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SYNAGOGUES IN ACTION
AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

ADL recorded 2,717 antisemitic incidents in 2021—a 34% increase from the 2,026 incidents tabulated in 2020 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. Overall, a larger proportion of antisemitic incidents targeted Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, Jewish community centers and Jewish schools. Discussing these disturbing trends with children and young people can be challenging, but these conversations are necessary. As a Kulanu synagogue, you will have the opportunity to have these conversations about antisemitism and other forms of bigotry and cultivate the tools to fight them with young people.

This resource from [ADL's education experts](#) and the [BBYO Center for Adolescent Wellness](#) is intended to enable adults—educators and parents/caregivers—to initiate conversations with young people about antisemitism and other forms of hate, and to safeguard youth mental health while tackling these difficult topics.

Defining Antisemitism

What is antisemitism?

Defining antisemitism is important to ensure each individual has the same understanding of this term, and a grasp of its meaning prior to diving into a deeper conversation.

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

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Creating the Space

- Set ground rules to create a **brave** space where it feels safe to discuss antisemitism.
 - Help young people feel secure in discussing antisemitism, validate their experience and center affirming their identity and encourage them to challenge.
 - In a classroom or group, bravery goes both ways—giving and receiving. This means taking a risk to say something that is difficult or scary. It is also brave to listen fully and hear hard things that people may tell you.
 - A brave space is one in which we accept that we will feel uncomfortable and maybe even defensive when exploring issues of antisemitism, bias, injustice and oppression.
 - A brave space is one in which we take risks, doing so with care and compassion.
- Acknowledge that antisemitism is a challenging and emotional topic.
 - Antisemitism is a topic that can bring up negative emotions for many young people.
 - Acknowledge the difficulty of the topic to discuss but provide framing and context for the reasons why it is important to discuss antisemitism.
- Review the roles in bullying situations and other relevant definitions (target, ally, aggressor, bystander, antisemitism, prejudice, and discrimination) from [ADL's Education Glossary Terms](#).
 - It is important to build common language by which the group can discuss antisemitism and oppression.
 - [ADL's Education Glossary](#) provides definitions for many of these words that are essential for discussing antisemitism.

Guide the Conversation

- Tap into prior knowledge, but don't expect it.
 - Some young people may have an understanding of antisemitism, but even for adults antisemitism is a challenging topic to understand all of the nuances.



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- Help create a space that encourages young people to share their knowledge but does not assume knowledge from the entire group.
- Make sure to define terms and translate Hebrew text unless the group is entirely fluent in Hebrew.
- Be honest about what you know and don't know and research answers together with your group.
- The ADL is here to support you and you can always reach out for assistance.
- Embrace Jewish Identity.
 - It is important to balance narratives of oppression with narratives of resilience, resistance, beauty, perseverance and joy.
 - Jewish identity should not be defined wholly by the hatred that exists against them; thus, centering Jewish voices both in the past and present.
 - It is important to include inclusive narratives of Jews, representative of Jewish intersectionality and Jewish ethnic diversity .
- Examine Antisemitism as a False Projection.
 - Antisemitism is a construct of the non-Jewish imagination, rather than a true reflection of the Jewish people.
 - Antisemitism is not merely a set of tropes but manifestations that exist in varying scopes and scales that continue to impact the lives of Jews and non-Jews, both as victims and as those who wield it as a tool.
 - Young people should explore antisemitism beyond the Holocaust, especially its impact in modern, pluralistic societies throughout the world.
- Don't be Afraid of Discussing Zionism, Israel or anti-Zionism.
 - Zionism is often misunderstood due to its wide negative use by anti-Zionist organizations and those opposed to Israel.
 - Zionism is the movement for the self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel.
 - The vast majority of Jews around the world feel a connection or kinship with Israel, whether or not they explicitly identify as Zionists, and regardless of their opinions on the policies of the Israeli government.

- Zionism is a big tent movement that includes those across the spectrum from progressives, moderates and conservatives and those who are apolitical. There are Zionists who are critical of Israeli policies, just as there are Zionists who rarely voice disagreement with the Israeli government. There are diverse views among Zionists about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, about how to promote peace, whether to support a two-state solution, and about approaches to Israeli settlements. Being critical of Israeli policies is no more anti-Zionist than being critical of American policies is anti-American.
- Zionism does not preclude support for Palestinian self-determination and statehood. For some Zionists, support for a two-state solution is the realization of self-determination for Jews and Palestinians alike.
- In order to truly be able to discuss the conflict, avoid oversimplification which only leads to stereotyping and bias.
- The best way to do that is to read a variety of informed sources from many perspectives.
- Avoid extreme voices on both sides – be wary of those who exclusively or overwhelmingly blame one group for the tensions in the region.
- You can express strong opposition to specific actions without invoking extreme terms such as "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing." These and similar terms are not accurate descriptions of the conflict in the Middle East; to levy these charges trivializes historical and modern-day atrocities and exacerbates tensions and the potential for violence.
- Accept that every Jewish person has their own experience and perspective, and they may differ widely.
- Ask and listen to how individuals define their identity as Jewish people, Israeli people, or Zionists. Identity is complicated, and not everyone identifies in the same way.
- Explore Antisemitism Intersectionally.
 - Help young people to examine antisemitism over the 4i's of oppression – interpersonal, internalized, ideological and institutional.
 - This framing helps young people to comprehend antisemitism as part of a matrix of oppression.
 - This framing helps young people to understand how antisemitism functions within broader psycho-social, political and legal dynamics.

- This will allow young people to apprehend antisemitism in its particularity, and its commonality with other forms of oppression and its interplay therewith.

Note: Some young people who have learned about the Holocaust will hyperfocus on Holocaust history. It's important to remember that antisemitism did not begin or end with the Holocaust. For these young people, this conversation should serve to broaden their understanding of antisemitism as a more complex and enduring ideology.

Educate and Act

- Honor questions and opinions.
 - Create a space that is inclusive of questions and differences of opinion.
 - Rephrase or reflect what your young adults say to confirm that you understand them.
- Allow for independent reflection time.
 - Reflection activities such as drawing, or writing allow young people time to process the conversation and pose any further questions they have.
- Inspire Hope and Activism.
 - When we discuss antisemitism with young people, it's important we don't leave them with overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and despair.
 - It can easily happen when you consider the monumental task of making the world more equitable and just.
 - At the same time, we don't want to fill their heads with false or empty hope.
 - It is useful to convey a sense of hope that sustains positive expectations and inspires action and activism.



Youth Mental, Emotional, and Social Health When Discussing Difficult Topics

Drew Fidler, Director of the BBYO Center for Adolescent Wellness

Often, when we discuss difficult topics, it can bring up mental and emotional challenges for the youths in the room. Sometimes we know in advance of challenges that can impact the room, but other times youth are triggered or affected without us knowing. How can you recognize if a youth may be struggling and respond in a positive and supportive way?

Signs that a youth is struggling:

- Signs of sadness and/or withdrawal
- Become easily frustrated
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Expressing anger or frustration during sessions
- Extreme mood swings or irritability
- Avoidance of subject matter
- Consistent absence from sessions or chronic lateness
- Significant changes in sleeping habits
- Not eating, throwing up, or using laxatives to lose weight
- Sudden, overwhelming fear and/or avoiding certain environments, situations, or social interactions altogether
- Self-harming (cutting or burning) behaviors

*If a youth is threatening to hurt or kill themselves or others, or struggling with suicidal thoughts, it is important to **get help immediately – call 911, a local mobile crisis unit, parents, and/or the national suicide prevention lifeline.** Additionally, your legal and ethical responsibilities should always guide your response and next steps.*



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How Can You Help?

- **Approach**
Consider your relationship to the youth - are you the right person to address these concerns or is there someone else who has a relationship that might make the youth more comfortable and likely to open up. When and how you are going to approach them? In a quiet space, that is convenient for you both and is still appropriate, observable, and interruptible.
- **Ask questions and describe what you've seen.**
Ask "how are you," "what has been going on," "tell me about how you are feeling," or tell them the behaviors or actions you have seen - "I've noticed that..." or "I have seen." Focus on questions or statements that are non-judgmental or accusatory and are compassionate and understanding. Let them express in their own words what is happening and how they are feeling. Listen non-judgmentally and let them know you are there to support them.
- **Offer reassurance and information**
You cannot force them to change or problem solve; instead focus on understanding what they are feeling and thinking. Tell them: "This sounds really hard, and I am here for you," "Your feelings are valid," "How can I support you right now," and "I care about you." Is there additional information you can provide that may help them process and be willing to connect to help?
- **Connect to help**
We cannot be a youth's therapist or make promises that we won't tell anyone. If a youth is struggling it is our responsibility to say something and get them help. Sharing information can be a key resource in getting a youth help. Who can help this youth and who needs to know to keep them safe – other staff who interact with the youth, parents, or even a therapist?

Key Things to Remember

The biggest factor in building resiliency is having one safe, supportive adult.



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If you see a significant change in behavior, sign that a youth is struggling, or have a concern, say something. You can help connect a youth with hotline information, a local drop-in center, support network or group, or even help connect them with a local therapist. Look back at “How You Can Help” for ways to talk and support.

You are not alone. Reach out to parents and/or other staff for help. It takes more than just you to help and support a youth. Be a bridge to help. Activate their network to support them.

Hotlines and Resources:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

Call or Text 988

Crisis Text Line:

Text from anywhere in the US or Canada to text with a trained Crisis Counselor.

Text “Home” to 741741 in U.S.

Text “Home” to 686868 in Canada

Trevor Project:

Leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ youth.

Call 1-866-488-7386

Text START to 678678



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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline (SAMHSA):

A free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

Call 1-800-662-4357

The National Eating Disorders Association Helpline:

The largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders. Provides support, resources, and treatment options for yourself or a loved one.

Call 1-800-931-2237

Local Child Protective Services: _____

Local Mobile Crisis Unit: _____

Local Jewish Family Services: _____



The BBYO Center for Adolescent Wellness ensures that youth-serving organizations (YSOs) are places where all adolescents thrive. Our team has developed the tools, resources, and training to support YSOs in making this possible. Learn more at <https://www.centerforadolescentwellness.org/>.

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