

Parent Handbook 2021-2022

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the Temple Shaaray Tefila Nursery School. This handbook is an introduction to how our school works, with updates specifically included this year to share new guidelines and policies that address additional Covid-19 related topics. There is a great deal of information included. It is important that you please read all documents in their entirety before school starts and use it as a resource throughout the year.

As you read through this handbook, please keep in mind that each of our classes is set up to encourage every child to participate fully, to create a caring, interactive community, and to let independence flourish as appropriate. Despite new guidelines that may seem to prevent that, we are determined to maintain a safe and caring environment for all children and staff which reflects the best practices for early childhood education at all times.

In addition to general school guidelines, the following protocols and procedures have been developed in accordance with rules set out by the CDC, New York State Department of Health, and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. We are instituting these protocols in order to operate the Nursery School in the safest and most developmentally appropriate way. We will continue to adjust our best practices to ensure the safety and health of our families and our staff.



Each classroom has a carefully constructed teacher-to-student ratio. All groups have their classroom teachers plus a few specialists who will teach movement, music, cooking or Hebrew on a weekly basis. Some of these activities will continue to be virtual as we assess and adjust to health and safety conditions as the school year progresses. There are various activities throughout each school day; some are more structured, others are purposefully more open. There is some time everyday to do what is most important for them: to explore, to tinker, to experiment. The children work with art materials, blocks, puzzles, etc., for extended time. Teachers facilitate the children's individual and/or cooperative goals. There are tangible lessons and more subtle ones as the children develop skills in many important areas: cognitive, physical, emotional and social.

Our goal is to foster a sense of community and to help all of the children appreciate each other's strengths. We look to you, the parents, to help support us in these goals.

We look forward to this school year and the opportunity to work with your child and family.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Blanco

Early Childhood Director



CONFIDENTIALITY

We see each child in our school as an individual. While we try to set up systems that foster comfort, thinking, and creativity for all children, we realize that there are particular factors that impact on each child differently. We know that different children have different strengths and different areas that may need extra support.

We want to be able to work openly with parents toward the goal of helping their children do well in our school. We want to reassure parents that we do understand the importance of confidentiality. We do not talk to parents about children other than their own in our school. We use the information we observe or have been told from parents about their children to help us be better teachers. That relationship exists between the parents and their child and the teachers and administration only. If there is a desire for more input or if there is personal trauma that the family is experiencing, we would ask the family if they would like to talk to the rabbi or to our social worker for extra support or guidance.

If the family has outside support from, for example, an occupational therapist or a speech and language specialist, we ask that you please sign a paper that gives us permission to talk with that person or persons for the purpose of gaining information about how to best to help your child proceed in our classroom as well as to help the specialist know which areas need the most support in our classroom. Those conversations would only be shared between the family and the staff.

The results of any standardized testing would also not be shared with anyone but the parents of the child who took the test. We would also ask parents not to tell other parents about their test scores so as not to create anxiety and competition. Please reach out to us if you have any questions.

A breach in confidentiality would be considered a grave mistake and would open a staff person to the possibility of termination.



NEW RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICIES ON GATHERINGS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

We are asking all families to partner with us to ensure that children and staff are kept safe throughout the school year. While we can be strict about keeping groups of children in isolated cohorts during the school day, we need your help to ensure that these policies are respected and followed outside of the classroom. Only in working together will we be able to keep children and staff healthy to continue in-person learning this year. With that in mind, we are asking all families to commit to the following recommendations:

- Indoor after school classes in class pods only
- Please follow the CDC's guidance on international travel as well as its regulations regarding quarantine- <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>
- Daily health screenings for all children

PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

Individual conferences are scheduled twice a year, in the fall and in the spring. The dates are noted on the Nursery School Calendar. You will be notified of the specific time for your conference a couple of weeks in advance. Conferences will be on Zoom or in person depending on our regulations in the fall. At the conference, your child's teachers will sit with you and discuss your child's growth and development. Where there is a need, additional conferences may be arranged. The teachers will not hesitate to contact the parent(s) if that is the case. You are encouraged to meet with your child's teachers any time you have a question or concern about your child's progress. Appointments can be made with the teachers directly or you can leave messages for them with the Nursery School Office (see below).

As much as we all try to have open, constructive communication between teaching staff and parents, it is possible that there will be a situation in which the parents might feel that they need to get more support.



When parents have any questions or concerns about their children in our school, about the teaching staff, about the administration or about the building, in general, we suggest the following procedure. First, parents should go to the teachers with their questions and concerns. If an understanding cannot be reached the parents should go to either the Director or the Assistant Director. If there still is no resolution, Isabel Schein, our Social Worker, is available for further help and is able to make virtual appointments on Wednesdays.

If no resolution is made within the context of the school, the school administration recommends going to the head rabbi, Rabbi Joel Mosbacher, or the president of the congregation, Liz Sherman. Messages can be left for either of them through the main office, 212-535-8008.

CONTACTING TEACHERS & SCHOOL WIDE COMMUNICATION

You can call the Nursery School Office (212-535-2146) when you want to speak to your child's teacher, leaving the times when your call can be returned. The teachers cannot be called to the phone unless it is an emergency, as this would disrupt the classroom program. Each classroom also has a designated email address. Teachers will not return emails during class. Maintaining professional channels of communication is paramount. As such we discourage texting between teachers and parents. In addition, contact with teachers is limited to the warm, professional exchange we have about children in school. There is to be no employing of teachers outside of school for babysitting, tutoring, etc. Teachers are also not permitted to attend children's birthday parties, to "friend" parents on Facebook, or to visit families outside of school except as part of our program, i.e., for beginning of the year home visits. Thank you for your cooperation.

This year we will once again be utilizing the Kaymbu communication platform to share updates from the administration, newsletters, and reflections from teachers and individual updates about your child. In



addition this year, we will also use the Kaymbu for Families app for Health Screening and electronic check in/out required by the Department of Health. Further details will be shared in the fall.

CONSULTANT AND VISITING TEACHERS

We have an early childhood consultant, Isabel Schein, MSW, who works with our school. She “visits” all of the classrooms regularly, meets with the Nursery School staff, holds occasional group talks on topics of interest to families with young children, and is available to meet privately with parents to discuss any areas of concern. With new guidelines to consider, our social worker will be available on Wednesdays by phone or Zoom exclusively. To schedule an appointment with Isabel, contact her via email at ISchein@tstnyc.org.

We also might have visiting teachers who work in the classrooms on a regular basis to help a particular child completely integrate into the class. This teacher, the Special Ed Itinerant Teacher (SEIT), is seen by us as a gift to the whole class. In helping one child to become more a part of the group, the SEIT is helping each child better develop the ability to make clear his/her needs to each of his/her friends. While we see the SEIT as a gift, there are parents who are reluctant to share the fact that their child might have been awarded a few hours of SEIT help each week, even though they have understood how wonderful this is for their child and the class. We thank you for respecting their desire for confidentiality. Clergy and our specialists will be “visiting” the classrooms on Zoom throughout the school year, as appropriate. In case of a teacher’s non-COVID related absence, a substitute teacher will be placed in the classroom. Parents in that class will be notified as soon as possible. All staff are required to follow the same strict health and safety guidelines.

ADJUSTMENT / PHASING-IN

Every school year, we create a very intentional and thoughtfully planned transition to help young children navigate the complicated feelings associated with the start of the school year. They (and you) may feel both excited and anxious.

Transition plans will vary by age group, but the overarching goal is for children to develop increased comfort via short (and then gradually longer) time spent in school. By the end of the phase-in period, they will ideally wave goodbye to caregivers confidently and be escorted to their classrooms by their teachers.

As adjusting to school is an individual experience, some children may nonetheless feel nervous or reluctant about the process, and we are committed to partnering with you to meet the individual needs of your child, should he or she require additional support.

Initial Opening Dates:

- September 1: Teachers return to school for training and classroom set-up.
 - September 6-8: School will be closed for Labor Day and Rosh HaShanah
 - September 9-10: Teachers arrange Zoom introductions, Small Group Visits, and Small Group Outdoor Visits with students. ***Teachers will contact families with individual dates and times when they return to school in September.***
 - September 10: Virtual Parent Orientation on Zoom at 9:00AM.
 - September 13: First day of school and phase-in
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CLOTHING

Please dress your child in comfortable, washable clothing. Comfortable clothing includes shoes and coats that are appropriate and safe for running and climbing. Party shoes, open back shoes, and flip-flops are not good choices for school. Although we supply plastic smocks and our paint and glue are mostly washable, we still ask you to send your child to school in washable play clothes. Occasionally your child will get messy. Furthermore, it is important that your child not feel restricted from using materials because he/she is worried about getting clothes dirty.

Each child needs to have a change of clothing and extra mask kept at school in his/her cubby. Even older children occasionally have accidents or spill food/beverages on themselves. All clothing needs to be clearly labeled with your child's name. Children will use the roof playground in all types of weather (except for rainy or dangerously cold days). There are lovely, cold, snowy days when children would benefit from playing outside, but they must have appropriate clothing, including boots, snow pants, hats and mittens.

In addition to the above items, children in the Pre-K who rest in school will bring a fresh, clean towel to school each day. With new guidelines in place, each child will be assigned their own rest mat which will be sanitized after each use by our staff.

We recommend that every child bring a backpack to school to carry their labeled water bottle, and for older children, their lunch box and fresh rest towel to and from their classrooms each day.

HEALTH AND ACCIDENT PROCEDURES

The most up to date science tells us that Covid-19 is transmittable even when mild or no symptoms are present. It is imperative that you take even the slightest sign of illness very seriously, and do not send your child to school until they are completely well. We know that children get sick with things other than Covid-19, but in order to protect our community, Temple Shaaray Tefila will be very strict about Illness Policies, as recommended by the CDC, New York State Department of Health, and the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene.

Please do not send your children to school if they are not completely healthy. If your child is begging to come to school but had a fever the night before, or was up all night with a cough or stomach ache, or has a cold or a lot of mucus, please let him/her know there is a rule at school that he/she must wait one more day at home. Sometimes a child will appear to get sick at school and we will call you to pick him/her up. We will call you if your child has a rash, diarrhea, a pink or goopy eye, excessive coughing, green mucus from a runny nose, a fever, is nauseous or is simply not him/herself. Even if you feel that your child could make it through the day with us, we will ask you to pick up your child because we are not only concerned about his/her welfare, but the welfare of everyone in the class. While it is important to listen to your child's perceptions on whether he/she is well enough to be in school, there are times when we have to overrule. Parents are required to notify us if your child is home with a contagious disease (i.e. stomach flu, strep throat, etc.) so that we can tell the other parents and the Board of Health. Please let us know if your child has any physical difficulty (eye-sight, allergies, etc.) so we can best meet his/her needs. Make sure we have your emergency cards on file so that we have a contact person other than yourself. In case of an accident, we will try to locate you before we call your pediatrician, unless there is an emergency in which case we will call 911.

Specific policies relating to Covid-19 will also be in effect this year.

- Children may not enter the building with the following symptoms, even if no fever is present: runny nose, cough, red/watery eyes, diarrhea, vomiting, fever, rash, stomach pain.
 - Children with a fever of 100 degrees or higher may not come to school.
 - Diagnosed allergies must be verified by a doctor's note before entry.
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- Children who become sick at school will be isolated in the Lobby Library classroom with a designated staff person.
 - Children who become sick at school must be picked up within 30 minutes.
 - If a child becomes ill, they must stay home until fever and symptom free (without medication) for 72 hours. This means that if your child's last fever was on Monday afternoon, he/she would return to school on Friday.
 - If a child, family member, or staff member is diagnosed with Covid-19, we are required to report the diagnosis to the New York State Department of Health and the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene.
 - If a child or their household member becomes symptomatic for COVID-19 and/or tests positive, the child must quarantine and may not return or attend the school until after quarantine is complete.

BIRTHDAYS

Birthdays at school are special! Please let your child's teachers know in advance about plans for your child's birthday. We recommend a simple party during snack time with a festive treat. Remember, we are a nut-sensitive environment. Summer birthdays are usually celebrated together at the end of the school year. *The statement below reflects our long standing policy on birthday parties and other out-of-school get togethers.*

If you are having a party for your child outside of school and you invite more than one or two children from the class, then please invite the whole class. Children will find out if they have not been invited and will be very upset. **This rule is very important.** Please feel free to talk to the Director or Assistant Director about this. We can somewhat enhance the in-school party if you choose not to have an out-of-school party. We also ask you to be sensitive to the fact that having birthday parties on a Saturday



may create an awkward situation for families who observe Shabbat. Also, please keep in mind other school or Temple events that might be taking place at the Temple when choosing a date for your party.

FOOD

Kashrut

The Temple is not strictly kosher. However, it is kosher-style. Pork products and shellfish are not allowed in the building and we ask you not to send in food that mixes milk and meat. Likewise, we will be providing snacks that are kosher-style.

Lunch Information

If your child stays for lunch, please send a kosher-style lunch in a lunchbox with your child's name on it. If your child's lunch requires refrigeration, please send the lunch in an insulated bag with an ice pack. And since we are trying to build independence, please send a manageable lunch.

Snack Time

Snack time is meant to be a time for children to relax together, to take the time to take a breath and drink water and have a small snack. On Fridays, the snack will include eating challah and drinking grape juice as part of the celebration of Shabbat.

Meal Time Protocol- Snacks are provided to the children each morning some time between the hours of *10am and 11:30am. The children are required to wash their hands again before eating. The teachers, wearing gloves, will place individually wrapped snacks on plates or napkins for the children. The children in the Older 3's and Pre-k bring in their own lunch which is kept at room temperature or with an ice pack. Lunch is eaten between the hours of *12:00pm and 1:00pm depending on the class. **Children should bring a labeled water bottle from home every day.** It will go into the cubby during the day and be returned home for washing every afternoon.

*Based on staggered arrival, these times may adjust.

Suggestions

Sandwiches are popular. Also, leftovers in a small container with a spoon or fork are fine.

It is nice to provide more than one item such as cut-up fruit or vegetables or pretzels (in addition to a sandwich or leftovers), but do not provide too many choices. Please send a drink – Water, a thermos of milk, juice, or a juice box is popular (the foil juice packets are hard to use).

The Don'ts

- Please do not send **too much food** – only send what you really think your child will eat.
- Please **do not send candy.**
- Please **do not send any pork products or shellfish products** into the Temple building (for example, no ham sandwiches or shrimp salad).
- Please understand teachers cannot leave the classroom to microwave any food – if you'd like to send hot food, please warm the food at home first and then put it into a thermos (this should keep the food warm until lunchtime).

Food Allergies

Due to the rising number of children coming to us with dangerous nut allergies, Temple Shaaray Tefila Nursery School is a nut-sensitive environment. Please do not send your child to school with any nut or peanut products. We understand that this makes preparing lunch for peanut butter lovers more challenging; however, we all need to work together for the safety of our children. Do be diligent and check ingredients. Some products have peanut oil and should not enter the classrooms.

Even though your children do not share lunches, some allergic children will react severely from only inhaling a nut product in his/her surroundings.

Some children have additional allergy concerns and there may be further restrictions in particular classrooms. Teachers and parents will be in close communication about all possible restrictions.



Thank you for your cooperation.

HOME AND CLASSROOM VISITS

A visit will be arranged so that your child can meet his/her teachers before he/she comes to school. This year a small group in-person visit as well as a small outdoor visit will be scheduled by your teachers.

You will be notified of your child's visit appointments via phone and/or email once the teachers return to school on September 1. Please try to accommodate the teachers' schedule. If, however, it is impossible to do so, notify the teachers and they will do their best to arrange another time.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

Arrival and Dismissal will take place at one of the two 79th Street Doors and will be assigned prior to the start of the school year. Class arrival and dismissal times will be staggered in 10 minute intervals in the morning, and the appropriate time, based on length of each class's school day, in the afternoon.

Arrival: It is very important to be on time. It is not even for the sake of establishing a routine (although that could be a reason). It is because it is often difficult for children to enter a room full of classmates who have already become engaged with their friends and their play/work. Teachers will meet each child at the 79th Street door and, after a health screening, bring your child to another member of the teaching team who will gather the children together in the Sanctuary. Once the children who are expected to arrive for the day are all present, the class will then travel together with their teachers to their classroom. If you are late, we will be as accommodating as possible. We know that sometimes there are delays that can't be helped. Please contact the school office as soon as possible in these situations so that we can share with you a plan for your child to enter school for that day. This may include a member



of the administration bringing your child to the classroom if the teacher is no longer available to come downstairs to meet you.

Dismissal: Likewise, it is difficult for your child if you are not there when the school day is over. Please try to arrive at school a few minutes before dismissal to make sure you are there on time. Again, it may happen that occasionally you are delayed. We will keep your child as comfortable as possible until you arrive.

If your child is to be picked up by a new person, send an email to the teachers and to the Nursery School Office and give us the names of the people involved. We are very careful and will only dismiss a child to someone whom you have authorized. **If a change becomes necessary at the last minute, please call the Nursery School Office (212-535-2146) so that we can notify the teachers and the security guard at the Temple's Front Desk.**

SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

TEMPLE SECURITY

Due to Covid-19, new guidelines will be put in place regarding building visitors. Our protocols will be shared as we get closer to the new school year.

BUILDING SAFETY

Under no circumstances will anyone be allowed to enter our school building with firearms of any kind. Failure to comply with this regulation will result in immediate dismissal.



EVACUATING THE BUILDING

In the event of an emergency that requires evacuation of the building, the red fire alarms in the hallways next to the stairwell doors will be activated. All children and staff will exit as indicated on the exit maps posted outside each classroom door and the following procedures will take place: Teachers will take their first-aid packs (containing the families' phone numbers and other supplies) and the children to the nearest staircase. They will count the children to make sure everyone is present and then proceed downstairs as quickly as possible while still being safe. When they get downstairs and are told that this is not a drill but a real emergency, classes will go to the following apartment building lobbies:

- Adom and Kachol: 301 East 79th Street
- Tzahov , Katom, Lavan, Zahav : 239 East 79th Street
- Yarok, Sagol, and Kesef : 308 East 79th Street

Teachers will call parents from the lobbies and will stay with their children until they can be picked up. General Security is provided by the Temple, including a guard at the entrances and surveillance cameras. Please alert someone in the Nursery School Office or the Temple Office if you notice anything suspicious.

INCLEMENT WEATHER SCHOOL CLOSING PROCEDURE

In case of severe weather, the Nursery School typically follows the New York City Public Schools. Please listen to your local weather reports; an email and text alert will be sent by 6:30am if we are closed.

**If you have any questions or concerns,
please do not hesitate to contact the Nursery School Office- 212-535-2146.**



