

Setting up a Shiva House

In our community, it is the custom for friends or other members of the community to set up a house for shiva so that family members do not have to deal with it and so that the house is set up when the family returns from the gravesite. This is typically done during the funeral or immediately after the funeral when the family has gone to the cemetery, unless it is a graveside funeral, in which case set up is done while the family is at the cemetery. Having said that, it is also important to work with the family as they may have particular preferences about what should be done.

Typically, one or two people coordinate the shiva, including getting the necessary items, arranging for or setting up and cleaning up, and arranging for dinner for the family for the week of shiva. WJC's Bikur Cholim committee may also be able to provide a meal. Please contact Cindy Heller at rjh613@aol.com or Mindy Feldman mindyfeldman@me.com.

For halachic information about sitting shiva, please contact Rabbi Arnowitz at rja@wjcenter.org or Rabbi Dalton at rabbidalton@wjcenter.org.

There are several aspects to setting up a shiva house:

To Purchase: The following items are recommended for a basic shiva set up. The person coordinating the shiva and others helping out should also keep an eye on supplies so that they can be replenished, if needed.

- ♦ Sugar (for coffee & tea)
- ♦ Sweet and Low/Equal/ (one box)
- ♦ Decaf coffee
- ♦ Decaf tea (box of tea bags)
- ♦ Sodas
- ♦ Milk (usually 1 or 2%)
- ♦ Non-Dairy Creamer
- ♦ Cups (plastic recommended)
- ♦ Hot Cups (make sure they are marked as hot cups)
- ♦ Dessert Plates
- ♦ Spoons
- ♦ Dinner Plates for the family for the week.
- ♦ Plastic utensils for the family for the week
- ♦ Napkins
- ♦ Plastic wrap, aluminum foil, zip loc bags (for leftovers) – family may have but make sure you have enough) and large garbage bags.
- ♦ Paper hand towels for bathroom

To Bring: (The family may have some of these items and ask you/offer to you to use their things.)

Two coffee urns (coffee & hot water)

Plastic pitcher & bowl/paper towels*

Hard Boiled Eggs (a dozen is usually enough)*

Covers for Mirrors (sheets/towels)*

Post it Notes: to mark meat & dairy cabinets/drawers in kosher kitchens where other people will be helping out.

* The plastic pitcher and bowl is to place outside the door for those who have been at the graveside to wash before coming into the house. Hard-boiled eggs are traditionally available as the first thing for family members to eat when they return from the cemetery, as they are a symbol of life. Mirrors are traditionally covered since the focus of shiva should not be on vanity. Please note: Some people may choose not to engage in these customs so please be respectful of individual requests.

Arrange for House Key

Preparing the House

- Check on the family's Kashrut requirements before bringing any food into the home.
- Cover mirrors on first floor. It is not necessary to do other areas of house.
- Confirm that prayer books and chairs have been arranged through WJC and will be at the home in time for the evening minyan at 7:45pm.
- It is helpful to have a basket with kippot by the front door for those who may come for minyan without a kippah. If the family does not have kippot for this purpose, please contact the office.
- Set-up one room, usually the living room for minyan. This typically means making sure the books and chairs are there. Please do not rearrange the furniture without the permission of the family.
- Confirm that the funeral home will provide a yartzheit candle (funeral homes usually do provide candles). If you are attending the funeral, you might take a moment to ask one of the funeral home staff.
- You can also ask the funeral home if they have a sign in book but before you put it out, ask a family member if they would like it out.
- Fill the pitcher with water and place outside the front door with the bowl and a roll of paper towels. Find a small garbage pail to use for the paper towels or use a small plastic bag.
- Ensure that a meal has been arranged for the family to eat upon their return from the cemetery. Whoever is providing the meal or the shiva coordinator should enquire as to whether they prefer meat or dairy. The hard-boiled eggs should be available at this meal.
- If food is being delivered, make sure that someone is there to receive the food. Someone in the family may have ordered the food so be sure to check.

- The dining room or dining area should initially be set up for the meal for the family upon returning from the cemetery. This should then be turned into a buffet area unless the buffet (fruits and desserts that people bring) can be set up somewhere else or the family has another area in which they prefer to eat.
- Set up 2 coffee urns. One should be for hot water and one for decaf coffee. It is not necessary to regular coffee. If you do not know how to make coffee in an urn, make sure someone does or that you have the instructions. Tea bags, sugar, sugar substitute, milk, and non-dairy creamer and hot cups should be set up near the urns. Please remember that it is almost impossible to plug 2 urns into the same outlet without blowing a fuse.) Place a small bowl near the urns for trash (tea bags, sugar packets, etc.)
- Set up soda & cold cups, ice if possible.
- Set up napkins, forks, spoons, dessert plates, etc. If the area being used for this is the same as the dining area, you'll have to set this up after the family eats.
- Depending on the weather, arrange for coat rack/hangars.
- Put paper hand towels in bathroom on first floor.

Other tips:

Try to be as helpful and unobtrusive as possible.

Keep the kitchen clean. It will make life easier for you and other people helping out and for the family. Bring garbage to wherever the family keeps garbage before pick up time.

Please note: This guide is a work in progress. If you have any ideas/information that you think should be added to this guide, please email it to info@wjcenter.org