

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

ABOUT BECOMING

# B'NEI MITZVAH



עץ חיים ETZ CHAYIM  
PROGRESSIVE SYNAGOGUE



## CONTENTS

Contact Information	2
Why You Should Read This Guide	2
The Etz Chayim Philosophy	2
Who May Become B'nei Mitzvah at Etz Chayim	3
Booking the Date	3
Initial Meetings	3
Education Requirements	3
Synagogue Attendance	4
Parental & Family Involvement	4
Mitzvah/Tzedakah Project	4
Planning The Service	5
Rehearsal	5
The "Big Day"	6
B'nei Mitzvah Timeline	6
Frequently Asked Questions	7
Glossary	8
Texts, resources and materials	8

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Our professional staff are available to assist you throughout the planning stages of your simcha. If you would like to speak to a member of the staff, please call the office on 9563 9208. You can also contact us via email.

Rabbi Gersh Lazarow:  
rabbi@etzchayim.org.au

B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator Jade Moore:  
education@etzchayim.org.au

The office: info@etzchayim.org.au

Etz Chayim Progressive Synagogue  
549 Centre Rd. (P.O. Box 69)  
Bentleigh, 3204

phone: 9563 9208 web: etzchayim.org.au

## WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS GUIDE

Very soon, your child will become B'nei Mitzvah. This handbook is designed to inform you about the procedures and to help you plan for the months ahead. It contains all the information you will need from the time you choose to have a B'nei Mitzvah to the actual celebration. The guide provides a brief overview of the Etz Chayim approach to B'nei Mitzvah and details exactly what will be required to ensure that the big day goes smoothly and happily. We suggest you read this handbook carefully and keep it for future reference.

Remember, it is up to you to ensure you fulfil the expectations set out in this guide, but please know that we are here to support you in any way that we can. If this handbook does not answer your questions or if you have frustrations, anxieties or suggestions, please feel free to call the Etz Chayim office on 9563 9208 for assistance.

## THE ETZ CHAYIM PHILOSOPHY

**P**reparation for B'nei Mitzvah is an exciting time for our students and their families. The students are starting on a journey, an exploration of texts and ideas that have sustained our people through generations.

B'nei Mitzvah at Etz Chayim is the culmination of several years of study, reflection, discovery and action. It is a milestone in Jewish life and a joyous occasion for the entire family and the congregation. The ceremony of Bar and Bat Mitzvah is not a goal or the end of the journey; it represents a beginning, first steps on the lifelong path of Jewish responsibility. We hope that as each child assumes the role of an adult Jew, he or she will become a life-long learner and a credit to the Jewish people.

Please remember, becoming a B'nei Mitzvah is not a party. It is not even simply a ceremony at the Synagogue or an event that happens only once. A person becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah - the son or daughter of the Mitzvot - for his or her entire life. The celebration lasts for a few moments; the commitment is forever.

Our B'nei Mitzvah program is designed so that the whole family can partake in the learning process, thereby enhancing both the family relationship and the religious experience - a true cause for celebration!

We look forward to sharing this exciting journey with you and your family.



## WHO MAY BECOME B'NEI MITZVAH AT ETZ CHAYIM

**B**'nei Mitzvah may be celebrated by a child of a Etz Chayim member who has reached his or her thirteenth birthday and has successfully completed the required program of preparation. The B'nei Mitzvah candidate must be a student in good standing in the appropriate religious school program at the time of B'nei Mitzvah and is required as a minimum to continue their studies through the completion of the year of their B'nei Mitzvah, with the expectation of continuing studies beyond that year. Families of children who are not able to meet these requirements are invited to discuss their particular situation with the Rabbi and B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator prior to the start of the date assignment process.

We would like to enable all interested families and their children to celebrate their B'nei Mitzvah at Etz Chayim. In the case of children with special learning needs, the Rabbi and the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator will help parents establish appropriate guidelines for instruction, preparation and participation, so the child and family can experience the satisfaction of a B'nei Mitzvah celebration.

## BOOKING THE DATE

**T**he date for your child's B'nei Mitzvah is arranged between the family, Rabbi and the Etz Chayim office. As a general guide, the date usually corresponds to a Shabbat service that falls on or after your child's thirteenth birthday (according to the Hebrew calendar). It is important to discuss the proposed date as early as possible, at least 2 years prior to the day of the B'nei Mitzvah is preferable. To confirm a booking, you must be a member. A tentative date may be requested several years in advance but can only be confirmed once the booking form is completed and returned and the booking fee paid. It is required that members be current in all financial obligations to Etz Chayim prior to receiving a date and starting tutoring, and at least six weeks prior to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah; any special arrangements must be made with the Etz Chayim office.

## EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

**O**nce a date is selected, parents and the B'nei Mitzvah candidate should schedule a meeting with the Rabbi and the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator at least a year prior to the event. Meeting with the Rabbi and the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator provides an opportunity to discuss the meaning of B'nei Mitzvah; to confirm the Torah and Haftarah readings, any special requirements for the scheduled date and to discuss tutoring plans.

Other meetings with the Rabbi will be scheduled during the period of preparation, closer to the date of the celebration.

## INITIAL MEETINGS

**E**tz Chayim requires every candidate for B'nei Mitzvah to complete a prescribed course of instruction in Hebrew and Jewish Studies to adequately understand what it means to become a responsible and committed member of the Jewish community. The candidate must attain a competent level of Hebrew and Hebrew reading. Each child must complete at least two full years of Jewish education immediately prior to the year in which the B'nei Mitzvah occurs, either at a Jewish Day School or Religious School. This means that if the B'nei Mitzvah is in October 2014, then the child must undertake Jewish education at a day school or a UPJ Religion School from February 2012.

As a synagogue community we do not believe that two years of instruction is enough to enable anyone to learn what it means to be a Jew and recommend that you enrol your child in Jewish instruction at an early age.

Two full years of study is our basic requirement. But please note that your child may need to undertake more study to take into consideration educational background and individual learning needs.

# THE ETZ CHAYIM PROGRAM

We are committed to helping all our students find the best way to prepare for B'nei Mitzvah. We recognise that each child is different and consider the child's special needs when setting appropriate goals.

One year prior to the B'nei Mitzvah date the candidates undergo an extensive course of study designed to increase the students familiarity and understanding of the Jewish calendar (holidays) and Jewish living (life cycle events, Jewish rituals and symbols, key blessings, etc.). Each student learns the skills necessary to read a Torah and Haftarah portion, to participate in the Shabbat service, and to analyse and explain the significance of the particular portion assigned to him or her. The students learn in groups and by individual instruction with skilled tutors.

The specialised tuition your child receives will include:

- › A comprehensive study of the prayers contained in our morning Shabbat service. The students practice reading from the Siddur and learn about the prayers in terms of their meaning, their significance to the service and their relevance to the students' lives. These classes are held on Thursday afternoons at Beit Sefer Chayim.
- › Weekly one-on-one B'nei Mitzvah tutoring where each child is given tuition for their own Torah portion. These sessions are arranged between the family and the tutor.

Students will need to keep a journal, recording reflections of their learning experiences and service attendances.

## SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

All B'nei Mitzvah candidates must attend at least two Saturday Shabbat Services per month during their period of instruction. Regular Synagogue attendance will enable the students to become familiar with, and ready to participate intelligently and with full understanding in the religious services.

We strongly emphasize the importance of the whole family attending services. Don't let your child sit in shul alone. Your participation and enthusiasm are vital in giving your child a meaningful and enriching experience of Judaism during the preparatory period.

## PARENTAL & FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Of course, as a parent you will wish to be involved and interested as your child is studying and attending Shabbat services. Etz Chayim encourages you to take an active interest in your child's progress. By all means, please attend lessons with your child, and accompany them to festival and Shabbat services. We hope that you will work with us to encourage your child to see his/her ongoing participation in our religious tradition as an integral part of life.

## MITZVAH/TZEDAKAH PROJECT

The B'nei Mitzvah provides a number of opportunities for observing the mitzvah of tzedakah, one of these being a community service/social action project.

A Mitzvah project is "hands on" and would be more meaningful to the B'nei Mitzvah candidate if the student creates a project based on his or her talents and interests. Ideas for projects can be simple or creative; for example, volunteering in the animal shelter, collecting food for the food bank, visiting members of the community who are alone and housebound or helping the family by taking on extra housework. Mitzvah project ideas should be discussed with the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator and approved by the Rabbi.

We hope that you will actively participate in your child's project by offering advice, time for discussion and transportation if needed.

# THE ETZ CHAYIM PROGRAM

## PLANNING THE SERVICE

The B'nei Mitzvah and their family are encouraged to participate in the planning of the Shabbat service at which the child becomes a B'nei Mitzvah.

There are several opportunities for family participation in the service:

**Presenting the Tallit:** The B'nei Mitzvah child is presented with the tallit at the beginning of the service from the bimah by one or two family members, usually parents. A prayer and a personal address to the B'nei Mitzvah child may be part of the presentation.

**Family Aliyah:** In addition to the B'nei Mitzvah child, family members may share the honour of being called to the Torah by their Hebrew names for an aliyah. The blessings before and after the Torah reading are recited in Hebrew. Often Jewish parents, grandparents, or an older siblings who had celebrated B'nei Mitzvah receive this honour.

**Dressing and Undressing the Torah:** the honour of undressing the Torah before the reading and dressing the Torah after the reading is often offered to younger siblings (under 13). If younger brothers, sisters or cousins are going to be asked to dress the Sefer Torah, it is important that they have attended some services at Etz Chayim and know what "dressing the Torah" actually means.

Other opportunities for family participation in the service include opening and closing the Ark, carrying the Torah and performing Hagbah.

In the months before the event you will be contacted by the Rabbi to finalise preparations for the B'nei Mitzvah service. At this time, the Rabbi will determine how many aliyot your child has successfully learned and consequently, how many honours you can request.

Generally there will not be more than seven Torah aliyot for the family, subject to other communal requirements. Forms are provided to record the honours which can be offered to family and friends. People performing honours must be Jewish. Please complete the Aliyah nomination form, providing the name, relationship and full Hebrew names (the person's Hebrew name plus that of their father and mother) where indicated, and return the form to the Etz Chayim office eight weeks before the event, so that we have time to complete administrative preparations and to make sure everything goes smoothly.

Invitations for aliyot will be sent by the synagogue with copies of the appropriate Brachot, plus the traditional donation form. It is appropriate and proper at a time of simcha to donate to the Synagogue. It is expected that people being called up to the Torah will be familiar with the Brachot over the reading of the Torah. If you require any assistance in leaning these blessings, please contact the office. Further, it is a good idea that people you are honouring attend our synagogue at least once before your child's B'nei Mitzvah so that they can familiarise themselves with the procedures at Etz Chayim.

## REHEARSAL

The B'nei Mitzvah rehearsal is usually arranged with the Rabbi for a time during the week preceding the event, unless circumstances, such as a festival (Chag) or the Rabbi's schedule, necessitate an alternate time.

Most rehearsals comprise the complete service, including the Torah reading and the B'nei Mitzvah's speech. Family and friends who will be involved in the service are asked to assemble at the shul, dressed in their Bar Mitzvah finery. Male guests entering the shul must wear a kippah.

The family will be allowed time for taking photos and videos before the rehearsal. Photos and videos may also be taken during the rehearsal, but are not to impede the rehearsal itself.

No photography or recording of any kind are allowed on Shabbat.

# THE ETZ CHAYIM PROGRAM

## THE “BIG DAY”

**O**n the morning of the B’nei Mitzvah we ask the family to arrive at Etz Chayim at 9.40 am to ensure that all is in readiness. We also ask you to make it clear to your guests that they are expected to arrive and be seated for the service by 10.00 am, to avoid disruption to others in the congregation.

## B’NEI MITZVAH TIMELINE

**T**his timeline outlines important dates relating to the preparation of the B’nei Mitzvah ceremony.

### 1-3 Years Prior to B’nei Mitzvah:

- › Confirm membership and educational requirements with Etz Chayim office
- › Participate in the B’nei Mitzvah orientation meeting
- › Schedule a meeting date with the Rabbi and the B’nei Mitzvah Coordinator. Appointments can be made through the Etz Chayim office
- › After completing the B’nei Mitzvah booking form, receive confirmation of your child’s B’nei Mitzvah date from the Etz Chayim office

### 1 Year Prior to B’nei Mitzvah:

- › Receive a packet from the Etz Chayim office with Torah and Haftarah portions, as well as relevant blessings/prayers
- › Meet and discuss tutorial times with a Etz Chayim-approved B’nei Mitzvah tutor
- › Weekly individual tutoring in Hebrew, Torah and Haftarah begins approximately 8-12 months prior to the B’nei Mitzvah date

### 6 Months Prior to B’nei Mitzvah:

- › At approximately 6 months, parents and student meet with the Rabbi and the B’nei Mitzvah Coordinator to discuss progress
- › Student meets with the B’nei Mitzvah Coordinator to discuss and shape the student’s approach to d’var Torah (several meetings as needed)

### 3-4 Months Prior to B’nei Mitzvah:

- › Contact the Etz Chayim office to discuss catering options for Kiddush for your child’s B’nei Mitzvah
- › Make sure the B’nei Mitzvah candidate has a tallit and kippah for the B’nei Mitzvah ceremony. Custom-made tallitot for the B’nei Mitzvah can be ordered through the office

### 2 Months Prior to B’nei Mitzvah:

- › Meet with the Rabbi to review first draft/outline of d’var Torah and to finalise arrangements for the service, including the number of honours
- › Meet with the B’nei Mitzvah Coordinator to put final touches on the d’var Torah
- › Submit the list of people who will be receiving honours at your child’s ceremony to the Etz Chayim office

### Final Month

- › Two weeks prior to B’nei Mitzvah, turn in final draft of d’var Torah to the Rabbi
- › One week prior to B’nei Mitzvah, review/practice final draft of d’var Torah with Rabbi and participate in the full dress rehearsal of the B’nei Mitzvah ceremony
- › Contact the Etz Chayim office to review/confirm arrangements for “The Big Day”, including the number of guests your family is expecting. Submit the guest list to the office.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## KIPPOT AND TALLITOT

It is appropriate for all boys to wear a kippah during their period of instruction and at the service. Wearing a kippah is optional for girls.

Wearing a Tallit symbolises a person's commitment to the Mitzvot and occurs for the first time at B'nei Mitzvah. As girls in our community share the same level of responsibility as boys, it is also appropriate for them to wear a Tallit.

## FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS

In addition to the normal yearly membership dues and Beit Sefer Chayim school fees (where applicable), you should anticipate the following expenses:

*A B'nei Mitzvah fee, which is set annually by the congregation. This one time fee is currently set at \$250.*

*B'nei Mitzvah tutor fees (if applicable), which are billed separately to school fees.*

Additional optional expenses you may incur:

*Kiddush catering*

*Fee for use of our Community Hall and kitchen for private reception*

*Contribution to the Synagogue fund in honour of the occasion*

You must be current in all financial obligations at least six weeks prior to your B'nei Mitzvah date.

## CAN NON-JEWISH FAMILY MEMBERS BE INVOLVED?

We recognise and value the non-Jewish family members and parents who are often deeply involved in their children's Jewish education, supporting their children's Jewish journeys by participating in family programs and in the life of our community.

Please discuss with the Rabbi how the non-Jewish side of the family can participate in the B'nei Mitzvah preparation and celebration.

## SHOULD WE INVITE THE TUTOR?

By all means you may invite the tutor who has participated in the service and played a large role in preparing your child for B'nei Mitzvah. However, please keep in mind that the Rabbi has many time demands, and while the tutor would enjoy participating fully in the celebration; regretfully invitations cannot always be accepted.

## WHAT CELEBRATIONS SHOULD ACCOMPANY THE B'NEI MITZVAH?

The congregational Kiddush after the service is an important way of sharing the simcha with the community.

Kiddush is recited over a full cup of wine, symbolising overflowing joy and bounty. The Kiddush generally consists of light refreshments. Some families choose to make the Kiddush the only celebration after the B'nei Mitzvah, and therefore cater more elaborately.

Private celebrations are a matter of personal taste. The only restriction is that they should not overshadow the religious ceremony in the minds of your guests, your family and, particularly, the young person who is the focus of the ceremony.

## KIDDUSH CATERING

Kiddush can be organised and catered through our L'Chayim Catering Group, and all proceeds go to the congregation. Please book and pay for the Kiddush and the hall through the office. There will be costs for cleaning up.

Please note, it is important that the kashrut policy of the synagogue is adhered to in catering your Kiddush. The kitchen at Etz Chayim is a "milchig" facility and therefore only kosher fish, milk or parve dishes are permitted. No meat products, poultry or gelatin can be included on your Kiddush menu. Please check with the Rabbi if you are unsure about the status of any food product.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Aliyah</i>	the honor of being called up to read from the Torah	<i>Machzor</i>	the High Holy Day prayer book
<i>Bar</i>	son	<i>Milchig</i>	food containing or derived from dairy products
<i>Bat</i>	daughter	<i>Mitzvah</i>	a commandment, thus, a Bar Mitzvah is a “son of the commandment” and a Bat Mitzvah is a “daughter of the commandment”
<i>Bimah</i>	Torah-reading table in a synagogue	<i>Mishkan</i>	residence or dwelling place
<i>Brit</i>	contract	<i>Siddur</i>	Shabbat and daily prayer book
<i>Bracha</i>	a blessing or praise of God	<i>Simcha</i>	a happy festival or a Jewish life-cycle celebration
<i>Chag</i>	festival or holiday	<i>Shul</i>	synagogue
<i>D’var Torah</i>	also known as drasha, a brief oral reflection that includes thought and insights about the Torah and Haftarah portion	<i>Parashah</i>	the weekly Torah reading
<i>Erev</i>	evening, a term often used to refer to a holiday eve	<i>Parve</i>	food that does not contain any meat or dairy products
<i>Galilah</i>	a person honored with undressing and dressing the Torah	<i>Tallit</i>	prayer shawl worn by Jews as reminders of God’s commandments
<i>Haftarah</i>	a chapter of the prophets read in services after the corresponding Torah section	<i>T’filah</i>	prayer
<i>Hagbah</i>	a person honored with lifting the Torah	<i>Tikkun Olam</i>	Jewish obligation to pursue social justice
<i>Kippah</i>	a Jewish head covering worn for worship, religious study, also called yarmulke	<i>Trope</i>	cantillation marks used to chant sacred books
		<i>Tzedakah</i>	Jewish obligation of righteous giving and just behavior

## TEXTS, RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

### REQUIRED TEXTS & MATERIALS:

- › Mishkan T’filah Siddur
- › The Parasha HaShavua booklet, a copy of the Torah portion without vowels and trope for your child’s own Shabbat
- › A clearly enunciated audio recording of your child’s Torah portion chanted by an experienced Torah reader
- › The T’filah Tutor booklet and CD that include all required blessings and prayers in Hebrew

### RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- › The Torah, A Modern Commentary, *W.G. Plaut, Ed.*
- › Tanach The Holy Scriptures *The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*

### USEFUL RESOURCES ONLINE:

**T**his handbook and other additional information are available by visiting the Etz Chayim Progressive Synagogue website. Forms, texts and audio files are available for download from the Additional Resources area, accessible by navigating to the B’Nei Mitzvah section from the Educational Life menu tab.

Additional resources including a transliterated support book for parents and a CD are available from the office on request