



# Main Line Reform Temple Beth Elohim

# B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

*Edited October 2025*



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**Dear B'nai Mitzvah Families,**

**Mazal tov on reaching this exciting time in your family's life! You are about to embark upon a journey towards a special moment, unique to the Jewish people.**

**We are all here to help guide you along this sacred path. We will travel this path with you and be by your side throughout the journey. MLRT recognizes that each person and family is unique, each bringing their own distinct qualities to our community, and we are here to support your needs, questions, and concerns along the way. Please let us know how we can best support you.**

**The awe and pride you will feel when your child(ren) ascends the bimah on the day of his/her/their Bar/Bat/Simchat Mitzvah will be incomparable. We are deeply honored to be a part of this special and sacred time in your family's life. We look forward to sharing this milestone with each of you.**

## **What is this thing called Bar/Bat/Simchat Mitzvah?**

The Torah states that the age of maturation for a young man is 20, when a man becomes eligible for taxation and military service. There is no mention of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah in the Torah, but *Pirkei Avot* (the Ethics of our Ancestors) states: "At age thirteen one becomes subject to the commandments." For generations, the age of thirteen has been considered the age of maturity for accepting and following the commandments. However, the ritual ceremony we know today did not begin to evolve until the Middle Ages in Germany, when a boy of thirteen would begin wearing *tefillin* and reading from the Torah. This became the central feature of the early Bar Mitzvah ceremony. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it became obligatory to call the Bar Mitzvah boy to the Torah on the Shabbat coinciding with his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Poland, boys who were particularly mature were also called upon to deliver a *D'var Torah*, a speech about the Torah portion. Over time, Bar Mitzvah boys were called upon to lead parts of the prayer service, and eventually the blessing of the Torah became a focal feature of becoming a Bar Mitzvah, as well.

It was not until 1922 that the first Bat Mitzvah would occur for a 13 year old girl. Judith Kaplan, the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, took the lead and is credited as being the first female to have a formal Bat Mitzvah. Today, Bar/Bat/Simchat Mitzvah celebrations are not uniform; they are crafted to the individual needs of each young person. Most importantly, however, is its significance in the life of Jewish people around the world. Rooted in Jewish values and the promise to pass Judaism down from one generation to the next, becoming a Bar/Bat/Simchat Mitzvah connects us to our ancestors and the future.

# Religious School Education

## K-Third Grade

- Participate in Religious School, Family and Holiday programming.

## Fourth Grade

- B'nai Mitzvah dates are assigned

## Fifth Grade

- 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Retreat
- Gaining confidence with Hebrew reading, Judaics, and Jewish knowledge
- Usher at two Shabbat services

## Sixth Grade

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Retreat
- Begin working on mitzvah project
- Have an introductory meeting with Cantor to receive materials and explore the Torah portion
- Begin B'nai Mitzvah tutoring with assigned tutor
- Usher at 2 B'nai Mitzvah services

## Seventh Grade

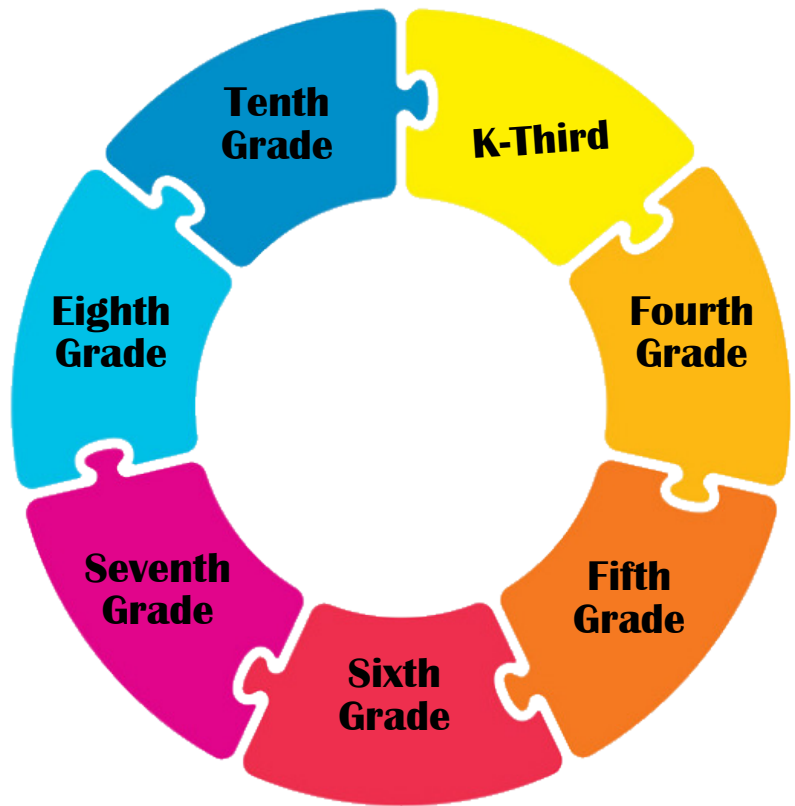
- Enrollment in Religious School through Seventh Grade is mandatory
- Continuation of B'nai Mitzvah training with tutors and Cantor
- Meet with the Rabbis to work on D'var Torah
- Schedule rehearsals in the Sanctuary with the Rabbis
- Celebrate your special day!

## Eighth - Twelfth Grade

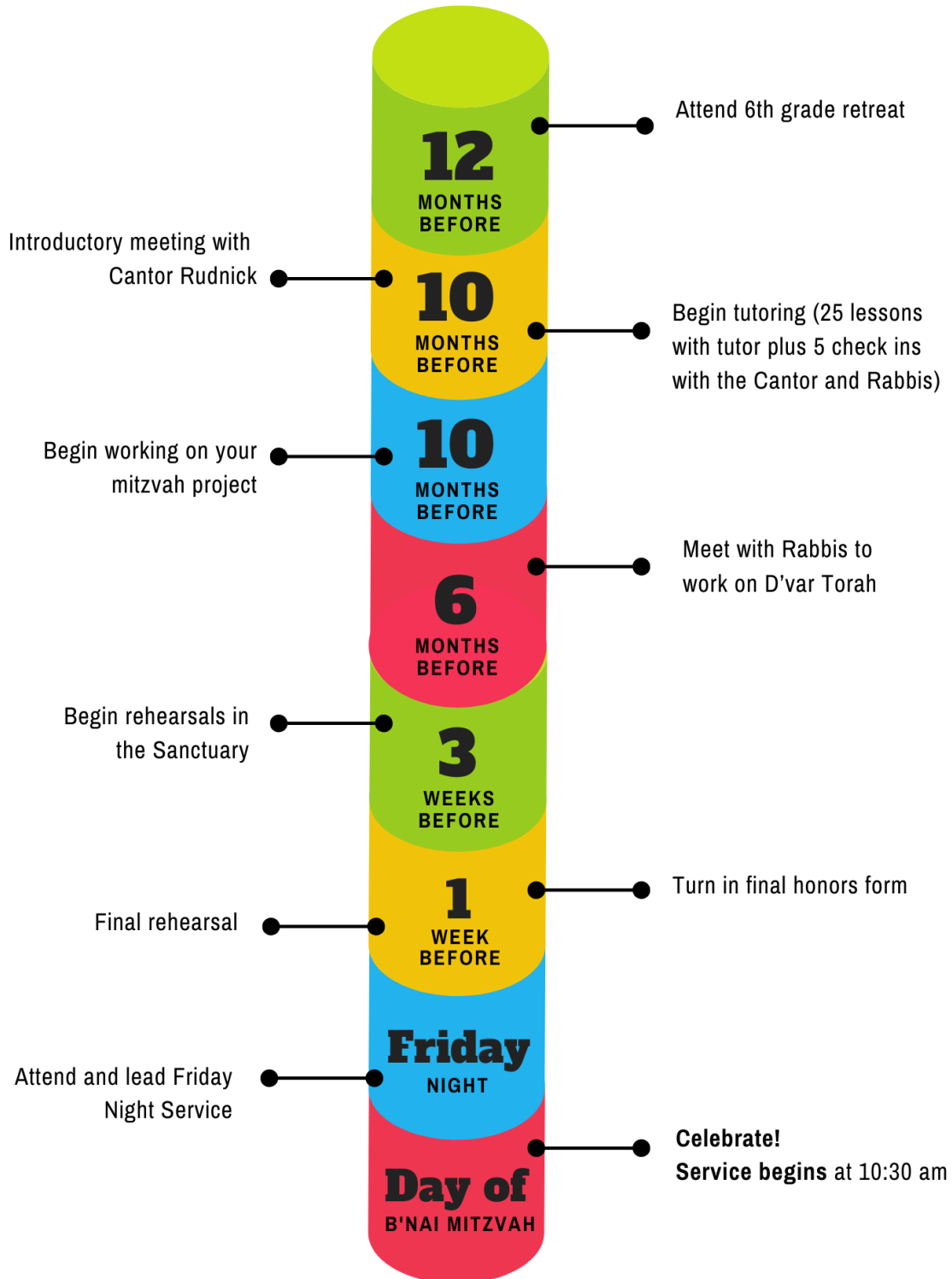
- Enroll in our post-BM program, the TRIBE!

## Tenth Grade

- CONFIRMATION



# B'nai Mitzvah Year







# B'nai Mitzvah Highlights

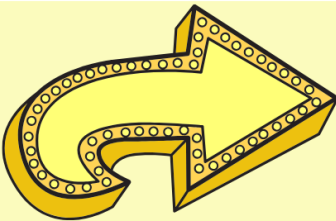
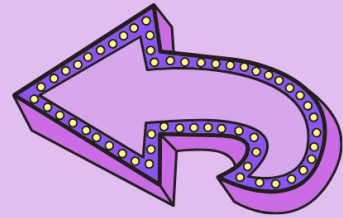


## Tutoring

Half hour, one on one lessons to prepare for your big day.

## D'var Torah

Learn about your Torah portion in depth with one of our Rabbis; write a speech to share at your Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah about the themes and what you have learned.

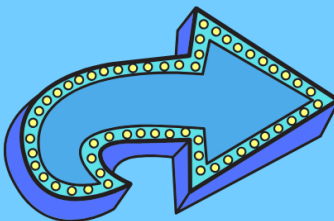
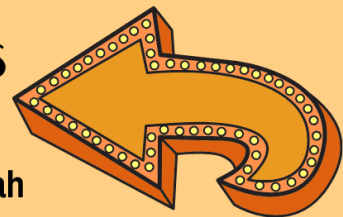


## Mitzvah Project

An opportunity to participate in the community and share in the mitzvah of tikkun olam, repairing the world.

## 5th & 6th Grade Retreats

Join your peers in a retreat to learn more about B'nai Mitzvah



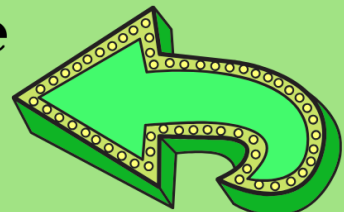
## Service Attendance

Attend 13 services throughout your B'nai Mitzvah year. These can be Friday night, Saturday, holiday, and at another synagogue.

## Religious School Attendance


(6th and 7th grades)

A commitment to Jewish education and building community through class attendance and participation.





## Service Information

 **FRIDAY** Please check the calendar for service times 

 **SATURDAY MORNING** \*Service begins at 10:30 am   
*B'nai Mitzvah Family arrives no later than 10:00 am*

### Tutoring Policy

**Mazal tov to you and your family!** This is an exciting time in your child's Jewish journey and we are honored to be a part of it. As part of the preparation for your Bar/Bat/Simchat Mitzvah, MLRT will provide 30 weeks of private tutoring: 25 lessons with an MLRT tutor, and 5 lessons with the clergy. Individual tutors are engaged on a contract basis to provide this service, for which MLRT pays from funds allocated from the B'nai Mitzvah fees.

Students and tutors choose a time to meet each week, and those appointments must be kept unless an emergency arises. In order to cancel a tutoring session, please call or email the tutor with at least 24 hours' notice. It is the student/family's responsibility to reschedule the lesson based on their tutor's availability.

If a tutoring session is missed without notice and it is not an emergency, the missed lesson will count towards the 25 allotted lessons. To ensure your child his/her/their full allotment of 25 lessons, there will be a \$25 fee per missed lesson.

Please do not hesitate to contact Cantor Rudnick ([frudnick@mlrt.org](mailto:frudnick@mlrt.org)) with any questions or concerns.

### Accessibility

**Main Line Reform Temple is proud to be an inclusive congregation.**

Please contact Cantor Rudnick at [frudnick@mlrt.org](mailto:frudnick@mlrt.org) to discuss accommodations for you and your family.



# Mitzvah Project

Each student is required to complete a mitzvah project. These projects can be completed on your own (volunteering time, raising money, etc.) OR choose several of the suggested activities listed below or posted on [mlrt.org/mitzvah-projects](http://mlrt.org/mitzvah-projects).

Please see a member of the clergy team for more information.

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | Read a Jewish themed book and share a review of it  |
| 2  | Create a piece of Jewish artwork/music/poetry   |
| 3  | Study and summarize a significant piece of Jewish history                                 |
| 4  | Interview an elderly person about what it was like to be Jewish and 13 in their lifetime  |
| 5  | Attend a TRIBE Jr. event  |
| 6  | Create a family tree  |
| 7  | Light candles every Friday night for four consecutive weeks                               |
| 8  | Make challah for four consecutive weeks   |
| 9  | Make Shabbat at home and keep a Shabbat journal for four consecutive weeks                |
| 10 | Recite Shema every night before going to bed for two weeks                                |
| 11 | Recite Modeh Ani every morning when you wake up for two weeks                             |
| 12 | Build a sukkah at your home and invite guests to eat at least three nights of the holiday |
| 13 | Visit a nursing center, a hospital, etc. and play games or read                           |
| 14 | Make blessing bags and deliver them to people living on the street                        |
| 15 | Pledge a part of your B'nai Mitzvah gift money to the charity of your choice              |
| 16 | Watch a Jewish themed movie and summarize   |
| 17 | Ask for donations to the food pantry as part of your birthday gifts                       |
| 18 | Write to an elected official about an issue of concern to you and the community           |
| 19 | Show hospitality – invite someone new to sit with you, usher at a Shabbat service, etc.   |
| 20 | Take on a new chore in your home and do it every day for a month                          |
| 21 | Volunteer to read Torah   |
| 22 | Plant trees in Israel through JNF   |
| 23 | Do a group mitzvah project with your friends  |
| 24 | Usher at additional MLRT services   |
| 25 | Invite a new MLRT family over for dinner  |
| 26 | Remember Us - The Holocaust B'nai Mitzvah Project   |



# Family Information Form

*Please complete and return to Cantor Faryn Rudnick*

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (circle one) AM PM

Name of Student(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Best Contact Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Best Contact Email(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Names as they should be listed in the eNews and Bulletin:

\_\_\_\_\_

*(Please write parents' names as John & Jane Doe or John Smith and Jane Doe)*

## Help Us Get To Know You and Your Child(ren)

This is an exciting time for your family. We are looking forward to being a part of your B'nai Mitzvah journey, and we look forward to building a stronger relationship with you and your child(ren). Please help us to maximize your child(ren)'s success by answering the questions below as best as possible.

Preferred Pronoun (Circle one): He She They/Them Other \_\_\_\_\_

What are your child(ren)'s strengths or what does your child(ren) do especially well?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Does your child(ren) have specific learning differences or receive accommodations in school, have an IEP, or receive any related services that you would like us to be aware of?

\_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_

Have there been recent challenges in your household (divorce, death, illness) that we should know about? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





Are there specific triggers of which our tutors should be made aware (i.e. body language, behaviors, verbal)?

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Please identify best practice strategies that are effective for your child(ren) (If applicable):

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How would you best describe your child(ren) (friendly, creative, caring, organized, anxious, easily frustrated, curious, etc.):

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Is there a tutor that you or your child(ren) would prefer to work with? Or not work with?

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Is there anything else we should know?

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***To make arrangements for a Kiddush, luncheon, room rental, or pictures, please contact Laurie Silverman at [lsilverman@mlrt.org](mailto:lsilverman@mlrt.org)***

***Shabbat and B'nai Mitzvah resources can be found online at [mlrt.org](http://mlrt.org) under Worship***



## B'NAI MITZVAH FAQs

### Who do we speak to about ...?

#### ◆ **Tutors, Binders/Training Materials**

Cantor Faryn Rudnick at [frudnick@mlrt.org](mailto:frudnick@mlrt.org)

#### ◆ **Mitzvah Projects, Religious School**

Rabbi Kevin Kleinman at [kkleinman@mlrt.org](mailto:kkleinman@mlrt.org)

#### ◆ **Appointments, Facility Rentals/Usage, Photography, Plaques, Facilities Set-Ups, Vendors, Caterers, Date Changes**

Laurie Silverman at [lsilverman@mlrt.org](mailto:lsilverman@mlrt.org)

#### ◆ **Bulletin/eNews**

David Chornock at [dchornock@mlrt.org](mailto:dchornock@mlrt.org)

#### ◆ **Finances, Fees, Congregational Issues** Lynne Balaban, Executive Director, at [lbaban@mlrt.org](mailto:lbaban@mlrt.org)

#### ◆ **The B'nai Mitzvah Service, Aliyot, Family Participation, Miscellaneous Concerns**

Rabbi Geri Newburge, Cantor Faryn Rudnick, and Rabbi Eric Mollo

**What do we need to know about ushering at services?** During the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade years, we ask that at least one parent and the B'nai Mitzvah child serve as ushers at TWO B'nai Mitzvah services. This process serves two purposes: to give parents a better understanding of what happens at our Shabbat services and to better support fellow B'nai Mitzvah families by helping to fill the ushering needs and ensuring that this special simcha is a meaningful spiritual experience for each child. A member of the Board of Trustees will also attend to provide guidance. Your children are welcome to join you as ushers. We will send you an Ushering Request letter prior to your child's B'nai Mitzvah year so you can request ushering dates.

**What is the B'nai Mitzvah Fee and what does it cover?** The fee for the 2028-2029 B'nai Mitzvah year is \$2,000: \$750 per child is due upon date acceptance. Your Temple bill will reflect this expense as soon as you are given your child's B'nai Mitzvah date. The balance can be paid in two subsequent equal annual installments of \$625 each. These payments are not refundable. The B'nai Mitzvah fee covers the cost of the Temple tutor for 25 sessions, the flowers at the Shabbat service, the Oneg Shabbat or Snack & Schmooze at the Friday night service, and the general use of MLRT custodial staff in preparation for and during the Shabbat service. *Please note that Religious School enrollment and remaining an MLRT member in good standing are requirements to keep your assigned date.*

**What if we have financial difficulties during the B'nai Mitzvah preparation process?** Lynne Balaban, our Executive Director, is always available to discuss your personal family situation. We will work together in recognition of your family's needs and financial concerns. You must be a member in good standing (fully meeting your membership and Religious School obligations) to have a Bar/Bat/Simchat Mitzvah at MLRT.

**What kinds of luncheons, receptions or parties can we have at MLRT?** We would love for all of our families to celebrate this amazing simcha here at the Temple. We have several spaces available for your use following the Shabbat service, whether in the morning or for Havdalah. These rooms are of various sizes and shapes with varying costs and they are available on a first come, first served basis. When we send you your child's date assignment, we will include a Facilities Request Form and a description of the available rooms. Please return this room request form as soon as possible because the room fee is subject to change and you will be charged based on when you reserve the room, rather than when you actually use it. Once we receive your form and we ascertain that the requested room is available, we will send you a contract, which must be signed and returned with a non-refundable deposit. Room rentals are only confirmed upon receipt of a signed contract and deposit. *All rentals are subject to MLRT's House Rules.*

**What is the Temple's policy regarding non-custodial parents?** Our policy requires that all parents receive correspondence and be invited to participate in their child(ren)'s B'nai Mitzvah preparation & service. Therefore, in situations where one parent has a different address, copies of all communications will be forwarded to that parent unless that parent requests to be excluded or an exception is granted. Exceptions to this policy must be addressed with the Executive Director.

**What if I have other questions?** Our Rabbis, Cantor, and all our staff are here to support you throughout this process. Your child's Bar/Bat/Simchat Mitzvah is a special stepping stone in their Jewish journey. We are proud to enable you to celebrate this simcha at MLRT and to work with you to make the event as spiritually meaningful as it can be. Thank you for giving us this honor.