

Tips from Students for Going Back to School

August 17, 2022

By Is Perlman and Sawyer Goldsmith

Is Perlman (they/them) is a trans, Jewish, Asian-American, and neurodivergent artist, poet, theatre-maker, and student at Columbia University in New York. They are passionate about the intersections of queer liberation, arts accessibility, and empowering people of color in Jewish spaces.



Born and raised in the Chicago suburbs, Sawyer (they/them) now identifies as a full-time New Yorker. A student at Hunter College, Sawyer is studying Education and Jewish Studies. Being involved with Keshet since 2017, they are thrilled to be on their third year on Keshet staff as Youth Programs Intern. When not working or at school, Sawyer, 98% of the time, will be with their dog Trixie and will show you pictures of her, even if you didn't request them.



As LGBTQ+ Jewish folks, we deserve to always feel affirmed and celebrated for who we are in all spaces, including at school. As you head back to school, **here are some tips from Keshet's youth interns to help you feel safe and proud of who you are.**

1 Email your teachers your name and pronouns before the school year starts, if they're different from what might be on the roster. It's also okay to wait and see what your teacher is like in-person before you email them, if safety is a concern.

Here's an example of what you can send:

Dear (teacher's name),
I am a student in your (class). I am contacting you to let you know that I identify as (identity). My name will probably show up on your roster as (legal name), but I actually go by (chosen name) and use (pronouns) pronouns. I will be putting (chosen name) on my assignments and would appreciate it if you call me that in class. If you have any questions for me regarding this, please don't hesitate to contact me. My email address is (email address) and my phone number is (phone number).

Thank you very much for your understanding,
(chosen name)

2 If you're new to the school, **try to connect with other older students to ask them about their best practices/school culture.** Plus, you never know what friendships you can make along the way!

3 **Explore school clubs that might be safer and affirming spaces.** You can most likely find clubs listed on your school's website, and you can reach out to the teacher sponsor or student leaders to learn more.

4 **Check in with a guidance counselor or another trusted adult at the school** to explore different ways you can feel supported and affirmed, including access to gender-neutral bathrooms and facilities (keep in mind that some schools require administrative permission).

5 **Make sure you pack lunch and have water on hand.** Taking care of your physical needs is super important for your mental and emotional health.

6 If you bind or tuck, **consider taking proactive breaks for yourself throughout the day** and avoiding tucking/binding when you have PE or scheduled physical exercise.

7 **Set up some self-care rituals** that you can partake in after school. School days can be pretty exhausting and you deserve the space to be kind to yourself!

8 If your school offers an open house before the year begins, **check around for:**

- **Gender neutral facilities** (e.g., bathrooms, changing rooms, locker rooms)
- **LGBTQ+ Safe Zone signage** (or other LGBTQ+-affirming signage)

9 If your school doesn't have uniforms, **plan out a fun and affirming outfit** that feels both empowering and comfortable.

10 **Bring any comfort objects with you that you find calming** (e.g., fidget/stim toys, stuffed animals, etc.). The first day back can be hectic and stressful and it's never a bad idea to equip yourself with calming tools!

11 Create a mini-support plan in case you need to reach out to someone immediately or shortly after school if you need support. [The Trevor Project](#) is a fantastic free resource that allows you to confidentially text, chat, or call with a crisis counselor 24/7, 365 days a year.

12 Familiarize yourself with your school's policies about bullying (from both students and teachers) and who you can reach out to for help if there are any issues.

If you attend a Jewish school:

1 Check in with your school's head rabbi about what ritual items might be required and what feels good for you.

- ✓ For trans masc folks, consider starting slow with wearing just a *tallit*/prayer shawl or *kippah*/*yarmulke*/head covering and then moving onto [tefillin](#) (if your school requires men to wear such items).
- ✓ For trans femme folks, do what feels most comfortable for you when it comes to how you present yourself.

2 If you attend a school that uses Hebrew often in the classroom, **consider utilizing some words that refer to a group of people without defaulting to assumptions of masculine presence** (e.g., *kehillah* / community, *mishpachah* / family, or *tzibur* / group).

3 Speak with your school's head rabbi about implementing gender-inclusive rituals. For example, Fort Tryon Jewish Center has created an informative and useful [All Gender Torah Service Liturgy](#) that can be utilized during services.