignments. It is also suggested that students call classmates to find out about missed lessons.
2. **All work should be completed** by the student and brought to the next class.
3. A TUTOR MAY NEED TO BE HIRED AT THE PARENTS' EXPENSE, unless the student can demonstrate that they have mastered the missed work. A list of tutors will be available from the Religious School Director.

ATTENDANCE AT MIDWEEK CLASSES IS ALSO REQUIRED for students in grades 6 and 7.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING ATTENDANCE:

1. What if my child is sick?

Everyone is occasionally sick or has a legitimate reason to miss a class. **For the health of our community and your child's comfort, please keep your children at home if they are sick.** Our illness policies are in place for the protection, health and well-being of ALL our students, their families and staff.

Please keep your children at home if they:

- a) have a fever or have had one in the previous 24 hours
- b) are vomiting or have had intestinal disturbance in the previous 24 hours
- c) have heavy nasal discharge and/or cough
- d) have discharge from eye(s)
- e) have symptoms of a possible communicable disease

If your child shows symptoms of illness upon arrival or during the school day, we will call and request that the child be picked up.

If your child will be absent, please call and leave a message at 607-256-1471, and contact your child's teacher as well.

Also please be sure that we have contact and emergency contact information should your child become ill during the Religious School morning.

Family weddings and b'nai mitzvah celebrations are good excuses for missing school; help your child be ready to talk with the class about his/her visit to another Jewish community! And contact the teacher to find out about missed work.

2. What if my child is on a sports team?

It is expected that all families have to make decisions about what to do each Sunday morning. By deciding to enroll your child in Religious School, you are choosing to provide your child with a Jewish education. This is a commitment that has great rewards for you and your child, but may necessitate cutting back on other activities. In order for the educational experience to be both successful and enjoyable, attendance must be consistent. Just as too many absences from sports games can mean losing a spot on the team, too many absences from Religious School leads to the loss of educational opportunities and Jewish experiences, and a loss of the feeling of community and growth that occurs in each of our classrooms throughout the school year.

3. What if I can't help my child with the work because I don't know Hebrew or the subject being studied?

Teachers will make every effort to make any homework reasonable and will provide additional support as needed. We also offer adult Hebrew courses periodically – join in the learning!

HOMEWORK

Homework is an opportunity to involve families in Jewish education and to practice work learned in class. This may involve a question to discuss with an adult, or Hebrew reading practice. Children in *bet-gimel* (grades 2-3) may have up to 15 minutes of homework each week. Students in *daled-zayin* (grades 4-7) may have up to 25 minutes of homework each week. All homework will be discussed when assigned, written on homework sheets or emailed home, and reviewed in class the next week. Please feel free to discuss homework with your child's teacher or the Director.

TZEDAKAH

Tzedakah (“righteousness”) teaches your child how to be a righteous person. We collect money for *tzedakah* every week at *T'fillah*. At the end of each semester students decide to which charitable organizations to donate the money they have collected. We suggest that parents help children decide how much money to give (a portion of their allowance?) or supply money for the children to donate.

MITZVOT

As well as learning and doing *mitzvot* every week in every classroom, each class will learn about and do *mitzvot* to improve their own lives, the lives of others, and their understanding of the world around us. A few of these *mitzvot* are connected to holidays and community celebrations, while others may be one-time events. Families are encouraged to become actively involved in the class mitzvah projects.

BOOKS

The cost of books is included in tuition. Please take good care of these books, as they are difficult to replace once the school year has begun. If you have registered on the first day of school or later, be aware that books might not be available for a few weeks. The teacher will photocopy any text pages that your child will need until the books are received. If a book is lost, please inform the teacher or Director as soon as possible so that a replacement can be ordered (at parents' expense).

MATERIALS

If additional supplies are required, the teacher will send a list home. In general, each student should come to class with a notebook, folder, and pencil each week, as well as his/her books. We do not have extra books at school, so it is important that books not be left at home!

SNACK

A mid-morning snack will be served each Sunday. The cost of snacks is included in tuition. We do ask our snack-buyers to be sure that all snacks are peanut-free, and have gluten-free and dairy-free alternatives if needed, but if special attention to snacks is needed for food allergies, please let the Director know.

Vav and *Zayin* mid-week families will have a separate schedule to share snacks on Wednesdays.

STUDENT PROGRESS REPORTS

Students will usually receive two individualized written progress reports during the school year. The Religious School Director and the teachers are available throughout the year to talk with you about your child's progress.

BEHAVIOR

Students are expected to comport themselves in a way that is appropriate for a learning environment. If disruptive behavior becomes a problem, the teacher or Director will contact the parent(s) to work out a solution. The school reserves the right to exclude any student whose behavior is persistently disruptive.

TEACHERS

Our teachers are adult community members as well as sometimes students at Cornell University, Ithaca College, and SUNY Cortland. They have experience working with children and extensive Jewish background and knowledge, which they are eager to share with our students. Please let the teachers know about any concerns you may have about your child or the class. Most teachers are also reachable by phone and e-mail. If you have other concerns about a teacher, please speak with the Director.

MADRICHIM

The Madrichim program is an opportunity for 8th-12th graders to contribute to the Tikkun v'Or community while strengthening and enhancing their skills and Jewish identity in the process. Madrichim are an integral part of Religious School at TVO. Teens work as teaching assistants, help in the office, with students with special needs, as a tutor, and lead chugim (electives) and tefillah. Participation as madrichim allows teens to contribute to the TVO community in meaningful ways, while working in roles that promote skill and character-building.

USE OF SPACE AND EQUIPMENT

Our synagogue is a beautiful building that serves many purposes, including our school. We have worked hard to figure out the best arrangements for the use of limited space, but we ask for your continued patience as we share space. Room dividers work as visual separations between classrooms, but we know that the acoustics in the room require soft voices. Supplies and books are on wheeled carts. Each week all supplies, tables, and chairs must be put away.

At all times, we must remember that Tikkun v'Or is a house of worship as well as our school; we expect property to be treated respectfully.

The outdoor space will have a designated play area; students are not allowed to wander on the field below.

If you are able to help organize or clean up for special events (or just to help out), please let the Director know.

Please help your children be respectful of the building and others' property.

- Because of the lack of extra space, please note the continuing Religious School policy that unsupervised children (those not enrolled in Religious School, or students before and after school) are not permitted to be left at the temple.
- If you need to use the TVO photocopier for legitimate temple use, please see the Director for instructions.

ROLE OF THE PARENT

There is no doubt that if a child is to have a positive attitude toward Jewish studies, there must be a nurturing Jewish atmosphere in the home. We hope to reinforce this involvement within our school and congregation.

We strongly encourage families to be involved in their children's studies, to attend services with their children, and to incorporate Jewish practices into their family life. We expect that parents will actively participate in school activities.

Rabbi Brian Walt joins us for several Sunday mornings each year. He leads parents and students in a *farbrengen* (gathering) of song, dance, stories, and learning as a start to the morning. Dates for these special events are listed in the school calendar.

Participation in adult education classes and relevant temple and community events is also highly encouraged. Religious School parents often can attend adult classes for free.

PARENT PARTICIPATION POLICY

At least one parent of each child is expected to help in school. We believe it is important for parents to be involved in their child's education. In addition, our limited resources make parental help necessary for the school's educational success. When you register your child for school, please select a task from the list of options. The school counts on each family's participation, so if you are unable to carry out your chosen task, please contact the Director as soon as possible, or arrange to switch tasks with another family.

CLASS PARENT

One of the Parent Participation tasks is to be the class parent. The class parent is in charge of organizing the Shabbat dish-to-pass and the Oneg Shabbat refreshments at the services led by that class. The class parent is also the first contact on the class phone tree in case of snow or other emergency school closures.

JEWISH EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Jewish Education (JE) Committee is a group of temple members who meet to plan school events, set school policies, discuss curriculum, and supervise the school director. If you are interested in participating in this committee, contact the current chair or the school director.

SHABBAT EXPERIENCES and CLASS SERVICES

Children and their families are always welcome at services at Congregation Tikkun v'or. Congregation Tikkun V'Or holds Shabbat services most Fridays at 7:30 p.m. Your family's attendance on a regular basis is a visible way of showing your children that Judaism is not just for kids!

In addition, each class participates in a Friday night service, led by Cantor Abbe Lyons. Kitah vav/zayin also participates in a Saturday morning service. Please mark these on your calendar.

During the sixth and seventh grade year, it is expected that students and families participate in many of the Shabbat services and all holiday services, with a minimum attendance requirement at:

- **At least two TvO Saturday morning bar/bat mitzvah service 6 months prior to your own bar/bat mitzvah**
- **All scheduled Vav-Zayin class participation services**
- **At least 6 additional Friday night services prior to your own bar/bat mitzvah**
- **At least 4 additional Shabbat morning services**
- **Bar/bat mitzvah services (both Friday & Saturday) of classmates**

MID-WEEK HEBREW CLASS – KITAH VAV and ZAYIN

Kitah Vav and Kitah Zayin meet twice each week – on Sundays and one weekday (*Wednesdays 4:30-6 pm*) It is a mandatory part of the Religious School program, unless other arrangements have been made with the Director. The class meets for 1 1/2 hours.

B'NAI MITZVAH PROGRAM

The attainment of the goal of becoming a bar/bat mitzvah is a milestone in Jewish learning and growth. To guide students to an understanding of the meaning of this achievement, the class meets weekly to study Torah, discuss Jewish ethics, and practice mitzvot.

In addition, Cantor Abbe meets individually (about twice monthly) with each B'nai Mitzvah student, beginning about six months prior to the ceremony date. In the month before the ceremony, students meet weekly with the Cantor Abbe. Families also meet regularly with Cantor Abbe for family education. Students in the Vav and Zayin/B'nai Mitzvah class are expected to regularly attend Shabbat and holiday services. See above for more details.

WEATHER EMERGENCIES

Notice of cancellation of Religious School due to weather will be sent by text, email, and broadcast on WHCU 870 AM. The decision to cancel school will be made by 7:30 am and the announcement should be on air by 8 am. In addition, we will make every effort to notify families via the class phone trees, texts, and on our webpage and Facebook.

PAYMENT POLICY

Religious School tuition payment policy: School tuition must be paid by the end of December, unless payment is being made by quarterly credit card payments. If payments are not up to date, student will not be able to attend religious school, unless arrangements for tuition assistance have been made by contacting the temple presidents.

All b'nai mitzvah families must be members in good standing during the kitah zayin year. All fees must be paid in full at least two months before the bar/bat mitzvah service

New families to religious school automatically become members of our Congregation. You can handle your membership in two different ways. If you elect to pay your annual dues the first year you will be charged a lower, member rate for religious school. If possible we prefer this as it will help fund the many programs and services we offer. However, if you prefer, your dues can be waived for the first year and you would pay the non-member rate for religious school.

Contact the membership committee chairperson for information about membership.

TUITION ASSISTANCE

We want all students to be able to receive a Jewish education regardless of family finances. Tuition assistance is available to Tikkun v'Or students through a grant provided by the Ithaca Area United Jewish Community (IAUJC). Applications are available with registration forms and on our website. They should be sent to the temple presidents. Requests are confidential. We do prefer to get these forms by August 1; however, if it is later than that and you would like your child to start Religious School, please contact the presidents and they will be happy to work with you on a reasonable plan for dues and tuition.

CONTACT INFORMATION

***If you need to call Religious School during school hours,
call Tikkun v'Or at (607) 256-1471 OR
Naomi's cell phone (607) 280-6781***