K-12 ADMIN & STAFF
RESOURCE GUIDE
ENSURING JEWISH INCLUSION & SAFETY

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OUR APPROACH

Nurturing Understanding

The word s*hema* comes from the Hebrew word "to hear," and it's this concept that guides everything we do. We are a team with diverse identities who have invested our lives in uplifting vulnerable communities

Listening with curiosity and compassion is at the center of our relational engagement approach. Our goal is to help others understand Jews' stories, identities and lived experiences.

Antisemitism is a systemic bigotry impacting all of us

We are all socialized into anti-Jewish ideas and must do the work to unpack these bigotries and act as allies. These biases show up everywhere, including in mainstream society and sometimes in Israel & Palestine discourse. When these bigotries and biases become normalized, Jews become dehumanized and isolated in society and Jewish people face collective risk.

All of us have a responsibility to disrupt antisemitism wherever it appears, even and especially when it is our peers who are perpetuating anti-Jewish harm.

We also recognize how antisemitism fuels white supremacy, undermines democracy, and divides efforts toward equity and progress.

A paradigm shift in this critical moment

We recognize that there are some people with malice toward Jews in every movement. We need new ways to engage peers who don't wish to harm the Jewish people, but may accidentally perpetuate anti-Jewish harm. This shift requires relationships and nuance. We have to transcend binaries, demonstrate allyship, and call out all dehumanizing language, including about Palestinians, Muslims, and Arabs.

This resource is designed for school leaders

Those responsible for building & maintaining healthy vibrant, and inclusive environments

GOALS OF THIS RESOURCE

01

Better understand specific narratives that are **undermining Jewish inclusion and safety**

02

Use that understanding to ensure that schools in general, and classrooms specifically, remain a space where **all students**, regardless of their identity, **can experience psychological and physical safety**.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, anti-Jewish sentiment has risen globally.
As has been true for millennia, Jews are being blamed for a wide
range of societal issues, Often made the scapegoat for society's
problems. Regardless of intent, in the aftermath of October 7th,
we've seen a surge of anti-Jewish rhetoric and action, often
unnoticed and unchecked. Consequently, ideas which undermine
collective Jewish safety and inclusion are being mainstreamed.

ANTISEMITISM IN SCHOOLS

Jewish students have been experiencing antisemitic
bullying and harassment. From drawing swastikas
to glorifying Hamas's terrorist attacks, **rhetoric
which demonizes and dehumanizes Jews has
become more normalized**, often leading to
exclusion, isolation, and, in some cases,
acts of physical violence. That's true
on school grounds specifically, and
in general across the country.

TWO KEY PRINCIPLES

For navigating these complex moments

01

FREEDOM OF SPEECH MUST BE UPHELD

Even for speech we find objectionable

We believe that it is not inherently antisemitic to criticize Israeli government policy, advocate on behalf of Palestinians, or call for an end to the war. The concerns raised in this guide are not about those conversations

02

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION SHOULDN'T IMPACT STUDENT SAFETY

Jews/Jewish institutions should not be targeted or held responsible for the Israeli government's actions, as it leads to dehumanization & ostracization, making the Jewish community more susceptible to systemic violence. Similarly, students protesting on behalf of the Palestinian people should be protected from harassment & retribution

UNDERSTANDING JEWISH IDENTITY & ANTISEMITISM

01 WHO ARE THE JEWISH PEOPLE?

SKIN COLOR

RELIGION

LANGUAGE

CULTURE

HISTORY

MANY ETHNICITIES

ALL RACES

NATION

what people **assume**

Most people **think of** Jews as a **white, religious community.**

who we **are**

- **Jews identify as a people or nation,** now and long before there was a religion called Judaism.
- Many Jews do not consider themselves to be religious.
- Jewish people are **multi-racial and multi-ethnic,** with diaspora communities **all over the world.**
- Jews **originate from the Land of Israel,** but were expelled and turned into a largely diasporic people as a result.

02 WHY THIS PERCEPTION?

Erasure of a complex identity

Despite the prevailing social constructs around race and identity, Jews are often and primarily categorized by non-Jews as a religious group, erasing the complexity of our identity. This ignores how the Jewish diaspora has been shaped by a history of expulsions and persecution, leading to the dispersion of Jewish communities across nations worldwide.
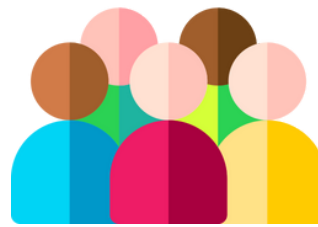
Safety through assimilation

In the U.S., many Jewish immigrants actively sought safety through assimilation into whiteness (changing names, adapting cultural practices, etc.). Images of Jews in media & popular culture are typically centered around white Jews. This centering of one Jewish narrative erases the complexity, beauty, and diversity of our global peoplehood.

UNDERSTANDING
JEWISH IDENTITY & ANTISEMITISM

03 WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM?

MOST THINK ANTISEMITISM IS ABOUT **RELIGION**

BUT ANTISEMITISM IS ABOUT **PEOPLE**

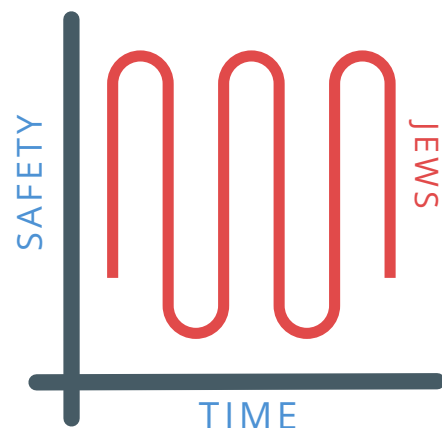Jews are typically attacked for **who we are**, not how we pray.

CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM IS TYPICALLY ANTI-JEW, NOT ANTI-JUDAISM
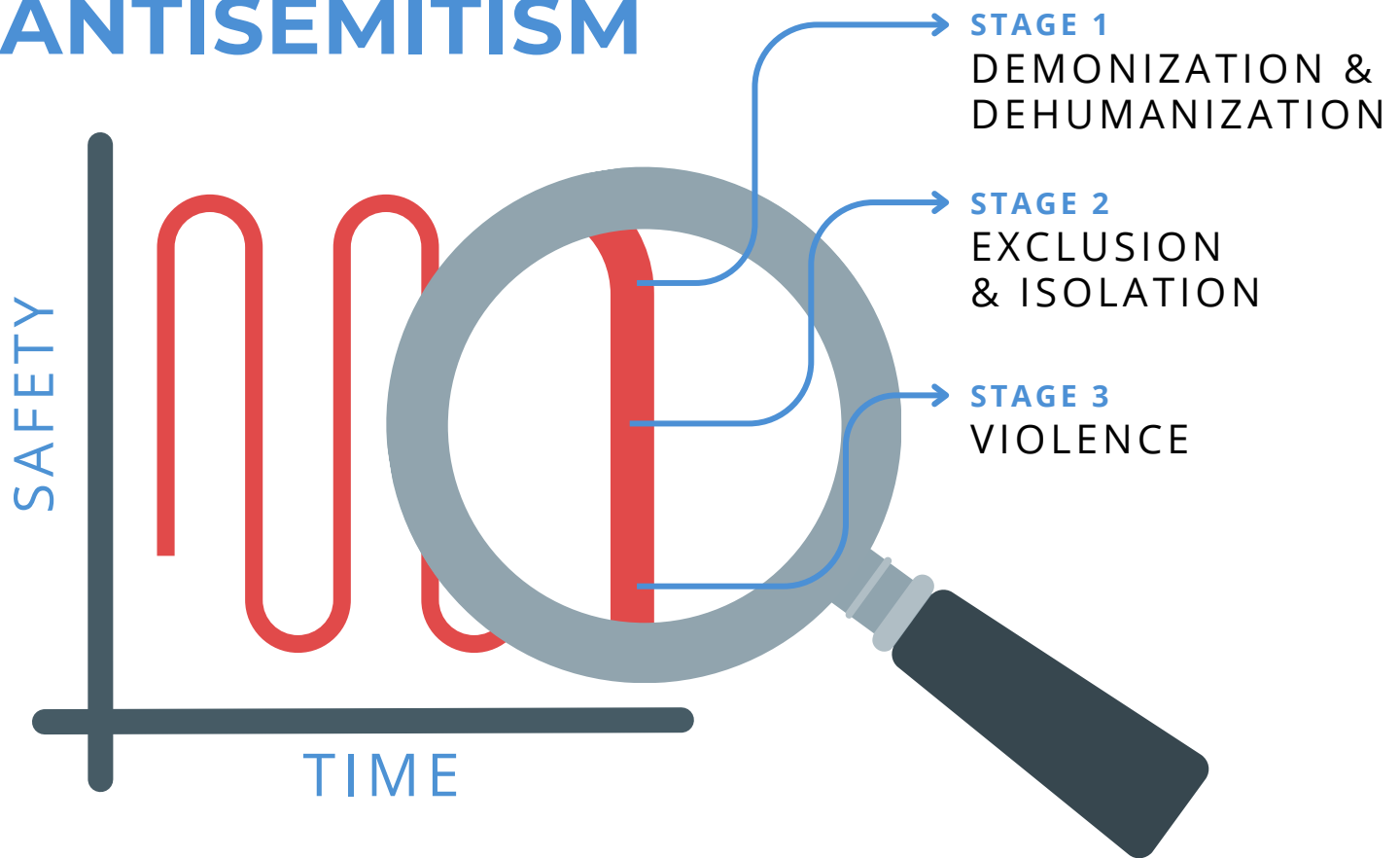
04 HOW DOES ANTISEMITISM WORK?

JEWISH SAFETY CAN CHANGE RAPIDLY

- **Antisemitism functions differently than other systemic bigotries**, which are typically fixed in a given society.
- There are many examples of Jews living safely and thriving in a society, only for this status to shift rapidly, leading to systemic violence and even expulsions.
- **Throughout Jewish history, skin color & status have not guaranteed safety in any society.**

SAFETY

JEWS

TIME

STOPPING THE CYCLE OF ANTISEMITISM

STAGE 1
DEMONIZATION & DEHUMANIZATION

STAGE 2
EXCLUSION & ISOLATION

STAGE 3
VIOLENCE

SAFETY

TIME

ANTISEMITISM CAN COME FROM ANYWHERE

Because antisemitism is so adaptable, elements of all three of these stages come from the far left or far right. White supremacists may demonize Jews as a non-white group that is trying to replace the US' white population while the far left may demonize Jews by treating them as exemplary of white supremacy

OUR GOAL IN COMBATTING ANTISEMITISM

Whether from the right or the left, these examples undermine individual and collective Jewish safety while also destabilizing the environment of pluralism & inclusion that serve as the bedrock of our educational institutions

Allyship with the Jewish people means working to stop this cycle

THE HARMFUL NARRATIVE

UNDERMINING JEWISH INCLUSION AND SAFETY

01 Our description of this narrative is not intended to serve as commentary on **whether the narrative itself is inherently antisemitic** or the people espousing them are.

02 Our intent is not to **discredit Palestinians' lived experiences.**

03 Our aim to help others understand how some of these narratives, in the way they're being reductively told, regardless of intent, are **undermining Jewish inclusion and safety.**

THE HARMFUL NARRATIVE
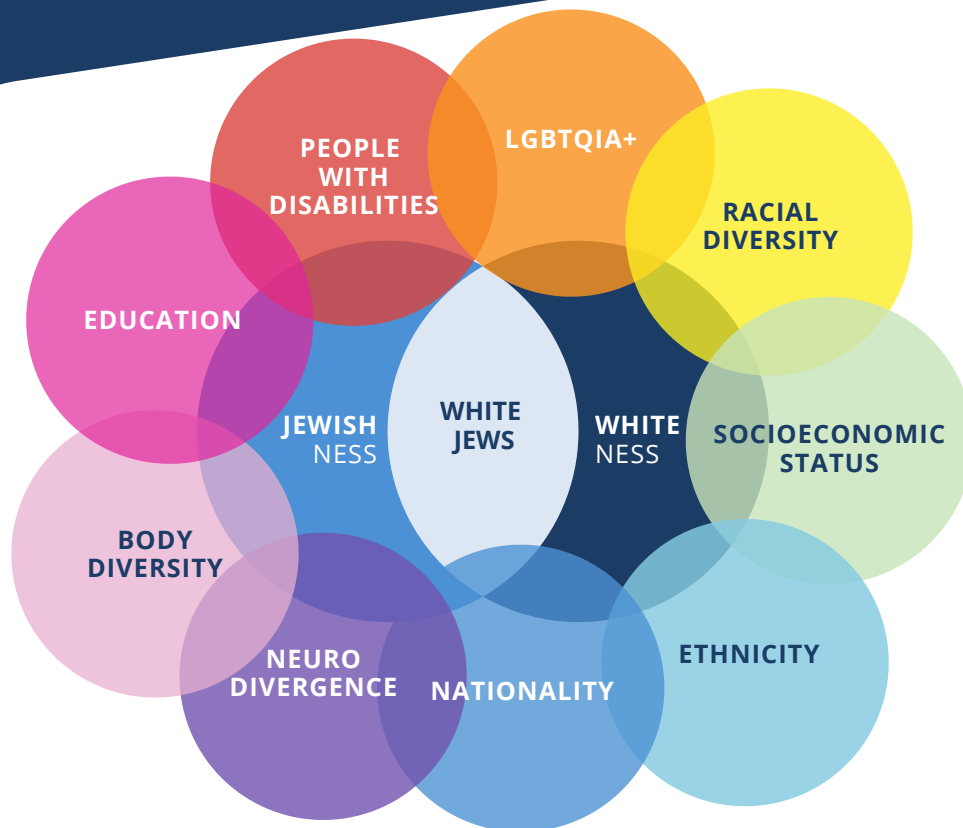
UNDERMINING JEWISH INCLUSION AND SAFETY

Some are pushing an overly simplistic and harmful narrative about the Jewish people. This narrative leverages binary thinking, dividing the world into the powers of good and evil. **Those who push this false binary want us to believe that the state of Israel, the world's only Jewish state, and all who support its existence, represent evil.** This feeds into the ancient antisemitic lie that Jews are responsible for, or are the prime example of, all the world's wrongs.

This narrative, and the rhetoric and actions that manifest from it, is incompatible with Jewish inclusion and safety

In this reductive narrative, Israel is defined as a white, European colony and, **Zionism is defined as racism, colonialism, and white supremacy**, rather than a movement for **Jewish liberation and national self-determination** in some portion of our ancestral homeland and a response to millennia of anti-Jewish oppression. This inaccurate narrative belies Jewish history to **justify the goal of dismantling Israel** rather than changing Israeli government policy or establishing an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

This narrative relies on the erasure of Jewish identity by flattening Jewish identity into whiteness.

JEWISHNESS & WHITENESS

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

LGBTQIA+

RACIAL DIVERSITY

EDUCATION

JEWISH NESS

WHITE JEWS

WHITE NESS

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

BODY DIVERSITY

NEURO DIVERGENCE

NATIONALITY

ETHNICITY

Why many Jews are racialized as white

Many of us have European ancestry, are racialized as white, and have made choices to gain the safety and privileges associated with whiteness. This level of access is the exception to the rule, though, for the Jewish world today and historically.

Conflating Whiteness & Jewishness

The problematic assumption that all Jews are white is often compounded by the belief that whiteness and Jewishness are inseparable. Not only does this erase the existence & history of Jews of Color around the world (and the majority demographic in Israel), **people often use this to dismiss antisemitism**

Accelerating antisemitism

For many, whiteness is associated with power and oppression, and ancient, deeply ingrained anti-Jewish ideas cast Jews as too powerful & untrustworthy. **Flattening our identity into whiteness therefore accelerates antisemitism** by enabling inaccurate narratives to easily spread. This narrative leads to the **demonization**, **exclusion**, and **isolation** of most Jews

THE HARMFUL NARRATIVE

UNDERMINING JEWISH INCLUSION AND SAFETY

This narrative leads to the demonization, exclusion and isolation of most Jews

Those pushing this narrative **equate concepts like Zionism and white supremacy,** hoping to make it **socially acceptable to argue that the world's only Jewish state shouldn't exist.**

In this binary framework, Jews who simply support Israel's right to exist (aka Zionists), even those who vehemently disagree with Israeli government policy, are considered akin to white supremacists. In this context, **the word "Zionist" is explicitly used as a pejorative, which has the intended targeting effect of placing almost all Jews outside the community of the good**, undeserving of allyship and protection. It then becomes acceptable to demonize Jews in Israel and harass Jews in the diaspora because of their perceived connection to Israel. This dehumanizing framework leads to exclusion, isolation, and ultimately **enables individual & collective violence against Jews.**

THIS INACCURATE NARRATIVE
NORMALIZES VIOLENCE AGAINST JEWS

Since this narrative casts Israel as an illegitimate, European colony, its **proponents argue Israel must be fully dismantled** ('decolonize Palestine'). This leads to the justification of horrific violence, where people refuse to hold Hamas accountable for the acts of October 7th.

They see this **violence as justified resistance to white colonial oppression.** Any challenge to this view is treated as an attack on the rights of Indigenous communities. We can assume a future attack intended to "decolonize" the land (destroy the state of Israel) would be justified as well.

THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE **LITERAL DECOLONIZATION** IS THROUGH MASS ACTS OF

VIOLENCE

AGAINST ISRAELI JEWS OR ROUGHLY **HALF THE JEWS ON EARTH**

There is no space or society Jews will feel safe or be safe in if violence against Jews is tolerated

Normalizing violence also threatens democracy

We should be wary of the normalization of violence against innocent civilians in pursuit of political goals, which poses a direct threat to democratic societies.

HOW THESE IDEAS ARE SHOWING UP IN SCHOOLS

Its important to view these individual ideas as part of a **single connected story undermining Jewish inclusion and safety**, not disconnected phrases

Globalize the intifada

"**Intifada**" means "**shake off**" in Arabic and is often used to describe social uprisings. Those social uprisings could be, and indeed at times have been, non-violent.

Jews associate "intifada" with the **Second Intifada**— a period of violent terrorist attacks, including bus bombings against civilians in Israel. So, Jews may hear this as a glorification of those terrorist attacks and a call for the replication of such violence.

Decolonization by any means necessary

"Decolonization by any means necessary" or any variation of that phrase can be viewed as a **justification of the violence of October 7th** and violence against Jews in Israel in general because it characterizes Israelis as colonists who are **legitimate targets** of anti-colonial resistance. This presumes that Jews have no relationship to the land.

So most Jews hear this as both a **threat to collective Jewish safety** and a means of **erasing Jews' connection to their ancestral homeland.**

From the River to the Sea

Not every person who chants this hopes for the elimination of the State of Israel. Some may intend this as simply a **call for equality.** Others, however, when taking this phrase to its literal extreme, describe a **single state of Palestine** existing in all the land of current Israel and Palestine (from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea). This is understood by most Jews as a **call to end the state of Israel**, a future only possible through violence.

Zionism is racism & colonialism

From the perspective of most Jews, describing Zionism as racism and describing Israelis as (European) colonizers is viewed as an **erasure of Jewish history and diversity**, and **dehumanizes Israelis** – those who fled persecution, the survivors of genocide or refugees of ethnic cleansing in the Middle East, and their descendants. Palestinians understandably have a different perspective on Zionism.

WHAT THIS SOUNDS LIKE
and what Jews hear

01

"We need a global movement"

"Globalize the intifada"

02

"To dismantle the world's only Jewish state"

"Decolonize the land"

"Free Palestine from the river to the sea"

"Zionism is racism and colonialism"

03

"Return the land to the *real* Indigenous population"

04

"Because Israel is a white supremacist, colonial project"

A CONNECTED STORY
not simply isolated language

It is paramount to see each example not as disparate, disconnected ideas, but as a single, connected story.

Some people are calling to globalize the intifada, to decolonize the land, and free Palestine from the river to the sea because Zionism is racism & colonialism.

Therefore, they argue, Zionists are racists, support white supremacy & must be confronted. This excludes almost all Jews from the community of the good. Taken together, this leads to Jews being **demonized**, **dehumanized**, and **excluded**, sowing the seeds of, and tapping into, anti-Jewish sentiment that has historically led to violence.

THERE ARE MANY
TYPES OF HARM

It is important to recognize that harm doesn't only come in the form of physical violence. It can also present itself in subtler ways, such as **verbal**, **emotional**, or **psychological harm**. The latter types of harm are harder to spot and prevent, so it is imperative we familiarize ourselves with examples of their manifestation on school grounds so you can disrupt these frameworks.

'A group of bullies called Zionists': Portland teachers union creates anti-Israel k-12 lesson plan

Zionism is the belief that the Jewish people have a right to and need for national self-determination in some portion of our ancestral homeland. The vast majority of Jews identify as Zionists. Targeting Zionists, or using the label as a pejorative, is effectively targeting Jews. Regardless of intent, referring to Zionists as "bullies" demonizes and dehumanizes Israelis and all Jews who support Israel's right to exist. This framework thus undermines collective Jewish safety by creating a social permission structure to target Jews. Curriculum should help students explore these issues in ways that ensure empathy for all, rather than normalizing demonization and dehumanization.

Jewish teacher sues DOE over antisemitism at NYC high school, shares abhorrent email: 'All Jews need to be exterminated'

Saying "all Jews need to be exterminated" is a call for genocide. It is particularly triggering for Jews given our peoples' genocide during the Holocaust and the reality that many Jews are descendants of Holocaust survivors or victims.

Family calls for apology after student told to remove yarmulke

Harassing Jewish students for displaying symbols of their identity contributes to an environment of insecurity & silencing where Jews feel "othered" and that they must suppress their identity as a safety mechanism.

THERE ARE MANY
TYPES OF HARM

Equating Zionism with Nazism

One unique form of demonization we're seeing is the equation of Judaism, Zionism, or Israel with unique evils. The Nazis were a uniquely evil, genocidal regime that was responsible for the genocide of 6 million Jews. Equating Jews with Nazis is not only a gross perversion of history, it is a dehumanizing framework that leads to exclusion, intimidation, and harassment of Jews, and conditions students to see violence against Jews, especially in Israel, as acceptable, just, or justified.
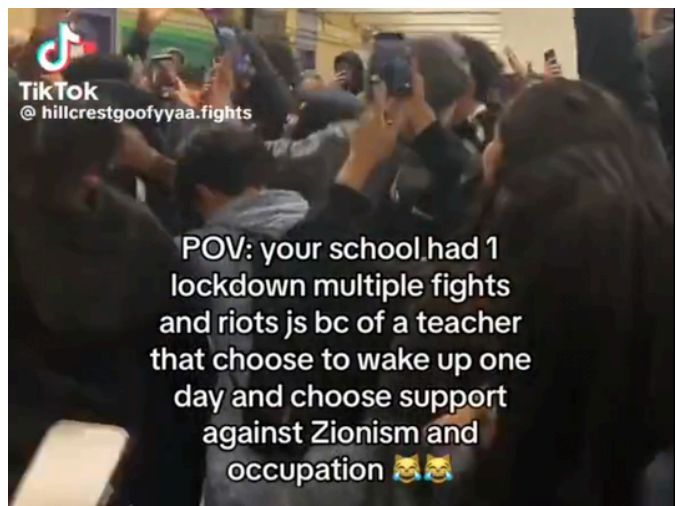

Exclusion of Jews

The ostracization and demonization of Jews is plainly antisemitic and has historically jeopardized collective Jewish safety. It also impairs students' ability to focus their attention on their education and the other developmental opportunities for students.

Demonizing Zionism

The majority of Jews have a connection to, or at minimum, support Israel's basic right to exist (aka 'Zionism'). Igniting a riot–and forcing the teacher to hide in a locked office–because of the teacher's alleged support for Israel is demonizing and ostracizing and risks both the teacher's individual safety and the collective safety of all Jewish faculty and students regardless of the teacher's personal identity. Other groups with ties to other nations aren't subjected to similar targeting.

HOW SCHOOL LEADERS
CAN ADDRESS
THESE ISSUES

Focus on systemic, long-term change

Addressing these challenges is not the work of one semester or one year; rather, it must be understood as a long-term process to shift the underlying cultural dynamics that enable the normalization of ideas and actions that undermine Jewish safety and inclusion.

Antisemitism education for key stakeholders

Project Shema can provide antisemitism education, tailored for the following stakeholder groups

- Administrators, DEI professionals, student support staff, and anyone responsible for building and maintaining school culture and responding to student concerns
- Teachers who are responsible for educating around these topics
- Students, if they receive education about other forms of bigotry

Prioritize a school and classroom culture rooted in inclusivity and pluralism

Jewish students across the country have reported being silenced, harassed, and demonized at school and inside the classroom. Too often, teachers push their own political agenda rather than teach the complex history of the land & people objectively.

School leaders can address this by:

- Ensuring teachers don't bring their personal and political biases into the classroom
- Auditing existing curriculum and conducting oversight over teachers' non-sanctioned material to ensure that (1) education about Jewish identity and antisemitism is comprehensive and diverse, and (2) any material on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict centers empathetic, dual narrative exploration that honors the concerns of all stakeholders
- Ensuring students have a trusted and credible reporting mechanism that addresses students' concerns seriously and protects them from reprisal
- Establishing clubs or working groups that empower students to respectfully engage across differences
- Teaching people skills for empathic, depolarized discourse across differences

OTHER
HELPFUL TIPS

01

Listen to the community

Let your students–Jewish or otherwise–know that you care about their safety, and that you take concerns about anti-Jewish harm with the utmost seriousness so that they feel both safe and seen. Acknowledge that mistakes will be made along the way, but that the school is committed to the wellbeing of students and their parents. Consider offering periodic listening sessions with Jewish students and their families.

02

Provide professional support

Inform students that trauma-informed school counselors or social workers are available to provide support.

03

Leverage affinity spaces

Though not all students process similarly, some Jewish students may find it preferable and safer to share their emotions with members of their own community. Create or encourage Jewish students to form a collective that meets periodically to foster community and reinforce mutual support.