

Parent Handbook 2024-2025

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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. 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.

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 in a manner that reflects the best practices for early childhood education at all times.

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. 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, yoga or Hebrew on a weekly basis. There are various activities throughout each school day; some are more structured, others are purposefully more open. There is some time every day 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.

We have tried to make this handbook as comprehensive as possible, but there will inevitably be situations and questions that arise which are not discussed in these pages. I encourage you to let me know if you have a question or concern. We strive to provide each child with a secure, caring, and inviting experience. It is our desire to help students use their innate abilities to create, imagine, explore, and learn. We are all partners in this endeavor and mutual support from home and school will allow the best learning possible for our students.

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 a wonderful year together!

Sincerely,

Sue Yulis

Early Childhood Director



OUR APPROACH


Temple Shaaray Tefila Nursery School's approach to early childhood education is based on extensive knowledge about young children and how they learn. While no two teachers ever have the exact same teaching style, all TSTNS faculty are guided by the same underlying early childhood philosophy. The program has evolved from our beliefs about what is developmentally appropriate. The faculty of TSTNS believe young children have the best opportunity to develop in an authentic environment that stimulates their curiosity and capitalizes on their abilities through developmentally appropriate activities, projects, exploration, and experimentation. We believe that *play (with a purpose)* is essential in children's lives. We believe that through exploration and discovery, our pedagogical practice should sustain a culture of inquiry, where educators listen, wonder, and reflect with their students.

Each child brings uniqueness to the school experiences. We know those experiences, whether in culture, language, growth patterns, experiences, strengths and approaches to the learning situation, are individual. The role of the teacher as a facilitator is first to assess the developmental level of each child, and then provide an appropriate learning environment for the different needs, interests and developmental levels of each child within a safe and loving, nurturing, and educationally sound environment.

We appreciate the individuality of each child and believe that no two children learn at the same pace, nor learn best by the same method. We provide a flexible and creative approach to best meet the needs of each child. Schedules, routines, and activities are flexible, and our teachers will work with therapists, special educators, and other professionals to integrate individual accommodations, modifications, and strategies into classroom routines and activities when needed. Any adaptations will be reviewed with families and other professionals supporting the child. If your child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) please share it with us so that we can best meet the needs of your child and coordinate strategies with other care team members and families.

CONFIDENTIALITY

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.

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.

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 in person or, in some cases, on Zoom, depending on scheduling. 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, our Early Childhood Consultant will be available for further help.

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, Seth Frank. 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 follow or connect with parents on social media, or to visit families outside of school except as part of our program. 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 electronic check in/out required by the Department of Health. Further details will be shared in the fall.

CONSULTANT AND VISITING TEACHERS

Our Early Childhood Consultant, Marcia Finkelstein, will spend time "visiting" all of the classrooms regularly, meeting with the Nursery School staff, holding 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. Contact information and guidelines regarding scheduling an appointment will be shared at Parent Orientation in the fall.

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 throughout the school year, as



appropriate. In case of a teacher's absence, a substitute teacher will be placed in the classroom. 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 parents and 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 3: Teachers return to school for training and classroom set-up.
 - September 6 & 9- Teachers arrange Zoom introductions with parents and Small Group Classroom Visits for the children. ***Teachers will contact families with individual dates and times when they return to school in September.***
 - September 6- Parent Orientation at 8:30am
 - September 10: First day of school and phase-in
 - September 18: Welcome back-to-school picnic in Central Park at 5:00pm
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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, crocs, and flip-flops are not good choices for school. Although we supply 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 shoes 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.

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

HEALTH AND ACCIDENT PROCEDURES

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, pink eye, RSV, COVID, etc.) so that we can tell the other parents and the Department 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.

- Children who become sick at school must be picked up within 30 minutes.
 - Children with a fever of 100 degrees or higher may not come to school.
 - If parents/caregivers, children and staff have COVID-19 symptoms, they should get tested and separate from others right away. If they test positive for COVID or become ill with any virus or disease, they must stay home until fever and symptom free (without the aid of medication) for 24 hours.
 - Once they are symptom free for 24 hours without the aid of medication, they may return to school.
 - ***Additionally, for those who test positive for COVID, for 5 days after leaving isolation, they should wear a mask in school as an additional precaution.***
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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 sometime 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 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.

CLASSROOM VISITS

A small group, in-person classroom visit will be arranged and scheduled by your teachers so that your child can meet his/her teachers and a few friends before he/she comes to school. These visits will take place on Friday, September 6th or Monday, September 9th. Please hold BOTH of these days so that your child is available to visit school on their assigned day and time. An adult must accompany your child, however parents are not required to attend.

You will be notified of your child's visit appointments via phone and/or email once the teachers return to school on September 3. 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 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 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.**

*****Please note that we are unable to store strollers and/or scooters during the school day.*****

SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

TEMPLE SECURITY

Our protocols regarding visitors to the building will be shared as we get closer to the new school year. 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.**