



PARENT HANDBOOK

BROTHERHOOD SYNAGOGUE NURSERY SCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK

הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב וְיִמָּה נִעִים שְׂכֵבֵת אֲחִים גַּם יַחַד
*Behold how good and how pleasant it is
for us to dwell together in unity.*
Psalm 133:1

Philosophy

Recognizing that learning opportunities for children must be both age and individually appropriate, BSNS provides a developmentally appropriate program in which:

- Children, parents, and teachers build authentic relationships which strengthen us individually and collectively,
- Children construct their own knowledge through a process of inquiry, investigation, and reflection,
- The physical and social environment support our learning opportunities,
- Children are active participants, rather than passive recipients,
- Inclusiveness expands children's opportunities for growth,
- Children's cultural backgrounds are honored.

The philosophy of BSNS is based primarily on social constructivist theory which asserts the following:

- Knowledge is built by the learner internally rather than being imported from an external source.
- The world is complex and intricate thus learning involves the consideration of multiple truths and perspectives.
- Optimal learning environments emphasize authentic tasks in a meaningful context rather than abstract instruction out of context.
- Social discourse and negotiation help students clarify and modify their ideas thus building a personal knowledge base.

Education is not a product or goal to be achieved, rather it is an ongoing process of growing and learning. Through a coupling of experience and reflection we evolve and transform. While change can be unsettling, it can also invigorate and inspire- particularly when resulting from deep, open-minded reflection. Reflective practice is at the heart of both learning and teaching at BSNS. As we explore new possibilities and approaches, guided by our own research and that of the larger community, we are continually refining our program. Thus, our learning process, as educators, mirrors as well as shapes, that of our students.

Derech Eretz: The Way of the Road / Respectful Citizenship

The Torah instructs the Jewish people to treat all people and property with kindness and respect. Loosely translated, *derech eretz* is about the way we get along with one another and how we live and work together.

As a parent you know your child better than anyone else. You understand your child's unique qualities, needs, interests, fears, likes and dislikes. We count on you to share with us information that will help us to better serve your family. We value your input and feedback and have designed Brotherhood Synagogue Nursery School as a family-centered program. We are a community of support and a community in which each member has an opportunity to grow. Our program is designed to be a team effort, in which parent, director, teacher and child all work together.

Parents as Partners

Parents play a valued and integral role in our school community. Parental participation is a keynote of our philosophy and accordingly is both expected and required. Parents are viewed as partners, working in tandem with teachers toward a common goal.

BSNS offers opportunities for meaningful involvement including, participating in, and supporting daily classroom activities; attending parent meetings and workshops, serving on committees; engaging in formal and informal discussions about educational goals; and attending special events and celebrations. Parents seeking deeper involvement may choose to serve as parent liaisons and working to raise the level of parental awareness of BSNS goals and philosophy.

Social Action and Tzedakah

Tikkun olam" (literally, "world repair") has come to connote social action and the pursuit of social justice. *Tzedakah* literally means righteousness, but it is often interpreted as charity, because Judaism views giving as the ultimate act of righteousness. Each month the Synagogue organizes opportunities to participate in *tikkun olam* and *tzedakah* projects. Throughout the year teachers may introduce opportunities for the children and families to participate in developmentally appropriate ways.

Role of Time

For children time is fluid, not to be captured or compressed. As a measure of our respect and trust, time at BSNS is organically experienced, allowing children to work at their own pace to formulate their thoughts and experience the outcome of their ideas. This means that an investigation may be as brief as ten minutes or as long as ten months, depending on the interest of the children and the complexity of the topic.

Physical Environment

We have designed our school to reflect our belief that physical space has the capacity to promote dialogue and interpersonal exchange. As much as possible, we have created opportunities for relationships to develop by organizing space that allows for communication between and within classes.

The images, identities, and voices of our community- child, parent, and teacher- are ever present. Through our documentation panels, our collective voices speak to all who visit, work, and play in our space.

Separation

Facilitating a positive separation experience is an important goal of the program. There will be opportunities for parents to hear more about the specifics of this process. Parent Night is an opportunity to discuss the issues related to separation as well as the logistical plans that support this process. We will also be holding separation workshops for parents and/or caregivers during the first weeks of school. We look forward to working together with you to make this a positive experience for you and your child.

Family Book

Before the start of school all families are given a blank book and a list of prompts to help you fill it. Families complete the book over the summer. The book enables the teachers and children to better acquaint themselves with the newest members of our school community. It also creates a link for your child between his/her experience at home and at school.

Home Visits

Home visits for children entering the 2's program take place before school begins, early in September, and are designed for each child to begin to establish a connection to his or her teachers. This gives the children an opportunity to meet their new teacher on their own turf without the pressure of a new environment or new friends.

During the home visit teachers collect the family book. Children then find the book in the classroom on the first day of school. This is one of many bridges from home to school that we build during the course of the year.

Yachad Meetings

Yachad meetings are voluntary opportunities for parents to meet with the teachers before the school year starts. The meetings are a platform to discuss goals and expectations for their children for the upcoming year. Teachers schedule these appointments before the start of school.

Phase-in Schedule

Although there are many differences in how and when children adjust to school, we believe that a slow phase-in schedule will ultimately benefit the children. This gradual schedule for the beginning of school enables children to come together in small groups and familiarize themselves with their teachers, their classmates, and the rhythm of the day. While this is sometimes inconvenient for families, we believe that it supports our long-term goal of a positive separation and helps to set a solid foundation on which to build an ongoing relationship between teachers, parents, and children.

Arrival and Dismissal

The teachers use the time before school begins to meet and prepare for the day. Therefore, please note the specific arrival time for your child's class. The teachers will open the door to the classroom at the scheduled time. We have designated a waiting area for your convenience. It is important to arrive at school on time. Please be mindful that it is disruptive both to your child and to the group when a child consistently arrives late to school.

Each class has its own procedure for dismissal. The teachers will discuss their specific plans with you. Teachers will not dismiss a child to anyone other than those people designated on the authorized pick-up form unless we have received a written note from you regarding the change. It is important that you or your caregiver always be on time. Even a very short delay can worry a child needlessly.

School Hours:

2's – 3's (Yellow Room)

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday: 9:00 am - 11:45 am

3's – 4's (Red Room)

Monday-Friday: 8:50 am - 12:30 pm

4's – 5's (Blue Room)

Monday-Thursday: 8:50 am - 2:00 pm

Friday: 8:50 am - 12:30 pm

The Challenge of Independence

It is not unusual for some children who have seemed enthusiastic and comfortable the first few days of school to then become apprehensive or resistant to coming to class. Suddenly their enthusiasm and eagerness may turn into, "I don't want to go to school." Please be assured that this is normal and can be best handled if you are forewarned and understand what is happening. The apprehension usually stems from the child's sudden realization that being at school without you is a step forward "being big". It may sound a note of independence that seems daunting. It is important to understand that growth does not always proceed forward without interruptions.

Instead, it is often marked by two steps forward and one step back. Together we can give your child the valuable gifts of our patience, understanding and acceptance as they learn what it means to be independent. To help facilitate your child's sense of autonomy and independence, we ask that parents refrain from carrying children while at school.

Specialists

Early Childhood Consultant

Our Early Childhood Consultant is a helpful resource for all members of the school community. Our consultant visits the classrooms, observes all the children, and works with staff. Our consultant is also available to parents to discuss individual concerns. In addition, the Early Childhood Consultant will facilitate parent workshops. If you wish to make an appointment to speak to them, you may do so through the Director.

Parent Workshops and Classes

During the year, several workshops will be held for parents to come together to discuss issues of common interest such as toilet training, sibling rivalry, preparing to celebrate Jewish holidays in the home, etc. Some of the workshops will be held during the day and others in the evening. Synagogue programs, including adult education classes, are open to BSNS parents.

Movement

Our specialist encourages children to express themselves creatively through movement. Movement classes introduce children to being active and physical in interesting, playful ways. The activities help children with developmental skills such as coordination, balance, flexibility, overall strength, increasing stamina, and even enhancing memory. Being active in this way also boosts a child's self-esteem, helping them to feel good about their abilities while increasing confidence. The concepts explored are developed in conjunction with classroom activities.

Music

Music education is a path to lifelong learning and knowledge of self and culture. It supports healthy social development and the quality of a young person's life. Music education facilitates recall and retention of verbal information while nursing a deep love and understanding of music. Through games, stories, and songs the children engage with rich musical and cultural heritage from different genres.

Clothing

Children should come to school in clothing that is comfortable and well suited for play. Please send your child to school wearing shoes that allow him or her to run, jump and climb comfortably and **safely**. Backless shoes, those with slippery soles, sandals, cowboy boots and Uggs, Crocs, etc. are not conducive to school activities. If necessary, send in sturdy shoes for outdoor play and the teachers will help your child change into them for recess and movement.

Because we play outside unless the weather is extremely inclement, please be certain to send appropriate outdoor clothes (i.e., hat, gloves, scarves, and boots in winter.) All children should have a complete change of clothing in a box that will be kept in their cubbies. We encourage children to use smocks when they are doing messy activities and help them learn to take care of their things. At the same time, the children are active explorers, and it is important that they are

free and able to enjoy the many varied activities of the school day. As a result, clothing will sometimes get soiled. Please keep this in mind when dressing your child for school. It is also helpful to help promote emerging independence by dressing your child in clothing that is easy for him or her to manage (i.e., no difficult buttons). Of course, teachers will be available to assist when necessary. **Please label all clothing with your child's name.**

In general, it is preferable for children to avoid bringing toys from home unless they are part of a study unit or in-class activity. It is understood that at times, especially during separation, children benefit from bringing a cherished transitional object. In those cases, teachers will be sensitive to the needs of the children while encouraging them to keep the object in their cubbies to avoid loss and distraction.

The school does not allow toy guns or weapons of any sort, including water guns, lightsabers, etc.

Please do not send bottles, sippy-cups, or pacifiers to school.

COMMUNICATION

Contacting Teachers

Teachers are available to discuss your questions or concerns. If you wish to communicate with a teacher by telephone, you are welcome to leave a message with the school office 212-995-9867, and your call will be returned within twenty-four hours. Please do not text teachers during school hours. Teachers will periodically initiate phone contact with parents. These are wonderful opportunities for teachers to share tidbits about your child's life at school. At arrival and dismissal times teachers must give their full attention to the children and we therefore urge you not to use this time to have detailed discussions about individual children. Each class has a designated email address to further facilitate communication. Please contact your teachers via emails rather than text messages.

Kitahyellow@gmail.com; Kitahred@gmail.com; Kitahblue@gmail.com

For your convenience, the following people can be reached at these email addresses:

- Merrill Feinstein- mfeinstein@brotherhoodsynagogue.org
- Sara Cohen – nursery_assistant@brotherhoodsynagogue.org
- Rabbi Daniel Alder- dalder@brotherhoodsynagogue.org

Conferences

Conferences are an opportunity for parents and teachers to share observations and insights about your child's growth and development. Although communication between teachers and parents is ongoing, we have designated two parent conferences each year. Please consult the school calendar for specific dates. In addition, as needs arise, conferences may be scheduled with the teacher or director.

Classroom Visits

There will be scheduled opportunities for parents to visit school throughout the year. All parents will have the opportunity to be a visiting *Shabbat* parent on a designated Friday. The annual in-class *Chanukah* party is another time for parents to interact with their children in the classroom.

Other opportunities may include a special project or event. From time-to-time parents who would like to visit the class, may schedule a time to join the class to read a story, help with a cooking project, etc. Our school-wide *Shabbat* dinner provides a wonderful opportunity for families to include siblings or special visitors in a school event. If you have an older sibling who would like to visit your child's class, please speak to your child's teacher in advance. Every effort will be made to accommodate older siblings for a brief visit.

HEALTH GUIDELINES AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Medical Forms

The New York City Department of Health requires that each child have a complete up-to-date medical form on file. Current health forms must be received prior to the opening of school. Please note that at any given point in the school year, the medical form must be up to date within one year from the last well-child visit. Therefore, please update your child's medical form if it becomes out of date during the school year.

If your child is sick or does not appear well, please do not send your child to school. **You should keep your child home if he or she has had a fever, diarrhea, or has vomited within the previous 24 hours.** For colds and other illnesses, we ask you to consider the comfort of your own child as well as the well being of others at school. Often remaining at home an extra day helps insure the health of all our children and staff. Some symptoms to watch out for include a heavy nasal discharge or a persistent cough, diarrhea, or vomiting, fussy, cranky, or atypical behavior, reddened eyes with discharge and/or crusty lashes. For routine colds, a good rule of thumb is to keep your child home if the nasal discharge is heavy, or not clear, or if your child is exhibiting more than one cold symptom (i.e., sneezing and coughing).

At times, if a child arrives at school and appears ill, the teachers will ask you for more information and may at times, with your permission, ask for input from your pediatrician. We sincerely feel that it is in the best interest of all the children to use caution in this area.

If your child has a communicable disease i.e. chickenpox, strep, impetigo, conjunctivitis, fifth's disease etc. please let the office know promptly, so that we may communicate the information to other parents as is required by the Department of Health. Even if your child is no longer contagious it is important that you report the illness to us.

Children returning to school after an illness should be well enough to participate in all activities including outdoor play. Please notify the school office if your child will be absent from school.

If a sibling is sick and you are dropping off your well child at school, please arrange for friend or a member of the staff to sit with the ill child upstairs or outside while you do drop-off.

Medication

The school does not dispense any medication except under emergency conditions. If your child needs emergency allergy medication kept in school, written instructions from the pediatrician and a parent release must be kept on file in the office. Please make sure we have all necessary information regarding allergies. Children who require an Epipen need to have emergency forms completed by both parent and pediatrician prior to the start of school and must meet with staff prior to the start of school to review the emergency protocol.

Allergies

The Brotherhood Synagogue Nursery School is a nut sensitive environment. No peanuts or tree nuts may be brought into the school. No pomegranates may be to school.

Parents of children with severe allergies are asked to meet with the Director and teachers before school begins to discuss a detailed plan in case of allergic reaction. Parents of children with serious allergies must also fill out an allergy protocol form to be kept at school along with the child's emergency information. It is essential that you keep the teachers up to date on any suspected or known changes regarding your child's allergies.

Emergency Procedures

Emergency forms are kept on file in the office. We must have these prior to the start of school. Please be sure to notify us of any changes that may occur during the school year. In an emergency we will attempt to contact you immediately. **Please make sure that you provide us with phone numbers where we can contact you during the school day.** If we cannot reach you, we will try the other people you have specified. Please let them know you have designated them to make decisions in case of an emergency. If an emergency involves an illness or injury that requires immediate attention, we will contact your pediatrician if we cannot reach you.

In the event that we would be required to evacuate the building, but could remain safely outside, we would use Gramercy Park as a temporary location until we could contact each parent or other authorized person to pick up your child. If that location would not be safe, we would use the Calvary St. George's at 21st Street and Park Avenue South (212-475-0830 or 212-475-1216) as an emergency shelter. Your children's safety is our number one priority. We will take care of your children for as long as needed until you, or another adult authorized by you, pick up your child arrives.

We are also able to contact the parent body via Parent Reach.

The contact information will be taken from the emergency forms that you fill out at the beginning of the school year.

Fire Drills

The Nursery School conducts monthly fire drills as required by the New York City Fire Dept.

Lockdown Drills

The Nursery School also conducts lockdown safety drills on a regular basis.

SPECIAL DAYS

Birthdays

Birthdays are a special time for children and their families. We look forward to acknowledging children's birthdays in school. Each class has its own plan for establishing birthday traditions. Some classes will coordinate in-class birthday plans with parents. We like to keep birthdays special but simple. Small, individual servings are suggested. Please be sure to consult your teachers about allergies in the classroom before making your selection. **Please do not send in**

party favors or special paper goods. If you choose to celebrate your child's birthday with an out-of-school celebration that involves other children from school, we would greatly appreciate your adhering to the following suggested guidelines. Our goal is to make extensions of the in-school experience reflect our community with thoughtful inclusive planning.

When scheduling a party that involves members of your child's class, we ask that you **please check the calendar so as not to conflict with the Sabbath or any Jewish holiday.** This includes Friday afternoons when Shabbat comes in early.

For children's parties, we request that parents adhere to the same guidelines that the school uses when serving food in school to children (regarding *Kashruth* and allergies of children in the class.) We want to ensure that all the children feel comfortable eating the food at a birthday party of a classmate. For any assistance in this matter please feel free to contact the school office.

We appreciate your sensitivity in composing a guest list for children's birthday parties. We suggest that children invite either the whole class, a small number of children (less than 1/3 of the class, or a logical segment of the class that does not personalize a child's omission (such as all the boys or all the girls). Please do not distribute invitations to out-of-school birthday parties at school. Do not leave presents or gifts in children's' cubbies.

Holidays

On Fridays, each class creates its own special atmosphere to welcome Shabbat. Children learn about the Jewish holidays through stories, art projects, songs and cooking. We do not celebrate Halloween, Valentine's Day, Christmas or Easter at school.

FOOD

As part of the Synagogue, the Nursery School observes Jewish dietary laws. In an attempt to be respectful of the many issues surrounding the sharing of food (i.e. allergies, dietary law observance, and varying nutritional expectations within families), we have adopted the following guidelines that we hope will help preserve those values.

All food served in school must be prepared in school or marked kosher. We cannot serve any food prepared at home.

Lunch

For those children who will have lunch in school, please send a kosher non-meat lunch along with a beverage in a lunch bag with your child's name on it. We ask that you send a nutritious lunch that your child will enjoy that **does not include candy, gum, or soda.** School policy does not allow for sharing food brought from home.

Snack

A kosher snack is provided daily by the school. Families are asked to sign up on a rotating basis to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to the classroom.

Other Food Policies

The school adheres to a **no nuts and no peanuts policy** for both foods served at school and food

brought from home. Please do not send tree nuts or peanuts to school. Please do not send any foods prepared at home to be shared with the group. For food that will be shared with classmates, such as in-school birthday parties must be Kosher. Please note that the above guidelines include food consumed in the hallways before or after school.

PARENT COMMUNITY

Parent Association

There are many opportunities to become involved as parents of children at BSNS. In addition to class parents who help facilitate communication on school issues for parents within classes, opportunities exist to help the school as a whole with volunteer projects, and to help plan events and activities throughout the school year. Involvement in the Parent Association offers an opportunity to meet other parents and to help the school community.

Here is a list of the various Parents' Association Committees:

1. **Tzedakah and Chesed Committee:** Coordinates community outreach in conjunction with the Social Action Committee of the Synagogue, acknowledges events in the lives of the Nursery School Community (sibling births, etc.), and promotes the extension of Jewish life beyond the classroom (parent education, etc.).
2. **Shabbat Dinner:** Plans and runs school wide Shabbat dinners for Nursery School children, alumni, and their families.
3. **Spring Benefit:** Plans and runs our Spring fundraising event.
4. **Teacher Appreciation Committee:** Plans and runs our annual "Orange Tea."
5. **Alumni Committee:** Organizes events for Nursery School alumni and their families. Maintains contact with alumni for outreach and mentoring of Nursery School parents engaged in the kindergarten search process.
6. **Newsletter Committee:** Coordinate monthly newsletters written by the parents for the Synagogue Newsletter.
7. **Challah Committee:** Coordinate's parent and student volunteers to distribute Shabbat challahs on Friday morning.

We ask that parents pay PA dues each year to support the work of the committees, and to promote opportunities for connection, growth, and enjoyment.

The PA dues cover the cost of holiday gifts for our valued security team, administration, and support staff as well as the class teachers. The dues also cover the Orange Tea; a beautifully catered lunch held every May to celebrate the staff and parents for having completed a successful year in their child's growth. The money additionally goes towards subsidizing our bi-annual Nursery family Shabbat dinners; lovely opportunities for the whole community to gather. If there has been a birth or a death of a family member in our Nursery School community, the PA dues

cover the cost to plant a tree in Israel to honor that event. Finally, if a child from the Nursery School has a hospitalization, the PA will send a gift to the child to help brighten their day and remind them that their classmates are waiting for them.

History of Brotherhood Synagogue

In 1954, Rabbi Block’s dream came to fruition with the founding of the Brotherhood Synagogue (Beit Achim). For its first two decades, our congregation shared space in the Village Presbyterian Church on West 13th Street in Greenwich Village. At its formation, Rabbi Block and his colleague and good friend, the Rev. Dr. Jesse W. Stitt, established a relationship that was quickly regarded as a pioneering venture in ecumenism. The two congregations – Christian and Jewish – entered a covenant of brotherhood – not only sharing space, but programming together in the arts and social action.

In 1974, Brotherhood’s growing congregation was fortunate to acquire and restore an historic Quaker Meeting House on beautiful and serene Gramercy Park. This Quaker Meeting House was originally built in 1859 by the Society of Friends. During its early years as a Meeting House, the building also functioned as a clandestine stop on the Underground Railroad as a safe- haven for runaway slaves. The building resonates both with this history and with Rabbi Block’s founding vision.

*I found a fruitful world, because my ancestors planted it for me.
Likewise, I am planting for my children.
-Talmud, Taanit 23A*

*Please sign and return the following slip to the Nursery School office
to confirm that you have read the Parent Handbook.*

I have read the Parent Handbook.

NAME(S) _____

SIGNATURE(S) _____

DATE _____