

Congregation Beit Tikvah  
**Kesher School and Jewish Families LIVE**  
Parent Handbook  
(Revised 6/08)

Congregation Beit Tikvah and its Kesher school are committed to developing a love of Judaism in every child. Our dynamic Reconstructionist educational approach affirms the evolving nature of the Jewish people and our diversity of thought and expression.

“The aim of Jewish education is to develop a sincere faith in the holiness of life and a sense of responsibility for enabling the Jewish people to make its own contribution to the achievement of the good life.”  
Mordechai Kaplan

***Mission Statement:***

As a Reconstructionist synagogue, Beit Tikvah is committed to providing a Jewish education that will help all our children, including those with disabilities, develop a love of Judaism that will enrich their lives through adulthood. Jewish Families LIVE offers bi-monthly programming for preschool and kindergarten-aged children. Kesher School offers once a week program for children six through thirteen. Its curriculum covers Torah study, prayer, Jewish history, ethics and values, customs and rituals, and the Hebrew language. Kesher School also attempts to incorporate the academic study of Jewish civilization with synagogue life. To this end, we encourage families to participate in the many Shabbat services and seders, special family services, holiday celebrations, and other special events scheduled throughout the year at Beit Tikvah.

***School Hours and Location:***

Kesher School meets Sundays from 9:30am to 12:30pm at the Waldorf School (4801 Tamarind Road). The school is in Cold Spring New Town, just east of Greenspring Road between Northern Parkway and Cold Spring Lane. There is ample parking in front of the school.

Congregation Beit Tikvah is located at 5802 Roland Avenue in Roland Park. The main office telephone is: 410-464-9402.

***Curriculum:***

1. **Jewish Families LIVE!** LIVE stands for Learning in a Vibrant Enjoyable Community. This is an exciting new family-based program for 4- and 5-yearolds and their parents set to begin in Fall 2008. Jewish Families LIVE bi-monthly classes will emphasize:

- *Shabbat* – Class meets at synagogue once a month, either on Friday (5:30 pm - 7:00 pm) for home rituals, or on Saturday morning (10:00 - 11:00 am) for family Shabbat service.
- *Holidays* – Class meets at Kesher School once a month on Sunday morning (9:30 am - 12 noon) for holiday celebration, family activities, and separate learning components for children and adults.

2. **Kesher School** is based on a two-year curriculum per class, which focuses on three subject areas taught each Sunday. Each subject is presented through the prism of

Reconstructionist Judaism. This structure currently accommodates children ages 6 through 13:

- *Tefillah* (Hebrew language and prayer): Students are expected over six years to develop increasing skill at reading Hebrew and applying it to prayer. Fluency in reading Hebrew is not expected, but a comfort in reading and an understanding of the main prayers used during services should be attained. Most students will require further tutoring in the year or two prior to Bnai Mitzvah.
- *Tanakh* (Torah/Prophets stories and values): The Torah and the writings of the Hebrew prophets offer both a narrative of Jewish history and a moral and ethical compass for living a just life. Through creative presentation and discussions, students bring alive the Jewish experience and are encouraged to draw meaning for themselves.
- *Zemanim* (Holidays, rituals, and custom): Judaism is rich in culture and ritual, whether played out in yearly cycles or in blessed events. From *bris* to grieving, from the High Holy Days to Passover, from lighting Shabbat candles to giving to those in need, student learn the Reconstructionist approach to why and how we do what we do.

3. **Shorashim**: Students in their last two years at Keshet attend the Shorashim class. The goal of this class is to guide our children as they begin to create their own identities as young adults. As is appropriate for this age group, the class has a unique format. In Shorashim, a lead teacher facilitates the growth and development of our young adults through self-reflective and community-based activities. These activities include journaling, service learning, participation in Beit Tikvah services, and enjoyable field trips to meaningful Jewish locations in Baltimore, Washington D.C. and New York City. Through these activities, our children develop an intrinsic motivation to integrate Jewish learning and rituals into their own lives. *This course is funded in part by a grant from The Associated Jewish Community Federation through its Jewish Educational Enhancement Program.*

During the school year preceding their Bnai Mitzvah, children and their parents will also enroll in the **Bonim** class. This class meets once a month with the Rabbi and is in addition to participating in the Shorashim class. There is no additional cost for this family-oriented program (parents are expected to participate in Bonim with their child). Further information on Bonim can be obtained from Congregation Beit Tikvah.

#### ***Class Division and Placement:***

To further the goal of creating not only a rich pedagogical environment, but also a community of learners, Keshet School endeavors to keep children of the same age together so that a grade level of children will celebrate their Bar or Bat Mitzvah within the same 24 month period. Students are usually placed in a grade according to age and grade in secular school. Generally, Jewish Families LIVE consists of children aged 4-5, Aleph consists of children in grades 1-2 (6-8 years old), Bet consists of children in grades 3-4 (8-10 years old), and Gimmel consists of children in grades 5-6 (10-12 years old). Shorashim covers older grade 6 (earlier birthdays) through grade 8 (12-13 years old).

Every effort is made to make sure that a child is with an age cohort that will go through their Bar/Bat Mitzvah within the same year or two. Because Keshet classes are based on a two-year cycle, children may be entering school during the second year of the curriculum cycle. If a child enters in the second year of the cycle and his/her birthdate is prior to December 31 of the year of the youngest child presently enrolled in that class (Aleph, Bet, or Gimmel), he/she will advance the following year to the next grade level. However, if a child enters in the second year of the cycle, and his/her birthdate is after December 31 of the year of the youngest child presently enrolled in that grade, then he/she will not be advanced to the next grade level at the end of his or her first year. Instead, this child will complete the 2-year cycle of his/her entering grade over the course of 3 years, so as to join the class of his/her future Bar/Bat Mitzvah year.

Students enrolling at age 8 or older will be assessed by the teachers for proficiency in Hebrew language and Torah studies, as well as developmental maturity. Based on the teachers' assessments, students may need to be placed at a lower grade level. To keep students at their appropriate grade level, parents are encouraged to arrange for tutoring, coordinating the material with the appropriate teacher. The Rabbi and Congregation Beit Tikvah can help arrange tutoring, but it is undertaken at the family's expense. There are resources available through the Beit Tikvah community for families who need assistance covering the cost of tutoring.

***Students with Special Needs:***

It is the goal of the Keshet School to provide a Jewish education to every congregant child, regardless of learning ability. Some students come to Keshet School with identified learning disabilities or other special needs. In this case, it is requested that parents inform the teachers of these special needs prior to the start of the school year. At other times our teachers identify a potential problem. Either way, the teachers and the parents will work together to develop a learning strategy that allows your child to get the most out of his or her Jewish education and permit your child's classmates to enjoy a positive classroom experience

***Attendance and Daily School Schedule:***

Attendance and punctuality are important to ensure continuity in the educational process. Late arrivals and early departures are disruptive to the entire class. There are a limited number of hours within which students must learn the information needed to successfully master the curriculum. It is expected that the Keshet School Chair and/or teachers be contacted in advance, by email or telephone, if a student will be absent. If a student's attendance becomes inconsistent, the parents/guardians will be asked to conference with the Keshet School Chair and/or teachers to address this concern.

Students are expected to arrive at Keshet School between 9:15 and 9:30am. School/the first class will commence *promptly* at 9:30am. The children in Aleph, Bet, and Gimmel rotate through three 55-minute classes. Assembly and snack are held between the second and third class. At this time group songs, announcements, and collection of tzedakah occurs. Children in Shorashim and Jewish Families LIVE will have different schedules, but will participate in assembly as well. Snack is provided by the "snack parent" of the

day (see below). Snacks are “kosher” dairy. Children can bring their own snack if they prefer.

### ***Synagogue Life***

In class children are taught ways to participate meaningfully in the various synagogue services. It is very difficult to prepare a child for his/her future Bnai Mitzvah without a familiarity with Shabbat services. To that end, on the third Saturday of most months, Congregation Beit Tikvah has special Kol Hano’ar (Voice of the Youth) Children’s Services geared toward Keshet-age children. All of the Keshet children (Jewish Families LIVE, Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, and Shorashim) will participate in special Kol Hano’ar Shabbat plays based on that week’s Torah portion at some point during the year. More information on these services can be obtained at [www.beittikvah.org](http://www.beittikvah.org).

Families are strongly encouraged to attend as many of the Kol Hano’ar and other Shabbat services as possible. The school will require attendance at and student participation in a few specific services:

- Consecration service, usually during a Saturday service in October, to welcome new students and welcome back old students.
- Spring Keshet school service in April or May.
- In addition, during the year prior to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, students will be required to attend at least four Shabbat and four Friday evening services.

### ***Field Trips:***

Twice a year, Keshet School plans field trips to integrate classroom work with the outside world. In general, one field trip is to reflect “tikkun olam”/world repair with a community service project. The other field trip is designed to be educational (e.g. visiting a matzah factory, a Jewish farm, or the Jewish Museum of Maryland). There are no regular classes on field trip days, and parents are encouraged to attend and learn.

### ***Tzedakah:***

One of the significant Jewish values we try to teach is concern for others. Each child is asked to contribute weekly to a “tzedakah” fund. Annually, the students choose one or two funds for which they will collect. The process of contributing, as well as the involvement in deciding among different causes, is invaluable. No amount is too small. The consistency of giving is the value we are trying to instill

### ***School Supplies and Homework:***

- *Tefillah*: Keshet School will supply students with the necessary textbooks for the Tefillah class. If a student loses a book, the family will be charged for a new one.
- *Zemanim*: Students are asked to purchase and come to school every week with a composition notebook and two sharpened pencils.
- *Tanakh*: Families are required to purchase and have their child bring to class a Tanakh (a Jewish bible). One Tanakh per family should be sufficient. It should be one that has English and Hebrew, if possible, since this will be needed for the Shorashim class when the child gets older.
- *Shorashim*: Students will be advised in advance of any other required materials.

While the volume of homework is kept to a minimum (usually only 15 to 30 minutes per week), doing the homework is very important to your child's educational development, particularly as they learn a new language. Practicing reading Hebrew, celebrating the rituals of Shabbat, etc. with your children is encouraged year-round to reinforce what they are learning. Keshet teachers will communicate homework assignments usually through weekly emails. Families who do not have access to email will need to make arrangements with the teachers to gather the assignments.

***Teacher Feedback to Parents and Children:***

Education involves a trusted partnership between the school, and each student and his/her family. Partnerships require communication. We will communicate with you in the following ways:

1. Email on weekly school assignments/homework, reminders, announcements and upcoming programs.
2. Phone calls on weather cancellations, immediate child concerns, or to schedule meetings.
3. Parent drop-in hours after school twice a year
4. Face-to-face meetings at other times, if necessary or requested, to discuss special concerns or issues.
5. Twice yearly progress reports. These are not report cards. They are evaluations of your child's progress in his or her various classes. No formal parent-teacher meetings are scheduled to review these reports, but parents can request a conference with any of the teachers at any time.

***Behavior Issues:***

Everyone (students, parents, and teachers) is expected to treat each other with respect and kindness. Disruptive behavior makes it hard for students to learn and teachers to teach. Student misbehavior will first be addressed by the teacher in the classroom. If that initial effort fails to positively resolve a behavior problem, the child's parent(s) will be contacted by the teachers or a member of the Keshet Committee. A parent will usually be asked to attend class with the child for a number of sessions (exact numbers can be decided with the teachers). Following these sessions the parent(s) will meet with the teachers and a representative or representatives from the Keshet Committee to devise a further plan of action.

***Parental Involvement:***

When a child enrolls in Keshet School, the parent(s) enrolls as well. Parents participate as integral partners in our school. They are encouraged to sit in on their children's classes as often as they like. They are also asked to help motivate their children and reinforce the material learned. Parent feedback is necessary and appreciated to know what is going well and what is not. ***Most importantly, parents are needed to keep the school running!***

Keshet School has no paid Principal or Education Director. The administrative aspects of the school are coordinated by our all-volunteer Keshet Committee. Parents can serve on the committee as the Committee Head, Parent Liaison, Teacher Liaison, Beit Tikvah

Liaison, Field Trip Coordinator, or simply as a contributing member. Parents can also help Keshet with special activities in class, holiday parties, etc.

At each Sunday class session there is a Volunteer Parent (formerly known as “Snack Parent”) and a Keshet Committee representative. Parents are required to serve as Volunteer/Snack Parent one time per year for every child enrolled in the school. Volunteer/Snack Parents stay the entire class day to help teachers if an extra hand is needed in class, serve and clean up snack (kosher dairy), and ring the bell between classes. The Keshet Committee representative is there to open up the school, set up and later clean up the classes, and assist the Volunteer/Snack Parent and teachers in any way needed. (\*Parents of children in Jewish Families LIVE will, at this point, not be required to participate as snack parent – unless they have older children in Keshet)

***School Calendar and School Closings:***

Keshet School usually starts after High Holy Days (earlier, if these holidays fall closer to October) and runs until late May. A full calendar will be distributed at the beginning of each academic year.

In case of inclement weather Keshet will close when the Center for Jewish Education (CJE) and/or Baltimore County Public Schools close. Families can consult the WBAL website (<http://www.thewbalchannel.com/closings/index.html>), radio or television station. The Baltimore County Public School website ([www.bcps.org](http://www.bcps.org)) can also be consulted. Keshet School will not be specifically listed, but if the CJE or the Baltimore County Public Schools have closed their school buildings for activities, then we will be closed.

***Enrollment and Tuition:***

Keshet School is open to member and non-member Jewish families for the first year. After the first year, families are required to become members of Congregation Beit Tikvah in order to continue enrollment in the school. Families in Jewish Families LIVE will not be required to become members until their child joins Keshet school. Application packets for both the school and the synagogue can be obtained by calling 410-464-9402.

The cost of tuition is on the enrollment form. Families with more than one child attending Keshet School will receive a 10% discount on tuition for subsequent children. Congregation Beit Tikvah does offer needs-based tuition scholarships, covering up to 50% of a family’s total tuition. A scholarship form is part of the enrollment package, or you can download an application from [www.beittikvah.org](http://www.beittikvah.org). 50% of the tuition is due by September 1<sup>st</sup> (prior to the start of that academic year), and the balance is due by December 31<sup>st</sup>. *Child(ren) will not be allowed to continue attending Keshet School if tuition payment is not received by the 3<sup>rd</sup> class day (9/21/08)!!*

***2008-2009 Kesher School Teachers:***

*Jewish Families LIVE:* Rabbi Ruth Smith and Judy Gerb

*Tefillah:* Maia Meeron

*Tanakh:* Lisa Libowitz

*Zemanim:* Deborah Buffalin

*Shorashim:* Debbie Rosenberg

***2008-2009 Kesher School Committee:***

*Chair:* Allyson Mattanah

*Beit Tikvah Board Liaison:* Larry Smith

*Parent Liaison for weekly events:* Stephanie Regenold

*Parent Liaison for special events :* Mary Pivawer

*Teacher Liaison:* Jennifer Shapiro

*Field Trip Coordinator :* Judy Gerb

*Consecration Service Coordinator:* Ruth Smith

*Beit Tikvah Newsletter Liaison:* ?

*Members-at-Large:* Dana Silver, Michael Checknoff

*Advisor to Kesher School:* Rabbi Elizabeth Bolton