

Mishpocah Avodah (Family Worship)

A Guide for Parents and Friends of Children Who Come to Worship With Us

Welcome to Olive Tree Congregation!

Families at OTC are encouraged to attend worship services together. It is important for children to see themselves as part of the larger body of Messiah and to observe and experience the many aspects of corporate worship, including liturgy and the teaching of the word as well as participating in song and prayer.

We take very seriously our responsibility to join with parents in helping to train the next generation of God's people. Bringing children to worship may not always be easy, but we believe it is an essential part of their spiritual growth. Children are beginning to learn by our words and example



what it means to honor and glorify God. Together we can provide a positive experience for these, our youngest worshippers.

Why should our children remain with their parents when we worship?

Children learn much as they participate in the congregational worship services week after week.

- They learn that God is worthy to be praised and that worship is a fitting response to His holiness.
- They experience being part of Messiah's body which brings special blessings and responsibilities.
- They discover God's calling upon their lives to receive Yeshua as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

“We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done...so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands.” (Psalm 78: 4b - 7)

“Let the little children come unto me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”
(Luke 18:16)

- They hear Scripture read and interpreted, and they begin to see Messiah centered worship as one place where God speaks to them.
- They begin to know by heart some of the Hebrew liturgy and songs of the faith.
- They witness the ordinances of Immersion and Nizkor as outward signs of an inward response to God.
- They are enriched by the beauty of music as a human response to God.
- They build a treasury of memorable, shared experiences of worship with the believing community from which they will draw when they are older.
- They establish the good habit of attending worship services which builds a foundation for later years.
- They are inspired by God to live in a way that pleases Him in their homes, schools, and play throughout the coming week.

How can I prepare my child for worship?

There are several ways we can help prepare children for participating in the service. To begin with, children need to know that we approach Shabbat worship seriously and that we enter the Sanctuary expecting to hear from God.

Your anticipation and conversation before and after the service will be important in helping your child learn to love worship and behave well in the service.

While we should not be unrealistic in our expectations of a child's behavior during their time in the service, there are certain standards that should be set and communicated to our children. These should be our goals:

1. That children learn early, and as well as they can, to worship the Lord.
2. That parents be able to worship.
3. That families would not distract the people around them.

Generally, children will rise to our expectations if they are realistic, clearly communicated, and consistent. Expectations we should teach the younger ones and expect of the older ones:

- Sit, stand, or close eyes when the service calls for it.
- Sit up straight (not lounging or crawling around).
- Keep papers as quiet as possible.
- Look toward the worship leaders in the front.

- If they can read, sing along with the printed words, and think about them. If they are not able to read, listen very hard.

Have children take a trip to the rest room before entering the Sanctuary, and highly discourage leaving the service.

“Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit your-selves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again. Tie them to your hands as a reminder, and wear them on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”
 (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Along with talking to our children about proper respect and worshipful attitudes, we can talk through the various elements of a service. Give your children things to look for during the service so they can anticipate them. Talk ahead of time about what is “special” this week, such as Nizkor, immersion, or a

missionary speaker. You might also discuss ways children can reach out to others by helping younger children find a Bible passage, opening the door for an elderly couple, or greeting someone they don’t know and extending kindness.

What age should my children come to the service with me?

It is up to each family to decide what is the best age to bring your child into the worship service. OTC offers classes for children ages 0-5 during the worship service. We believe that once a child is able to read, in most cases, they should be able to sit quietly and act respectfully for the full length of a service.

You can begin “promoting” attending worship services as something exciting and grown up. Even at the very young age of three you can start by using other gatherings as a training ground—immersions, concerts, Purim or Sukkot services, or other special events.

Practice sitting quietly at home as thanks is given for a meal, a Bible story is read to a toddler, or during family devotional times. Once you have decided your child is

ready to attempt services on a regular basis recognize that it will be a learning process for them.

Children absorb much more of value than we might expect on Shabbat morning.



Music and words of liturgy, such as the Shema and V'ahavta, become familiar.

These make a special impression as a kind of music and liturgy the children may hear at no other time.

Prayer, songs, and the sermon all provide wonderful opportunities

for parents to teach their children the great truths of our faith.

An intangible but wonderfully significant result of being a part of worship is the sense of awe children experience as they observe their parents and adults of all ages worship their God. A child's spirit can be deeply touched when he/she observes tears of conviction in his/her mother's eyes, or hears his/her dad singing worship songs or responding to truth with a quiet "Amen."

It is our belief that the earlier parents allow children to sit with them in the service, the more inclined and better

trained they will be to enjoy worship. Interestingly, it can be more difficult to acclimate a 10 or 12 year old to a new worship service. As John Piper says, "The cement is much less wet, and vast possibilities of shaping the impulses of the heart are gone."

How can I help my child during the service?

Plan to arrive on time and find a good place to sit. By sitting near the front, your child can see better and feel more a part of the congregation.

Help your child by letting them know what will happen next. Give them the opportunity to find the Bible passage and also let them put the family's offering in the Pushke. Encourage them to participate in reciting the Scripture memory verse and the liturgy. These activities help them become a part of the worship experience.

"Worship is the most valuable thing a human can do. The cumulative effect of 650 worship services spent with Mom and Dad between the ages of four and seventeen is incalculable."

(John Piper)

Allow a little one to climb up into your lap, or put your arm around his or her shoulder. The child will associate this closeness and warmth with special God-times.

Encourage children to use good listening to write down two or three things they have learned during the sermon or draw a picture of what they hear. A spiral bound notebook labeled “Shabbat Services” could be used for this note-taking and illustration and would be a special way to keep track of your child’s growth. Their notes can be very useful as you discuss what they learned later. If this becomes the expectation, they will be learning a very valuable listening tool as they grow.

There might be times when a child gets restless or a bit noisy, despite our best efforts as parents. In that event we must try to deal with the situation subtly, as best we can. If the child will not respond and won’t be quiet or still, it is best to take him or her out of the sanctuary, both for the sake of quick discipline and other worshippers.

What should I do as follow-up?

Immediately after the service, words of praise should be given to the child who has behaved well. You might also mention one or two things you hope will be better next

time. In the event that there has been disregard of your established expectations, consequences should be carried out as promised.

When parents take time to ask their children questions and to discuss and explain things after the service, their children’s capacity to understand and participate greatly increases! Take note of the “Homelink” questions provided during the sermon. You can use this as a way to apply the truths taught in the sermon to your children’s lives as you drive home, have lunch together, or later in the week. Pray together about what God has taught your family.

We should not underestimate the moving of the Holy Spirit in the young tender hearts of children through certain moments of prayer, music, or preaching. Always be looking for these significant moments and for ways to enhance a child’s understanding and experience.

What other ideas can help me make family worship a reality?

On Friday before sundown:

- Lay out clothes for Saturday morning.

- Prepare your breakfast menu and have children help set the table.
- Have a meal plan for an easy lunch and make necessary preparations.

On Shabbat morning:

- Put a meal in the crock pot or on timed bake so lunch will be ready when you get home.
- For very little ones who are ready for a nap, have a healthy snack or sandwich prepared to give to them as soon as you get in the car after Shabbat School. If they fall asleep, they can be carried straight into their beds when you get home.
- Use the drive to Olive Tree as a time to pray for services—that God would open our hearts to His Spirit and that our communal worship would be pleasing to Him. Also, take time to review the weekly Scripture memory verse.

After spending the morning at services and Shabbat School, it is a wonderful goal to set the day aside for what God himself declared we need—rest. While this may seem like the impossible dream, with some determination and planning, it can become one of the best days of your week.

What
values will
they take
with them?

In a relatively short number of years, our children will leave our homes to begin lives of their own. What values will they take with them? We have the God-given privilege and responsibility of helping our children to love the Lord God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Together, let us make every effort to lead every child to their Redeemer.

While we encourage families to worship together, we understand that sometimes parents may need help with younger children.

During the worship service loving volunteers provide a nursery for children up to 3 years old. After the singing portion of the service, children's worship is provided for children ages 4-6.

For more information, contact the Olive Tree Congregation office at 847-222-1230.