

Stanmore & Canons Park Synagogue

B'nei Mitzvah Preparation, Advice & Guidelines



While all the information contained herein and provided by the Honorary Officers and staff of the synagogue is given in good faith, neither the shul nor the United Synagogue accepts any liability for any loss or damage which may be suffered pursuant thereto, including in the event that a simcha has to be rescheduled for unforeseen reasons.

Mazal-Tov!

The lead up to your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah is an exciting time in the life of a parent. It is undoubtedly also a time of feverish and anxious planning. We all want our child to shine and excel on his or her special day. With this in mind, we have prepared this comprehensive document which offers best advice and important guidelines to assist with your preparations.

We are confident that this document will address and clarify many queries and issues.

For further information please contact the shul office:

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Initial points

- 1 Check your child's Hebrew birthday with the shul office.
- 2 Make a provisional "hold the date" booking with the shul office up to 36 months before the proposed date.
- 3 Confirmation of the date will not be possible before 18 months prior to the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah and will require ratification by the Rabbi and the Honorary Executive.
- 4 Check the date of your party does not fall into the period of the "Omer" or the "3 Weeks". The shul office can guide you in this area.
- 5 Check your membership and fee payments are all up-to-date. Should you be experiencing any particular financial hardships, please contact the shul office for a confidential discussion with our Financial Representative as to options for assistance.
- 6 The shul office is here to help you.

Booking Your Simcha

In relation to Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah bookings, the shul office may be contacted up to 36 months prior to the proposed date – at which time the shul can be notified of your proposed simcha date and plans.

For reasons to do with the rules of the parent body - the United Synagogue - dates cannot be confirmed in the shul diary until 18 months ahead of the actual simcha date itself. To avoid any confusion, it is imperative you calculate the date 18 months ahead of your simcha and check with the office.

Please be aware that the Freeman Susman Hall is available for hire for private simcha functions and further information is available from the Shul office.

Bar Mitzvah Teacher

It is important to inform the shul office as soon as possible (before lessons begin) of the name of the proposed Bar Mitzvah teacher.

Bar Mitzvah

Normally this is marked at the Shabbat morning service. However, in addition a mid-week call-up wearing Tefillin is often done closer to the child's actual birthday (Monday, Thursday or Rosh Chodesh) and then followed by his 'grand' call-up in the main shul on shabbat. This allows for a more intimate occasion and the opportunity to take photographs to mark this special occasion! (see below)

Our Shul offers options as to what the Barmitzvah may read on a Shabbat, ranging from a Call Up, Maftir and Haftarah to several portions or indeed the entire Sedrah. This is usually guided by the tutor and needs to be communicated to the Shul office when confirmed.

Midweek service

Increasing numbers of people opt for a mid-week call up as soon as possible after their actual Hebrew 13th birthday in addition to the main Shabbat ceremony (whether or not this is possible depends on when the Hebrew birthday falls that year). On that morning, the boy will put on his Tefillin, read his berachot and may even choose to read the midweek leining. This is the first part of the weekly reading, the sedra.

The Bar Mitzvah boy and family often find that the atmosphere is warm and intimate. It is usual for the family to provide a small l'chaim Kiddush at the end of the service (soon after 8am) with whisky, Kiddush wine and orange juice and some biscuits. For large families this provides an opportunity to offer honours during the shul service (aliyot, mitzvot, call ups etc) to members of their families where the numbers are very large and it would be impossible to fit everybody in on Shabbat alone.

If you would like a midweek option (either prior to, or instead of, a Shabbat morning ceremony), please contact the shul office, who will check the date and help to arrange this with you.

Bat Mitzvah

Options:

1. Communal ceremony in shul at the Shabbat morning service.
2. Private havdallah service in shul or at home.
3. Private Sunday afternoon ceremony in shul or at home.
4. Private Lunch at home with a special ceremony.
5. Private party with special ceremony .

Please ask the Shul office if assistance is required in selecting a teacher and advise the Shul office as to your chosen teacher as soon as you have engaged one.

If your daughter is to present her D'var Torah in shul, this will take place at the conclusion of the Shabbat morning service. Your daughter will be invited to come into the downstairs section of the synagogue, normally with her father and mother, and proceed to the front.

Parents need to share the D'var Torah with the Rabbi at least two weeks before the Shabbat for approval to avoid duplication.

Please ensure your daughter is modestly dressed to reflect the sanctity of the place of worship.

After she has completed her presentation she will be addressed and blessed by the Rabbi. If your daughter is to have a midweek or Sunday event we would invite her to shul on the Shabbat preceding the ceremony. We will give the father a Mitzvah (usually an Aliyah) after which she will be invited to stand (in the ladies' section) while the Rabbi blesses her with a special Bat Mitzvah prayer.

In order to help make your Bat Mitzvah preparations as enjoyable as possible, a synagogue representative will contact you to help with any queries you may have and to act as a liaison between your family and the Synagogue. This liaison will continue throughout the run up to your daughter's Bat Mitzvah. The Rabbi will also contact you a few months beforehand to discuss progress in arrangements for the ceremony and one of the Wardens will contact you a few weeks before to confirm and finalise the details for your special day.

Shabbat Seating

- for Bat Mitzvah Blessing (if the ceremony is on a Sunday or midweek and the Shabbat is shared with a Bar Mitzvah)

The Bat Mitzvah's male family members will normally be asked to sit on the left-hand side as you enter the shul, by the Rabbi's seat. The female family members will be asked to sit on the right-hand side of the shul as you enter.

- for a Shabbat morning Bar Mitzvah or Shabbat morning Bat Mitzvah D'var Torah

Men:

The shul can be very crowded on Shabbat. Usually there is enough seating for everybody. We make every effort to keep the celebrating family together.

The front three rows in the middle section of the shul are normally reserved for the simcha family. The two rows behind are reserved for other guests within the simcha party.

Seating positions are usually discussed with all parties in advance of the simcha. However, Seating arrangements remain at ultimate discretion of the Wardens and reflect the specific communal demands on that day.

Women:

The simcha family sit at the front, on the left of the women's section as one enters the ladies' gallery. Again, the front two rows will normally be reserved.

Note: *If you are expecting a large crowd, please let us know through the shul office and additional space will be reserved.*

Honours during the Service (eg aliyot, mitzvot, call ups)

It is usually very difficult to accommodate all requests. However, we will always try our best to accommodate.

During the reading of the weekly portion (leining), there are breaks where men are invited up to the Bimah and given the honour to stand next to the one reading the portion from the Torah. At each break someone else is invited.

. Each call-up is called an aliyah.

Naturally a Bar Mitzvah boy has a special Aliyah, which will take place at a particular point in the Torah readings determined by what portion the boy is reading. The Rabbi and/or the Bar Mitzvah teacher will explain the details of this.

There are seven mandated breaks each week. Besides the Bar Mitzvah boy, and on the occasion of a Bat Mitzvah, we will always call up the father or his representative and, if possible, the grandfathers as well.

There is a considerable demand for aliyot by the community. Although on his Bar Mitzvah the boy is treated as being very special, we have to allocate available aliyot to other members of the community as well. Often there is another simcha in the shul – an engagement, a birth or a wedding anniversary. It might be people who are observing a Yahrzeit (the memorial for a relative who has passed away). With the size of our community it is difficult to fit in everyone's demands although every effort is made to be fair and honest.

One of the wardens will normally contact you a few weeks beforehand to discuss this with you, but it is difficult to finalise or confirm all aliyot until just before the day itself. The Shul Office will let you have a form for you to insert the Hebrew and English names of those close family members you wish to suggest for an aliya and whether they are Cohen or Levi. It is also useful to know the relationship to the Bar mitzvah e.g. paternal grandfather. Please return the form at least a month ahead of your simcha.

Anim Zemirot

The Bar or Bat Mitzvah family can choose a boy to sing Anim Zemirot at the end of the service if they wish. This can be the Bar Mitzvah boy or any other pre-Bar mitzvah boy. It is advisable that the Bar Mitzvah teacher check that the boy is able to sing this. If the family do not wish to choose a child to lead, then the chazan or a boy from the community will normally sing Anim Zemirot.

Alternative Mitzvot

There are other honours that can be offered to family members to perform: Opening the Ark when the Torah scrolls are taken out and returned; lifting the Sefer Torah (Hagbah) or dressing it (Gelilah). The scrolls are very heavy especially once fully adorned. When selecting a person for Hagbah this should be borne in mind. These other honours do not involve Hebrew reading.

Kiddush

A Bar or Bat Mitzvah family traditionally sponsor the Kiddush for members of the community after the service. Currently, the cost for this is £600 depending on the number of sponsors on the same Shabbat. Please be aware that this sum is simply a contribution to cover costs and does NOT form a donation to the Shul. Please see below for details about donations.

The shul has a strict rule about the weekly Shabbat Kiddush. Though the quantity may vary according to anticipated numbers, the quality and 'grandeur' of the Kiddushim are consistent to avoid discrimination.

A private Kiddush at the shul is not allowed.

The shul arranges the ordering of the food for the Kiddush once this has been booked with the office. Simcha families do not need to do anything else but may purchase their own whisky if they prefer to. Once again, please liaise with the Shul office.

Ozer Dalim

For those families where there are genuine financial challenges, please speak in absolute confidence to the Financial Representative who will attempt to assist you.

Newsheet and Website

The very popular weekly newsheet is distributed in the main shul on Shabbat and has a members-only password-protected section of our website (www.sacps.org.uk) which gives details of the Bar Mitzvah boy and / or Bat Mitzvah girl and their immediate family.

The Shul office will contact you a few weeks before your simcha to ask you for a photo and a short bio of your son or daughter which will be published in the weekly newsheet and on the website. There will be a form to give consent for these publications.

Kosher Functions

This is a religious event in your child's life and we would most strongly recommend and encourage that on this religious landmark in your child's life, all food served at any celebration of the event, wherever this is to be held, is strictly kosher. Please contact the shul office for details of all kosher caterers, many of whom are very affordable.

Any event arranged on the shul premises must strictly follow the rules of the synagogue. The Rabbi would be very happy to discuss further.

Delaying a Bar Mitzvah or a Bat Mitzvah

It is not uncommon for a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah celebration to be delayed for a variety of reasons.

Please remember the technical day of your son's Bar Mitzvah is the day immediately following his HEBREW, 13th, birthday; similarly 12th birthday for a girl.

For the boy, if for any reason there is a delay in the formal celebrations, it is important he should nevertheless be called up in a synagogue service on or as close to his actual birthday as is possible. This may be a low key affair at a weekday or youth service with no fanfare and fuss or something more elaborate may be arranged. Please contact the Rabbi if this should be the case.

Also, attendance prior to your big day is not compulsory and we recognise that there will be weeks when you have your friends' celebrations too. However, it is recommended that you attend as regularly as possible in the year leading up to your big day as it helps to make your Shul exactly that and we want you to feel as welcomed and comfortable as possible.

Tefillin

At his Bar Mitzvah a boy is privileged to start putting on Tefillin. These contain special texts from the Shema prayer in the Torah on carefully prepared scrolls within crafted boxes.

The procedure for putting on Tefillin is something which must be taught properly and requires careful guidance. We place great importance in Bar Mitzvah boys learning how to put on Tefillin as, once learned and practiced, it is something usually permanently remembered. Please ensure your Bar Mitzvah teacher incorporates this within his lessons to your son.

Please also note that Tefillin will need to be worn at a mid-week Bar Mitzvah call up. If you have any concerns or anyone in the family would like a refresher or guidance, please contact the Rabbi, who will be happy to help you or your son put on his tefillin and to give a hands-on demonstration of how to do it.

For those families where there are genuine financial challenges please speak in absolute confidence the Financial Representative who will attempt to assist you in this very important purchase.

Friday Night

Although the main event is on the Shabbat morning, the Friday night service is relatively short and warm in atmosphere. We would recommend very strongly you bring your son to shul on the Friday night. This adds considerable excitement to the whole occasion.

Non-Jewish guests

Many families and their children have non-Jewish friends. The Wardens have prepared a leaflet which is available to give to non-Jewish people during what could be an otherwise confusing ceremony.

These are normally available from the Wardens on Shabbat morning. Please do ask.

In the meantime, please also direct your visitors to our webpage:

<https://stanmoreshynagogue.org/assets/uploads/2025/08/Visitors-Guide-2025.pdf>

... so that they can obtain an understanding of the proceedings before attending the service.

Security

The Synagogue uses security staff who do not generally stop and question members, or visitors who are obviously guests. They will, however, in the interests of safety and security, prevent entry to people whom they don't recognise until they are satisfied that there is absolutely no risk.

Please let our security team know in advance, either by emailing our head of security or by informing the Synagogue office, the names and descriptions of any of your guests whose appearance could bring them under suspicion so that they can be admitted without any possible embarrassment.

Our security teams are instructed to refuse entry into the Synagogue on Shabbat to anyone carrying a gift or a camera, and all visitors are asked to ensure that mobile phones are switched off. No electronic device may be operated on Shabbat - and certainly not in shul or anywhere on the shul premises, as this is in violation of Jewish law and hugely disrespectful to the community. Visitors who drive to the synagogue are asked not to park their cars in the immediate vicinity of the Synagogue. The car park is not in use on Shabbat.

Sweets

It is the community's tradition to throw sweets:

- (i) in the case of a Bar Mitzvah - at the end of the bar mitzvah boy's final bracha – usually after he reads the haftarah; or
- (ii) in the case of a Bat Mitzvah, only in circumstances where the bat mitzvah girl presents a D'var Torah at the conclusion of the Shabbat morning service - at the end of the bat mitzvah girl's D'var Torah.

A limited number of individually wrapped kosher sweets will be provided by the Wardens on the day. Please note that no additional sweets may be brought along for this purpose.

Shabbat Mincha – afternoon service

We encourage Bar Mitzvah boys to return to shul on Shabbat afternoon for the shorter mincha, afternoon service. We normally offer the Bar Mitzvah boy the mitzvah of gelila, dressing the Sefer Torah, when he does so. The simcha family may also wish to consider sponsoring a seudah for the whole community between Mincha and Maariv on the Shabbat afternoon which is a lovely way to continue the celebrations throughout Shabbat.

Shared Shul Functions

The synagogue is the religious hub of a large and very busy community. Many weeks we have people sharing their semachot. Please be understanding and work favourably with other families if asked to share an anniversary or another simcha. This will enhance your own occasion.

This often means that it is difficult to fit in every member of the family to whom one would wish to offer an honour. Please do bear this in mind.

Many times, but not always, families will wish to jointly host the Kiddush. Details of the costs of sponsorship can be obtained from the shul.

Shared Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah

Occasionally a Bar Mitzvah Shabbat coincides with a week when a girl has her Bat Mitzvah ceremony on the following day, the Sunday. Their family guests will be accorded as much respect and offered as many honours as possible and the girl will be blessed by the Rabbi during the service.

Multiple Semachot (eg Twins or Triplets)

Boys or girls

This is an exciting situation and, as a family, please discuss your plans on splitting the roles of your sons / daughters through the service with your tutor and the Rabbi.

Boy(s) – Girl(s)

Although the girl(s)' Bat Mitzvah is a year ahead of her brother(s) there can be a considerable logistic and financial strain on the family. Many families decide to share the event for their children. If this is the case, please discuss your plans with the Rabbi, as there is an important stipulation.

Presentations in Shul

Our current arrangement is for Bar Mitzvah boys and Bat Mitzvah girls to be given a presentation in shul by the Rabbi as well as a certificate of youth membership of the shul and any other certificates relating to any relevant Jewish exams they may have passed.

We do not present certificates or gifts from charity or other organisations in the service. These should be presented at the family party.

Twinning the Simcha

Some families decide to twin their child's simcha with, for example, under-privileged children overseas (eg Ethiopian or Russian Jewish children), recent immigrants to Israel or the Yad Vashem Guardian of Memory Programme. You can obtain more details from the shul office as to which Charities can assist.

Decorum

We know that these special occasions are a highlight in the life of every family and it is always very exciting to have so many family and friends in Shul.

However, we must ensure that appropriate levels of decorum are maintained at all times for the benefit of our members and also to reflect the importance of the synagogue services and the prayers being recited.

We, therefore, kindly request that guests enter and exit the Shul at appropriate times and wait by the door if requested by our Stewards at key times such as during the Sermon, during the Kedusha prayers or when the ark may be open.

In addition, it is kindly requested that all guests be reminded to be appropriately and modestly dressed, and for married women to wear hats / head coverings during the Shul services.

Finally, and to reiterate, it is absolutely essential that all electronic devices are preferably left at home or switched off. These must not be taken out or used during any of the Shul services or whilst on the Shul premises on Shabbat.

Your cooperation will ensure that your celebration is enjoyed by you and your family - and by the whole community.

Donations

It is a well-established custom that the parents of a barmitzvah/barmitzvah make a donation to the Shul and its activities at the time of a child's Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. Please note that this is different to any cost recovery payment that may have been made towards sponsoring the Kiddush. This of course very much depends on the financial position of the parties.

Please be assured that while we hope that, in line with Jewish practice, parents celebrating a happy event such as this share their celebration by sharing an element of the prosperity which has been bestowed on them with the shul, this will always be dealt with sensitively and in strict confidence. Please feel free to discuss this with our wardens ahead of your child's event, who will be happy to provide guidance if required.

We recognise this is a time of financial commitments with many competing and coinciding expenses. The donations made at this juncture support the youth projects of the Shul and it is most likely that your child, at some point, will have been, or will be, a beneficiary of these activities.

We prefer, should you wish your donation to be assigned to a specific item or set of items, that this is discussed with the Honorary Executive. We have an abundance of some things and a paucity of others and would like to agree with you anything that you may specifically wish to donate.

Special Circumstances

Some children initially find the Bar Mitzvah and Hebrew reading difficult. The quality of reading is important, however we are sensitive to people with special needs. If this is the case, please have a word with the Rabbi who can advise and guide you on this matter.

There are occasionally situations where special circumstances may exist with regard to either the child who is having the Bar or Bat Mitzvah or for a close relative. Please speak to the shul office in the first instance and the shul will work closely with the family to ensure that all is taken care of professionally and confidentially.

The Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah ceremony is an emotional point in the lives of many families and a landmark to be remembered for many years. It can, however, be a very difficult time for families where the child is bereaved of one or more parents, or a sibling. The recent loss of a

grandparent can also be very traumatic. Please let us know the situation and bring it to our attention. It is not always possible for us to be aware of every family's individual and immediate circumstances especially if some time has elapsed between the bereavement and the ceremonies.

Unfortunately, separation and divorce in the Jewish community is a situation that arises - as in any part of English society. The shul will do the best it can to accommodate all sides of the family as much as possible. If there are particular sensitivities, e.g wording of announcements, it is imperative you let us know well in advance as we are keen to avoid any potential embarrassments.