

WRS Where You Are—An Approach for the Coming Year

Judaism is not meant to be practiced in a vacuum - Jewish life exists in community and families. Given the health risks inherent in the current pandemic, the Weiner Religious School will reimagine how each of us understands, practices, and learns about Judaism in the short term and long term.

The 2013 Pew Study asked “What does it mean to be Jewish?” and answers were all over the board. This tells us that, while some principles are widely held, others vary widely from individual to individual. This religious school model will enable families to tailor an experience that meets their family’s vision of Jewish life and engagement. Our faculty will be there the entire time to help them articulate what that vision is and support them in their endeavor to live a life along with the Jewish calendar and guided by Jewish values.

The Weiner Religious School will shift to a hybrid approach for at least the first half of the 5780 academic year. This is to ensure the safety of our faculty, staff, learners, and families.

In-Person activities will take place at Congregation Beth Torah only when it is deemed safe to do so. All events will be voluntary (for faculty and families) and take place with appropriate physical distancing per Beth Torah policy. Events will be led by our faculty and provide families with a way to connect with one another. These will be family events (each family must have one adult present).

What does the virtual model look like?

We learned last spring that a straight transition from classroom to Zoom does not meet our learners’ instructional and social needs. While it was nice to “see” our friends online, the rituals and customs our faculty has worked hard to devel-

op do not translate smoothly online. If we are to be successful in a virtual format to honor the safety of all members of our community, we need to rethink what Jewish education hopes to achieve and what it should look like.

When young people see their adult family members engaging in Jewish life, it indicates to them that being Jewish is something worth their time and energy. Young people see the many directions in which their parents and grandparents are pulled, and if Judaism merits their time, learners see that it is a worthwhile endeavor. To put it bluntly, parents spending an hour doing something Jewish demonstrates their family’s commitment to Jewish life and, in some ways, is more valuable in identity-building than months of classroom instruction.

Therefore, given our current circumstances, instead of grade-level classes with teachers, our faculty will serve as Jewish “coaches” to help families integrate Jewish activities and learning into their everyday lives. Families with learners in grades PreK-5 **will meet with their coach approximately twice per month for approximately 15-20 minutes on Sunday mornings**. Those in grades 6-9 will meet with their coach one-on-one approximately twice per month for 15-20 minutes on a Wednesday evening.

The curriculum will still be divided into four major categories: Torah (Learning), Avodah (Worship), G’milut Chasadim (Acts of Loving Kindness), and Holidays. Coaches will work with families to co-create opportunities for learning in each of these categories. The goal for families is approximately **one hour of Jewish engagement** on their own each week. For some families this will not be a challenge, and they will work with their coach to expand their current repertoire. For others this will be a stretch, and coaches will support them as they weave Jewish learning

and experiences into their home routine.

Faculty members will take turns teaching **short term courses** (1-3 sessions) in real-time that will count towards families' experiences. They will not be every Sunday/Wednesday, but announced in advance. They will be divided into the same grade levels, PreK-2, 3-5, and TAG. This enables learners to see and interact with one another and spend time with faculty members other than their coach. According to the faculty member's comfort level, these will be in person or virtual.

For those families who wish, they can collaborate with another family for any of these experiences. Learners can work together on a specific project, or families who feel physically safe with one another can celebrate holidays and engage in shared activities and experiences. For example, if two elementary-school age learners want to create a graphic novel/ comic book of a story from Torah and one wants to write the text and another wants to illustrate, great! They can collaborate using digital resources. If families want to engage in a physically-distancing activity together (cleaning up litter, volunteering in a safe way), they are encouraged to do so. Coaches can connect families who share common interests, then **families can then connect with one another using boundaries that each finds acceptable.**

Coaches will collaborate with one another to create and collect age and developmentally appropriate activities for a "bank" from which to pull. That "bank" will be available to families and coaches via Google Sheets (there are separate banks for PreK-2, 3-5, and TAG). Coaches will have the discretion to approve activities not on the sheet- those will probably be some of the most beautiful and creative ones! I have years of activities upon which to draw, along with our faculty's copious resources. Here are a few examples:

Torah (Learning)

- Create artwork with a Jewish theme in a medium of the learner's choosing;
- Interview someone who practices Judaism differently from how you do, or someone who practices a different faith tradition and compare their experience to yours;
- Watch a movie or read a book with a Jewish theme and tell your coach about it;
- Learn about how Jewish communities function in different parts of the world and create a model - it can be drawn, designed graphically, Minecraft, etc
- Visit a Jewish Museum's virtual tour
- Learn about a Jewish concept, tradition, etc, and create a way to teach it to others - instructional video, infographic, etc.

Avodah (Worship)

- Select a prayer (with help from the coach) and create their own version of a prayer on the same theme - the medium is up to the learner (written, sung, drawn, etc);
- Learners who play an instrument or sing can record an already-composed version or an original composition of a piece of liturgy;
- Create a ritual at home as a family - it can mark Shabbat, Havdalah, or a special time in your family's week;
- Attend Shabbat services "virtually" twice per month;
- Attend a holiday experience, either virtually or in person;
- Create an at-home experience for an upcoming holiday.

G'milut Chasadim (Acts of Loving Kindness)

- Write a letter to an elected official to express your concern/support for an issue that you feel passionate about;

- Do a nature “cleanup” and take before and after photos;
- Volunteer with an organization you are passionate about - follow their guidelines for in person vs virtual opportunities;
- Learn about a cause, and create a way to teach it to others - instructional video, infographic, powerpoint presentation, song, etc.

Holidays

- Learn about how Jews in different parts of the world celebrate our shared holidays - for example, a Sephardic Rosh Hashanah Seder, different foods for Passover seder plates in different parts of the world, diverse charoset tasting, the origin of the Purimspiel
- Rosh Hashanah - learn why it is a tradition to create and send Rosh Hashanah cards to family and friends - and then make some! They can be digital or hard copy and sent to family, friends, and even residents at Village Shalom or other long-term care facilities; create a family tashlich ritual for Rosh Hashanah day
- Yom Kippur - create a family “cheshbon nefesh” (accounting of the soul): what can we do better as a whole family next year? (recycle more? walk/bike somewhere instead of drive, etc); Put yourself in Jonah’s place - what would you have done if you were Jonah and God spoke to you? (There is also a choose-your-own-adventure story I wrote!);
- Sukkot - create a meal out of seasonal vegetables, decorate the backyard like a sukkah, learn about food insecurity and take steps to help alleviate it in our community
- Simchat Torah - create sifrei Torah out of supplies you have at home! Can be of household objects, foods, digital, etc and have a dance party

Sundays 5781

Oct.	11		Feb.	7	
	18			14	No Meetings Presidents’ Day Weekend
	25			21	
Nov.	1			28	
	8		Mar.	7	
	15			14	No Meetings Spring Break
	22			21	
	29	No Meetings Thanksgiving Weekend		28	No Meetings Passover
Dec.	6	Community Ha- nukkah Program	Apr.	4	
	13			11	
	20	No Meetings Winter Break		18	
	27	No Meetings Winter Break		25	
Jan.	3	No Meetings Winter Break	May	2	
	10				Special Holiday Programs: Rosh Hashanah – Sat Sep 19 Yom Kippur – Mon Sep 28 Sukkot – Sat Oct 3
	17				
	24				
	31				