

DISCUSSING ANTISEMITISM

A Guide for Classrooms and Families

Introduction

The ADL recorded 2,024 antisemitic incidents in 2020— a 4% decrease from 2019. Thankfully, compared with 2019, 2020 saw a 49% decrease of antisemitic assault involving 41 targeted individuals and no fatalities. Overall, a larger proportion of antisemitic incidents targeted Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, Jewish community centers and Jewish schools. With the vast majority of Jewish institutional events and activities moving online, the nature of antisemitic incidents followed suit. Of the 264 recorded incidents of harassment that targeted Jewish institutions, 114 were “Zoombombings”. Zoombombing is a practice in which virtual meetings are disrupted by graphic or threatening messages. Antisemitic Zoombombings typically involve the use of antisemitic slurs or imagery, and the specific targeting of Jewish religious or cultural services. While some of 2,024 incidents can be traced to individuals or groups with specific extremist ideologies, other incidents lack such a connection, other than the incidents targeted Jewish people and groups. Discussing these disturbing trends with children and young people can be challenging, but these conversations are necessary. ADL’s tools and resources can help.

Read more: [“Zoombombing” and Who is Behind it](#)

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.

Read more: [Antisemitism Uncovered: A Guide to Old Myths in a New Era](#)

Though some may describe antisemitism differently depending on who is spreading myths or perpetrating violence, antisemitism is an ideology and system that permeates all parts of society. Distinguishing between antisemitism on the “left” or on the “right” distracts from the fact that all examples of antisemitism in our society relate to long held and deeply entrenched beliefs that are as inescapable as the air we all breathe. A key lesson to understanding the rise in antisemitism is acknowledging that in today’s society, everyone of us is exposed to antisemitic myths and tropes.

The Audit of Antisemitic incidents accounts for assaults, vandalism, and harassment, but we know that there are many unreported incidents of antisemitism, from “jokes” to microaggressions to insensitive comments that normalize antisemitic rhetoric. The 2,024 incidents that ADL logged in 2020 is the third highest number of incidents recorded per year since ADL began tracking incidents in 1979. . Antisemitic incidents took place across society, including on college campuses, in K-12 schools, and at Jewish institutions. The complete dataset of antisemitic incidents for 2016-2020 is available on ADL’s H.E.A.T. Map, an interactive online tool that allows users to geographically chart antisemitic incidents and extremist activity nationally and regionally. In order to better understand and unpack antisemitism, this guide provides a way to initiate conversations about how antisemitism impacts both the Jewish community and the United States at large and what we as ordinary people can do about it. This resource is intended to enable adults—educators and parents or caregivers—to initiate conversations with young people about antisemitism and other forms of hate.

Discussion Guide

Setting the Stage:

■ In the classroom

- Set [ground rules](#) to ensure a comfortable environment for all students.
- Review the roles in bullying situations and other relevant [definitions](#) (target, ally, aggressor, bystander, antisemitism, prejudice, and discrimination).
- Tap into the prior knowledge of your students, and research answers to questions together.
- Honor students' questions and opinions; rephrase or reflect what your students say to confirm that you understand them.
- Allow for independent reflection time, such as drawing or writing to allow students time to process the conversation and pose any further questions they have.

■ In your home

- Consider initiating the conversation by reading an [article](#), viewing a [video](#), or reading a [book](#) together.
- Create an environment where your children can feel safe, and avoid stoking fears unnecessarily.
- Honor your children's questions and opinions; rephrase or reflect what your child says to confirm that you understand them.
- Be honest about what you know and don't know; do research together.
- Save any related family history or experiences with antisemitism for the end of the conversation.

Note: Some children and 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 students/children, this conversation should serve to broaden their understanding of antisemitism as a more complex and enduring ideology.

Discussion Questions:

■ Looking at data/current events

- *Do you know what antisemitism is? What do you know about antisemitism?*
- *Who is targeted by antisemitism? Who do you think are the aggressors in antisemitic incidents?*
- *What have you seen or heard on the news about antisemitism?*
- *What have you seen or heard about antisemitism online, including on social media?*
- *What other forms of hate or bias have you been hearing about recently?*
- *What do you know about [antisemitic symbols](#)? Do you know what they (a swastika, 1488, etc.) mean?*
- *Have you heard of "Zoom bombing"? Do you know what it is?*
- *Are you having conversations about antisemitism or other forms of hate with your peers? What is that conversation like?*
- *What questions do you have about antisemitism or other forms of hate?*

■ Incidents in our community

- *What concerns do you have about antisemitism or other forms of hate in our community? In other parts of our country or the world?*
- *Have you heard any biased or antisemitic remarks in your school? Have you seen any online?*
- *Have you seen any antisemitic symbols (or other hate symbols) in your school or our community? Online?*

■ How to act as an ally/taking action

- *What would you do if you heard someone say an antisemitic joke or insult? What about another biased joke or insult?*
- *What would you do if you saw an antisemitic or other hate symbol in school or the community?*

- *Who in your school could you speak to if you were worried about antisemitic incidents (language, vandalism, bullying, etc.)?*
- *What can you do when you see antisemitism or bias online?*
- *Who might need our support when antisemitic incidents happen? What about other acts of hate?*
- *What do you think we should do to make our community more inclusive? What about leaders in our town? Our state? Our country?*

Opportunities for Follow-up & Extended Engagement:

■ In the classroom

- Incorporate [lesson plans](#) that address antisemitism and other forms of hate into your classroom curriculum.
- Use books that tackle antisemitism or other forms of hate in read aloud lessons, whole class literature units, or independent reading initiatives. Check out ADL's [Books Matter](#) for a curated list of children and young adult literature.
- Plan independent or class research projects that enable students to explore various forms of hate and oppression, including antisemitism.
- Teach about the [Pyramid of Hate](#).
- Arrange for a speaker (virtual or in person) with expertise or personal experience in antisemitism or other forms of hate to speak to your class.
- Send home information and [discussion questions](#) for students to continue the conversation with their parents or caregivers.

■ In your home

- Plan a visit (virtual or in person) to a Holocaust memorial center or Jewish cultural site. Consider exploring institutions that educate about other forms of bias, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Muslim bias, and anti-immigrant bias. History centers that focus on slavery, the civil rights movement, women's suffrage, and more exist throughout the United States.
- Encourage participation in interfaith and other intergroup events (virtual or in person) in your community.
- Model examining media/news with a critical eye and using strategies for civil discourse, even when discussing challenging issues or points of view with which you disagree.
- Encourage your children to advocate for antisemitism (and other forms of bias) to be addressed in their school curriculum.