

SHINSHINIM

2026 - 2027

HOST FAMILY GUIDEBOOK



הסוכנות היהודית
JEWISH AGENCY
לארץ ישראל
FOR ISRAEL

Thank you! Toda Raba! תודה רבה

We are thrilled you have chosen to host a ShinShin in your home. Opening your home to a ShinShin will no doubt bring great rewards to your entire family. Past host families regard this as one of the most enriching experiences they have ever had and express that they feel they have not only gained a new family member but have also gained a whole new understanding of what it's like to be an Israeli. Host families play a vital role in the success of the ShinShinim program. Host parents and siblings provide a great deal of support to the ShinShinim and help them transition to living and working in our community.

The following material is intended to answer basic questions and provide some guidance to help you make the most of this opportunity. If you have questions, and you will, please do not hesitate to reach out to Heather Zucker, Director of Jewish Engagement and JCC Cares or any of the other contacts listed on the next page.

Contact Information

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Who are the ShinShinim?

The ShinShinim program is a partnership between the Merage JCC and the Jewish Agency for Israel. The program seeks to bring contemporary Israeli life to the community by bringing post-high school young adults to Irvine for a year of service to the community.

ShinShinim are young Israeli leaders who defer their army service for one year to volunteer in communities around the globe. Our new ShinShinim, Dror and Ofri will arrive in August 2026 for eleven and a half months of service, including three months at our JCC camps. They were carefully chosen from hundreds of candidates after a lengthy and thorough selection process which evaluated candidates' personality traits, creativity, interpersonal skills, knowledge of Israeli culture, fluency in English, and much more.

What will they be doing?

The ShinShinim will be a living bridge between our community and Israel. They will share about Israel and Israeli culture, Jewish identity, Jewish celebrations, and life in Israel in general. In addition, they will help create community-wide programs about Israel.

We recommend reviewing your ShinShin's particular schedule together with her to help them get settled and to help you and your family understand their time commitments. They will be working primarily at the Merage JCC, with our preschoolers and after school kids.

The ShinShimin will meet at the Merage JCC for program planning as well as professional development (PD) sessions run by the CJL Program Director. They will be working at the Merage JCC to create Jewish spaces, educate our members, and build relationships within our community.

Becoming a Host Family

Host Family Criteria

- ShinShinim will be placed in warm, loving, Jewish homes of ALL backgrounds.
- Family members should have time to dedicate to spending with the ShinShin. Regular family meals and activities are very important.
- Consider your family's schedule and when you are available to include the ShinShins part of your family. The ShinShin will be VERY busy and involved in the community but the host family experience is a major component of the mission of the program.
- The ShinShin must have a dedicated bedroom that is not used for other family needs (the computer, the family TV, tutoring, etc.) It is preferred that the bedroom be a guest room or other unoccupied space so that the ShinShin is not displacing a member of the family. Additional private space, such as a bathroom or living area is a plus, but not required.
- The home must be a non-smoking, non-vaping environment.
- The ShinShin must have access to the internet and Wi-Fi.
- Host families are required to take part in a background check paid for by the JCC.
- Host families ideally will have school age children at home. It is also very helpful although not required, that host parents have some experience with teenagers.

Home Details

Once they move in, the ShinShin become a part of your family and household. Be sure to show them where things are located and how things work. We encourage you to treat them as members of your family. They must live by the rules of your home and we encourage you to speak candidly about how your family life runs.

You will be provided with the ShinShin's email address, phone number, and other means for you to connect. It would be ideal to connect with the ShinShin and their family before they move in. It is very reassuring for their parents to get to know the people their child will be living with. Pictures of you and your family are greatly appreciated.

Please remember these are young adults who have been chosen for their maturity, skills and experience. We expect and communicate to the ShinShinim that they be respectful of all household rules and responsibilities. Please note that the ShinShinim do not have curfews but they may need reminders to be considerate of family's schedules. As with American teenagers, the ShinShinim may start their social evening much later than we do.

Food

Food and shared meals are an integral part of the cultural and family experience. As host parents, this is especially important to the bond you will develop with your ShinShin. Please include them, when possible, in family meals and outings. Explain the rules and dynamics of your kitchen: whether you keep kosher, if anyone in the family has allergies and/or other dietary restrictions, who cooks the meals, if they are expected to do their own dishes, etc.

While the ShinShinim do their best to be home as often as possible, they do have very busy schedules and as such, will not be able to join you for dinner every evening. We recommend you sit down with your ShinShin on a weekly basis to discuss her schedule.

In the event that they are working late or if you choose to go out to dinner without them, please ensure that there is food for her to eat and that she is comfortable preparing the food herself.

Please remember the ShinShinim are 18 years old and generally eat quite a bit. To avoid embarrassing or uncomfortable situations regarding food, please ensure you maintain open communication right from the beginning.

Finances

The ShinShinim receive a monthly stipend from the J. They also receive a cell phone and data plan. The Host Family is expected to feed and house the ShinShin, it is also recommended that the host family provide basic toiletries (soap, toothpaste, shampoo, toilet paper), and we encourage you to discuss this with your ShinShin when they arrive.

The ShinShinim are here to volunteer, and their visas do not allow them to work for pay. They are not allowed to babysit or tutor. Beyond that, the ShinShinim will have very busy schedules volunteering in our community, and any available free time that they have should be time for them to relax and recharge.

Transportation

The ShinShinim will be provided with two leased cars and car insurance paid for by the J. The J will also arrange for the ShinShinim to receive driving lessons when they first arrive to familiarize them with the California laws and driving conditions.

It is important to note that the ShinShinim are not permitted to transport anyone under the age of 18 in their cars. Furthermore, the ShinShinim are not permitted to drive the leased cars outside of city limits without prior consent from the CJL Program Director.

Health Insurance

The ShinShinim will have health insurance coverage arranged by the Jewish Agency for Israel. If your ShinShin needs a doctor or a dentist, you can take them to your own, if that option is available. Please check that your physician accepts the ShinShin's health insurance first. If not, the J has a list of doctors and dentists who are willing to provide the ShinShinim with medical and dental services when needed. If you have concerns about your ShinShin's health, contact the CJL Program Director.

Please follow the following guidelines:

- Encourage the ShinShin to talk to you, when they feel unwell.
- In the case of any serious or contagious illness, the J contact person must be informed as soon as possible due to the ShinShin's close involvement with the community.
- In the case of a medical emergency, please take the ShinShin to the emergency room, and contact the J contact person as soon as possible.
- If your dentist or family doctor is willing to see the ShinShin, or if you take the ShinShin to one of the physicians on the J call list, please notify the Federation staff person of this decision.
- In the case of COVID-19, please consult with the Program Director regarding protocols at the time.

House Rules

The ShinShinim do not have a curfew. However, they are told that they must be respectful of the house rules and to be considerate of their families' schedules. The general guideline is that they should be home no later than 12 midnight on weeknights, and 1 am on weekends. Please note that there are evenings when the ShinShinim will be working late at their institutions or with their partners. As the ShinShin is part of your family, they will need a key (or code) to your house and the code to the alarm (if applicable).

It is up to the host family who does the laundry. Please discuss with your ShinShin and ensure that they know how to do laundry and work the machines in your home. If a housekeeper is doing laundry for other members of the family, it would be recommended that the ShinShin's laundry is done for them as well. We encourage families to treat the ShinShinim as another member of their family.

Please refer to the Discussion Checklist on page **15** of this manual for a useful guide to reviewing and discussing other rules in your household.

As difficult as it can be for a North American teen to talk about their feelings, imagine that challenge magnified by the limitations of trying to express yourself in a foreign language. Remember that speaking in English is stressful and exhausting at first. Don't be surprised if your ShinShin chooses to go to sleep early in the beginning. Please help your own children understand the ShinShin's occasional need for privacy and rest. Host parents have commented that it often takes some time for things to come together. Hosting takes some effort, but the experience is richly rewarding.

Vacations

If your family is going on vacation, you may include your ShinShin in the trip (domestic only), if you deem it appropriate and feasible. However, you must consult with both the CJL Program Director about your plans well in advance to determine your ShinShin's availability. If it is not feasible for your ShinShin to join you, short-term alternate hosting arrangements will be made for the ShinShin. The ShinShin may not stay alone in your house while you are on vacation.

The ShinShinim will have a scheduled vacation to return to Israel for a 2-week break normally during the February break.

Due to Visa & immigration laws, the ShinShinim are not permitted to travel outside of the contiguous United States. This includes Canada, Mexico, and non-US territory islands in the Caribbean. If your vacation is to any of these locations, your ShinShinim may not join you and will need to be placed in short-term housing.

Cell Phones

Every ShinShin receives a cell phone from the J and a monthly data plan that includes texting and voicemail. Their cell phones are critical tools for communication and safety. It is important that you provide your ShinShin contact information for the whole family and that you have their contact information as well.

Time Management

Some host families have found that the ShinShin is so busy with community work and preparations that it becomes a challenge to find times when the host family and the ShinShin are both free. Plan a time to sit down with your ShinShin and review their weekly schedule and identify and designate specific times during the week that you both know you will be able to connect with each other. Ask your ShinShin for her schedule and post it where you can check it as needed. We view spending time with the host family as an important component of the mission of the program. Please communicate any concerns around this issue to the CJL Program Director. Please be open and honest. We value your feedback and wish to address any issues as soon as they arise.

Holidays

Holidays can be a difficult time for the ShinShinim. Jewish holidays are ingrained in the national culture of Israel and it is just not the same here in the US. Even the most secular Israeli usually has a Friday night Shabbat dinner and or Saturday Shabbat lunch with family. Holidays inevitably bring a longing for family and friends. Many holidays which may be considered “less important” in America are significant in Israel: Lag B’Omer, Purim, Yom Hazikaron, etc. Before a holiday, share information about how your family observes the holiday with your ShinShin. Use this as an opportunity to learn more about his/her family and their customs. Encourage them to teach you and share with you about their traditions or family recipes. Perhaps incorporate some of your ShinShin’s customs into your family’s observances this year. Please use sensitivity and be sure to include them and show them that you understand and care!

Cultural Differences

There are tremendous similarities in culture and values between Israelis and North Americans. However, there are also significant cultural differences. Be aware and encourage your ShinShin to talk about how they are feeling. They may experience culture shock and will need your help and guidance to work through their feelings. Some of them have traveled previously, but for some this is the first time they will be away from home. Please be sensitive to any issues that arise from this. At times, you will act as a cultural advisor who may need to explain behaviors that seem odd and help your ShinShin avoid any conflicts that may arise from misinterpretations or misunderstandings. The recognition of differences and bonding based upon what we share is what **living bridges** are all about!

Your ShinShin may experience periods of worry or anxiety about not being in Israel while their family and friends are serving in the army. This can be especially difficult during periods of tension in the region. It may be helpful to stay current on Israeli affairs, so that you can help offer reassurance. Websites like Ynetnews, the Jerusalem Post, Israel Hayom or JFNA’s and/or Makom’s website are some good sources of accurate information on what is happening in Israel. Just as you would with your own teen, please reach out and engage in conversation.

Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking

The J does not tolerate illegal drug or alcohol use by our ShinShinim. All ShinShinim have provided written and verbal assurance that they should expect to be sent home should they violate this rule. As role models within the community, they must also refrain from smoking, vaping, and/or tobacco use. Call the CJL Program Director or any other ShinShinim program contact person immediately should this be an issue.

Dating Policy

As the ShinShinim are young adults, a few of their relationships may have the potential to develop romantic intentions. The ShinShinim have been made aware that the legal age of consent in the United States is 18 and that they are not under any circumstances permitted to become romantically involved with a minor. They understand that doing so is a crime and will result in their immediate dismissal from the program.

They are not permitted to become romantically involved with any member of your household. During their stay here, they are a member of your family, with respect to all the same boundaries. They are to respect your home and the trust you place in them. They are not permitted to engage in any sexual activities in your home, nor are they permitted to have overnight guests in your home.

They have been reminded to remain mindful of the distracting nature of relationships and to remember that they are here first and foremost to volunteer as Israeli Shlichim (emissaries). They have also been instructed to confide in you should a relationship ever make them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Please be there for them during this time. Should you have any concerns or questions regarding this issue, please reach out to the CJL Program Director.

Keys to Hosting

- Make regular time to share the details of your life and be interested in learning about the ShinShin's life and interests outside of the program. It is important to also ask them how things are going each day at school and at the synagogue.
- Be available to lend a helping hand, offer counsel, and give an occasional hug.
- Maintain your normal schedule and lifestyle. Encourage your ShinShin to participate as much as they can but recognize that they have incredibly busy schedules.
- Be open, sensitive, respectful, and keep all lines of communication open.
- Your ShinShin is family now, treat them as you would your own son or daughter.

Discussion Checklist

Kitchen, Food, and other general information

- Discuss the level of Kashrut (dietary laws) observance in the home, and the Kashrut observance of the ShinShin.
- If there is an allergy, explain to the ShinShin what is ok and what is not.
- Are there any particular meals during the week at which you would like the ShinShin to be home?
- What time is dinner? Does the family eat dinner together?
How do you want the ShinShin to communicate with you about their presence at dinner? By what time do they need to notify you if they will or will not be home for dinner?
- Is there anything the ShinShin would like you to buy in terms of food? Would they like to come with you to the supermarket to choose some of the food?
- Find out what foods the ShinShin likes/dislikes.
- What are the expectations regarding helping clear, loading the dishwasher, food consumption outside of the kitchen/dining area?
- Is the ShinShin welcome to go in the refrigerator/cupboards? Is there a system for 'reporting' food consumed for a shopping list?

It is important to show your guest around and explain particularities such as where spare towels and paper goods are kept, how appliances work etc. Remember that many of these young people have never lived in North America and there may be significant differences.

General Household Responsibilities

- How are household responsibilities divided in your house and what are your expectations of the ShinShin (laundry, garbage, general clothing, parking)?
- Is there someone employed in your home that does certain household tasks? If so, please describe that person's role.

Discussion Checklist continued

Scheduling and Communication

Please spend some time sharing and explaining household scheduling. If the ShinShin or the family's schedule changes weekly, please discuss how everyone will continue to update one another about schedule changes. Some issues to consider:

- What is the family schedule in the morning? How will the ShinShin fit into it? Please discuss the weekly time in your schedules that you will spend together. The ShinShinim are busy, and so **setting** this time in advance will be helpful.
- Do you have a family bulletin board for messages? Can you perhaps put calendar up on the fridge?
- What would be the best way to give updates and or communicate that they are invited to a meal at another family from the community?
- What is the easiest and most comfortable way to communicate a late-night arrival home? (If they are running later than 9 p.m.)
- What is the best way for the ShinShin to reach members of the family during the day – cell phone? Text? Etc.

Other Considerations

- What are the rules of your stereo, television, computer and internet usage, use of the cell phone during meals?
- If the house has an alarm and they trigger it by accident, who do they call?

General Safety

- List of emergency phone numbers should be available to ShinShin including contact info for the family. It must be posted in the host family home and provided to the CJL Program Director.
- Review the use of 911 as the first call in any emergency.

Discussion Checklist continued

Home Safety

- Home must have functioning smoke alarms.
- Make sure ShinShin understands home escape plan in the event of fire.
- Make sure ShinShin understands exits and functioning of locks and alarm system.
- Make sure ShinShin understands what to do if electricity goes out (flashlights, generator, etc.)

Kitchen Safety

- Make sure ShinShin understand how to properly and safely operate kitchen appliances including microwave, oven, and cooktop.
- Make sure ShinShin understands how to unplug or turn off appliances appropriately.
- Make sure ShinShin knows where the fire extinguisher is located and how to operate it.
- Discuss with ShinShin any restrictions on kitchen use if they are alone in the house.

Fireplace / Wood Burning Safety

- No ShinShin should operate a fireplace or wood burning stove in your home without host family supervision.

Bedroom Safety

- Make sure the ShinShin understands how to safely operate electric blankets, space heaters.
- NO candles, matches, lighters should be used in ShinShin bedroom. No smoking anywhere, anytime.
- Make sure ShinShinim knows what to do with personal trash.

Bathroom Safety

- Make sure the ShinShin understands how to safely operate any appliances in the bathroom.
- Make sure the ShinShin understands how to turn off water in the event of a plugged toilet.

Toda Raba תודה רבה

Once again, thank you for generously offering to host one of our ShinShinim. We are grateful to you for opening your home and hearts.

Host families play a vital role in the success of the ShinShinim Program. Host parents and siblings are supportive guides in helping the ShinShin navigate the transition to living and working in our community. The challenges your ShinShin may face include finding their place in a new group dynamic, refining their command of English, understanding and adapting to American culture and the local Jewish community. All of these challenges can be tempered by open and frank dialogue. When there are problems that seem institutional, please reach out immediately to the CJL Program Director at the J.

Similarly, if issues arise within your family, or with the ShinShin, being open and honest about thoughts and feelings is very important. Every community has a “backup family” who is available should unanticipated circumstances arise that make it necessary to consider moving the ShinShin to a different family. Contact the CJL Program Director or any of the other individuals listed under Contacts for assistance if needed.

We hope you find the information in this guide helpful. The J’s ShinShinim Program provides a rare gift to our community by giving community members of all ages the opportunity to develop a close personal relationship with Israelis and Israel.

Our past ShinShinim have shared that bonding with their host families was the highlight of their experience here. Likewise, past host families have shared that hosting a ShinShin in their home has been a joy for their family and has greatly enriched their lives and strengthened their connection with Israel. They feel that they have gained not only a new family member in their ShinShin but a whole new Israeli family as well. If you are selected to host, you will be asked for your thoughts and reflections on the experience. Host families provide important insights and your input will be greatly appreciated.

Host Family Policy Guide Acknowledgment

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the policies and guidelines presented in this Host Family Guidebook and the ShinShinim Guidelines which I have also received and I agree to abide by requirements set forth in both documents.

I also acknowledge and agree that our family will provide a warm, welcoming and secure home to our assigned ShinShin, and will host the ShinShin in accordance with the policies and guidance provided in this Host Family Guidebook.

Full Name of Host Parent 1 (Please print)

Signature

Date

Full Name of Host Parent 2, if applicable (Please Print)

Signature

Date

Letter from Ofri

Hey everyone! I'm so excited to come to Orange County and meet all of you!

My name is Ofri, I'm 18 years old, and I live in Moshav Ein Yahav, a small community in the desert in the south of Israel. It's a small place, but that's exactly what I love about it. I know almost everyone, and it really feels like being part of one big family and a strong community. The desert, the quiet, and the feeling of freedom are a big part of who I am.

I have a really big family. I'm the youngest with a lot of siblings, and I'm also an aunt .

For the past three years, I've been a counselor in my moshav's youth movement. I really love being a counselor, working with kids, creating activities, and building connections with them.

I really love to cook and bake, and I enjoy traveling in the desert with my friends

. My favorite food is either sushi or homemade food.

I'm so excited to meet you all and start this new experience together! 😊



Letter from Dror

Hi everyone!

I'm Dror and I'm super excited to come to Orange County and spend the year with y'all!
I've heard many great things about the community and can't wait to join you on this year's journey.

I'm from Petach Tikva, a big city in the center of Israel. Even though it is one of the biggest in our country, my neighborhood is very friendly and has a strong sense of community. Growing up, I've always loved spending time with my friends - whether playing sports like basketball and running, or just hanging out together.

I'm the middle child in our family; my older sister is 21 years old and works as a security officer at Ben Gurion Airport; she loves dancing and going to the theater. My younger brother is 14; he's in the Scouts just like me, loves watching F1 races, and playing computer games. My mother works as a payroll specialist in a cellular company named "WeCom" and my dad works as a developer at Apple. We also have a cute dog named Mishmish that we all love. Our home is always warm and alive! We eat together twice a day and we do cool stuff together a lot.

I went to Golda Meir High School, where I majored in law and cinema. Volunteering has always been a big part of my life. I served as president of the school's debate program, chairman of the student council for three years, competed in running races, and always looked for ways to support others.

Outside of school I was the chairman of Israel's national students and youth council, I represented the students in Israel in front of Members of Knesset (the Israeli parliament) and government ministers, spoke in the media, initiated national projects and did everything I could to support my peers during challenging times. I was a youth counselor in the Scouts for two years and volunteered in "Zicharon BaSallon" association, a holocaust remembrance initiative in homes and non-formal meetings.

Coming from my own background, I'm truly eager to immerse myself in yours. I'm not here just to teach or volunteer; I'm here to build real relationships, learn from everyone, and contribute whatever I can along the way.

Can't wait to meet you all!

Dror

