ESTIE THE MENSCH
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Estie does not always know how to be around other people and sometimes when her grandmother reminds her to be a mensch, she’d rather not. She’d prefer to be a turtle or a seagull. Eventually, something happens that shows her grandmother and Estie herself what a mensch the girl can really be.

In Estie the Mensch, Estie spends time experimenting with ways to be comfortable with herself and others. How clever of Estie to take on the persona of various animals to explore the person that she wants to become. Each child takes a different path to self-discovery, and each makes that journey in a different way, and on a different timetable. For Estie, this journey to self-discovery takes place through the animals that she personifies. Ultimately, it is through her play that Estie realizes what a mensch she can truly be. As parents we can see Estie as an example of the incredible ways in which children’s play can lead to self-discovery.

CELEBRATING ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Jewish tradition teaches that we are all b’zelem Elohim—made in God’s image. All children deserve to know and feel that they are a unique blessing to the world. We communicate this fact when we celebrate our children and the wonderful—sometimes miraculous—things they achieve. We offer a gift by acknowledging our children when they answer the phone politely, remember to feed the family pet, offer to take a bath, spontaneously help clear the dinner table, control their temper in a difficult situation, or take their medication without complaint. Whatever your children’s achievements, recognize them by posting a notice on the refrigerator, mentioning the accomplishment to family and friends when your children can “overhear,” or reading an extra book together in the evening.

BE A MENSCH
Estie is asked repeatedly to be a mensch, a Yiddish word that means a kind, responsible person. Her family is requesting that Estie behave with derech eretz, a Hebrew phrase referring to appropriate ways of behaving toward other people and the world. Like Estie, we all learn about life from our experiences and from observing others, especially those we love. Our children notice, remember, and learn when they see others:

- Act politely to wait staff in a restaurant and the clerk in a post office
- Thank the person who cooked breakfast
- Greet neighbors and relatives or give directions to someone who’s lost
- Invite a lonely person to a Shabbat meal
- Send a card for a friend’s birthday
- Share our ice cream!