

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

As we continue to navigate the current situation in Israel and Gaza, as well as around the world with the rise in antisemitism, we want to validate the wide range of mental, physical and emotional reactions you may be going through. While many of us share a strong connection to Israel, we need to be sensitive to the different feelings and experiences people have had since October 7, 2023. Conversations around the situation in Israel will naturally arise with individuals in your life. This resource offers ways to think about how to have these difficult conversations.

גְבוּרָה G'VURAH

SELF AND COMMUNAL EFFICACY

The key to engaging in hard conversations is to come from a place of listening and openness. Too often we jump to a conclusion or think we know what will “fix” a situation. It is possible to exist as one community while holding different beliefs and experiences. There are times when judgment, discernment, limitations and boundaries are essential.

Understanding how trauma affects us.

What is trauma?

Trauma is a “deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual’s ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness and diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences.” (<https://integratedlistening.com/blog/what-is-trauma/>) What is traumatic or distressing for one person might not be the same for someone else. (<https://www.apa.org/topics/disasters-response/recovering>)



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What is the impact of a traumatic event?

Traumatic events affect people in both physical and emotional ways. These symptoms vary widely from person to person and might not occur in predictable ways. If they become severe, they can develop into post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or other mental illnesses. Symptoms may appear quickly, or they may surprise us later on.

([The Blue Dove Foundation “Jewish Mental Wellness Toolkit”](#))

What is second-hand trauma, and how does it affect us?

A person does not have to experience a traumatic event directly to suffer from these symptoms. When this occurs, it is called secondary or second-hand trauma. The symptoms are just as real and significant as if someone experienced the event themselves. Even the threat of a traumatic event occurring or hearing someone share their traumatic experience can be enough to trigger the symptoms. Individuals with a history of trauma can be more sensitive to current trauma.

[Conversations about Israel will naturally occur with individuals in your life.](#) We have all had different experiences and reactions as the situation there has unfolded. Many people have had traumatic responses to the violence, and as it continues, the way people cope continues to change. As you engage in difficult conversations, you need to understand your personal boundaries and biases. The way you respond to young people or individuals you don't know as well will be different than how you respond to your peers. In all conversations, it is important to provide space to listen and know when it's time to pause the conversation.



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What are boundaries?

Boundaries ([UC Davis Health](#)) are limits we identify for ourselves and apply through our actions or communication. Setting boundaries allows us to feel secure and healthy in our relationships at work and home and can look different ways.

- Physical boundary: Feeling uncomfortable hugging a person you just met or standing a couple feet away when you speak to someone face to face.
- Verbal boundary: Asking someone who seems upset to lower their voice when speaking to you or asking not to speak about a particular topic in a specific setting.
- Workplace boundary: Having a limit to how many personal details you want to share about your life.



Use this worksheet to
think about your
boundaries.

- When discussing the situation in Israel...
 - What are your rigid boundaries? How will you know you need to take a break and stop the conversation?
 - What are your flexible boundaries? How will you actively listen and engage during these conversations?
 - These boundaries look different with young people and your peers. What will your boundaries look like when you're engaging in conversation with young people? With your peers?
 - How will you know when you've pushed someone else's boundaries and they are no longer comfortable? What will you do?
 - What will you do when a conversation comes up at an inappropriate or inopportune time?



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Remember

- Everyone's experience is different; it is important to respect what others' experiences have been.
- Listen; in order to engage in these difficult conversations, we need to listen to each other openly and kindly.
- You're not alone; know who you can turn to when you need support.

Additional Resources

[A Jewish Guide to Supporting Individuals Through Traumatic Death](#)



NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WORKSHEET: BOUNDARIES

“When you set a boundary correctly, you should hear pushback. It is a statement of having heard us.” – Dr. Betsy Stone

- Setting and sticking to boundaries can be uncomfortable.
- We have different kinds of boundaries - rigid boundaries and flexible boundaries. The things that fall into these categories may change over time and situations. We also each have things we want to set boundaries around, but may not have done so yet.
- Setting and holding to boundaries is good modeling. We get to be whole people with different feelings, opinions, and experiences.

On the other side of this paper:

- Use the space inside the middle circle to write down the boundaries that are strict for you personally.
- Use the space inside the dotted line to write down the boundaries that may be more flexible.
- Use the space on the outside of the circles to list the boundaries you’re not sure about or are working on setting.



NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WORKSHEET: BOUNDARIES

