

CHINUCH AGE

The obligation of *chinuch* in *mitzvos* starts when a child is between five and six years of age, depending on his individual intelligence level¹. However, there are some *halachos* which parents customarily start training their children in even before five years of age. There are also certain *mitzvos* which warrant a deeper understanding of their essence (for example the laws of *availus*), or a more thorough knowledge of their details (for example the laws of *lulav*), therefore the age of *chinuch* is later².

Parents should always be cognizant that *chinuch* is inherently a gradual process. A child can stumble many times before he begins to execute the *mitzvos* properly. It is therefore unwise to overreact to a child's lackluster *mitzvah* performance. One must keep in mind the long term picture.

The following is a partial list of *mitzvos* and their appropriate *chinuch* age:

Emunah

- As soon as children are old enough to be cognizant of their unique relationship with their parents, which can even be prior to their ability to speak, children should be informed that *Hashem* is the Creator and Sustainer of the world and all its inhabitants³.

Netilas Yadaim in the Morning

- The appropriate age for washing *netilas yadaim* in the morning is five to six⁴, however the accepted custom is to start earlier (approximately when the child starts to walk)⁵.
- A parent should not overly pressure a child in washing *netilas yadaim* in the morning⁶.
- Food touched by a child below the age of five or six prior to washing his hands in the morning does not render the food *tamei*⁷.
- The custom with young children is to sing "*Torah Tziva...*" while washing their hands.
- Parents should wash their hands in the morning prior to diapering and nursing

1. See *Mishnah Berurah* (128:123).

2. See *Mishnah Berurah* (343:3). See also *Children in Halacha* by Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (p. 5) for an elaboration on this topic.

3. See *Igros Moshe* (Y.D. 3:76).

4. This is also the age when children are obligated to wash their hands before bread and after using the washroom or touching areas of the body usually covered.

5. See *Halichos Bas Yisrael* (1:22) in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein z"l.

6. See *Shailos v'Tshuvos Tzitz Eliezer* (*Chelek 7, 2:10*)

7. See *Eishel Avraham* (*Butchatch*) (*Siman 4*).

their children⁸. Some poskim are lenient⁹ and don't require parents who wake up in the middle of the night to wash their hands before caring for their children as long as no food is touched and no *berachos* are recited¹⁰.

Tzitzis

- The custom is for a boy to start wearing *tzitzis* at 3 years old¹¹.

Yarmulke

- The custom is for a boy to start wearing a *yarmulke* at 3 years old¹².

Berachos

- The appropriate age is five or six, however the accepted custom is to start earlier¹³.
- An adult is allowed¹⁴ to aid a child verbally in the recital of the *beracha* and can also answer *amen*¹⁵ to the child's incomplete *beracha*.
- Children older than five or six that get up in the middle of the night should not eat or drink unless they first wash their hands and make a *beracha*.

Bircas Hamazon

- Between the age of five and eight, a child should recite as much of *Bircas Hamazon* as their patience and skill allow¹⁶.
- Children eight years and older should recite *Bircas Hamazon* at least until “*al yichasreinu...*”¹⁷.

Cleanliness

- One should not daven or make a *beracha* in the presence of a child with a dirty diaper¹⁸. This *halacha* applies to a baby who started eating solid food.
- Unless there is an odor, one is not obligated to check the child's diaper prior to making a *beracha*¹⁹.
- It is preferable not to diaper children in front of *seforim*²⁰.
- It is forbidden to make a *beracha* in the presence of a boy over the age of nine or a girl over the age of three who is totally unclad, however if one turns away it

8. See *Halichos Bas Yisrael* (1:6)

9. See *Eishel Avraham (Butchatch)* (Siman 4).

10. When washing the hands in the middle of the night the *beracha* of *Al Netilas Yadaim* is not recited.

11. Provided the child is toilet trained. See *Shaarei Tshuva* (17:2).

12. However, it is not wise to force a child at that age to keep his *yarmulke* on at all times, eventually he will wear it on his own volition.

13. The best method for a parent to be *mechanech* a child in *berachos* is by the parent themselves making *berachos* slowly and out loud.

14. See *Mishnah Berurah* (167:93).

15. See *Chanoch L'Naar* (14:4).

16. *Psak* of Rav Shlomo Zalman Zalman Aurbach z"l quoted by *V'Sen Beracha* (appendix p. 13).

17. See *Mishnah Berurah* (187:4) and *Shaarei Tzion* (6) there.

18. See *Shulchan Aruch* (81:61).

19. See *V'Sen Beracha* (19) in the name of Rav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv *shlita*.

20. See *Shailos v'Tshuvos Mishnah Halachos* (Chelek 6, 24).

is permitted²¹.

Tznius

- Once a girl is five years old²² she should dress according to the general *halachos* of *tznius*. However, it is customary to start at an earlier age, and each community has their own custom in this regard.
- A girl (in a bathing suit) should not go swimming with her father after the age of five²³.
- A boy should not go swimming with his mother (who is in her bathing suit) after the age of three²⁴.
- Very young children of the opposite gender may see each other unclothed, however it is not advisable to bathe boys and girls together past the age of two or three²⁵.
- Children will develop on their own a natural sense of *busha*²⁶ to be seen unclothed. Once the child reaches that stage, they should be prevented from being unclothed in the presence of the opposite gender.
- A parent should not punish or overly admonish children for infractions²⁷ in this area²⁸.
- Families may sing together. However, if there are male guests present, girls older than eleven should not sing²⁹.
- Boys over the age of nine should not hear a woman sing (except for their mother, grandmother and sisters)³⁰.

Yichud

- The complex laws of *yichud* apply to an adult male together with a girl over the age of three, and an adult female together with a boy over the age of nine.
- There is no prohibition of *yichud* amongst children under *Bar* and *Bas Mitzvah* age of the opposite gender³¹.

Physical Contact

- A woman should not kiss any male relative (brothers are permitted, however it is discouraged) over the age of nine, except for her own child or grandchild³².

21. See *Rema* (75:4) and *Mishnah Berurah* (29) there.

22. See *Children in Halachah* by Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (p. 30) in the name of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky z"l.

23. See *Halichos Bas Yisrael* (7:39) in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach z"l.

24. *Ibid*.

25. This can lead to unnecessary questions or explorations on their part.

26. The term *busha* is often wrongly translated as "shame", however the proper understanding of the term in the context of *tznius* is "sensitivity" or "dignity".

27. For example, if they walk around without putting their clothes on promptly after bathing.

28. Children are naturally pure in this area. When adults overreact on such issues they are really projecting their own attitudes which can negatively affect the child.

29. See *Halichos Bas Yisrael*

30. See *Children in Halachah* by Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (p. 33)

31. See *Sefer D'var Halacha* (*Perek 2, Halacha 8*).

32. See *Shulchan Aruch Even Ha'ezer* (21:7). See also *Children in Halachah* by Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (p. 32, footnote 14).

- A man should not kiss any female relative (sisters are permitted, however it is discouraged) that is of the age where her gender is physically obvious, except for his own child or grandchild³³.

Kashrus

- Children of any age should be prevented from eating non-kosher food items³⁴.
- Children under the age of three can eat milk immediately after meat provided their mouth is cleaned of any meat remnants³⁵.
- Children from age three to six should wait one hour³⁶ between meat and milk.
- Children six year of age and older should wait the full amount of time between meat and milk (if it is not too difficult for them)³⁷.

Kiddush and Havdalah

- Children over the age of six or seven are obligated in *kiddush* on *Shabbos*. However, in contrast to adults, children do not have to be prevented from eating prior to *kiddush*³⁸.
- Children over the age of six or seven are obligated in *havdalah*³⁹ on *motzai Shabbos*. However, if they miss *havdalah*⁴⁰ on *motzai Shabbos*, the prevailing custom is that they don't have to make *havdalah* on Sunday morning⁴¹.

Kohanim

- It is forbidden to bring a male child *Kohein* of any age under the same roof as a Jewish dead body⁴².



33. Ibid.

34. See *Rema* (Y.D. 81:7) and *Shach* (26).

35. See Children in Halacha by Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (p. 35).

36. Some say a half-hour.

37. See *Aruch HaShulchan* (89:7).

38. See *Mishnah Berurah* (269:1).

39. See *Mishnah Berurah* (343:3).

40. As often happens during the late summer *Shabbosim* when their bed time is before *havdalah*.

41. See *Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah* (*Chelek 2, Perek 58:20*). See also Children in Halacha by Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen in the name of Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg *shlita*.

42. See *Mishnah Berurah* (343:3).