



Totally Terrific Tot Shabbat Tips & Techniques

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1. What makes a service “work” for you?

- a. Think about a service you really enjoyed... what made it work for you?
- b. Think about a service that left you cold... why?
- c. Relate those elements to tot services.
- d. Consider the following elements when planning a service: flow, energy, engagement, reflection.
- a. Sing it, don't talk it!

2. I believe...

- a. ...that when you shorten a service, you strip it of many of the key elements that make it engaging and give it meaning. This is ESPECIALLY true for children!
- b. ...that the best Tot services are at least 45 minutes long, because then you have time to include elements that enhance the overall experience.
- c. ...that a totally terrific Tot Shabbat service should be welcoming, relaxed and upbeat, with moments that are reflective and quiet, educational and engaging.
- d. ...that a totally terrific Tot Shabbat service is one that allows children to sing, dance, jump and shout; incorporates instruments, stories, sign language and movement; and involves the parents as well as the children!

3. How to choose songs that “work”...

- a. Consider whether a song engages children. Can they sing along? Is there movement? Can they use an instrument? Can they answer questions or share ideas? Can they be a helper?
- b. Multiple Intelligences Theory (different learning styles) explains that people learn in a variety of ways. Apply this by using a variety of approaches to engage children.
 - ♦ **kinesthetic** - use sign language and movement;
 - ♦ **musical** - offer percussion instruments;
 - ♦ **interpersonal** - encourage community-building moments;
 - ♦ **intrapersonal** - ask reflective questions (where is God?) and allow for quiet moments (silent prayer).
- c. Make a song work by editing the lyrics, shortening the number of verses, adding movements, doing it a capella or with echoes, being dramatic or acting it out, etc.

4. Re-define your expectations of what it means to participate...

- a. Preschoolers may not sing along, but that doesn't mean they aren't participating.
- b. Using puppets, instruments and sign language, clapping, dancing and marching with Torahs, and asking questions and inviting children to share their ideas are all wonderful ways to allow children to participate.

5. Final Thoughts...

- a. Figure out what works for you and your congregation. (Just because I like a song doesn't mean it's the one and only song to use.)
- b. Consistency is important. Once you figure out what works, stick with it.
- c. Know your music and service structure inside out so you can maintain the flow of the service and make eye contact throughout.
- d. Don't let time constraints rush you if you feel you have the children's attention. Likewise, if you feel you are losing their attention, change things up or bring the service to an end earlier than planned.

6. Tot Service Structure...

- a. To begin the service...
 - ♦ Opening songs should be friendly, welcoming and participatory! I like to sing 2-3 songs of greeting to create a warm and engaging environment, such as **Boker Tov** (Heckelman, adapted), **Hinei Mah Tov** (Gershon), **Hal'l'luyah**, **Shalom Chaverim** (Baydush), **Bim Bom**, **Shabbat is Here**, **Mah Yafeh Hayom** (Miron).
 - ♦ Your song choices will depend on the mood you are trying to create: you may want to begin gently for a morning service and upbeat for an evening service.
- b. Bar'chu/Sh'ma/V'ahavta/Mi Chamocha...
 - ♦ Engage the children with **Are You Ready to Pray** (Allard), an un-orthodox version of Bar'chu that forces the parents to participate from the very beginning.
 - ♦ I love to chant **Sh'ma** (Sulzer) with sign language! It allows you to chant a traditional melody while at the same time actively involving very young children who wouldn't otherwise have a way to participate because they have not yet learned the Hebrew.
 - ♦ Immediately follow Sh'ma with **God is Everywhere and God is One** (Allard) and engage the children with the question – where is God? Sing the children's responses; be patient, don't be afraid to milk the moment!
 - ♦ V'ahavta is often skipped at tot services, though that seems strange to me, as this is the prayer that instructs us to teach our children! I wrote an English interpretative setting for this prayer that works well – **V'ahavta** (Baydush).
 - ♦ Mi Chamocha is a celebratory song, so choose a melody that is upbeat and vibrant. Offer percussion instruments and let the children rock out – I like to use **Mi Chamocha** (Friedman).
- c. Avot v'Imahot/Silent Prayer/Sim Shalom...
 - ♦ The text for **Great, Mighty and Awesome** (Allard) comes from the end of Avot v'Imahot, so this song works beautifully at this place in the service. I added verses that include reference to our ancestors. I ask the children if they want to be cheerleaders for God and they shout "Yeah!" At the conclusion of this song, we put away the instruments.
 - ♦ Silent prayer is a challenging concept with preschoolers; nevertheless, silent prayer can be a beautiful moment. I like to sing **My Silent Prayer** (Rossio). I preface the song by telling the children that this is their opportunity to share with God the prayer that is in each of their hearts, and I urge them to close their eyes and talk silently to God. I close my eyes too (though I peek to watch the kids).
 - ♦ Conclude silent prayer with a prayer for peace – keep it simple because they need to be able to join in. I like **Sim Shalom** (folk). You could alternatively use this moment to engage the children in **Building a Better World** (Allard) which has hand motions and maintains the quiet mood of silent prayer.
- d. Torah Service/Story...
 - ♦ We stand up and face the Ark; I chant Ki Mitzion while a teacher or student opens the Ark.
 - ♦ If I only have a few Torahs, I hold one up for the children to see; if I have enough for all of the children, we hand them out and then everyone holds their Torah up high. I ask them to repeat after me: "This is the Torah/that God gave to Moses/and Moses to the people of Israel./It is a tree of life/to those who hold it fast/and all who support it/find happiness."
 - ♦ Then we march around in the room singing **Torah Torah**, and return the Torahs to the Ark.
 - ♦ Now it is story-time... I sit on the floor and invite all of the children to gather around me, and then read or tell a holiday-related story and sing a couple of songs.
- e. Concluding the service...
 - ♦ I find it's difficult to get them back into service mode after the story, so I invite everyone to "Shabababa" to the back of the room for Kiddush and Motzi (where we have a table set up with challah, cookies and juice), and I lead them singing **Shabababat** (Heckelman).
 - ♦ Stickers! I love to give out stickers or hand-stamps to the children during the oneg. It's just one more way to connect personally with each child. Stickers are usually holiday or theme related, but if a special class is being honored, I give stickers that relate to the class name, such as "Dagim" (fish) or "Rainbow Friends."