

POLICIES

Dear Students MT 5785,

When you chose Midreshet Tehillah as your seminary, you elected to join a community of young women strongly committed to genuine, integrated, and sustainable growth. This affords you remarkable opportunities for development, but it brings with it responsibilities in terms of maintaining a group environment conducive to everyone achieving her goals.

We, the staff and administration, are challenged to set policies and rules to foster an atmosphere appropriate to achieving those goals. This requires that we set high standards to nurture your past accomplishments and inspire new achievements. But it also requires that we give you the space to be yourself. Since both are prerequisites to moving forward in a genuine and integrated way, our rules and policies are formulated to balance between these two considerations.

Music in the Dorm

Our policy on music in the dorm is a good example of trying to strike this balance. The importance of music and why it is such a powerful influence upon us will be a topic of discussion during the year. But we cannot and do not want to legislate what you listen to. On the other hand, each person has different tastes and draws the line marking what she will listen to at a different place. To protect both your needs as an individual and those of the people around you, we do not make any rules about what you can listen to so long as you are using headphones. On the other hand, we require that music played out loud must fall within the broad rubric of Jewish music.

Phones

In our many years of running Midreshet Tehillah, we can say without exception that the extent of a student's success during the year is directly proportional to her academic and social focus in the school. This fact was powerfully demonstrated three years ago. The restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus prevented students from spending time with their friends in other seminaries, confining the attention of our students to other students in Midreshet Tehillah and the program. The result was that deep friendships developed quickly and continued to mature over the year, attentiveness in class was at an all time high, and the personal and religious development of students was extraordinary. A number of seminaries had a similar experience that year. Our assumption is that next year you will not be restricted with those kinds of externally imposed limitations. This means that if you want to maximize your achievements, you will need to take personal responsibility for keeping your focus in Midreshet Tehillah.

For many students the biggest challenges to maintaining this focus come from the various devices that are standard equipment for any young adult. The most impactful of these devices is the phone. While offering many essential services and valuable benefits its access to YouTube, Netflix, Disney +, Apple TV, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, international texting, and gaming etc also place a multitude of escapes and distractions in the palm of your hand. The more your head is in these various things, the more it is out of seminary. Your phone, for all the genuine benefits it brings, will also be the single greatest technological challenge to a successful seminary year.

We will have lots of time to discuss the impact of phones on our lives, along with that of other technologies. But since app companies pour billions of dollars into designing their products to pull in and hold your attention, making this device work for you in the best possible sense will be challenging. You should not wait until you get to Israel to start thinking honestly about how you want to handle your phone so as to limit its ability to get in the way of your growth in the coming year.

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Expect some restrictions on where you can have your phone during school hours. If you expect to be recording shiurim, you might consider bringing a dedicated recording device that is separate from your phone.

Laptops and Tablets

Number two on the list of incredibly useful devices that can also be incredibly distracting is the personal computer/tablet. For this reason in the past we have prohibited them in the dorms. That no longer seems like a realistic rule as for many students laptops or tablets have become fully integrated into their lives.

So you are welcome to bring your computer or tablet with you. But, like the phone, if you plan to bring one you need to put some thought into the pitfalls this device adds as well as its benefits. While watching video on your phone is already a temptation it is all the more tempting when you have a large computer screen on which to watch. A primary reason for coming to Eretz Yisrael is to get out of old ways of thinking and open yourself to new ways of looking at the world. Since nothing more powerfully pulls one out of Torah and back into the norms and values of the larger society than a movie, television show, or video we encourage students to minimize watching video at least during their year in seminary.

It is not just how watching video affects you individually. Cliques tend to form around watching programs which create tensions in the dorm and compromise its integration. We want the dorm to be a safe zone where students who want to avoid video feel comfortable. It is important that you give thought to these considerations before coming to Israel.

We have a laptop gemach for students who want to do projects or take notes in class so you might consider not bringing your laptop/tablet.

Dress Code

Midreshet Tehillah students come from communities with a variety of standards on the issue of dress. Since we want all our students to feel comfortable in the school, we require certain conduct which may be different from what you are used to. By requiring these standards, we are not imposing a specific halachic interpretation of Tzniut. Rather, we are defining the dress code of Midreshet Tehillah. It is important that you understand that by attending Midreshet Tehillah, you are accepting an obligation to abide by this dress code during the school year just as you are accepting an obligation to abide by all the other rules.

Our dress code put simply is: elbows, neckline, and knees must be covered, along with everything in between, including the waist, with no slits in the skirts or dresses. This is true at all times, whether walking, sitting, or raising your hand. Clothing should not be tight or overly clingy. Shoes should be closed-toe. Since, necessarily, while you are attending the school you will be representing it, the dress code applies both in school and out for the duration of the academic year. For a number of the students attending Midreshet Tehillah this dress code goes beyond their accustomed practice and that of their home communities. But as long as we are all clear on why we have set this particular standard, no one needs to feel judged by it or out of place.

If you have any questions on anything discussed in this letter – or anything else, for that matter – feel free to contact us. We are very excited about the group of students coming and we look forward to spending a wonderful, fun, inspiring, and meaningful year together!