



# K-12 JEWISH PARENTS **RESOURCE GUIDE**

ENSURING JEWISH  
INCLUSION & SAFETY

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# OUR APPROACH

## Nurturing Understanding

The word *shema* 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.

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# Jewish students & parents

## RESOURCE GUIDE

### INTRODUCTION

This past year has been incredibly challenging for Jews across the globe, particularly for Jewish students. 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.**

We as a community acutely understand that this spike in antisemitism is not an aberration, but a time-tested, historical pattern that occurs whenever society's social fabric frays. And, it's usually made worse when conflict emerges between Israel and Hamas regardless of our feelings about the conflict.

### ENGAGING EFFECTIVELY

This resource is designed to **guide Jewish parents** on how to effectively engage school stakeholders, with recommendations for effecting systemic change in order to protect your child from the anti-Jewish harm that is being mainstreamed in schools.



# 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

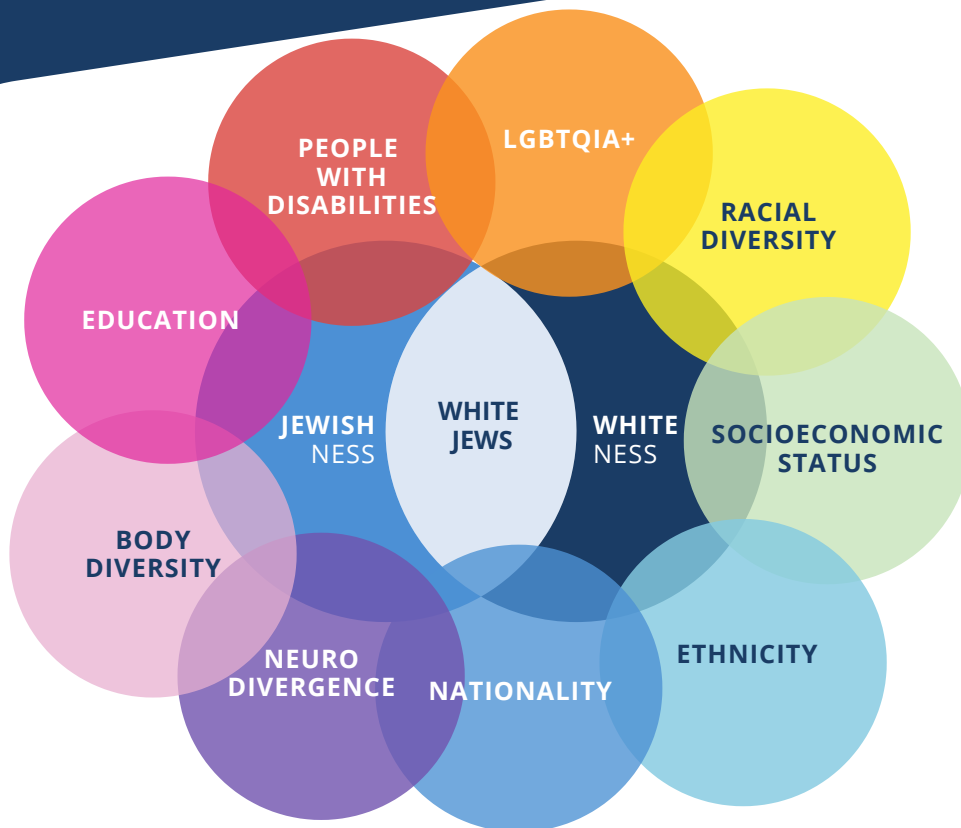
Some are pushing an overly simplistic and harmful narrative about the Jewish people. This narrative leverages binary thinking, dividing the world into the powers of good and evil. **Those who push this false binary want us to believe that the state of Israel, the world's only Jewish state, and all who 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



## 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  
PALESTINE  
WILL BE  
FREE



## 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”



03 “Free Palestine from the river to the sea”



04 “Zionism is racism and colonialism”

05 “Return the land to the *real* Indigenous population”

06 “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 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.



# BEFORE ENGAGING IN CONVERSATIONS

WITH ADMINISTRATORS OR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

## HAVE A PLAN

**It's important to have a plan before you meet with a school administrator.**

In order to successfully use the information provided, we encourage you to reference this checklist to ensure your conversations are fruitful.

### 01 UNDERSTAND

**Talk to your child** to get a clear picture of what they're experiencing and what the general school climate has been like. **Talk to other Jewish parents** to see if their child might be experiencing something similar, and how that parent is handling the situation.

### 02 ORGANIZE

**Form a parent affinity group** with other Jewish parents (and non-Jewish parent allies) that can speak with a united voice and attend meetings with school administrators as a collective.

### 03 OUTREACH

Email the school's administrator to **schedule a meeting**. Use the sample email templates provided & attach the administrator guide. If you can, **meet in person**.

### 04 PREPARE

Use this guide to help you navigate the conversation and to prepare your major points. Define clear roles among all the group participants in advance of any meeting. Remember, you don't need to carry the burden of education; rather, **your goal is to help the administrators understand your personal pain/concerns** and, in time, get them to meet with antisemitism educators as needed. Print out the **administrator resource guide** and bring it to the meeting.

### 05 CONSULT

Project Shema offers 30-minute prep sessions to strategize with you before your meeting.

### 06 MAKE THE ASK

At the appropriate time in the meeting, ask them to implement the policy recommendations contained in the resource guide, and set a follow up meeting to discuss their progress. If possible, set a date for the **next conversation during the meeting** to keep things moving forward.

### 07 FOLLOW UP

After your meeting, send an immediate follow up email to **summarize your discussion, thank them** for their time, and **affirm next steps**.



# METHODS FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Story of Them

Story of Self

Story of the Jewish People

Explaining Antisemitism

Clarify & Verify

Make  
the ask

## ENGAGE EFFECTIVELY

Your goal is not to debate the conflict or educate. It is to humanize and build compassion for Jewish students in order to slow the spread of antisemitism.

## BUILD TRUST AND EMPATHY

**Story of Them** & **Story of Self** builds a relationship and establishes trust by sharing of personal narratives. We want to help administrators see your and your child's concerns as theirs.

## HUMANIZE JEWS AND OUR CONCERNS

**Story of the Jewish People** helps to fix an often inaccurate perception of Jewish identity and share some of our history and lived reality, including experiences on school grounds today.

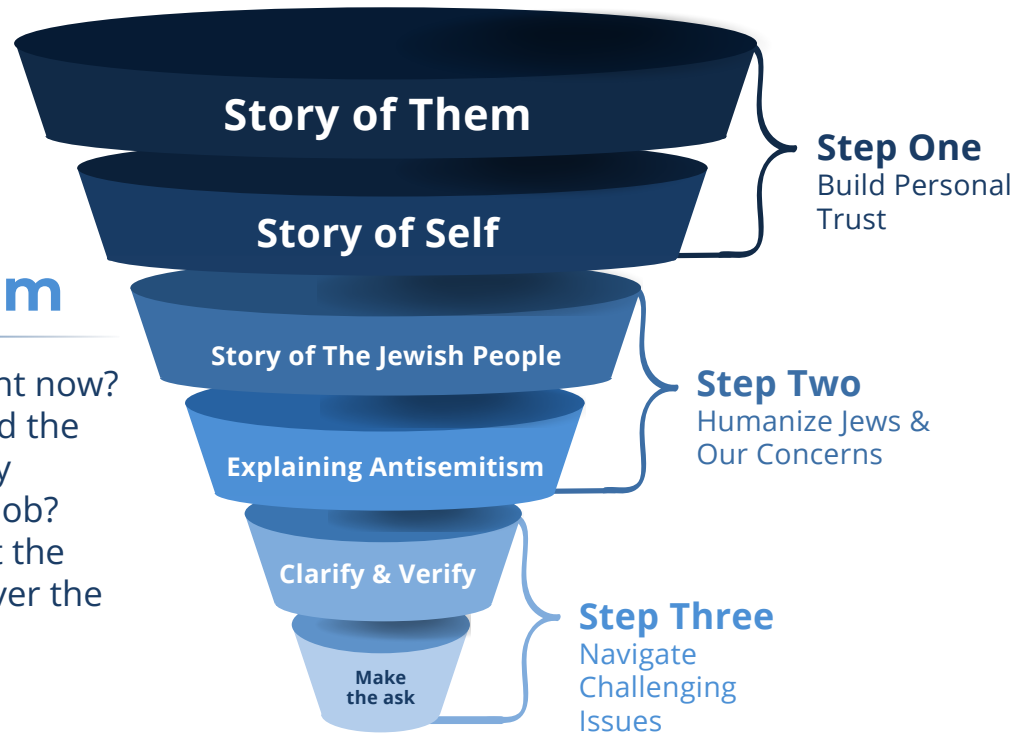
**Explaining Antisemitism** fixes an often inaccurate understanding of what antisemitism is and how it works and provide some examples to demonstrate that point.

## MAKE THE ASK

At the appropriate time, ask them to **implement the policy recommendations** contained in the resource guide

# ENGAGING ADMINISTRATORS GUIDING QUESTIONS

Using the funnel



## 01 Story of them

- How are you doing right now?
- How has October 7 and the ensuing war personally impacted you or your job?
- How do you feel about the school environment over the past year?

## 02 Story of self

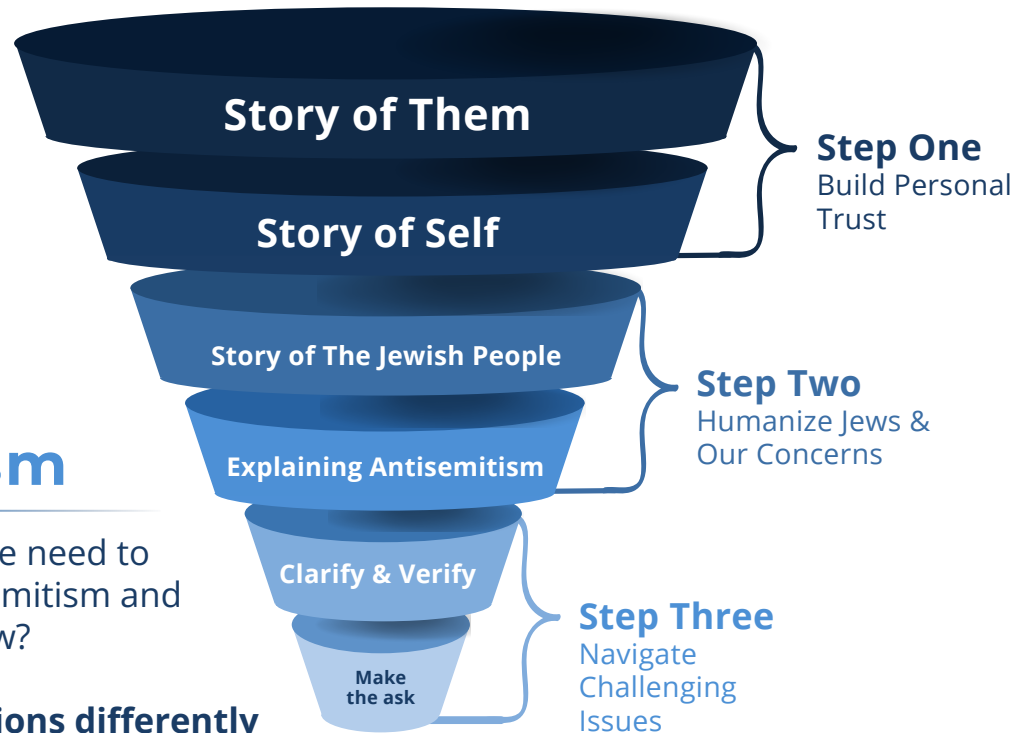
- How has October 7 and the ensuing war personally impacted you?
- Do you feel like the school environment has been welcoming to and protective of your child?
- Has your child personally experienced antisemitism since the war's outbreak?
- Has your child raised any concerns about the school climate to an administrator? Were your child's concerns taken seriously?

## 03 Story of the Jewish People

- How have the events of October 7 and the ensuing war activated the Jewish community's collective trauma?
- How does a history of systemic violence influence our sense of psychological and physical safety?
- How does our history of persecution inform our connection to and strong belief in Israel's existence as a homeland for the Jewish people?

# ENGAGING ADMINISTRATORS GUIDING QUESTIONS

Using the funnel



## 04 Explaining Antisemitism

What do you think people need to understand about antisemitism and how it operates right now?

- **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 safety to shift rapidly, leading to systemic violence and even expulsions.
- **Throughout Jewish history, skin color & status have not guaranteed safety in any society.**

## 05 Make the Ask

- We'd like you to implement the suggestions in the guide we shared. Is that something we can work on together?
- **Remember:** you're not there to debate the conflict, you aren't there to be the educator. Your goal is to humanize our concerns.
- **Affirm:** we hold empathy for Jews and Palestinians.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

## Be strategic & maximize your impact

The priorities below are meant to guide your engagement with an eye toward being strategic with your time and maximizing your impact.

### 1 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 else 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
- School boards, whom administrators can recommend receive training

### 2 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.

**Administrators 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 and humanity of all stakeholders
- Teaching people the skills for empathetic, depolarized discourse across differences
- Establishing clubs or working groups that empower students to respectfully engage across differences

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

## **Establish trusted & credible reporting mechanisms**

Students may be reluctant to report incidents out of fear of backlash, exacerbating the issue, or having their concerns be dismissed.

These concerns can be addressed by:

- Ensuring that the school establishes a trusted, confidential, and anonymous means by which students can report incidents safely and without reprisal
- Committing to a transparent, open, and public process in which the school shares the anonymized complaint and provides updates on their progress to rectify issues raised in the underlying complaint

### **Remember**

Addressing these challenges must be understood as a long-term process. Our goal is to ensure that administrators prioritize these systemic changes

# OTHER HELPFUL TIPS

## 01 Check in

It's a challenging time to be a student. Ask your children how they're doing and if they've been personally affected by incidents of anti-Jewish hate. For various reasons, children may choose not to divulge negative experiences they've had. But it is important for children to see that their parents deeply care.

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## 02 Take mental health breaks

Social media algorithms intentionally expose us to negativity. That has a profound impact on kids' and young adults' mental health. Decreasing exposure to such negativity could be beneficial.

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## 03 Use Professional support

Encourage your child to take advantage of trauma-informed school counselors or social workers, if needed, to seek support.

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## 04 Keep showing up for others

As Jews, we know what it's like to be the targets of bigotry. That's why it's important that we continue encouraging our children to stand up for their friends when they face bigotry as well.

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## 05 Celebrate Jewish culture

Administrators should honor Jewish heritage and cultural celebrations in the same ways schools honor other communities. Jewish American Heritage Month (May) is a great way to provide education and celebrate the contributions Jewish Americans have made.

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## 06 Leverage student 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. If one doesn't already exist, encourage the formation of a collective that meets periodically to foster community and reinforce mutual support.



# **PROJECT SHEMA**