



# Parent Handbook

Temple Beth Ami Early Childhood Programs

14330 Travilah Road

Rockville, MD 20850

301-762-5594

[www.ganami.org](http://www.ganami.org)

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Dear Families,

We are so happy that you are part of the Gan Ami community. We appreciate your trust in us to protect the physical and emotional well-being of your child while providing the highest quality Jewish early childhood education. This Parent Handbook delineates the practices and policies necessary to fulfill that commitment.

The Parent Handbook is current as of the date published, though it may be updated periodically when impacted by external circumstances and/or licensing regulations. By registering your child to attend our school, you are agreeing to abide by all the protocols set forth by Temple Beth Ami and Gan Ami.

Thank you for sharing your child with us. We humbly accept the immense responsibility of caring for your child, and we will always do our best to exceed your expectations.

Thank you,

Paula Sayag, Ph.D.

Director of Early Childhood

Temple Beth Ami

Rockville, MD

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## **Overview**

### **Mission**

We provide an inclusive, joyful, Jewish learning environment where passionate teachers support each child along their unique developmental path. Through guided play, each child acquires a strong foundation for ongoing social-emotional and educational success.

### **Vision**

Every child is prepared for future social and intellectual pursuits, and every family feels a meaningful connection with our community.

### **History**

Temple Beth Ami founded a school for young children in 1989 and fondly called it Temple Beth Ami Nursery School, reflecting our connection to the larger congregation and our priority of providing a nurturing, warm, and intimate Jewish setting for our children.

Temple Beth Ami Nursery School adopted the nickname "TBANS," using the acronym of the full name, and was known as such for over 30 successful years.

The pandemic of 2020 necessitated a reinvention of our program and the opportunity for a more accurate, meaningful, and modern name. We chose the name "Gan Ami," which means "Garden of our People." Our Gan Ami is housed within "Beth Ami," which means "House of our People." "Gan" is also the word used for preschools in Israel. So Gan Ami is our garden where we nurture young children's social, emotional and intellectual growth on their path to a successful future.

Beth Ami's early childhood program will always stay true to our roots and core values, as we constantly evaluate our programs and strive to meet the ever-changing needs of our community and to ensure children's readiness for later schooling.

### **Jewish Practices**

We share our Jewish heritage and traditions with our families. Early exposure to our special customs lays the groundwork for developing a Jewish identity. In early childhood, Jewish experiences basically revolve around the holidays, as we share each holiday's stories and morals, songs, traditions, and rituals. In addition, we recite prayers before we eat, at both snack and lunch time. We also share the Hebrew language with our children by introducing them to everyday words (such as water and milk, body parts, and numbers); we want children to understand that there is a language other than English that Jewish people share and that they can use.

Fridays are particularly special, as each class creates a unique and meaningful celebration of the Jewish Sabbath, known as Shabbat.

Temple Beth Ami does not celebrate non-Jewish holidays with origins in other religions, including Halloween, Christmas, St. Valentine's Day, or Easter. We proudly celebrate uniquely American holidays, particularly Thanksgiving.

## **Curriculum**

Gan Ami's unique "Framework for Early Education" (published 2018) expresses specific goals for young students. The Framework delineates the core skills that we help each child develop to best prepare them for future social and academic success. The Framework for Early Education may be viewed on our website and in our office.

The Framework for Early Education was designed to coordinate with the Creative Curriculum (as approved by Maryland State Department of Education). We monitor children's progress by maintaining ongoing observational records and sample portfolios, as well as administering the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and/or The Speed Dial-4 assessment.

## **Covid-Related Health and Safety Restrictions**

### **Arrival and Departure Procedures**

Caregivers who bring a child to school must wear a mask. A child who exhibits symptoms of illness, especially those associated with COVID-19, may be denied entry to school.

Staff will help each child exit their car and enter school. Caregivers are not allowed in school. At the end of the school day, parents will create a carpool line, and their children will be brought outside.

### **Maintaining a Sanitary Environment**

Children and teachers wash hands frequently.

Items from home must be kept to a minimum. Children bring a tote bag with required items, but no additional toys or trinkets, unless requested by a teacher.

Classroom materials will be allocated in such a way that all items are used by only one cohort at a time and then sanitized and disinfected properly before use by another class. Each classroom will be fully cleaned each night in accordance with CDC guidance.

### **Masks**

In accordance with our regulatory agencies' guidelines, masks are optional for students and staff. Gan Ami will continue to monitor guidelines and regulations and may amend this policy as necessary.

### **Social Distancing**

Each classroom community (students in a particular class and their assigned teachers) will comprise a "social bubble" or "cohort." With rare exception, no additional children or adults may enter a "social bubble." For these reasons, children from different classes rarely overlap and special activities may be severely restricted. Children are seated at least 3 feet apart when eating.

## **Meals**

Parents of Bet, Gimel and Dalet children are required to provide their child with lunch every day. Lunches will be refrigerated at school.

School will provide snack each day, including milk and water.

## **Outdoor Time**

Each class will have their own daily playground time, in addition to opportunities to play outside in other safe areas around the Temple building.

## **Illness during the School Day**

A child who exhibits any signs of illness will be isolated with an adult, while awaiting pick up. An approved adult must pick up the child within 30 minutes of the phone call. The requirements for the child's return to school will be made by the Montgomery County Department of Health and conveyed directly to the parent. For further details, see the Health Policy section of this Handbook.

## **Administrative Policies**

### **School Calendar**

Find our complete school calendar [on our website](#). This calendar may be printed or downloaded. Scheduling is subject to change.

An Open/Close Schedule can also be found on the website and serves as a quick reference list of days school is closed.

### **Admissions**

Enrollment procedures are detailed on the school website. Any special procedures necessitated by extraordinary circumstances will be distributed through email to each family.

Temple Beth Ami does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, veteran status or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law.

### **Payment Policies**

A non-refundable tuition deposit is due at the time of registration. The remainder of tuition is paid through Direct Debit from a credit card or bank account through the family's account on the Temple database.

Tuition and fee schedules and payment policies are available on the school website and in the school office. There are no refunds, unless a family moves out of the area or the school and parent agree that TBA is unable to provide the best educational program available for the child.

If the school must close for any COVID-related reason, teachers will provide digital learning for an age-appropriate period of time each day. Tuition is due.

If a child withdraws from school at any time, for any reason, there will be no refunds of fees paid, but no further fees will be due.

### **Scholarships**

The Joel Blue Scholarship Fund was established to financially support families with young children in our school. Contact the school office for an application. If you would like to donate money to increase the impact of this fund, please contact the Temple's Main Office.

### **Licensing**

Temple Beth Ami is licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education to operate a Child Development Program, and by Montgomery County Health and Human Services to operate a Private Educational Institution. Temple Beth Ami adheres to all regulations established by our licensing agencies. During the pandemic, Gan Ami is also carefully attending to the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and the State and County Departments of Health.

### **Parents' Guide to Regulated Child Care**

[This document](#) must be made available to all parents.

### **Required Forms**

Children may not attend school without required forms on file, including the Maryland State Office of Child Care Health Inventory with up-to-date immunization records and Emergency Contact Information. In addition, children with asthma or allergies must submit "Action Plans." And Temple Beth Ami may require additional permissions, such as consent for Vision and Hearing Screenings. All forms are available on the school website.

### **Security Procedures**

All doors remain locked and under constant surveillance. No adults other than Temple staff and approved specialists are allowed in the school. There are numerous other security features in place to protect our community. Contact our Director with questions.

Temple Beth Ami's emergency preparedness is regularly reviewed by the Security Department of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, the Montgomery County Police Department, and the Montgomery County Office of the Fire Marshall. The Emergency Plan is up-dated annually. Safety drills are conducted at least monthly.

### **Mandated Reporting**

All educators are required by law to report any suspicion of physical or emotional abuse and/or neglect and sexual abuse to the Montgomery County Office of Child Protective Services. Once a report is made, staff members are legally obligated to cooperate with any investigation undertaken by authorities.

## **Health Policy**

Each child must submit a current Maryland State Department of Education Office of Child Care Health Inventory, including an immunization record indicating up-to-date vaccinations, in order to attend school. Attestation that each child has received a flu shot is also required.

When a child or staff member shows symptoms or reports exposure to a contagious illness, Gan Ami will follow the Montgomery County Department of Health instructions. The Department of Health may institute any number of protocols including the ill person's exclusion from school for a set period of time, the requirement of a doctor's note clearing the person to return to school, a negative COVID-19 test result, or even closure of a classroom, multiple classrooms or the school for a set period of time.

If a child has been ill but determined by a health care professional not to have COVID, the child may return to school when they have been free of fever and any stomach upset (without the aid of medication) for at least 24 hours, and when they have taken any prescribed medication at home for at least 24 hours. All children returning to school after illness should be ready to fully engage in all activities and comfortably wear a mask as required.

Notices will be sent to parents when information provided about a medical situation may be instructive for other families watching their own children for signs and symptoms of contagious illnesses. Gan Ami will make a concerted effort to respect the privacy and confidentiality of teachers, students and/or families who may be experiencing health adversity. However, due to the necessity of contact tracing during the COVID pandemic, in some cases, the name(s) of those affected may need to be shared to better ensure the safety of the community at large.

When a child has lice, the child must be treated, and all nits and bugs must be removed. If a child is treated by a professional lice remover, then the child may return to school with the documented permission of the professional. If a child is treated by the parents, then the school will check the child's head to clear them for reentry to school. Other parents will be notified so they can check their own children, and the classrooms will be cleaned appropriately.

## **Medication Administration**

Parents must sign and submit a "Medication Authorization Form" to allow school staff to provide any prescription or over-the-counter treatments (e.g., sunscreen, diaper rash ointment, hand lotion) to children. Any medication to be given to a child in school must first be administered at home for at least 24 hours, and then must be provided to the school in the original manufacturer's container. Prescription medications must have a standard pharmacy label stating recipient's name, medication name, dosage and expiration date.

## **Immunization Policy**

For the health, safety and welfare of our community, TBA adheres to [State of Maryland immunization expectations for students in our programs](#). Documentation of compliance with these requirements

shall be provided for all students before the beginning of each school year. Each child in Gan Ami classes must have on file current, complete Office of Child Care Health Forms, indicating satisfactory vaccination history. The parent of each child in any adult-child program must confirm that the child has received all necessary immunizations for their age. There are no religious or personal exemptions to this policy. Medical exemptions will be reviewed, and parents will be notified if their child may attend programs. This policy follows the principles of the Union for Reform Judaism, as well as the standards of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and the American Council on Immunization and Prevention

### **Emergency Closing Policy**

Use the following information if you think school may have an alternate schedule because of snow or other emergency situations. For information on schedule changes, check your email for announcements from Temple Beth Ami.

If Montgomery County Public Schools close, then Gan Ami will adhere to MCPS' decision to close for the first two days of a weather incident and will make an independent decision based on the conditions around our facility on the third day and after.

If Montgomery County Public Schools has a delayed opening for inclement weather, then Gan Ami will open at 9:30 am. There will not be any Early Arrival.

If Montgomery County Public Schools has an early dismissal due to inclement weather, then Gan Ami classes will end at their regular times, and AfterCare will contact you if it is necessary to close early.

We ask that you always use your judgment when weather is inclement. If you feel that driving is hazardous, please stay home, even if school is open.

Gan Ami may close early for other emergency situations, if directed to do so by local health, law enforcement or government officials.

### **Photography**

As part of our program, we routinely take pictures of children participating in classroom activities and special programs, so we can share this documentation of learning with families and with our greater community. We ask parents to support our efforts and grant permission to display pictures in our classroom online journals, as well as around our building and in public places including print media, advertisements, our website, or platforms like Facebook. Parents indicate their willingness to allow the use of photos of their children during the registration process.

## **Classroom Practices**

### **Class Placement Policy**

Teachers who are most familiar with a child's strengths, goals, learning styles, communication abilities and friendship patterns consider the best classroom placement for each child. Our teachers'

expertise in child development, their affection for each child, and their passion for each child's success are paramount in the class assignment decision-making process.

The School Staff will:

- Place each child in a nurturing and supportive classroom environment that will optimally support their growth and development.
- Place each returning student with familiar peers from the current same-age classes who will best support their learning.
- Ensure that each child has the opportunity to develop new relationships in their next class.
- Create and reevaluate class lists prior to distribution to be sure each group is best suited to create a positive classroom community the following year.

Parents may email information to the Director that they believe will help facilitate the best class placement for their child. Helpful information includes parents' reflection on their child's learning and play styles, responses to varying teaching styles, and especially their hopes and dreams for their child's next educational year.

### **Inclusion of Children with Diverse Learning Needs: Our Keshet Program**

At Gan Ami, we value the unique qualities that each child brings to our community. We do everything we can to create a learning experience that recognizes individual differences among children, while maintaining an intentional play-based educational approach. Our goal is to be a fully inclusive school. We welcome all children, including those with special developmental and/or health care needs. However, we recognize that some children may not be best served by our approach or structure, and in such cases, our school staff and parents work together to determine the best placement for each child.

"Keshet," which means "connect" in Hebrew, is our program for providing support services for children. Our Keshet Coordinator provides consultative services to teachers and children. With parent's permission, the Keshet Coordinator will provide additional classroom observations and feedback to parents at no additional charge. Private evaluations and treatment by a professional therapist may be arranged for an additional fee.

Gan Ami is committed to building open communication and partnerships among our school, families and any outside providers supporting our students so that we can most effectively meet the needs of each child. We expect parents to inform their child's teachers of any services the student is receiving, and we welcome and encourage those providers to connect with our school to learn about the child's participation in the classroom setting. To aid in accommodating activities to meet all children's needs, parents are required to share any existing Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

All children, with or without special needs, are honored by our policy that states that the welfare of the classroom as a whole takes precedence over the needs of an individual child. That is, a child with

special needs may require and receive extra time and attention from the teachers, but this cannot be out of balance with the needs of the class as a whole.

Our program and our commitment to serving diverse learners in our community continues to evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of our students.

### **Outline of Our Daily Schedule**

Every day, teachers welcome children into their classrooms and help them follow established routines (such as hanging up their coat and washing their hands) to best prepare for the day. As students enter the classroom, teachers facilitate the use of instructional materials to support the development of emotional, social, and intellectual skills.

Classes then gather to discuss the schedule for the day. Teachers share new concepts and plans. Books, songs, movement and language games enhance the daily educational experience. The focus is on participating effectively to build community and provoke curiosity.

All activities are individualized to meet the unique learning styles of every child. Children are given choices of activities multiple times throughout the school day.

The core school morning may include, but is not limited to the following:

- Movement activities focusing on self-control, body awareness, coordination, and endurance
- Music activities focusing on language development, auditory discrimination, following directions, and cultural awareness
- Outdoor experiences focusing on nature exploration and large muscle exercise
- Story times focusing on listening, comprehension skills and vocabulary building
- Literacy experiences, including Handwriting Without Tears activities for 4-5 year olds
- Art experiences focusing on creativity, risk-taking and perseverance
- Dramatic Play focusing on promoting imagination and communication skills
- Puzzles and manipulatives focusing on small motor development and problem-solving
- Building, planning and creating with various types of blocks and manipulatives
- Snack time
- Lunch time

The school day culminates with a closing routine, including a reflection on the day's activities.

### **Clothing**

Good early childhood education requires freedom of movement and independence. Children should dress in comfortable clothing that fits properly and can get messy. Children who are potty trained should wear clothes they can manage independently (such as pants with elastic waist bands). Children should always wear (or bring) a pair of sneakers. Clothes will often get dirty with mud, paint, markers, clay and more, so clothes should be washable. If you may be upset if particular clothing items became torn or stained, do not send your child to school in those clothes.

An extra set of clothes, including underwear and socks, must be kept in the classroom. To be usable, these clothes should be replaced as the child grows and the seasons change. For children not yet potty trained, please provide appropriately sized diapers and wipes to be kept in your child's classroom.

Children should dress appropriately for the weather. With rare exception, children go outside every day. Children's clothes should all be labeled clearly, so lost articles may be returned.

### **Toileting**

Children are not required to be potty trained, and staff will change heavily soiled diapers as needed. Teachers are willing to work with parents to help assess a child's readiness and support potty training methods and schedules. Our teachers have potty trained many children over the years, so please seek and follow their advice. Parents and teachers work together to determine when a child is ready to wear underwear to school. Teachers always wear gloves when performing a diaper change or assisting a child in the bathroom.

Children who are in the midst of potty training should come to school with multiple sets of extra underwear and clothes, not just the one required change of clothes.

### **Food Policy**

Parents will provide their child with lunch every day. Lunch must be marked with the child's name. Lunches will be refrigerated. School will provide milk or water.

Gan Ami will provide snack each day, and challah and grape juice on Fridays as part of our Shabbat experience.

Gan Ami strives to be a nut-free facility. Staff will not provide any foods that contain nuts. Parents should not send any foods to school that contain nuts. This policy applies to peanuts and all tree nuts including pecans, pistachios, almonds, pine nuts, cashews, walnuts, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts and brazil nuts.

Our school follows the religious dietary guidelines of Temple Beth Ami. Lunches from home may include meat or dairy products. No pork or shellfish is allowed. Our Rabbis prefer that you do not mix meat and dairy products in the same meal.

Parents of children with any food sensitivities must notify the school of their child's restrictions prior to the start of the school year. Notification is provided through the online registration questionnaire and the medical forms. Parents will talk with school staff prior to the start of the school year to confirm any necessary individualized procedures for ensuring their children's safety in school. Parents will communicate with their child's teacher regarding food intake whenever necessary to ensure the child's safety.

Though Gan Ami strives to be a nut-free zone, the entire Temple building cannot be designated as such. Please review the Temple food policy at [www.bethami.org](http://www.bethami.org) for guidelines at other Temple events.

### **Birthday Celebrations**

Birthdays are celebrated in the classroom, and each class has their own special traditions (crowns, songs, etc.). The school provides a special food treat for each class member in honor of the child's birthday.

### **Screen Time Policy**

Gan Ami does not provide children access to any electronic devices. The classrooms do not have TVs, computers, or phones for children's use. Screen time is kept to a minimum during class time. On occasion, as it contributes to the curriculum, teachers may share information found on the internet with the class.

### **Physical Fitness Policy**

Temple Beth Ami attends to the physical well-being of each child and believes that children must stay active. Children spend time outside every day, weather permitting. In addition, classes spend significant time engaged in movement activities throughout the day.

### **Discipline Policy**

Conflicts naturally occur as children relate to each other in a group setting, and discipline provides an opportunity for growth and learning. To that end, Temple Beth Ami teachers actively engage children in thinking about and discussing positive behaviors in developmentally appropriate ways that facilitate children's success. Teachers use many techniques when dealing with conflict situations, including:

- **Limit setting:** Children are given clear, concise, and consistent rules to guide their behavior. Boundaries and expectations expand as children grow, and children are given the opportunity to participate in the identification and definition of the classroom rules.
- **Modeling:** Adults clearly demonstrate compassionate, caring behaviors that provide examples for children to follow. Children are *shown* expected behaviors.
- **Offering Choices:** Children are given choices throughout the day, as appropriate, to choose their activities, thereby gaining control over their routine, interactions, and behaviors.
- **Generating Options:** After a conflict occurs, children are given the opportunity to reflect on the situation and children are given tools to settle future conflicts.
- **Delayed Involvement:** Teachers give children time to work through their own problems but are always available to engage with the children if they cannot yet reach a solution independently.
- **Identifying/Interpreting/Validating:** Teachers clarify difficulties and facilitate problem solving to help children learn to express and understand their feelings and frustrations, as well as those of other people.
- **Redirection:** A request to stop a negative behavior comes with a suggestion for an appropriate replacement behavior.

- Natural consequences: Teachers explain and reinforce natural consequences as they occur. Children see the results of their own behavior and begin to modify it accordingly.

Challenging behaviors that fall outside of developmental expectations include:

- Any physical aggression that puts another person at risk of being hurt, such as biting, spitting, scratching, hitting, pushing, or throwing objects.
- Any behavior that disrupts the flow of the classroom and consistently takes a teacher away from the other students, such as screaming, destroying property, or running away.

When such challenging behaviors continue despite consistent implementation of the techniques listed above, parents will be contacted to discuss strategies and consider next steps. The professional staff is committed to open and honest communication, and we expect that parents will take an active role in helping us collect all relevant information pertaining to their child. In some cases, parents may be advised to seek outside professional support in order to promote their child's development. In rare cases, after all of the above avenues have been explored, a child may be asked to leave the school. In that case, we will make every effort to help the family find a more suitable placement and help ensure a smooth and positive transition for the child.

## **Parent/Guardian Involvement**

Beth Ami parents are highly encouraged to partner with teachers in the best interest of their child. Please maintain ongoing conversations with teachers to exchange ideas about your child's progress in open and respectful dialogue.

Given current restrictions during the pandemic, parents are not allowed to enter the school building, and therefore, regular parent involvement programs are revised to meet our new normal.

We encourage parents and guardians to stay connected:

- Visit "Gan Ami Early Childhood at Temple Beth Ami" on Facebook and click the "like" button.

## **Communication Between Teachers and Parents/Guardians**

Email is the most common form of communication between parents and teachers.

- Emails may replicate information sent through other channels, provide reminders of classroom activities, or announce new and upcoming opportunities.
- Parents should read all emails received and provide any requested responses.
- Teachers will respond to emails in a timely fashion. Except on rare occasions, teachers do not read or respond to email during the school day while they are teaching.
- During school hours, if parents need to provide teachers with any pertinent, time-sensitive information about their child, contact the Director, [PLS@BethAmi.org](mailto:PLS@BethAmi.org), 301-762-5594.

Private Classroom Site. Each class will have a private digital site with posts and pictures depicting your child's school experiences. At the beginning of the school year, parents or guardians will be invited to the site, and teachers will explain the protocols for following, responding to, and

engaging with their particular classroom community. Only parents or guardians of a child in a given classroom and school administrators are granted access to each classroom site.

Phone Calls. Teachers may call parents on occasion to share information about their child's participation in the classroom. If you want to arrange a time to talk with your teachers by phone, email them to schedule a mutually convenient time.

Designated Parent-Teacher Meetings. Teachers will schedule parent-teacher conferences as warranted. You are welcome to schedule additional meetings to discuss your child's educational progress. Email your teacher to arrange a time.

### **Communication Between School Administration and Parents/Guardians**

Email is used to send notifications concerning important changes to school policies, practices, or schedules, such as snow days, other emergency closures, or carpooling and parking adjustments.

Facebook. Like our school's page at [facebook.com/EarlyChildhoodatTempleBethAmi/](https://facebook.com/EarlyChildhoodatTempleBethAmi/)

- On our Facebook page, you will find photos of special school experiences, announcements of big events, and even links to informative articles on effective parenting.
- Many teachers have personal Facebook pages. Each teacher establishes their own practices with regards to sharing their personal page. Your teacher will notify you of their individual policy.

The school website is [www.ganami.org](http://www.ganami.org). In addition to general school information, you will find a Google calendar with all school dates as well as announcements for special events that you may link to your own calendar.

## Contact Information

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### Early Childhood Staff

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### Parent Committee

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### Temple Staff

For personal and religious questions:

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*This Parent Handbook of Gan Ami Early Childhood Programs at Temple Beth Ami includes the major policies and practices of the school. By enrolling your child, you are agreeing to abide by these guidelines as well as all policies of Temple Beth Ami which can be found [here](#). All questions may be referred to the Director.*