



Parents' Guide for Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation

Or Hadash,
A Reconstructionist Congregation
Joshua Waxman, Rabbi
Barbara Weisman, Education Director



Bar/Bat Mitzvah Guide

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a life cycle celebration that Jewish families anticipate from their children's earliest years. It is a joyous milestone that marks an important time of transition for every child and every family, welcoming that child as an official "adult" member of the Jewish community. It is also an event that requires a great deal of commitment and preparation on the part of both the child and the family.

At Or Hadash we want the Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation process and celebration to be a meaningful experience for both the child and her/his family. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not merely an opportunity to "perform" before family and friends and have a celebration afterwards; it is a rite of passage that marks the culmination of one's elementary Jewish education and the beginning of adult Jewish learning. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is also an important opportunity to affirm the child's and family's sense of belonging to the Jewish community in general and to the Or Hadash community in particular.

- 1) Continuing religious education - It is our hope that students continue through our High School/Confirmation program and well beyond in order to become life-long Jewish learners. There are a myriad of post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah learning opportunities.
- 2) Shabbat Service attendance expectations - According to our Religious School curriculum, it is expected that all students attend a minimum of ten Shabbat services during seventh grade. It is highly recommended that these services include both Friday night and Saturday morning. Saturday morning may include a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. Bar/Bat Mitzvah services are open to the entire congregation, so do not feel that you are intruding if you attend a Bar/Bat Mitzvah to which you have not been invited. The goal is for families to connect to the Or Hadash community and prayer experience. At least four services should be at Or Hadash. The remaining services may be at other synagogues.
- 3) Financial Obligations
 - a) Financial obligations to OH, including all dues and tuition, must be up to date one year prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date in order for a tutor to be assigned. They must be paid in full or, if you are on a payment plan, payments must be up to date. In addition, payments must remain up to date throughout the year prior to, and the year of, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration.
 - b) If you are renting the building for your celebration following the service, the rental fees must be paid in full no later than two months prior to the date.
 - c) We realize that there are many expenses associated with a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. If you have any difficulties meeting these obligations, please contact the Or Hadash Treasurer as soon as possible to make arrangements in regard to your situation. The matter will be handled with strict confidentiality. It is our goal to be as supportive as possible while still being fiscally responsible.



- 4) Family Education - The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a family celebration. It is also an opportunity for family learning. As part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation you will be participating in numerous family education programs across a wide range of subjects. These will take place over the sixth and seventh grade years on both Saturday and/or Sundays. They will include various topics and experiences. For example, it is an Or Hadash custom for the students to learn about and make their own Tallitot as part of a family education experience in sixth grade. Families will also learn together on topics relating to Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and Jewish views on becoming an adult and changing relationships within the family. It is our hope that these programs will be enjoyable and beneficial for you and your family, and that they will help build a greater sense of community among our Bar/Bat Mitzvah families.
- 5) Tutoring
- a) Families will be contacted approximately one year prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date to arrange for a tutor.
 - b) The length of tutoring is determined by ceremony date, time of year, summer or winter vacation schedules, conflicting activities, and your child's proficiency in Hebrew and Prayer. In addition, any learning disabilities or special needs should be taken into consideration, and the Rabbi, Education Director, and your tutor should be informed of these special needs before the onset of tutoring.
 - c) In general, tutors are arranged by the Rabbi. However, if you have a specific request such as gender, whether or not the tutor drives to your home, the desire to use the same tutor as an older sibling, or other special concerns or needs, inform the Rabbi immediately so that the proper tutor can be assigned.
 - d) The Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee paid to Or Hadash provides for 18 one-half-hour lessons with the tutor. Tutoring is intended to teach your child the Torah and Haftarah readings that are specific to his/her service. Additional tutoring sessions may be required if extra support is necessary for the prayers for the service. Additional sessions and payment are arranged directly with the tutor.
 - e) Families may arrange to use tutors not on the regular Or Hadash tutor list, but this must be done in consultation with the Rabbi.
 - f) Arrangements for times and locations of lessons are made directly with the tutor.
 - g) The tutor will work with the child on preparing him/her to do the following at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service:
 - i) Chant between 3 to 7 portions from the Torah (minimum 3 verses per portion).
 - ii) Recite the blessings before and after the Torah reading (aliyah).
 - iii) Chant from the Haftarah (prophetic portion for the week), including the blessings before and after.
 - iv) Review the prayers that your child has learned in religious school and which s/he will lead as part of the service. (Please refer to *Prayers Led by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.)



- h) All of our tutors are skilled at what they do. However, we are aware that sometimes a student and tutor do not make a good match. If you believe this is the case, or if you have other issues or questions, contact the Rabbi at any time.
- 6) The Mitzvah Project -This project is meant to be of service to the Or Hadash community or the community at-large and MUST include at least 12 hours of direct student involvement. The service hours may not coincide with Religious School hours. The project is intended to convey the importance of service as a vital part of stepping into the responsibilities of an adult. The Education Director and the Education Steering Committee must approve all Mitzvah Projects before the student begins the project. (See Proposal Form for details.)
- a) The Project Proposal Form must be submitted to the Education Steering Committee for approval. Proposals must be submitted at least 12-15 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date for approval. The project must be completed between 3-6 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. Students are allowed to do a project in pairs as long as each student fulfills the requirements.
 - b) Parents are responsible for assisting with the logistics of the project. The Rabbi and Education Director are available for counseling and advice.
 - c) Some suggested ideas for the project are:
 - i) Tutoring children in our Hebrew School
 - ii) Helping the Building & Grounds Committee do simple repairs at Or Hadash, or participating in the beautification of the building or grounds
 - iii) Volunteering in a shelter or soup kitchen, as well as cooking for and eating with the families we host through the Ambler Interfaith Hospitality Network
 - iv) Organizing a food or clothing drive and delivering the goods to an appropriate agency is an appropriate project if it is in conjunction with another direct service activity.
 - v) Volunteering on a regular basis at a social service agency or organization
 - vi) Leading prayers at services on a regular basis or composing your own musical piece to accompany the service on a regular basis
 - vii) Creating a work of art, literature, or other creative contribution, for the congregation with the prior approval of the Or Hadash Board of Directors).
- 7) The Bar/Bat Mitzvah's remarks to the congregation
- a) All B'nai Mitzvah are expected to present a D'var Torah (a speech commenting on the Torah and/or Haftarah portion) during the service. This may take the form of the child's personal reflections, interpretations and thoughts on the portion and how they connect to his/her life. This can also be combined with the Mitzvah Project speech if there is a connection between the Mitzvah Project and the comments relating to the Torah and/or Haftarah portion. The D'var Torah should take approximately 5 to 7 minutes to present.



- i) You will receive a letter from the Rabbi approximately 10 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date with a schedule of meetings to discuss the D'var Torah and other aspects of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
 - ii) In preparing for a D'var Torah, the child and parent(s) should read through the entire Torah and Haftarah portion and the summaries and commentaries provided in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah folder, as well as any additional commentaries you find relevant. The family will meet approximately 8 months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service to discuss possible directions for a D'var Torah.
 - iii) The process of writing a D'var Torah should begin after the initial meeting with the Rabbi 6 to 8 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The Rabbi should receive a first draft no later than four months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The Rabbi will work with the child on "fine tuning" the D'var Torah in person and/or via email. Though it is helpful for the child and parent(s) to do the initial studying in preparation for the D'var Torah together, the D'var Torah should be written by the child and express his/her feelings and beliefs.
 - iv) The final version should be completed no later than two months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The same is true for all other speeches.
- b) All B'nai Mitzvah will present a summary of their Mitzvah Project and reflect on its meaning to them and connection to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration. Length: 2 to 3 minutes.
- c) For suggestions in working with your child's Torah portion prior to the first meeting, see the supplement "How to Begin Working on a D'var Torah."
- 8) Parents' brief words to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah (3 to 5 minutes total) - These brief remarks to your child should focus on who your child is and what your hopes and wishes are for him/her on this special day.
- 9) Assigning honors, parts, and readings - The following parts should be assigned no later than four weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and should be given to the Rabbi. (See Service Participation Form in your packet for more information.)
- a) Presentation of *tallit* to Bar/Bat Mitzvah at the beginning of the service - usually parent(s) or grandparent(s).
 - b) 3 -7 *Aliyot* / Torah blessings. The number of aliyot should be determined towards the beginning of the tutoring process so that the tutor will know how many Torah readings should be assigned to the child. Group *aliyot* are permitted, but it is strongly suggested that no more than four people have an *aliyah* at one time. Though non-Jews are welcome to come to the *bimah* as part of a couple or group *aliyah*, the recitation of the actual Torah blessing is limited to Jews.
 - c) *Hagbah* (lifting the Torah) and *G'lilah* (dressing the Torah)



- d) Torah readers. If members or friends of the family will be chanting from the Torah in addition to the minimum of three aliyot chanted by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah your tutor should be informed at the beginning of the tutoring process in order to determine who should read which verses. The tutor will provide additional Torah readers with a tape of the verses if necessary.
- e) Ark openers/closers. The ark is opened and closed twice during the service. This is an honor that may be performed by adults or children (young children should be accompanied by an adult).
- f) Children to pass out candy at the end of the service to be thrown at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- g) Presenter of the congregational gift. (See below.) This is optional, but it must be a member of Or Hadash. Otherwise the Rabbi or tutor may present the gift.
- h) Names of additional ushers (recommended if you will have a large number of youngsters or teen guests). A Or Hadash student and parent will be assigned to usher your Bar/Bat Mitzvah service, but we recommend that you assign additional adults from your guests to assist with supervision of teenagers and children during the service.

10) Additional readings, songs, etc.

- a) Suggestions for additional readings to be read by any family member or friend, whether Jewish or not, can be found in the Shabbat Morning Service Outline in your packet. You may also choose other readings in consultation with the Rabbi.
- b) You may include additional songs or musical selections, when appropriate. The Rabbi should be consulted regarding songs and readings in order to make sure that the length of time is taken into consideration, and that all songs and readings are in keeping with the spirit of the service.
- c) In the interest of time it is suggested that only a limited number of readings and additional songs be included. Please be aware that a large number of additional songs and prayers might cause the service to end later than 12:30.

11) Bar/Bat Mitzvah Booklet

- a) You may choose to prepare a booklet with an explanation of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, an outline of the service, additional songs and readings, etc. for distribution to your guests at the service. Samples of past booklets are available at the Or Hadash office. If you borrow any of these please return them to the office when finished. If you would like to receive a sample electronically, contact Barbara Weisman.
- b) Please remember that all booklets should include the name, "Or Hadash, a Reconstructionist Congregation" in addition to the child's name on the front cover.



- c) Please give the Rabbi a draft copy of the booklet for review at least two weeks in advance in case any changes need to be made.

12) Candy throwing -You may choose to have candy thrown by your guests toward the conclusion of the service.

- a) This ritual symbolizes the sweetness of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration.
- b) If you wish to include this ritual, the congregation will supply suitable soft candy.

13) Passing down of Torah through the generations

- a) This involves parents and grandparents. If grandparents are deceased, other relatives of that generation, such as great aunts and uncles, may be chosen to participate instead.
- b) Since this represents the passing down of Jewish tradition and heritage, only Jewish Grandparents should participate. However, since in most of our interfaith families, the Non-Jewish parent is also involved in the passing of Jewish tradition, s/he should be encouraged to participate in this ritual if s/he is comfortable doing so.

14) Wearing of Tallit and Kippah

- a) The wearing of *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *kippah* (head covering) is optional at Or Hadash for both men and women. The congregation will provide a limited number of both for attendees.
- b) You may also provide *kippot* with your child's name and Bar/Bat Mitzvah date inscribed on the inside. These are available through Jewish book/gift shops and online.
- c) A *tallit* will be provided for all those called up to the Torah for an *aliyah* to use for touching and kissing the Torah. Jews and non-Jews may both wear *kippot* but, as a symbol of covenant, *tallitot* are worn only by Jews.

15) The Erev Shabbat/Friday night service

- a) The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family sponsors the *Oneg Shabbat* (refreshments) on Friday night. Food for 40 people should be provided. This includes providing wine, kosher grape juice: Kedem and Manischewitz brands (Welch's grape juice is not kosher), and at least 3 challahs. Please contact the Synagogue Administrator if you have any questions.
- b) The entire immediate family will light the Shabbat candles and say the blessing at the beginning of the Friday night service.
- c) The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will lead certain prayers on Friday night. See *Service- Prayers led by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.



16) Flowers, food baskets, deliveries, etc.

- a) In lieu of or in addition to flowers on the bimah it is strongly suggested that you donate money to the Mitzvah Food Pantry. Alternately, Or Hadash can provide a beautifully decorated Bimah Mitzvah basket (please see informational flyer in this packet or on our website). The money for the Bimah basket is donated to the Mitzvah Food Project to help the needy in our area.
- b) Please contact the Synagogue Administrator ahead of time to arrange delivery of any flowers, food baskets or other items (i.e., rented tables, chairs, etc.). Please note that the Office closes early on Friday for Shabbat.
- c) Gift from the congregation
 - i) Your child will receive a tzedakah box as a gift from Or Hadash.
 - ii) The gift will be presented by a member of the congregation of your choice or by the Rabbi.
 - iii) There is a place on the Participation Sheet to specify who will be presenting it.
- d) Mazon: a Jewish Response to Hunger - Mazon is a Jewish organization that provides funds to help feed the hungry throughout the world. Or Hadash encourages all families to donate 3% of the cost of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah reception to Mazon in honor of this special day. There is more information on Mazon in the packet.
- e) Other Contributions to Tzedakah and the Congregation
 - 1) Judaism teaches that we should donate between 10-20% of our disposable income to tzedakah. As a new Jewish adult, a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is strongly encouraged to choose two or three tzedakah organizations and to donate at least 10% of the money that s/he receives as gifts to the organizations. At least one of the organizations should be Jewish in nature. You should consult with the Rabbi for suggestions if necessary. This may also connect with the child's Mitzvah project.
 - 2) In addition, it is customary to make a donation to the community at the time of a *simcha* (joyous occasion). Donations to Or Hadash may be made to any of our various funds. These include, but are not limited to: Library Fund, Torah Fund, Rabbi's Discretionary Fund, Legacy for Learning, Prayer Book Fund, and the Building Beautification Fund. As an option, a parent, or parents, from the Bar/Bat Mitzvah class can volunteer to collect the money from all families to make a group donation to the synagogue. Please consult the Rabbi, Education Director and/or President for suggestions.



17) Special Considerations

a) Children with learning differences or special needs - We will make every effort to help provide the resources and support services necessary for a child with learning challenges or special needs to participate to the best of his/her ability in a meaningful Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. We will approach this on a case-by-case basis and are happy to make modifications or accommodations to the service necessary for your child's success. Please meet with the Rabbi, the Education Director and your child's teacher early in the process to discuss your child's specific needs and strengths.

b) Interfaith Families - We know that many of the children celebrating a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Or Hadash are being raised in families where one parent is not Jewish. In addition, there are many families in which one parent is a Jew-by-choice. In both cases, there may be many non-Jewish family members in attendance at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. It is important that everyone feels as comfortable as possible at our B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies. If there are any issues related to non-Jewish family members that are of concern to you, please speak to the Rabbi early in the preparation process.

c) Families of Divorce/Separation - We realize that some of our B'nai Mitzvah come from families where parents, grandparents or other significant relatives are separated or divorced. It is important that we all work towards the goal of making the Bar/Bat Mitzvah a meaningful and enjoyable experience for your child and everyone involved. If there are any specific issues of which the Rabbi should be made aware concerning family configurations and dynamics, please inform him towards the beginning of the preparation process. Remember that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a time of joy and celebration. The ceremony should not be used as a time to play out family dynamics or interpersonal issues. All parents and other family members with whom the child has a positive relationship and who wishes to be present and participate in the service should be welcome as a way of honoring your child's relationships.

18) Rehearsal - Rehearsal will generally occur on the Thursday nine days prior to the ceremony at 4:00 PM.

a) During the rehearsal the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will review the following:

- i) All prayers and blessings
- ii) Chanting the Torah and Haftarah portions with blessings
- iii) Reading the various speeches and remarks
- iv) All honors and other parts in the service.

b) All information, including Hebrew names where needed, must be provided two weeks prior to this time. This should all be written on the Participation Sheet.

c) Bring all necessary written materials to the rehearsal.



19) Shabbat Service Attire - Out of respect for Shabbat and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service appropriate attire should be worn by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as well as all those who will be on the bimah for aliyot, honors, readings, etc. The service is not a formal affair, nor is it a picnic. Attire should be nice, but comfortable.

a) For boys and men: no shorts, t-shirts, tank tops, as well as no tuxedos or other formal attire.

b) For girls and women: no shorts, t-shirts, strapless/sleeveless dresses, blouses or evening gowns without a jacket, shawl. Please remember to cover arms/shoulders, and that skirt length and neckline are appropriate.

c) Head covering for all men and women and the wearing of a *tallit* (prayer shawl) by all Jewish men and women is encouraged, but not required. This applies especially to those coming to the *bimah* for an *aliyah*, as it is traditional to touch the Torah with the *tzitzit* (fringes) on the corner of the *tallit* and kiss it prior to reciting the blessings. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the Rabbi ahead of time.

20) Teenage guests/Young children/Baby sitting

a) Or Hadash is an inclusive community and children are certainly welcome at our services. However, it is also important that those attending the services are able to experience a meaningful service with minimal distractions. In addition, distractions for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah should be minimized while leading a prayer or reading from the Torah or Haftarah. For this reason we ask that you assign one or two adults to sit near your child's teenage friends (who usually sit in the back) to keep noise to a minimum. If you will have a large number of teenage guests, we ask that you identify these additional ushers on your participation sheet.

b) If there will be young children at the service who may distract the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, please consider hiring a sitter so that the parent(s) can also enjoy the service without distractions. If you do hire a sitter, inform Or Hadash office so a room with toys, etc. can be reserved in the school building. If guests with young children decide to keep their children with them, ask them to be conscious of noise when your child is chanting from the Torah and Haftarah and delivering his/her D'var Torah so s/he will not be distracted.



21) Invitations and start time

- a) In order to promote a feeling of community and development of friendly ties among the students, we ask families to invite all of their student's classmates for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration.
- b) It is appropriate to invite the Rabbi to your reception. You may also extend the invitation to your student's tutor, teacher and Education Director.
- c) All morning B'nai Mitzvah services will start at 10:00 AM, as the congregational Torah study concludes at 9:50. Please help the ushers make sure that everyone is seated by 10:00 so that we can start no later than 10:05. You may wish to assign other adults to assist the ushers in seating the guests in a timely fashion.
- d) A Shabbat morning service will last approximately 2 hours, depending on the number of readings and extra songs as well as the length of the d'var torah and remarks by parents and the person giving the congregational gift. Please make arrangements for your reception or luncheon based on an ending time of 12:30 in order to be safe. For families with twins, please assume a 12:45 ending time.

22) Food/Catering/Kashrut policy

- a) All functions taking place in the Or Hadash building must conform to the Or Hadash Kashrut policy. Kosher catering is required if you plan to serve meat at your function. Otherwise you may use a non-kosher caterer, but they must follow the Or Hadash Kashrut guidelines. (See enclosed.) For a copy of the full Kashrut policy or a list of suggested caterers, please contact the office. If you have any questions, contact the Rabbi.
- b) Prior arrangements must be made with the Synagogue Administrator for delivery of any food, tables, accessories, etc. Please note that the Office closes early on Friday afternoon for Shabbat.**

23) Ushers/Greeters for Shabbat Morning Service

- a) In order to make your guests feel welcomed, an usher will be assigned. The assigned ushers will be a student and parent from the Or Hadash Religious School. It is their responsibility to assist you. This will help them to better understand the b'nai mitzvah process.
- c) The usher will make sure that each person receives a prayer book and supplementary booklet, if you are providing one. The ushers/greeters will remain at the door throughout the service in order to greet latecomers, answer any questions that guest may have about the service or the building and, if necessary, help maintain appropriate decorum during the service. If you are inviting a large number of teenagers or children, we ask that you identify a couple additional ushers from among your adult guests to provide supervision of young guests.