

CONVERTING A CHILD

Mazel Tov! Converting a child is a very happy occasion and is usually a great experience for families. The following are some helpful FAQs and guidelines about immersing a baby or a child.

Is the water warm?

The waters of the Adas Israel Community Mikvah are very warm, constantly filtered and slightly chlorinated. It is a lot like a Jacuzzi, just no jets.

Who goes in the mikvah?

A baby or a child may immerse with (only) one parent, who can say the two berachot for or with them. In the case of an adoption, either parent who is Jewish may immerse the child. In the case of a non-Jewish mother, the Jewish parent will immerse the child. If the parent who is not immersing wishes to participate in the mikvah, there is a brief handwashing ritual involving mikvah waters. If there is more than one child who is being converted on the same day from the same family, they will each have their own time in the mikvah. They will not be immersed at the same time. If a parent and a child are converting on the same day, the parent will immerse first.

How do we prepare for our immersion?

The parent is required to shower here and may wear a bathing suit. It is fine to take pictures of a child's conversion, as long as everyone consents. Children should be bathed before they come, although they will still have to take a shower when they arrive. It's a good idea to remove all jewelry, bandaids, nail polish and barrettes before coming here. For babies and toddlers, parents will wash the diaper area in the sink or the shower before entering the mikvah. We have gentle baby soap but you can bring your own.

How does a child immerse?

Babies less than one year old usually have a reflex that makes them take a deep breath when someone blows air in their face. ([Click here for a good explanation.](#)) This prevents them from getting water-logged.

Parents are often much more nervous about immersing their children than the children themselves. It is important to convey confidence and security to your child. Usually babies less than one year old don't mind being dunked. Children ages 1-3 sometimes squawk about it.

If a baby or child is cooperative, the rabbis generally ask for three dunks. If it causes too much distress, then one dunk may suffice. This is decided on a case-by-case basis.

If a child can swim and dunk on their own, but prefers that a parent is with them, the parent may shower, put on a bathing suit, and get in the water with the child. Older children often like it so much that they don't want to get out of the water when it's over!

In the case of an older child or a teenager who is concerned about their privacy, they may want a Jewish relative of the same gender to be their witness. That person will receive brief instructions about how to serve as a witness. The Rabbis only need to hear the immersions and the blessings from an outer room; they don't see anything that happens in the shower area or the mikvah itself.

What do we need to bring?

Please remember to bring a towel for the parent and a towel for the child. Everything else is provided for you. The suggested donation is \$72 per family. Please bring cash or a check. You can also bring (kosher) sweets or juice to make a L'Chaim when it is over.

** All conversions require the presence of a Rabbi and a Bet Din. Immersing a child in the mikvah is the last step in their conversion process. Immersing, on its own, does not constitute a valid conversion to Judaism and is not permitted until the formal process is complete. If you need assistance in finding a rabbi who will guide your family through this process, please contact us at 202-841-8776 or email us at mikvah@adasirael.org.*