

K-12 ADMIN & STAFF 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. Listening with curiosity and compassion is at the center of our relational engagement approach.

We are a team with diverse identities who have invested our lives in uplifting vulnerable communities. Our goal is to help others understand or community’s diverse stories, identities, and lived experiences.



Antisemitism is a systemic bigotry impacting all of us

No person, group, movement, or political party is immune to anti-Jewish ideas. We are all socialized into them and we all must do the work as allies to unpack and disrupt this conspiratorial bigotry, including in mainstream society and Israel & Palestine discourse. Regardless of intent, these ideas demonize and isolate the collective Jewish community, undermining our safety and inclusion.

Anti-Jewish ideas and reductive binary narratives are enabling anti-Jewish harm to go unnoticed & unchecked. We all have a responsibility to address this.

We also recognize how antisemitism intersects with and fuels other forms of bigotry including white supremacy, and how anti-Jewish conspiracy theories erode democratic, pluralistic societies

A paradigm shift in this critical moment

We need new ways to engage peers who don't wish to harm the Jewish people, but may accidentally perpetuate anti-Jewish ideas. We do this by creating space for curious, empathetic exploration grounded in relationships and nuance. We know when we transcend binaries, demonstrate allyship, and call out all dehumanizing language, all of us, including Palestinians, Muslims & Arabs, are more safe





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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K-12 ADMIN & STAFF RESOURCE GUIDE INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, anti-Jewish sentiment has risen globally. We are once again seeing many in society scapegoat Jews for social issues and demonize the Jewish community as uniquely evil. 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

In schools, Jewish students have been and continue to experience antisemitism. 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 in schools specifically, & in general across the country.



TWO KEY PRINCIPLES

For navigating these complex moments

1 FREEDOM OF SPEECH MUST BE UPHELD

Even for speech we find objectionable

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

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION SHOULDN'T IMPACT STUDENT SAFETY

Jews and Jewish institutions should not be targeted or held responsible for the Israeli government's actions, as it leads to dehumanization and 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?



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?

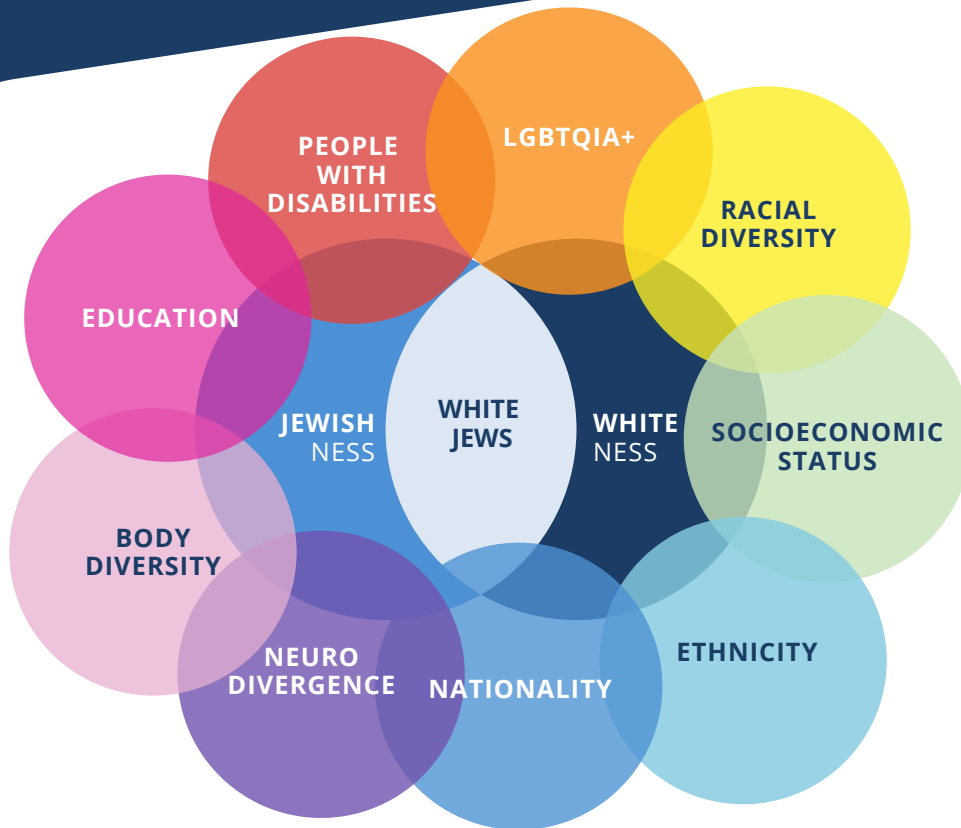
Erasure of a complex identity

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.

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**. This leads many people to **misunderstand the collective risks that Jews face**, while also **erasing the global existence of Jews of Color**

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

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.

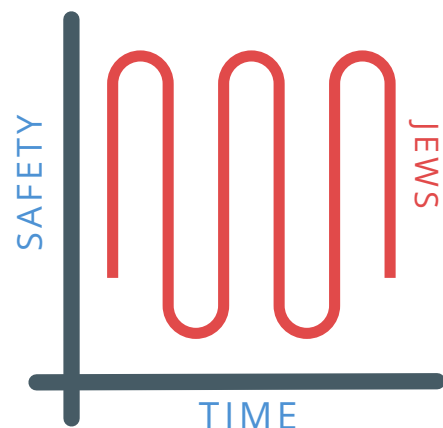
**CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM IS TYPICALLY
ANTI-JEW, NOT ANTI-JUDAISM**

04

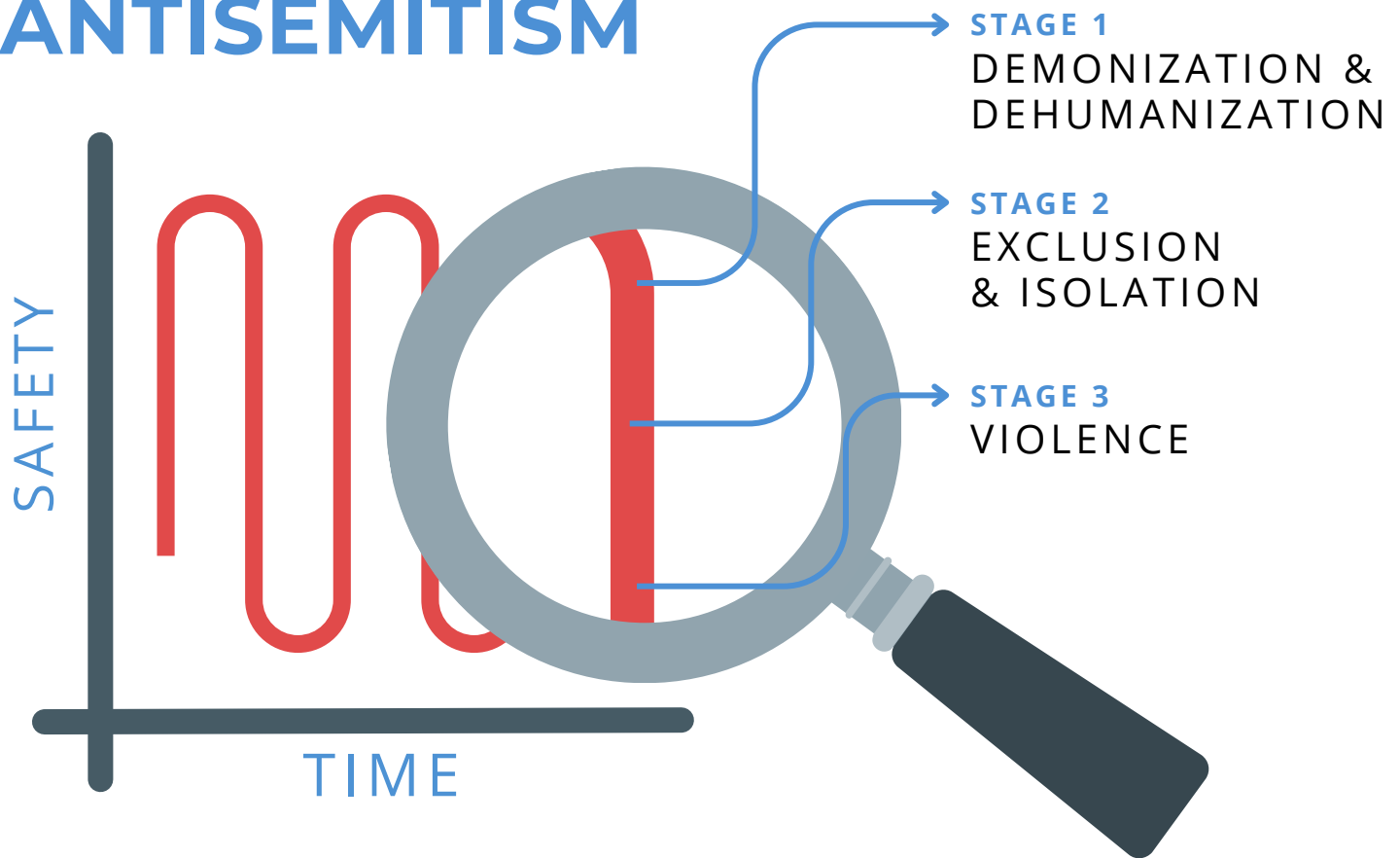
HOW DOES ANTISEMITISM WORK?

JEWISH SAFETY CAN CHANGE RAPIDLY

- **Antisemitism is a cyclical systemic bigotry.** Meaning the safety of the Jewish community can change rapidly in a very short period of time
- 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.**



STOPPING THE CYCLE OF ANTISEMITISM



ANTISEMITISM CAN COME FROM ANYWHERE

Because antisemitism is so adaptable, elements of all three of these stages come from the far left and far right. White supremacists may demonize Jews as a non-white group that is trying to replace the 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

POINTS OF CLARITY

01 We are **not** claiming that the narrative below is inherently anti-Jewish or that those who hold this narrative are antisemites.

02 We **reject** all efforts to discredit or erase Palestinians' lived experiences.

03 Our **goal** is to help others unpack how **some of the language in these narratives**, regardless of one's intent, **can perpetuate anti-Jewish biases that undermine Jewish inclusion and safety.**



THE HARMFUL NARRATIVE

UNDERMINING JEWISH INCLUSION AND SAFETY

One narrative, rooted in binary frames and the historic trope that Jews are the prime example of evil and the world's wrongs, is causing harm today. This is the claims that the idea of Jewish national self-determination (Zionism) is **uniquely evil, unforgivable**, and worse than every other form of nationalism. The result of this is that any individual who supports Jewish self-determination in some portion of our ancestral homeland is characterized as evil and demonic, regardless of their political positions or criticisms. One example of this language is claiming that "all Zionists are Nazis"

This story, even if unintentionally, makes nurturing compassion for Jews very difficult.

At its worst, this perspective has led some to **celebrate the attack on October 7** and call for more global violence against Jews. In some cases, those that call to "decolonize Palestine by any means necessary" are calling for violence against all Israelis and those "complicit," **including Zionists or Jews around the world.**

They see this violence as justified resistance to white colonial oppression, and they see **anyone who supports Jewish statehood as evil.** Any challenge to this view is treated as an attack on the rights of Indigenous communities.

The work is in understanding how some of the language in this narrative, regardless of one's intent, can lead to isolation & violence, undermining Jewish inclusion & safety.



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 & is often used to describe social uprisings. Those social uprisings could be and have been non-violent.

Many Jews associate "intifada" with the **Second Intifada**— a period of violent attacks against civilians in Israel. So while we cannot know someone's intent, it is understandable that many Jews hear this as a glorification of those terrorist attacks and a call for the replication of violence.



Decolonization by any means necessary

There are many different and even nonviolent contexts in which we can understand decolonization. This specific phrase has been explicitly used by some as a **justification for the violence of October 7th** or a call for violence against Jews. In this framework, **Israelis are colonists and all Zionists are complicit**, meaning they are **legitimate targets of anti-colonial resistance** around the world.

Many Jews experience this phrase as both a **threat to collective Jewish safety** and a means of erasing Jewish connection to their ancestral homeland.



FROM THE
RIVER TO
THE SEA
PALESTINE
WILL BE
FREE



From the River to the Sea

Slogans are inherently vague, and this is no exception. Some use it to call for equality or a binational state to protect both peoples. Others, like Hamas, use this same phrase to call for the destruction of the state of Israel through **mass violence against Israeli civilians and Jews**.

As a result, this slogan has the effect of **undermining Jewish psychological safety** and, when taken to its most extreme, is heard by Jews and others as a call for violence.

Zionism is racism & colonialism

It is not inherently harmful to criticize Israeli governmental policy. This phrase frames the idea of Jewish self-determination as an inherently racist extension of white European colonial crimes. This **erases whole aspects of Jewish history, identity, and ancestral connection to the land**.

This can be used to justify boycotting or even harming Jews, undermining Jewish safety and inclusion.



What this sounds like

AND WHAT JEWS HEAR

“Zionism is racism and colonialism”

“Jewish self-determination (Zionism) is inherently evil”



“Free Palestine from the river to the sea”

“We need a global movement to dismantle the Jewish state”



“Many Jews are complicit and must be boycotted & isolated in society”

“Globalize the intifada”



“Violence is justified to accomplish these goals”

“Decolonize the land”

JEWISH INCLUSION AND BELONGING

UNDERMINING COLLECTIVE JEWISH SAFETY

Collective Jewish safety is undermined

- when **Jews are dehumanized and demonized**, cleaving Jews from many/most other groups in a society
- and when **problematic and binary slogans** about Jews are mainstreamed

Because antisemitism is intertwined with other bigotries, and Jews have diverse identities, we also know that **combatting all forms of hate is necessary to ensure Jewish inclusion and collective safety**

DISRUPTING ANTI-JEWISH HARM

Recognize when language encourages **exclusion** or **violence** against the Jewish Community.



THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF HARM

It can be hard to recognize when language encourages exclusion or violence against the Jewish Community.

To help us in this work, we can familiarize ourselves with examples of anti-Jewish language and how it shows up on campus so you can disrupt these frameworks.

Language that frames anyone who supports the idea of Jewish self-determination is inherently problematic. Regardless of intent, this language has the impact of characterizing a majority of Jews around the world and in the United States as bullies, which demonizes Jews. It is especially concerning that this language was incorporated into a curriculum, which should help students explore these issues in ways that ensure empathy for all, rather than normalizing exclusion.

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

Calling for the extermination of Jews undermines the safety, inclusion, and belonging of Jewish students, teachers, staff, and families. Everyone feels less psychologically safe in an environment where any group of community members is targeted in this way. This language is especially traumatizing for a community that has survived a genocide and still faces serious collective threats.

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

THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF HARM

EXAMPLES CONTINUED

In this example, a student was told to remove their Jewish head covering. This kind of intimidation contributes to an environment of insecurity & silencing whereby Jews feel “othered” & that they must suppress their identity as a safety mechanism.

Family calls for apology after student told to remove yarmulke

These are examples of student writing in a school that states Jews are evil, invokes the Nazi Swastika, and includes anti-Jewish tropes about money and greed.

This kind of language has long been used to collectively demonize, ostracize, and commit violence against Jewish communities. This dehumanizing and intimidating language undermines Jewish safety, inclusion, and belonging in our schools.



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; it must be understood as a long-term process to shift the underlying cultural dynamics enabling the normalization of ideas and actions that undermine Jewish safety and inclusion.

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 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

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.

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 empathetic, 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.



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