

# THE B'NAI MITZVAH PLAYBOOK



**A GUIDE AND RESOURCE  
FOR FAMILIES PLANNING  
A B'NAI MITZVAH DURING  
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



**CENTER FOR**  
Impact & Innovation

DEPARTMENT OF THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

THE B'NAI MITZVAH PLAYBOOK



The Jewish Federation of Southern NJ designed **The B'nai Mitzvah Playbook** to help families plan meaningful bar/bat mitzvahs during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These materials offer helpful resources, including mitzvah service projects, creative ideas, and other tips. We hope to connect families planning a bar or bat mitzvah with other community members who have already celebrated during the pandemic.



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## **ADVICE/TIPS FOR PLANING PROVIDED BY FAMILIES WHO CELEBRATED ALREADY:**

- Let go of pre-Covid expectations and enjoy a smaller, more intimate and relaxed experience.
- Speak with your clergy to help with the letting go process of your original plan for your mitzvah. Then, you can transition more easily and focus on all the wonderful possibilities that still exist.
- Most importantly, have a conversation with your child and determine what he or she really wants. Have an open discussion about the meaning of a b'nai mitzvah with your child. Make it all about your child's milestone.
- Take it in stride, have contingency plans, and stay positive.
- Focus on why you are so proud that your child has reached this milestone. Have conversations where you share this with each other.
- Refrain from sharing or allowing your child to see/hear any disappointment you may feel. They are extraordinarily resilient.
- Focus more on the b'nai mitzvah/service project and consider making it a family project.
- Keep things easy and be sensitive to the way your guests will feel.
- Whatever you decide, make it special, fun and meaningful!



## **SERVICE/B'NAI MITZVAH PROJECTS THAT CAN BE PERFORMED SAFELY DURING THE PANDEMIC:**

### **JFCS – Ways to engage virtually with Mitzvot**

Contact Sherri Jonas – [sjonas@jfedsnj.org](mailto:sjonas@jfedsnj.org) if interested

- Prepare a presentation for the Café Europa Holocaust survivor group. Presentation ideas: share a talent – sing, play an instrument, dance; share information and/or pictures about a place he/she visited such as Israel etc.
- Students can host Zoom Happy Hours with Bingo for seniors. There are online Bingo cards.
- Students can write letters or cards for seniors and Holocaust survivors.
- Adopt a senior. Students can deliver weekly treats to a senior with bags dropped at doors or left at the building entrances. Ideas: weekly Shabbat bags with challah and juice; periodic gift bags with items seniors can use such as puzzles, books, sweet treats, reading materials etc. Any food delivered must be kosher.
- Students can create, market, and hold a food drive. Collected items need to be dropped off at the Betsy and Peter Fischer Food Pantry on Route 70 in Cherry Hill in coordination with Donna Broecker.
- Help deliver groceries with the assistance of a parent. Student would need to pick up sets (4 bags of non-perishable groceries per client) and gift cards at the Route 70 food pantry at specified times. The groceries would need to be delivered that day or the next day.
- Collect gift cards for clients in need.
- Collect and deliver art supplies for our special needs clients
- Help survivors of domestic violence through Project SARAH – hold a gift card drive, create personal care bags, etc.
- Donate your time in the Betsy and Peter Fischer Food Pantries: bag food for clients, collect kosher non-perishable food, or collect new pajamas, socks, underwear, and books.





## OTHER B'NAI MITZVAH/SERVICE IDEAS DURING COVID-19:

- Jewish Community Foundation (JCF) provides the opportunity for B'nai Mitzvah age kids to participate in a Carob Tree Fund. A Carob Tree Fund (CTF) with the JCF provides a way for local teenagers to learn more about and participate in charitable giving in the Southern New Jersey Jewish community. A Carob Tree Fund operates similarly to a JCF donor advised fund and is like having a charitable checking account. Visit <https://www.jcfsnj.org/carob-tree> for more information.
- Bar/Bat mitzvah students can go to the JCC camps at Medford property and perform camp projects such as beautification, painting, and/or replanting the Israeli salad garden.
- For the Early Childhood Center at the JCC, teens can read stories, perform dance routines, and/or Shabbat blessings on video that can be added to the ECE Facebook Library.
- Deliver Shabbat-o-Grams for the Jewish Federation.
- Label siddurim for High Holidays.
- Attend virtual services.
- Collect toiletry items and clothing for New Beginnings Camden (a homeless resource in Camden). [newbeginningscmd.com](http://newbeginningscmd.com)

## Other B'nai Mitzvah/Service Ideas:

- Raise funds virtually for The Victory Fund. [victoryfund.org](https://victoryfund.org)
- Collect donations for the Animal Welfare Association and Voorhees Animal Orphanage. [awanj.org](https://awanj.org) [vaonj.org](https://vaonj.org)
- Collect sports equipment for Leveling the Playing Field. [levelingplayingfield.org](https://levelingplayingfield.org)
- Book Smiles – gives children the opportunity to build personal libraries and provides educators in Title I schools with books for their classroom libraries. [booksmiles.org](https://booksmiles.org)
- Philly Friendship Circle – connects teens and young adults to youth with special needs. [phillyfriendship.com](https://phillyfriendship.com)
- Collecting trash on beaches in the spring and summer.





## **MAKE IT SPECIAL AND FUN** **FOR YOUR CHILD, FAMILY AND GUESTS**

### **Ideas for before the B'nai Mitzvah Day:**

- Make a collage of notes or videos of well wishes from your guests to present to your child.
- Send invitations. Paperless Post invitations to those coming in person and save-the-date cards via Paperless Post to those invited virtually.
- Whether in person or virtual, make sure to enjoy all the fun that goes along with planning. Have a special family day shopping for dresses and suits. It adds to the excitement and you will still want beautiful photos!
- Order party favor shirts for family to wear and have pictures taken.
- Order customized masks, Kippahs, programs and favors. For those who watch virtually, make gift bags that include a blanket, a program, and a face mask with a note on the front showing the Zoom link codes. The Mitzvah family can deliver them to friends' houses the day before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and ship to out-of-towners.
- Send a celebration box with a ceremony booklet containing a schedule of the service, Torah portion, Haftarah, and the whole havdalah service so people can participate and know what to expect. Include in the box small candies to throw after the service, Kippahs, and a bag of spices for the havdalah service.
- Plan a special Friday night dinner for your son/daughter with their favorite meal. Bake the challah ahead of time with your child.
- Contact a bakery/restaurant/caterer and have food individually wrapped in plastic to safely serve your guests.
- If the b'nai mitzvah is on a smaller scale, order a mini mitzvah cake with your theme on it.
- Contact [hresnick@jfedsnj.org](mailto:hresnick@jfedsnj.org) and have your child's picture, b'nai mitzvah date and D'var Torah published in the Voice.



### If you can gather on B'nai Mitzvah Day/**Ideas:**

- Have fun decorating your house with flowers and/or balloons. Make it festive!
- Arrange a drive by parade. Having people come during various time ranges versus an exact time is a safer way to spend time with your family and friends.
- Offer individual personalized lunches in a box with disposable utensils, condiments, and napkins.
- Provide a sweet treat. For example: Cover Hershey's chocolate bars in a do-it-yourself wrapper created and printed at home and hand those out to onsite guests and those that drive by.
- Survival kit for onsite guests: hand sanitizer, bottled water, tissues, antibacterial wipes, challah pieces in zipper baggie for prayer, candies to throw after the service, a juice box as a cute touch for the wine prayer (for symbolism), and most importantly, masks.
- For the celebration, consider the following fun activities: non-contact limbo, a DJ that plays games with kids on the big screen or on a driveway, a firepit to roast s'mores, a scavenger hunt, bean bag toss, or a socially distant photo booth.
- Have food individually packaged.
- Arrange for separate tables for each family (safe pods).



### For virtual B'nai Mitzvah:

- Speak to your synagogue about technology choices so that you have the best audio and video quality.
- Have an experienced moderator behind the controls.
- Consider having an internet booster if virtual – call your internet provider.
- Have multiple microphones for those who are speaking during the service.
- Make sure your privacy controls are set up correctly.
- Think about lighting in the house for pictures – get spotlights from your photographer.
- One of the best things about a COVID bat/bar mitzvah is that the entire service is recorded. This enables people who are unable to be online that day to watch at a later date, including family from out of town.
- Expand invite list for virtual guests: Extend the invite to family, friends and neighbors near and far.
- Take pictures of all your guests on Zoom for your photo album.
- A custom mask, Kippah and program can be mailed to virtual guests.
- Fun extras: Vidhug, Love Note Video, Trivia, Montage, Virtual Photo Booth, Magician and Game Show





## BRINGING MEANING AND PURPOSE TO YOUR DAY:

- Make sure the Torah can be delivered to your home if the service is not at a synagogue.
- If clergy can't attend the service in person, check and see if they can stop by your house for a special outside visit with you and your child the week of the mitzvah.
- Don't miss the opportunity to dance the Hora to Hava Nagila with your child raised in a chair. This can be done anywhere with music!
- Have a special candle lighting service.
- Hang a special picture in the background for the service if it is at home. Examples: Western Wall photo, photos of other family members' mitzvahs, pictures or other décor with your logo and/or theme on it.
- Focus on the wonderful Jewish traditions of the day.
- Encourage your son/daughter to lead the service and chant the prayers loud and proud whether at home or in the synagogue.



## HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- Join Facebook groups:  
*Virtual Mitzvah Planning*  
*New Jersey Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planning (group by Mitzvah Market)*  
*Philadelphia Area Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planning (by Mitzvah Market)*  
*CoronaVirus Bar and Bat Mitzah Parents (group by Destination Mitzvah)*
- *Xtreme Event Group.com – The virtual Simcha is an all inclusive, virtual mitzvah planning service connecting religion, tradition and celebration for those becoming a bar/bat mitzvah during COVID-19 pandemic. Testimonial – “They made it feel like something more to those watching virtually by zoom. It was interactive and engaging. They offer great technology help and guidance.”*
- Vidhug.com – send videos/inspirational messages to mitzvah child from friends and family near and far.

## B’nai Mitzvah Family Contact List

*The Jewish Federation has a contact list that includes names, phone numbers, emails and synagogue affiliation of people who are offering to help answer questions concerning planning upcoming mitzvahs during COVID-19. These individuals have already had their child’s bar/bat mitzvah during the pandemic and are happy to provide guidance.*

- **If you would like to connect with someone from this list, please contact Lisa Fradin at [lfradin@jfedsnj.org](mailto:lfradin@jfedsnj.org).**