

B-Mitzvah Family Guide

Visit www.bethelmc.org for more information and resources.

Updated November 2026

MAZEL TOV!

We know this is an exciting time for your family as your child is preparing to become a B-Mitzvah. All of us at Congregation Beth El are looking forward to celebrating this special experience with you.

This guide has been created to assist in the lead-up to the day itself. Whether this is the first such simcha in your family, or one you've celebrated before, we hope you will read this material carefully and take advantage of all of the information and resources we are making available to you.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions. We look forward to assisting you in making your simcha a special and memorable occasion for everyone.

Senior Rabbi, Greg Harris
Associate Rabbi, Deborah Megdal
Hazzan, Asa Fradkin
Executive Director, Heather Garrett
Executive Assistant to the Clergy, Robin Finkelstein

OFFERING A PERSPECTIVE

A B-Mitzvah ceremony is a public acknowledgment that a child has become a responsible adult member of the Jewish community. It is an exciting time for families as children are called to the Torah for the first time, and an important step in the transition to adulthood and the acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions. As a public acknowledgment, the B-Mitzvah ceremony takes place in the context of a regular worship service. During the course of that service, the B-Mitzvah is given the opportunity to demonstrate they have acquired skills to lead the congregation in prayer and become a responsible member of the Jewish community. Beth El is an egalitarian congregation and participation is not dependent on gender. The term B-Mitzvah is an ungendered phrase used to make the ceremony inclusive for all.

Beth El's B-Mitzvah ceremony is an event for the congregation as well as for the family. The congregation looks forward to sharing the joy as our children become young adults. It is important to keep in mind that the B-Mitzvah ceremony is part of the regular congregational service. It is not, and should not be thought of, as a separate, private ceremony only for the B-Mitzvah family. Posters, pictures, and items to be contributed as a mitzvah project are not to be displayed as part of the service or kiddush, but should be part of other aspects of your family celebration. Beth El encourages celebrations following the service to be consistent with the occasion and in keeping with Shabbat traditions.

The B-Mitzvah program is very closely aligned with Beth El's core values.

- We strive to create a warm and ***welcoming*** environment that nurtures and cares for our B-Mitzvah students and their families. The environment created through our interactions during the preparation sets the tone for the experience of the B-Mitzvah itself and following.
- Family involvement is key to the success of our program and the B-Mitzvah experience. We are ***inclusive*** of all family structures and family members. We encourage families to take an active role in the child's preparations and share in their learning.
- It is important to create a ***connection*** of B-Mitzvah families to the greater Beth El community and create lasting bonds between them, clergy members, tutors, educators, synagogue staff, and peers during their journey through the experience.
- We emphasize the ***relevance*** of the religious and spiritual significance of the B-Mitzvah. It is our goal for each child to do the best they can and to participate in the service to the full extent of their ability. Preparing for the service is a unique opportunity for them to learn a variety of Judaic skills and values that can be applied to everyday life. Our goal is for each student to feel accomplished.

B-MITZVAH CHECKLIST

- ◯ Pathway to B-Mitzvah Kickoff Meeting (December)
- ◯ Complete Online B-Mitzvah Date Request Form (due in January)
- ◯ What's My Story? 4th Grade Family Program (February/March)
- ◯ B-Mitzvah Planning Together Meeting (16-26 months prior)

18 Months

- ◯ Reserve synagogue space for Friday Night Dinner or Saturday Celebration with Tania (tcedillo@bethelmc.org)

15 Months

- ◯ Complete online Tutor Selection Form

12 Months

- ◯ Begin serving at Kiddush "30 Minutes and a Smile"
- ◯ Develop ideas and begin Mitzvah Project
- ◯ Pay B-Mitzvah Administration Fee

6 Months

- ◯ Complete online form relating to terminology and gift selection
- ◯ Receive notice of B-Mitzvah Rehearsal date and time
- ◯ Pay B-Mitzvah Administration Fee
- ◯ Meet with Hazzan

3-4 Months

- ◯ Begin meeting with officiating Rabbi
- ◯ Order custom kippot (see page 7 of the B-Mitzvah Family Guide)
- ◯ Arrange synagogue photography session with Lauren (lpartlow@bethmc.org)
- ◯ Acquire a Tallit

2 Months

- ◯ Receive Kiddush information and begin making arrangements
- ◯ Order bimah flower arrangement (see page 9 of the B-Mitzvah Family Guide)

1 Month

- ◯ Meet with Hazzan
- ◯ Pay Kiddush Fund Contribution
- ◯ Finalize Torah readers and assignment of honors; submit information and completed Ceremony Information Sheet to Robin (rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org)
- ◯ Notify Heather (hgarrett@bethelmc.org) of special accommodations or security needs

1 Week

- ◯ Participate in final rehearsal with clergy
- ◯ Send photo of B-Mitzvah child to Robin (rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org)
- ◯ Deliver kippot to main office (no later than 12 noon on Friday)
- ◯ Relax and enjoy your simcha!

TIMELINE

3 years - 18 months

Attend the Pathway to B-Mitzvah Kickoff Meeting (held in December) and complete the online B-Mitzvah Date Request Form by the required deadline (early-January). B-Mitzvah ceremony dates are scheduled by the senior rabbi. Date assignments will be announced in Feb/March at the 4th Grade "What's My Story?" Family Education Program. Any subsequent changes are made only by Rabbi Harris and subject to availability. Changing circumstances may require a ceremony originally scheduled on a Shabbat morning as a single to become a double. This may occur because new families join Beth El or unexpected family situatuations arise.

Ensure your membership and financial obligations are current. It is our policy that families must be members when the B-Mitzvah is scheduled and must remain members through the B-Mitzvah date. *We never want personal finances to be a barrier to participation in the B-Mitzvah program. If you need a revised financial plan, please contact Executive Director Heather Garrett at hgarrett@bethelmc.org.*

Continue your child's Jewish learning. B-Mitzvah students are expected to attend an approved program beginning in fourth grade and continuing through the end of seventh grade. This may include enrollment in BERS or attendance at a Jewish day school. Any deviations from the required educational background and study obligations must be approved by Rabbi Harris.

Consider making a tallit with your child in the Women of Beth El Tallit Workshop. The tallit is a symbol of welcome to adulthood and its responsibilities. It's so much more special if the tallit comes from the heart and includes the loving touches of family members. B-Mitzvah students enjoy being able to choose their own fabric and help with the design. Taking turns tying the tzitzit around the four corners is the ultimate family bonding experience. Many of the beautiful and original tallitot worn at Beth El were designed and handmade in this workshop. No sewing experience is necessary. Look for registration information in the September and October issues of *The Scroll*. Note that this is a very popular program that has been extremely successful for many years. Space is limited and the workshop tends to fill quickly.

Start thinking about a Mitzvah Project. An important component of the B-Mitzvah process is participating in a Mitzvah project of the child's choosing. Ideally, the project will be one which taps into their special skill or interest and provides an opportunity for the most meaningful way for them, and the rest of their family if desired, to contribute to their world. For ideas and suggestions, please visit the B-Mitzvah page of the Beth El website.

Attend the B-Mitzvah: Planning Together Meeting (held in March/April) to discuss important information and logistics related to the B-Mitzvah.

18 months - 12 months

Monitor your child's knowledge of Hebrew and prayer. The first step in studying the texts used in the service is to ensure your home has a Chumash and a Siddur - texts that should be proud possessions of every Jewish family. At Beth El, we use *Etz Hayim Humash* and *Siddur Lev Shalem*, the most recent Siddur of the Conservative Movement. This Siddur contains not only the prayers themselves, but also commentaries, essays, inspirational poetry, and accessible English translations. This Siddur is a great spiritual companion for you and your child as you embark on the B-Mitzvah experience. Please consider acquiring one for your family.

Complete the online Tutor Selection Form. Approximately 15 months prior to the B-Mitzvah date, you will receive an email with a link to this form, which allows you to provide input into the selection your child's B-Mitzvah tutor. Hazzan Fradkin will make the tutor assignment and after receiving notification, you will be able to connect with them and begin lessons. The B-Mitzvah honors themselves by the manner in which they participate in the service and are expected to be well prepared. Lessons are usually 30-45 minutes per week and daily practice is strongly encouraged. Financial arrangements are made directly between the family and the tutor. The amount of tutoring needed and the specific tutor's rates are factors in determining the total tutoring cost, which is separate from the B-Mitzvah Administration Fee.

Reserve synagogue space for your private celebration or Friday night dinner, if desired. Contact Tania Cedillo at tcedillo@bethelmc.org or x122, for information on available spaces and approved Kosher caterers, as well as all applicable policies and fees.

12 months - 9 months

Attend Shabbat services. Regular attendance at services gives students and parents the opportunity to become familiar with the prayers and the structure of the services. Additionally, Junior Congregation is a key way for students to develop the skills necessary to participate comfortably in various parts of the service.

Serve at a kiddush. This is a requirement of all B-Mitzvah families in order to build a sense of community. Go to www.bethelmc.org/kiddush and click on the large blue button to access the Sign-Up Genius calendar and select a date when your family can share "30 Minutes and a Smile" with other congregants and guests. More information about this important commitment can be found on the B-Mitzvah page of the Beth El website.

Watch for the B-Mitzvah Administration Fee to appear on your synagogue statement. This fee of $500 (*subject to change) covers the planning, administrative, operational, and material expenses relating to the B-Mitzvah. Families with siblings sharing a B-Mitzvah ceremony will be charged $750 (*subject to change).

8 months - 6 months

Complete the online form indicating details specific to your child and their service. This form asks for information regarding preferred terminology for the simcha, chosen pronouns, and whether your child would rather receive a kiddush cup or a set of candlesticks as a gift from the Men's Club / Women of Beth El.

Receive notice of rehearsal date and time. Rehearsals are full run-throughs of the service with the clergy and generally begin at 5:00 pm on the Wednesday preceding the service. They last between 1 and 1.5 hours. The B-Mitzvah, parent(s)/guardian(s), and siblings who are participating in the service should attend.

Meet with Hazzan Fradkin to monitor your child's study progress and discuss the possibility of them leading additional parts of the service. You may also want to discuss Torah readings for other family members and friends. You will be provided with an email link to schedule this meeting, which will be held in person at Beth El.

4 months - 3 months

Meet with the officiating rabbi to get to know one another, discuss the B-Mitzvah service and honors, and begin the D'var Torah process. The first meeting will be an in-person meeting with the child and their parent(s)/guardian(s). Subsequent sessions can occur in person or via Zoom and parent/guardian attendance is welcome, but not required.

Order kippot. Jewish and non-Jewish males must wear a head covering while they are in the synagogue. Females must wear a head covering if they will be on the bimah. Gender non-conforming and nonbinary persons may choose their individual practice between these two options. Many B-Mitzvah families choose to order custom kippot as it is a special touch for the service and can become a treasured keepsake for their family and friends. They recommend coolkippahs.com, davidkippot.com, kippas.com, kippotpro.com, and kippotworld.com.

Expect to see the Kiddush Fund Contribution appear on your synagogue statement (for Saturday morning services only). The amount of $2500 (*subject to change) covers the Classic Kiddush Menu for up to 75 of your guests. You will be provided with more detailed information and menu options approximately 8 weeks prior to your simcha.

8 weeks - 6 weeks

Acquire a tallit if one has not already been made, gifted, or purchased. We have a large selection of tallitot in the Beth El Judaica and Gift Shop. Email wbe@bethelmc.org for store hours or to make an appointment. All purchases help to support the Women of Beth El.

Continue meeting with the officiating rabbi to work on the D'var Torah.

Arrange a date and time for your family photos to be taken at the synagogue. As Beth El does not allow photography on Shabbat, families usually reserve the sanctuary on a weekday afternoon or evening (most commonly on the same day as the rehearsal) for this purpose. Please contact Lauren Partlow at lpartlow@bethelmc.org or x102 to make these arrangements.

6 weeks - 4 weeks

Receive kiddush sponsorship information. If the B-Mitzvah service is on a Saturday morning, you are responsible for sponsoring (or co-sponsoring) the congregational kiddush following services. Just as you have enjoyed other's hospitality, now you are able to share your celebration with the community. You will be provided with materials outlining menus, upgrades/additions, fees, policies, and deadlines for submitting menu choices, guest counts, and additional payment (if necessary). If the B-Mitzvah is on a Saturday afternoon or weekday, and you would like to sponsor a kiddush following the service, please contact Tania Cedillo at tcedillo@bethelmc.org or x122. Visit the B-Mitzvah page of the Beth El website for more information.

Finalize assignment of Aliyot and other honors. Assure that honorees have been contacted and are prepared. To avoid potentially difficult situations, please do not assign any honors that are not listed on the Ceremony Information Sheet or have been discussed beforehand with the rabbi/hazzan. Check the Beth El website for recordings of the Torah Blessings and Ashrei, and copies of the English prayers that can be assigned to family and friends.

Assign additional Torah readers, and notify Robin Finkelstein at rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org with information regarding who will be reading which portion(s). Ensure that Torah readers (besides the B-Mitzvah) have contacted Hazzan Fradkin at least one week prior to the B-Mitzvah date, to be heard and approved either in person or by phone.

Complete and return the B-Mitzvah Ceremony Information Sheet to Robin Finkelstein at rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org by the stated due date. This form is an integral part in planning the logistics of the day as it designates the people who will receive honors during the service. Honors (for both Jewish and non-Jewish family and friends) are reserved for those celebrating B-Mitzvahs, as well for other members of the congregation. Because Beth El is a large and active congregation, no family is given all of the honors at any one service.

Meet with Hazzan Fradkin to review Haftarah, Torah, and prayer nusach.

Order a flower arrangement for the bimah. While not required, some families choose to have flowers on the bimah during the B-Mitzvah service as it is a thoughtful touch that makes the day seem more special and separate from any other Shabbat morning. Beth El recommends Bethesda Florist (301-202-4955) or Suburban Florist (301-656-2288) as they are familiar with the best size and shape for the arrangement, as well as our delivery procedures. If you select a different florist, please contact the synagogue office to discuss the necessary delivery details.

Ensure that your synagogue account is current (including yearly membership dues and security fee, BERS tuition, etc.) and that your B-Mitzvah Administration Fee and Kiddush Fund Contribution have been paid.

3 weeks

Send *Helpful Information for Guests* to your B-Mitzvah guests. This document, containing information regarding arrival time, attire, parking, respecting Shabbat, and other important details can be found on the B-Mitzvah page of the Beth El website.

Notify Beth El of any circumstances that need specific attention. Contact Heather Garrett at hgarrett@bethelmc.org or x106 if any of your guests will require special accommodations or security arrangements.

1 week

Participate in the final rehearsal. The B-Mitzvah, parent(s)/guardian(s), and siblings who are participating in the service should attend. Make sure that the B-Mitzvah brings all of their materials with them (Torah and Haftarah portions, printed copy of D'var Torah, head covering and tallit, etc.).

Make sure you have sent a photo of your child (to be printed in the Shabbat Announcements) to Robin Finkelstein at rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org.

Deliver kippot (and other items if necessary) to Beth El. All Friday deliveries must be made before 12:00 noon as the main office closes early for Shabbat.

THINGS TO KNOW

The information in this guide is geared towards B-Mitzvahs occurring during Shabbat morning services. If your child will be having a Mincha/Maariv/Havdalah or Weekday service, there will be some differences from the stated information, including:

- Unless you are expecting over 180 guests, services, family photos, and the final rehearsal will be held in the chapel.
- The service starting time depends on the date of the B-Mitzvah and will be confirmed by the clergy. Havdalah services are normally set by the designated time for Shabbat's conclusion.
- The final rehearsal will generally be held at 5:00 pm on the Tuesday preceding the service.

Our goal is for the B-Mitzvah section of the Beth El website to contain a great deal of helpful information and resources. It is currently in the process of being updated and we ask that you be patient with us as we make the necessary revisions. To access this section of the website, go to www.bethelmc.org and select *PRAYER AND SPIRITUALITY* from the headings across the top. On the drop down menu, select B-MITZVAH (the last option of the column on the left).

The timeline contained in this guide is also being refined as we work to make improvements and provide the most relevant information to our B-Mitzvah families. Be aware that as each timeline item approaches, you will receive more detailed information and guidance from the Executive Assistant to the Clergy. If at any point you have questions, or would like more information, please contact Robin Finkelstein at rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org or x131.

Videography and photography are prohibited on Shabbat (both inside and outside of the building). Beth El has installed 3 HD cameras and now makes beautiful, high quality recordings of each service. Assuming there are no technical issues, you will receive a flash drive containing a recording of the B-Mitzvah service in the mail within 4-6 weeks after the simcha.

B-Mitzvah services are livestreamed on the Beth El website. Those who are unable to attend in person can go to https://www.bethelmc.org/spirituality/watch-live/ to view the service in real time or for up to 2 weeks afterwards.

Torah Honors - As is customary in the Conservative movement, only Jewish individuals may receive these honors.

- Aliyot - B-Mitzvah families may assign four Aliyot (including the one for the B-Mitzvah child). Other honorees may include parents/guardians, grandparents, and older siblings. Aunts, uncles, cousins, close friends and tutors are also commonly included. Up to four people can be given a single Aliyah.

- Lifting and Tying the Torah - B-Mitzvah families may designate the people who lift (MAGBEAH) and tie (GOLEL) the Torah. The honor of lifting the Torah must be given to a person with the ability and expertise to raise the Torah in the proper manner.
- Holding the Torah - B-Mitzvah families may assign a person (often, but not exclusively, a child of 8 to 13 years of age) to sit on the bimah and hold the Torah while the Haftarah is chanted.
- Opening/Closing the Ark - B-Mitzvah families may designate people to come to the bimah to OPEN/CLOSE THE ARK before and after the Torah service. We ask that no more than 2-4 people at a time be assigned this honor.

Other honors are also available and can be assigned to friends or family of any religion. These honors include leading the congregation in prayers for our country, Israel, and peace.

Although the official start time of the Shabbat morning service is 9:15 am, B-Mitzvah guests are encouraged to be in their seats by 9:45 am. The service usually concludes at about noon.

Dress for services should reflect the honor and dignity of Shabbat. It is our practice to dress modestly and it would be inappropriate to enter our sanctuary/chapel wearing overly revealing clothing (for example, shorts or clothing that does not cover the shoulders or midriff).

- Jewish women and girls must wear a head covering if they will be on the bimah. They are required to wear a tallit for Torah reading. Non-Jewish females must wear a head covering if they will be on the bimah.
- Jewish men and boys must wear a head covering while they are in the synagogue. It is customary to put on a tallit before entering the sanctuary/chapel. It is required to put on a tallit when on the bimah to receive an honor. Non-Jewish males must wear a head covering while in the synagogue.
- Nonbinary or Gender non-conforming people may choose their individual practice given the guidelines above.

Beth El's parking lot is not large enough to accommodate all the cars of those attending services. When our lot is full, your guests may park on alternative sites surrounding our facility.

- Subject to church activity, the upper parking lot of the Bethesda United Methodist Church at Old Georgetown Road and Huntington Parkway is available.
- Parking is available on the residential streets opposite the synagogue, across Old Georgetown Road. Limited parking may also be found on the streets surrounding our building. Please do not park on someone's lawn or in their driveway. Montgomery County law prohibits parking within five feet of a driveway, as well as any area designated as *No Parking*. Be aware that Montgomery County Police may ticket and/or tow vehicles that are parked illegally, whether in our lot or on the neighborhood streets.

GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

Aliyah The honor given to a person called to recite the blessings for the reading of a section of the Torah portion. The word translates as "going up."

Bimah The elevated area at the front of the sanctuary/chapel where the Ark holding the Torah scrolls is located, where the clergy speak and lead the service, and where the Torah is read.

Chumash Contains the entire text of the Torah, as well as selections from other writings in the Hebrew Bible. At Beth El, we use *Etz Hayim*.

D'var Torah A commentary on the Torah portion.

Haftarah The reading from one of the books of the Prophets, chanted after the Torah reading during the Shabbat morning service.

Kiddush The blessing over wine recited at the end of the service. It is also used to refer to the refreshments or light lunch that is served following the Shabbat morning service.

Kippah A head covering; also referred to by the Yiddish word, yarmulke.

Havdalah The evening service that marks the end of Shabbat and ushers in the new week. The ritual involves lighting a special havdalah candle with several wicks, blessing a cup of wine, and smelling sweet spices.

Ma'ariv The evening prayer service consisting primarily of the evening Shema and Amidah.

Mincha The afternoon prayer service.

Musaf The prayers after the Torah service which conclude the Shabbat morning service.

Nusach The text of a prayer service.

Shacharit The morning service preceding the Torah service.

Siddur The prayer book used throughout the service. It contains ancient Hebrew liturgy as well as modern Hebrew and English prayers. At Beth El, we use *Siddur Lev Shalem*.

Tallit The prayer shawl worn during the service.

Torah The Five Books of Moses written by hand on a parchment scroll wrapped around two wooden rods. The text is written in ancient Hebrew by a specially trained scribe using no vowels or punctuation. A portion of the Torah is read each Shabbat. The Torah is read from start to finish in sequence each year.

CONTACT US

Robin Finkelstein, Executive Assistant to the Clergy, will be your primary contact for all B-Mitzvah matters. If she is unable to help you, she can direct you to the person with whom you may need to be in touch. Please do not hesitate to reach out to her via email at **rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org** or call **301-652-2606 x131**.

If necessary, you are also welcome to directly contact any of the people listed below, or call the synagogue's main office at 301-652-2606.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Heather Garrett, x106 hgarrett@bethelmc.org
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