

Dear Parents of Temple Shalom Teens,

Back when you first joined Temple Shalom, we asked you if it was time to give your kids more than just a “shmear” or taste of Judaism. Over the years, they have had many wonderful opportunities through our religious education program – classes, workshops, retreats, services and life cycle events. Now we are offering something more, a chance to join Jewish teenagers from around the region in a bunch of fun and learning-filled weekends known as a NFTY Kallot. These events, held four times per year, around the Mid-Atlantic region, are a wonderful opportunity for your child to learn and grow, meet other Jewish kids, share in worship services and tzedakah projects, and explore and strengthen their Jewish identity beyond the wonderful world of Temple Shalom. By connecting with other teens, and with an amazing group of youth advisors, your child will be engaged, excited, challenged and encouraged about being Jewish.

Every year, a few kids from Temple Shalom are active in NFTY and attend various kallot around the region, but dozens more miss out on these great opportunities so we need your help. This year, we would like to get as many Temple Shalom kids as possible to one or more NFTY Kallot. What’s the catch? Yes, they do cost money (around \$150/weekend, but there is scholarship money available, so don’t let that stop you). More importantly, they take planning. Kids have to sign up in advance. Because of the planning involved, these are not last minute, drop off events and this is where you come in. Kids this age – even the best of them – are poor planners (something about those frontal lobes...). To make this work, we need your help, your support, your encouragement and your attention to details.

The first kallah is coming up October 23-25 in Richmond, VA. Registration is done on line (go to nfty.org, under “Regions” click on NFTY-MAR. The username is nftymar, the password is marvelous. Follow-up paper forms have to be mailed in within three weeks.). Early bird registration is \$160 by Sept. 17; if space is available, registration will stay open until Oct. 8 for \$180.) And no, you don’t have to drive (at least not very far). Buses will pick the kids up in Kensington (see FAQs).

I am sure you have a lot of questions, so we have tried to think of them (or at least the ones we had) and answer them in the attached FAQs. Also, you can call me, or Linda Kushner, or Rabbi Feshbach, or Lisa Pressman and we are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Don’t miss this great opportunity to expand your kids Jewish horizons and deepen their Jewish connections. Then mail in your registration before the deadline and send your kid off for a wonderful Jewish experience at NFTY’s Fall kallah.

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Temple Shalom Temple Youth aka Senior Youth Group

P.S. NFTY runs absolutely fabulous summer programs taking hundreds of teens to Israel and, on some trips, Eastern Europe every year. These are truly life-changing trips and I strongly urge you to plan now so that your kids can attend the summer after 10th or 11th grade. These trips are expensive, but money is available through Temple Shalom and the local community, so don't let that stop you, but do plan ahead. These trips are truly amazing (and make for great college essays!). Please ask me about these too.

FAQs:

1. What is NFTY? NFTY is the National Federation of Temple Youth, the youth organization from the Reform movement, which is known as the URJ, the Union for Reform Judaism. There is more information at www.nfty.org and www.urj.org
2. What is NFTY-MAR. NFTY has several regional organizations. We are part of the Mid-Atlantic Region or MAR. Kids come to NFTY-MAR events from D.C., Pennsylvania, Virginia, Delaware, Maryland and West Virginia.
3. What is a kallah? A kallah (or kallot, which is the plural) is a weekend gathering of the teen community. Activities include worship services, programs, meals, song sessions, speakers, activities and loads of fun.
4. Who organizes the programs? Programs are organized by the host youth group as well as regional NFTY leadership, supported by rabbis, cantors and youth leaders/advisors. In recent years, kallot themes have covered everything from identity to sexuality to social justice to secrets to world religions.
5. Where do the kids stay? At winter kallah, kids stay at Capitol Camp, in Pennsylvania. For the other three kallot, the host congregation arranges housing with members of the congregation. Two or more kids stay with a host family. While not required, a small hostess gift is appropriate for the family your kid is staying with. A box of chocolates is always welcome.
6. Do I have to drive my kid to all these events? No. If the event is out of the D.C. area, there is a bus to and from, leaving from the Temple Emanuel in Kensington or the Bindeman Center on Tuckerman and Falls Road. Buses usually leave Friday afternoon and come back early Sunday afternoon. While kids generally don't have to miss school, for Spring Kallah, buses usually leave on Thursday. Even if they have their driver's license, kids are not allowed to drive themselves to, from or during NFTY events.
7. What if my kid doesn't know anyone else there? There are always first timers at every event. NFTY staff is very good about making sure new kids feel part of what is going on. Also, there are usually at least a few temple Shalom kids there

Temple Shalom Temple Youth aka Senior Youth Group and they are very good about taking new kids around and introducing them to others.

8. Does my kid have to go to all four NFTY events? No. Each event is organized separately and due to soccer, swimming, debate, It's Academic, family vacations, work, theater and other events or activities, most kids can't make every kallah. Once your kid goes, however, they will probably want to go back.
9. If the event is in D.C. can kids come to only part of the event? Can I pick them up for a soccer game Saturday morning, but have them there Friday night and bring them back Saturday afternoon? Generally not, but you need to work that out with the regional Youth Group Advisor, Alexa Brida, on a case-by-case basis. She can be reached at abroida@urj.org or nftymar@urj.org.
10. If my kid doesn't want to go, should I make them? No. Encourage your kid to talk with other Temple Shalom kids who are involved in NFTY. Start with Sara Kushner. However, if your kid is on the fence, encourage them to check it out. NFTY really helps kids solidify and strengthen their life-long connection to the Jewish community.
11. What if my kid gets sick, homesick, is unhappy, wants to come home, etc? NFTY has been organizing these trips for years, so they have seen it all. There is plenty of adult supervision, so if your kid needs anything, tell them to talk to the adults in charge – rabbis, youth advisors, etc., or their host family. The trips are only a few days so even homesick kids, and kids who hate camp, should be fine.
12. **How do I sign up? This year, registration is on-line. Go to nfty.org, click on "Regions" find NFTY-MAR. The username is nftymar; the password is marvelous. After you register, there are a lot of forms to fill out, including a general registration form, a medical form (you don't need a doctor to sign it), an eligibility form, that has to be signed by Rabbi Feshbach, Cantor Levine or Ms. Pressman, so get it filled out early, and a Code of Conduct form. These are due within three weeks of registering for the event. The forms are mailed to:**

**NFTY/URJ
2027 Massachusetts Ave., NW at Kivie Kaplan Way
Washington, D.C. 20036**