

Subject: Important Information for Kayitz 2019

Shalom Ramah Families,

"The camp* grounds were gleaming in the sunlight as though freshly painted; the cloudless sky smiled at itself in the smoothly sparkling *agam**, the satin-green lawns rippled occasionally in a gentle breeze: June had arrived."

—J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

* words slightly changed to fit camp.

The very thought of the arrival of June and the summer season makes me think of all the wondrous things that can and will happen at camp this summer. We are looking forward to our return to our summer home in Palmer. Our number one goal is to make this a great *kayitz* (summer) for each *hanich* (camper). Please contact us if we can be of help. We have wonderful *yoatzot* (who both provide “camp mom”-like care to campers and act as parent liaisons) who are easily accessible during the summer. However, always feel free to reach out to me directly by phone or email.

[Click Here to read our updated 2019 Family Handbook.](#)

I highly recommend reading the entire Family Handbook. Below, I am highlighting a few key points that I think are especially important. The rules are primarily for the safety of our *kehilah* (community) and to create a living and learning Jewish environment. I am asking you to review these points with your children to help ensure our success.

- We pride ourselves on being a warm and welcoming community at Camp Ramah. I think it is helpful to tell your children that they will meet all types of people at camp. Some of these people will become their lifelong friends and some of them they will just be friendly with. They should do their best to be inclusive of others and to be kind and patient and to take into account other people’s feelings. If they need help with a particular person, they should reach out to their *madrichim* (counselors) or their *yoetzet*. You should also tell them that Talya Kalender (our Director of Camper Care) and I want them to come to us if they are having any problems. It is good for your children to develop these self-advocacy skills. We, of course, also spend a lot of time watching our *hanichim*’s (campers’) social dynamics, and the *madrichim* (counselors), with advice and input from us, work on *tzrif* (bunk) unity and building friendships.
- Our professional staff and our community wellness committee have spent significant time crafting our policies on how we approach mental health and behavior issues at camp. The policy is in the family handbook (on page 37) and is worth reading. We strive to embody the Jewish value of compassion while caring for each camper and the camp community. We spend considerable resources trying to help campers, and there is also a limit to what we can accommodate. It is critical that parents reach out to us well in advance of the summer with potential issues in order that we can work together to provide the best care possible.
- Camp security along with the overall health and safety of our campers is the single most important thing to us at Camp Ramah in New England. We are, of course, aware of the recent shootings at synagogues and the rise of anti-Semitic activities in the U.S. Each year, we review security risks and plan revisions with our outside security company, Securitas (the largest security company in the world). We also meet with the Palmer police chief and their police officer in charge of school safety. The police department is in contact with the FBI. Every year, during the offseason, we participate in

several conference calls, webinars and groups about security. We also monitor regular emails from the Jewish Emergency Management System (CJP, ADL, JCRC) and the Secure Community Network of the Jewish Federations of North America. Over the past few years, we have added more electronic monitoring, increased police presence and patrols, enhanced our communications technology and engaged in more emergency training. Our multi year effort to make camp as secure as possible has put us on firm footing. Still, we are constantly reviewing our security measures to ensure we are taking appropriate measures.

- Immunizations – The outbreaks of measles affecting 22 states including MA, CT, & MD has been in the news of late. The health of your child and of our community is a priority to us. The best manner to keep our community safe and healthy and prevent the spread of an infectious disease like measles is to ensure that the members of our community are adequately vaccinated. At Camp Ramah in New England, our policy has long been clear: full vaccinations in accordance with the standards of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the CDC are required for admission to Camp Ramah in New England for both campers and staff. We do not allow for personal, religious or philosophical exemptions. We do permit for the rare true medical exemption where there may be a medical reason for an individual to not receive a particular vaccine. We have long held this policy as a matter of communal health, and this year more than any other we are pleased to know that our community is protected against measles and other infectious diseases.
- Food at camp – For both *Kashrut* and health reasons (primarily food allergy safety) reasons, we do not allow campers to bring any food to camp. We have a sacred trust to provide both a totally Kosher and food safe environment. We have many campers who have very serious food allergies. Please help us keep our campers safe by not bringing or sending any food to camp. We will confiscate and give away any food brought by campers to camp. We will treat violations of this rule as a disciplinary matter. [Please click here to view this year's allergy protocol letter.](#)
- Vaping and dabbing has become more prevalent in our society and schools and can be hard to detect. All forms of marijuana or similar drugs, regardless of form or how they are ingested, are prohibited at camp and will result in immediate dismissal. Possession of drugs, these devices or other drug paraphernalia will also result in immediate dismissal. Please check carefully what your children are bringing to camp. Because we are a children's summer camp and need to provide a safe environment for all of our campers, Camp Ramah reserves the right to search any camper's belongings at any time.
- *Shabbat* Dress Code – Last summer I had extensive conversations with our *hanichim* and *tzevet* about our *Shabbat* dress code. We are trying to balance two values. One value is that we should dress nicely for *Shabbat*. The second value is that we do not want to embarrass people for their clothing choices. Therefore, we do not have a *Shabbat* dress code. Please have a conversation with your children about these values and what they plan to bring to camp. For more information see page 7 in the handbook.
- Full Summer Campers and Intersession – We expect campers to remain at camp during intersession. We feel that the full session camper time between sessions is fun and meaningful. Here is the [letter](#) we wrote on this topic earlier this year.
- Visiting Day July 21st coincides with the fast day of the 17th of *Tammuz*. We are once again offering a free BBQ lunch to campers and their families. If you hold the custom of breaking your fast after *mincha*, we will have a *mincha minyan* option and the BBQ will remain open until 2:00 p.m. for those who wish to eat after.
- [Please click here](#) to see our letter on Israel education.

For the safety and well-being of our camp community, I encourage you to read the Family Handbook. We can't wait for the *hanichim* to arrive. Thank you so much for entrusting us with your children. We look forward to an exciting and memorable *kayitz*.

B'Shalom,

Rabbi Ed Gelb
CEO