

Going to Synagogue: A Guide for Children with Autism

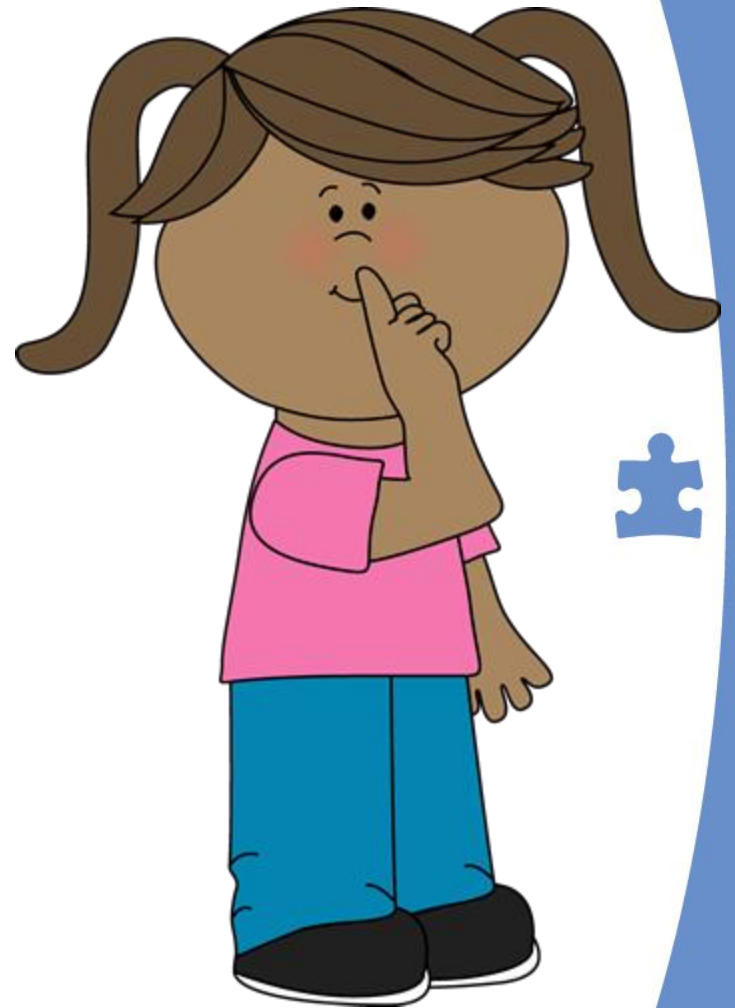




Going to a synagogue on Shabbat is a great chance to come together to pray, think, thank God, and listen to inspiring speeches.



When you enter a synagogue with your family, it is very important to be quiet so that everyone is able to focus on their thoughts and prayers and can hear the rabbi speaking.



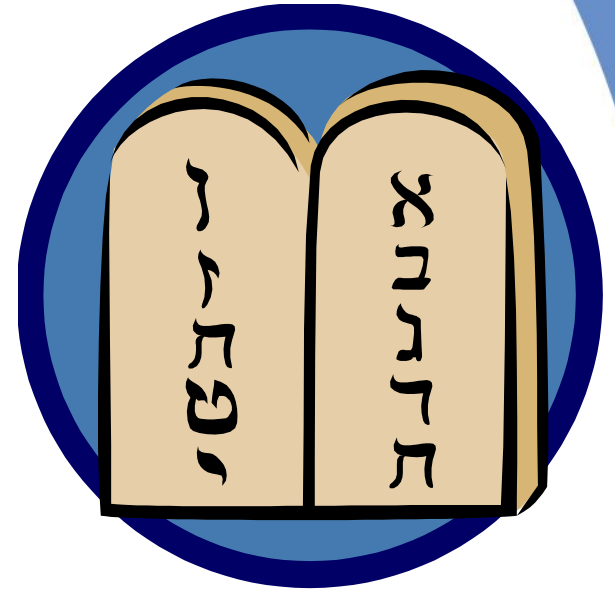


When you go into a synagogue, you will see a cabinet with a curtain covering it. This is the ark, where the Torah scroll is kept. When it is opened we stand up out of respect. In the middle, there is a raised platform called a Bimah. When it is time to read the Torah, we take the scroll out of the ark and carry it to the Bimah. We also stand out of respect when the Torah is being carried. Some people walk up to it and give it a kiss. You can, too.

In some synagogues, your mom and dad will sit together. In others, they will sit separately. You can ask them before you go.


Usually the ceilings in a synagogue are very high, much higher than at home.

Many synagogues are very pretty. For example, in yours there might be a statue of the 10 Commandments or a menorah.





The people who go to a synagogue are called a congregation. The man or woman who leads the congregation is called a rabbi. The rabbi usually has a special seat in the front of the synagogue.

Rabbis are very nice. Sometimes, they lead the prayer services. But someone else can, too. In the middle of the services, the rabbi will talk about what was read in the Torah to inspire us to follow God and become better people. 

It might be nice to go with your mom or dad to meet the rabbi before or after services. That way you can go and say hi to him or her on all of your trips to the synagogue!



At different times during the prayer services, you will have to stand, sit and bow.



If you are not sure what to do, you can watch what everyone else is doing and follow them.




People like to sing in the synagogue. It can be fun to sing songs with your family and friends, but it is okay if you don't want to.

The songs are only a few minutes long. Some of them are slow and calm. Others are fast and exciting.



In some synagogues, some people like to clap or dance in a circle during the exciting songs. You can join them if you want.



On Shabbat, we make a blessing over wine or grape juice. This is called Kiddush. We do this because God told us to remember Shabbat and make it holy. 

If it's grape juice, the rabbi might let you drink from the cup.



After the prayers are finished, we shake hands with the people around our seats and say “Shabbat Shalom”. This means Shabbat of peace.

It is okay if you don’t want to shake hands with people. You can just smile or wave.





After we shake hands, the service is over and it is time to go home!

