



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. 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



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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

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"

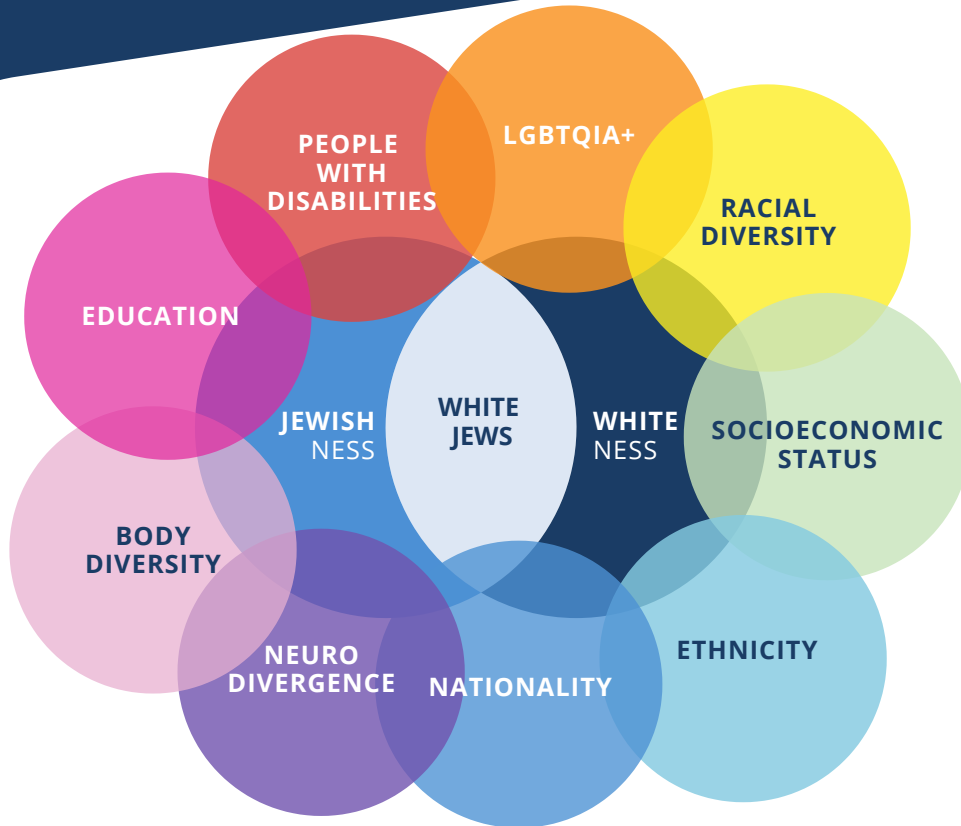
This story, even if unintentionally, makes nurturing compassion for Jews very difficult.

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.

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



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.



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.

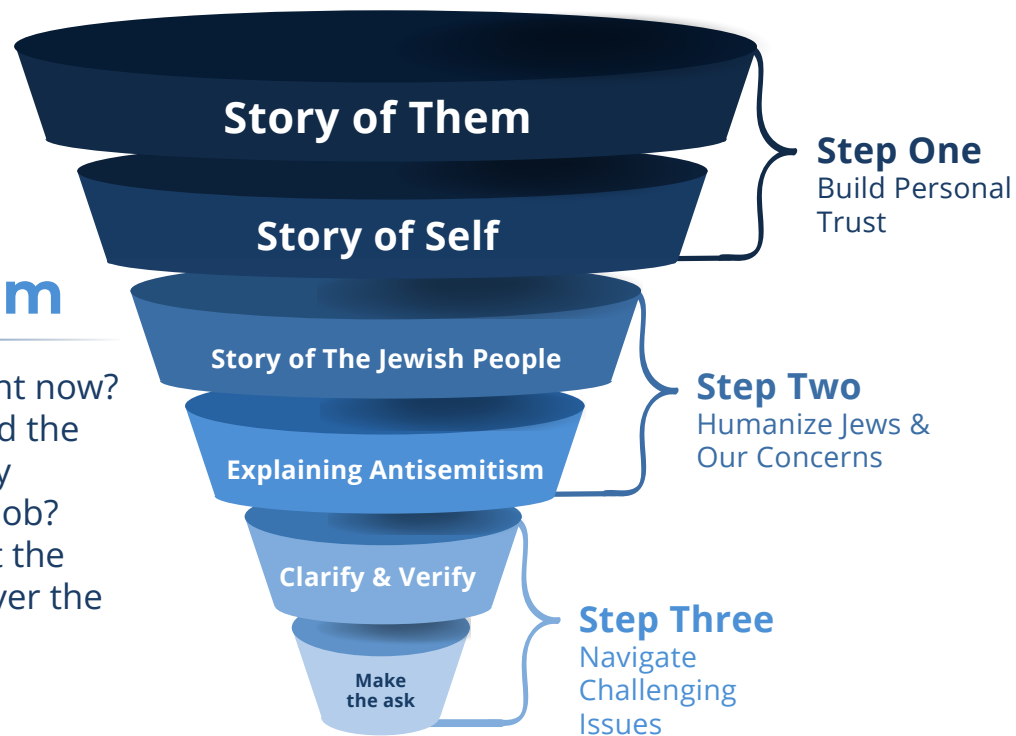
Explaining Antisemitism fixes an often inaccurate understanding of what antisemitism is and how it works and provide some examples to demonstrate that point.

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

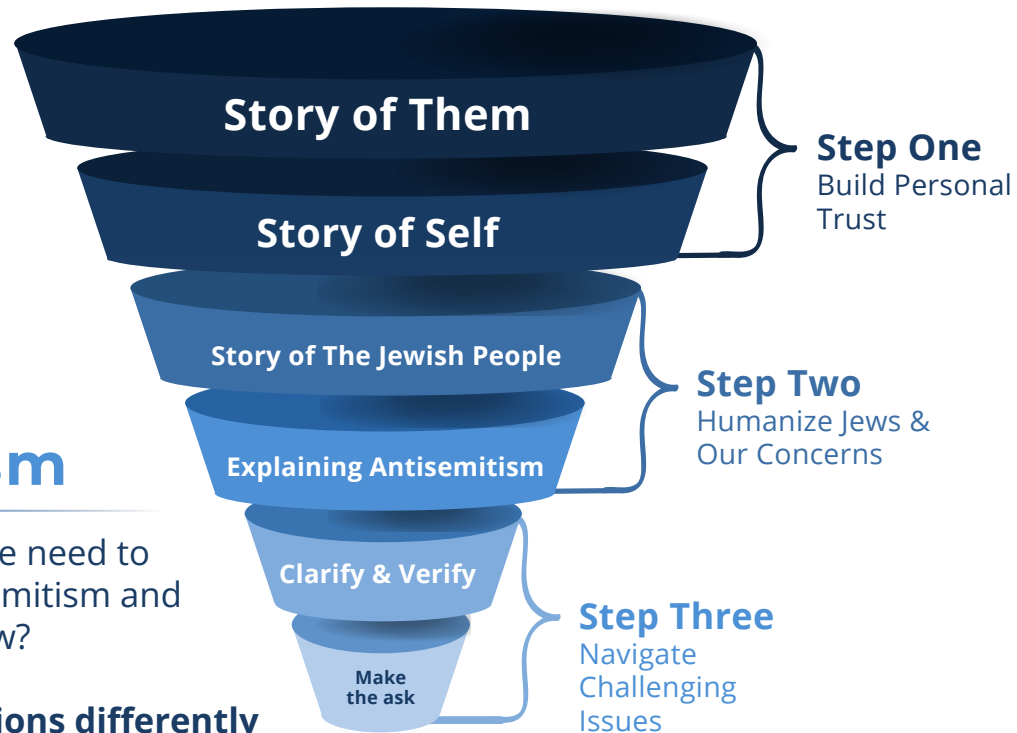
- How has October 7 and the ensuing war personally impacted you?
- Do you feel like the school environment has been welcoming to and protective of your child?
- Has your child personally experienced antisemitism since the war's outbreak?
- Has your child raised any concerns about the school climate to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

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.

03 Use Professional support

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

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.

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.

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.



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