

Understanding and Talking About:
Antisemitism
Let's Talk: Building Bridges Through Conversation

INTRODUCTION

In a world where understanding and empathy are more crucial than ever, it's essential to engage in open, honest conversations about sensitive topics like antisemitism and other forms of hate. As adults, it's our responsibility to guide children through these discussions, fostering empathy, awareness, and respect for diversity.



WHY DIALOGUE MATTERS?

Understanding Complex Issues: Antisemitism, racism, and other forms of hate are complex topics that children may struggle to comprehend. Dialogue provides an opportunity to unpack these issues in age-appropriate ways, helping children grasp their significance and impact.

Promoting Empathy: By engaging in dialogue, we can encourage children to empathize with those who have experienced discrimination and prejudice. Through shared stories and experiences, children can develop a deeper appreciation for diversity and the importance of standing up against hate.

Empowering Critical Thinking: Dialogue encourages critical thinking skills as children learn to question stereotypes, challenge biases, and explore different perspectives. These skills are essential for fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society.

TIPS FOR MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE

- **Create a Safe Space:** Establish an environment where children feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and asking questions without fear of judgment.
- **Listen Actively:** Practice active listening by giving children your full attention and validating their feelings and concerns.
- **Be Honest and Age-Appropriate:** Tailor the conversation to the child's age and maturity level, providing honest yet age-appropriate information.
- **Encourage Reflection:** Encourage children to reflect on their own experiences with prejudice and discrimination, fostering self-awareness and empathy.
- **Lead by Example:** Model respectful communication and empathy in your interactions with others, demonstrating the values you wish to instill in children.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

We invite you to join us in creating a dialogue that promotes understanding, empathy, and acceptance. Together, we can empower children to stand up against hate and build a more inclusive future for all. Let's start talking and paving the way for a brighter tomorrow.

DEFINING ANTISEMITISM

- 1** Antisemitism, the hatred of the Jews, is thousands of years old dating back at least to the time of the ancient Greeks. It has taken many different forms, changing to reflect the key preoccupations and fears of the age. In the Middle Ages, Jews were falsely blamed for the death of Jesus. During the 18th and 19th Centuries, conspiracy theories circulated blaming the Jews for the economic, social, and political upheaval associated with modernization. In the Twentieth Century, the Nazis used racial theories to cast Jews as subhuman, blaming them for all the ills of society. No matter the nature of the grievances, Jews have been a useful scapegoat throughout history. And the consequences have been perilous. At a minimum, Jews were rendered second-class citizens and denied the basic rights in society. At the maximum, they lived in constant fear, subject to expulsion, brutal violence, and death.
- 2** Despite the changing shape of antisemitism, there has been one constant in the hatred: antisemitism has focused on the prime form of Jewish collective existence in that particular era. While in the Middle Ages, Jews were principally a religious community and in the 19th Century they were seen as an ethnic group, today their primary collective embodiment is as the people of Israel in the state of Israel. When the Jewish state of Israel is demonized and delegitimized with the intent of wiping it (and Israelis) off the face of the map, this is a 21st-century manifestation of antisemitism. Jews today are hated for their right to exist collectively as Jews in the state of Israel.
- 3** Because it can take so many forms, it is not easy to capture antisemitism in a brief definition. Yet, it is vital to have a working definition so that antisemitic speech and acts can be identified and called out.
- 4** The State of Florida, to ensure that our schools can combat all forms of antisemitism wherever and whenever they occur, has adopted a definition of antisemitism that applies to K-20 public education. This definition, which can be found in s.1000.05(8), F.S. closely mirrors the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition.
- 5** The IHRA definition, adopted in 2016, was the product of an international consensus built to capture the particular nature of antisemitism in the 21st century. By the end of 2022, 1100 global entities, including a diverse array of international institutions and organizations, national and local governments, NGOs, universities and corporations had adopted the definition as a framework for tackling antisemitism.

WHAT DOES ANTISEMITISM LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Antisemitism may involve classic historical stereotypes or tropes or hostile actions that take, for example, the following forms:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews, often in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective, especially, but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, the State of Israel, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Accusing Jews as a people or the State of Israel of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interest of their own nations.
- Demonizing Israel by using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism to characterize Israel or Israelis, drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis, or blaming Israel for all inter-religious or political tensions.
- Applying a double standard to Israel by requiring behavior of Israel that is not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation or focusing peace or human rights investigations only on Israel.
- Delegitimizing Israel by denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination and denying Israel the right to exist.

These are only a few examples of the expression of hate against the Jewish people, known as antisemitism. However, criticism of Israel that is similar to criticism toward any other country may not be regarded as anti-Semitic*.

* The information on this page is taken from the 2023 Florida Statutes.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERMINOLOGY

We should all be able to sense when we are using damaging stereotypes or promoting hatred against another group. No group should be stereotyped or defined in such negative terms. All students and school employees have the right to feel safe and free from discrimination in their school environment.

But sometimes we may inadvertently engage in antisemitic behavior simply because we don't know the meaning of the words or understand the narrative that we are expounding. Thus, it is essential to educate oneself both on the history of antisemitism and the history of the Arab-Israel conflict. Both these "histories" span centuries and they are complex and frequently controversial.

However, some terms and concepts can be defined quite simply. One useful resource is a short pamphlet on *Understanding Modern Day Antisemitism* produced by Shine a Light on Antisemitism. It addresses such questions as: What is Antisemitism? What is Zionism? Why does Antisemitism Persist? Their website also has an FAQ section.

TEACHING RESOURCE EXAMPLES



- 1** Anti-Defamation League Challenging Antisemitism: Debunking the Myths and Responding with Facts: These two lesson plans provide students with a basic understanding of Judaism and the cultural, historical, and religious aspects of the US Jewish community (Lesson for Grades 3–6) and offer facts to refute antisemitic myths and stereotypes so that young people can effectively respond to antisemitic incidents in their schools and communities (Lesson for Grades 8–12).
- 2** United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Teaching Materials on the Holocaust: These lesson plans introduce key concepts and information to students. Grounded in historical context, the lessons utilize primary source materials from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collections.
 - Overview of the Holocaust (2-Day Lesson) - Lesson for Grades 9-12
 - History of Antisemitism and the Holocaust - Lesson for Grades 7-12
 - Nazi Racism - Lesson for Grades 9-12
- 3** Facing History and Ourselves Responding To Rising Antisemitism: In this Teaching Idea, students learn about the rising number of antisemitic incidents in the United States and then explore how one teacher responded when she heard about an antisemitic incident involving high school students in her community (Grades 8-12)

- 4** Institute for Curriculum Services Content-based professional development for English and Social Studies teachers. Courses include “Understanding the American Jewish Experience,” “Primary Sources and Media Literacy,” “History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” and Holocaust-related subjects. The ICS has also produced a brief Glossary using accurate definitions and historical background to answer some students’ questions about the Hamas-Israel war, <https://icsresources.org/wp-content/uploads/IsraelHamasGlossary.pdf> (Grades 8-12)

Finally, some excellent short video resources define the terms and explain a little of the history. For example, there is an “unpacked” video website that could be useful:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCU63EiU7Y-8xcR ntPIR Vrz A>

Specifically, the new short videos on the Hamas-Israel war help understand the conflict: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgAq-9_4Rz s (Grades 9-12)

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Antisemitism persists as a troubling reality in our world, but as educators and caregivers, we have the power to combat it through education, awareness, and fostering a culture of empathy and respect. Here are some actionable steps you can take when talking to students about antisemitism:

1 EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

- Teach students about the history of antisemitism, including its origins, manifestations, and consequences.
- Explore the cultural, religious, and historical significance of Judaism, promoting understanding and appreciation for Jewish heritage and contributions to society.

2 PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING

- Encourage students to question stereotypes and challenge misinformation about Jewish people and culture.
- Provide opportunities for critical analysis of media portrayals and historical narratives related to antisemitism, emphasizing the need to speak out and speak up against falsehoods and biases.
- Encourage students to be critical thinkers when viewing social media and to fact-check everything before sharing, to prevent the spread of misinformation.

3 FOSTER EMPATHY AND RESPECT

- Create a safe and inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued and respected, regardless of their background or beliefs.

- Promote empathy by encouraging students to consider the impact of their words and actions on others, fostering a sense of solidarity and compassion.

4 ADDRESS BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION

- Be vigilant in addressing instances of antisemitic language, jokes, or behavior in the classroom, emphasizing the importance of respectful communication and mutual understanding.
- Empower students to speak out against antisemitism and other forms of hate, providing them with the tools and support they need to be allies for change.

5 PROMOTE POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

- Highlight the stories of Jewish leaders, activists, and changemakers who have worked to combat antisemitism and promote human rights and equality.
- Emphasize the value of allyship and solidarity in sustaining and strengthening democracy.

Together, we can make a difference in countering antisemitism and fostering a culture of inclusivity, acceptance, understanding, and respect in our schools and communities.

We have an insightful infographic that demonstrates how to deal with antisemitism [here](#).

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