



SAFETY FIRST

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayikra 5781

Dear Parents,

On *Pesach*, the focus is on the home. It's on the family. We are told to bring the *Korban Pesach* (*Shemos 12:3*)

לִבֵּית אֲבוֹת שָׁה לִבֵּית אֲבוֹת שָׁה "a lamb for each father's house, a lamb for each household"

There are no massive public celebrations – the eternity of *Klal Yisrael* is forged anew each *Seder* night in the confines of a household.

With our attention turned inwards, our responsibilities to our family, and specifically the children, should be at the forefront of our consciousness. The most fundamental responsibility of a parent is to ensure the physical, medical, spiritual and emotional safety of their child. All the *Divrei Torah*, and creative parenting ideas that we share, will not achieve any of the desired results unless the child is in a safe environment. It behooves us to recognize that being a successful parent requires very basic measures to keep our children safe.

“The most fundamental responsibility of a parent is to ensure the ... safety of their child.”

The need for a periodic review of safety guidelines helps ensure we remain focused and knowledgeable about potential dangers facing our children and what we need to know and do about it. Along with the excitement, inspiration and spiritual elevation that the time of *Pesach* brings, we need to take a good, hard look at potential dangers that may be lurking for our children. Our *Pesach* plans undoubtedly took many, many factors into consideration. Now that we are about to embark upon those plans, we need to consider a most important issue.

What plans are in place to ensure our children's safety?

Some of us are going to hotels, some to rented villas, others to relatives and many will stay home. One common thread will be the presence of people with whom we don't usually spend extended time. Our children may be coming into contact with strangers. Our children may be in close contact with more distant relatives that we don't know 100%. If our family will be in a hotel, or in other communities' shuls and *Batei Midrash*, there will be unknown spaces that our children will access. We wish for nothing more than a relaxing, uplifting and enjoyable *Pesach* for ourselves, and a good time for our children. As unpleasant as it may be to contemplate – we may unwittingly be placing our children in very risky situations.

We need a plan. Our children need guidelines and boundaries. To let an elementary aged child wander a hotel freely is not a plan. To allow our child to be alone with some distant uncle is not a plan. To allow children to be alone, unsupervised, whether at home or in a resort, is not a plan.

Due to covid, we have not been able to conduct our annual in-school review of our Safety Kids™ program. In addition, it has been several years since we had a parent workshop about safety. I will outline just a few brief ideas that will provide a very basic outline of what parents need to know about and can implement.

What plans are in place to ensure our children's safety?"

- 1) Discuss safety measures in advance of Yom Tov
 - A. Bring a friend – never go in public places alone. Never go into a public bathroom alone.
 - B. Check first – parents must know where their children are. Any change in plans must be discussed with parent.
 - C. Child needs to be comfortable sharing with his parents. Calmly encourage your child to share any unpleasant experience they may have had. Respond calmly to whatever your child shares.
 - D. Parents be vigilant – if your instinct tells you a situation may not be so safe, go with your instinct. Be clear and firm about setting limits. Follow through so your child knows you really mean what you say.

“... present them with the greatest gift any child can want – a close, loving relationship with their parents.”

2) Plan in advance:

- A. Where will I allow my child to play? Where can they be during a meal? Long afternoons? Davening times? After dark?
- B. Decide with whom they can play, visit, hang out
- C. Identify trusted adults the children can go to if they feel unsafe and parents are not around
- D. Check out any new babysitter very carefully

Most importantly, spend time with your children.

On *Pesach*, parents can give over to their children their most deeply embedded beliefs, hopes and dreams.

Let's make it a time when we get to know them better, understand their fears and let's capitalize on the uniqueness of *Pesach* to get closer to our children. By giving extra thought and concern to their safety, well-being and emotional health, we will keep them safe, draw them close and present them with the greatest gift any child can want – a close, loving relationship with their parents.

Have a wonderful *Shabbos and a Chag Kasher V'Sameach*

Rabbi Kalman Baumann