



## What does an inclusive sanctuary look like?

Recently I saw a Facebook post from a Muslim friend during Ramadan that read, “The Ottomans would say, If you don’t have children playing at the back of your *masjid* [mosque] whilst you’re praying - then you don’t have a bright future ahead of you.” The exact same sentiment can be said for our Jewish sanctuaries and sacred spaces.

You may not realize it, but we have already taken steps to promote inclusion in our service. *Mishkan T’filah* is a *siddur* that makes use of clear Hebrew fonts, transliteration, color, and layout to help engender meaningful worship for readers of all different styles. Our visual *T’filah* helps complement verbal announcements with visual cues, as well as artwork that helps visual learners better understand the content of our prayers.

The new sound system installed last year helps ensure that voices and music sound crisp and clear; wheelchair and walker accessibility have been part of our Beth Torah experience since the beginning.

But what else can we be doing to ensure as many people as possible feel welcome and at home in our worship space? Our next change requires no outlay of finances or construction. All it asks of us is opening our hearts and minds.

The discontinuation of babysitting during Friday evening services, as approved by the Board, is a step in ensuring that Beth Torah is a home for everyone, regardless of age or ability. While maintaining the prayers and songs we so adore, we will open our hearts, and sanctuary doors, to the young people in our community. The book of Proverbs tells us, “Train up a child when they are young, and when they are old they will not depart from their ways.”

The next question may be, what does this training look like in all practical terms? You may see more strollers in the sanctuary (remember that accessibility! It comes into play here, too!). Little ones standing on pews, taking in the sights and sounds around them will hopefully become the norm rather than the exception. Children learn by modeling, and it is our task to ensure a future generation of involved and committed Jewish people. This may result in a little more noise in the sanctuary and a cry here and there amongst our singing voices. But remember, the cries today could morph into the synagogue president of tomorrow.

Our *V’ahavta* prayer, which follows the *Shema*, says “you shall teach them to your children.” The word “teach” here can also be rendered as “repeat.” It is our task to not only repeat our traditions verbally, as in describing them, but to also enact them with our children present. In the upcoming school year we will invite our religious school learners and their families to join us on Friday evenings in grade-level Shabbat experiences.

As always, please use your personal agency to make worship meaningful for you. If it’s chilly, bring a sweater; if the sun is in your eyes, slide down the pew; if someone tall sits in front of you, please utilize the freedom of space our sanctuary gives us.

**Are you interested in reading more about family-friendly sanctuaries? Check out what others have written on the topic:**

“Taking Your Kids to Services” Carla Naumburg  
[kveller.com/article/taking-your-kids-to-services](http://kveller.com/article/taking-your-kids-to-services)

“Children in the Sanctuary” Rabbi Menachem Creditor  
[huffpost.com/entry/children-in-the-sanctuary\\_b\\_5283826](http://huffpost.com/entry/children-in-the-sanctuary_b_5283826)

“Why I Will Be Bringing My Kids to High Holiday Day Services” Jordana Horn  
[kveller.com/why-i-will-be-bringing-my-kids-to-high-holiday-services](http://kveller.com/why-i-will-be-bringing-my-kids-to-high-holiday-services)

“To the Woman Who Told Me My Kids Don’t Belong in Synagogue” Rochelle Kipnis  
[kveller.com/to-the-woman-who-told-me-my-kids-dont-belong-in-synagogue](http://kveller.com/to-the-woman-who-told-me-my-kids-dont-belong-in-synagogue)

“Seriously, Stop With the Shushing” Emily Aronoff Teck  
[kveller.com/seriously-stop-with-the-shushing](http://kveller.com/seriously-stop-with-the-shushing)



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