Responding to Antisemitic Incidents: A Resource for Jewish Communities

Developed in partnership with the URJ

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PREVENTION AND PREPARATION

When working to assess your community's needs, we strongly encourage you to engage in an open and transparent process with broad community buy-in. There are many ways to prepare your community while also ensuring that certain demographics of people within your community do not feel unsafe or at risk of...
further harm. To do so, it is critically important to consult with and center the voices of congregants who may share these concerns based on their intersectional identities or lived experiences. In addition, any plan involving security-related issues should involve security specialists, along with community members.

**Community Relations**

Preparation for responding to incidents also requires establishing relationships with your community. Prior to antisemitic incidents, synagogues should work to build close relationships with community and civic leaders, including clergy and interfaith leaders, neighbors, elected officials, school administrators and first responders. They may be able to provide assistance and support in the wake of an incident.

Interfaith leaders, coalition partners and neighbors: Building and maintaining authentic relationships will help your partners and allies better understand and respond to antisemitism and all forms of hate. These leaders can in turn educate their communities about antisemitism. Establishing relationships with neighbors can create a cadre of allies who can provide support and help counter antisemitic activity in the community.

We encourage synagogues and their interfaith and coalition partners to engage in implicit bias training and ongoing opportunities for meaningful dialogue. Your Jewish community should put in the work to learn about how other communities may experience bias and oppression, as well.

First responders and law enforcement: Synagogues should also establish relationships with first responders, including fire departments, emergency medical services personnel and law enforcement. As you explore these relationships and consider what it means to keep your entire community safe, it is critical that the voices of community members with multiple marginalized identities (including those of Jews of Color, people with disabilities and LGBTQ+...
Jews) are included in conversations about how your community interacts with first responders — particularly law enforcement.

You should use an open and transparent process, guided by your community, to determine what your relationship with law enforcement looks like. Keep in mind the historical relationship some groups — again including Jews of Color, people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ Jews — have had with the police and security. These groups likely have a wider purview of and understanding around the involvement of law enforcement in your synagogue community's safety plan and may have some reservations.

A strong relationship does not necessarily require a physical presence at services or other events; alternatively, you may wish to have uniformed or plainclothes officers stationed at your doors or a police car stationed nearby. In all instances, it is critical to ensure that law enforcement receives training about the diversity within the Jewish community and how the reality of your Jewish community may differ from their preconceived notions. While it may not necessarily be the responsibility of the community or temple to provide that training, you might consider suggesting appropriate organizations to do so.

First responders should have an opportunity to regularly see and engage with your community and learn about the actual diversity of Jewish communities, particularly with respect to race and gender identity and expression. If it makes sense for your community, consider having a get-to-know you event with law enforcement, organized by a team of people who include people from marginalized communities.

Regardless of the presence you choose, it is important for your congregation to have a standing relationship with local law enforcement and other first responders who can provide professional threat assessment and response. Make a blueprint of your synagogue readily accessible to law enforcement for emergency use.
Communal Security Organizations: There are a variety of community security practices being used today. Take time to research the security practices being used locally in your community and to ask questions of your neighbors, including local religious and non-religious communities. Like your congregation, they have a vested interest in community safety, and, therefore, it makes good sense to share ideas and strategies. (For more on this topic, see “9 Things to Consider When Creating an Inclusive Security Plan.”)

Consider developing relationships with the following Jewish organizations that focus on safety and security or researching other organizations that serve your community.

- **Secure Community Network (SCN)** is the official homeland security and safety initiative of the organized Jewish community in North America. Founded in 2004, under the auspices of The Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, SCN works across 146 Federations, 50 partner organizations, 300+ independent communities, and other partners in the public, private, nonprofit and academic sectors. They offer training on institutional security, preparedness, cybersecurity and other topics.

- **Local Jewish Federation Security Directors**: Some local Federations may also provide services to help secure your facilities and installations. These relationships are worth exploring as well.

School administration: It is equally useful to establish a relationship with your local school administration, including the superintendent and school board. You can help educate your school administration about antisemitic tropes and their damaging impact. Consider asking the school administration to notify you if an antisemitic incident occurs and to include you in the response process. You can play a critical communications role in incident response both by elevating issues with the school administration as a trusted partner and by setting the tone for your community. Knowing your school administration can also be helpful when congregants bring school-based incidents to you. You can encourage the school...
district to educate students about antisemitism and other forms of bigotry both before and after bias incidents occur.

Human rights or human relations commission: Many communities have a human rights commission, human relations commission, diversity, equity and inclusion officers or other entities that work to protect civil rights and promote equal opportunity on the basis of race, religion, national origin, disability status and other protected characteristics. Your human relations commission can serve as a key ally in educating the community about antisemitism and improving relationships between residents. Some human rights commissions offer educational programming for the community, while others investigate reports of discrimination and bias.

Create a Community Safety Committee
Create a Community Safety Committee that reflects the entire community you serve. Congregations both big and small can form this type of committee. Be sure to include individuals who may bring diverse perspectives to the table in light of race, ethnicity, age, income, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or disability status. Center the perspective of this group in determining your congregation's processes and protocols to ensure that your plans keep all your congregants safe.

Because we know that People of Color, people who are LGBTQ+ (in particular people who are trans, nonbinary or gender expansive) and people with disabilities are disproportionately harmed by law enforcement, it's important that we engage people from a wide range of backgrounds and lived experiences in our planning. We know that inclusive practices and language evolve over time, so we suggest that you commit to revisiting and updating this committee and your safety plans regularly.

Determine Roles and Responsibilities
Clear roles and responsibilities are essential in times of crisis. Staff and lay leaders who may be involved in your incident response protocol should understand their role before incidents occur.

Before assigning any roles, it is worth clarifying that all the members of a congregation share a responsibility to act if they are threatened or unsafe. At the same time, it is important to recognize your own biases; consider asking yourself if you would feel the same way about a situation if the person was of a different age, race or gender.

Some congregations may determine that in these situations, the first call should be to the head of their security committee, clergy, president or executive director, while others may decide to reach out to law enforcement first to assess the potential threat. All of these decisions should be guided by your congregation's Community Safety Committee, which should include the voices of People of Color, people with disabilities, people who are LGBTQ+ and members of other vulnerable groups.

You may consider designating the following roles (and in some smaller communities, the same person may serve in multiple capacities). What is critical is that people understand what is needed from them in the response process. You will want to make sure that these roles are determined with transparency and community input and buy-in.

- **Investigation Liaison**: This person, typically the executive director, chair of the Community Safety Committee, synagogue president or an executive committee member, is the point of contact with any entities assisting in the investigation. They may be tasked with communicating with law enforcement, the local human rights commission, ADL, SCN or any other organization that assists in the investigation. The investigation liaison will be tasked with communicating the most up-to-date information internally so that others involved in the response are knowledgeable and can appropriately execute their roles.
- **Target or Victim Support**: This person coordinates all forms of support for individual targets or victims in the wake of an incident. If a specific person or group of people were targeted or experienced the incident firsthand, there will likely be a necessary pastoral response, met by a clergy person or members of a Caring/Chesed Committee. Some incidents can be very traumatic, and victims may enter a stage of shock or grief. Doing basic things may be challenging for victims of trauma, and as a community, it is important to provide support and reassurance.

- **Communications Coordinator**: This person oversees all external communications and is the main point of contact with the media, drafting any statements to be released to the community. The Investigation Liaison and the Communications Coordinator must be in touch consistently when major incidents occur to make sure that any messaging accurately describes the situation on the ground. Consider engaging a lay leader with communications experience to serve in this capacity. They should also confer consistently with clergy and, if part of the staff structure, the executive director.

- **Community Healing Coordinator**: This person, typically a clergy person, will create intentional space for the community to process what has happened. This may take many different forms depending on the incident: making themselves available for one-on-one conversations; offering a space for the community to reflect together; and/or helping to plan a solidarity/unity event. Often, in the aftermath of an incident, people will express a desire to do something to help; this person harnesses that energy and determines how to mobilize people toward positive actions.

To determine incident response protocols, we encourage you to think through various scenarios and consider what type of response would be appropriate for your community. You may do so by reviewing the checklist provided in the "Incidents by Type" section of this document and discussing which actions may be appropriate for your community to undertake in various situations. The proper
response for a large congregation in a major metropolitan area with a thriving
Jewish community may be very different from the response to the same incident
by a smaller, more rural Jewish institution. As you go through the checklists,
consider assigning responsibilities to different staff members or lay leaders so
that everyone understands their role in a response.

**Responding to Incidents Proportionally**

You will want to make sure that the response you put forth in the aftermath of an incident is proportional to the incident itself. Sometimes community members try to downplay serious situations or aggrandize minor incidents, but remember: Incongruous responses can detract from efforts to counter antisemitism. By diminishing incidents or failing to report them, we signal that this type of behavior is acceptable and embolden bad actors; by exaggerating incidents, we run the risk of not being believed when something truly serious happens because of previous disproportionate responses. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that different community members will react differently to the same incident; understanding the broader sentiment may impact your response.

If you are in doubt about how to respond to a certain incident, reach out to your local ADL office or the URJ for support. The ADL's Incident Response Team assists in responding to thousands of incidents each year and would be glad to have a conversation with you and provide suggestions on how to proceed. Any personal information provided through this process will not be disclosed without your consent. ADL can help educate your community on antisemitism and all types of bias through a range of programs.

The URJ can help respond with pastoral support, by connecting you with other congregations who may have experienced similar incidents, and by offering guidance regarding next steps, both communally and with external secular and interfaith communities.
Whom to Call
An important step in preparing for incidents is knowing who to call for assistance. We encourage you to create a list of services in your region focused on the areas listed below.

Often, community members seek assistance from clergy or ADL regarding situations that appear to be antisemitic but are better addressed by other agencies or professionals, such as social workers. These may include situations such as elder abuse, mental health issues and/or domestic violence. If you come across such situations, you will want to direct the person(s) seeking assistance to appropriate resources. Feel free to add other support organizations to your list based on your community’s needs.

- First Responders
- Law Enforcement
- Graffiti Removal
- Elder Affairs
- Suicide Prevention Hotline
- Domestic Violence Hotline
- Child Abuse Hotline
- National Center for Victims of Crime or Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Human Rights Commission /Commission on Discrimination or Canadian Human Rights
- Commission
- Housing Authority
- LGBTQ+ Advocacy Organizations
Security Plan and Procedures

Using an open, transparent and inclusive method that involves your Community Safety Committee and others, create a safety plan that addresses your institution’s needs. Center the perspectives of People of Color, people with disabilities and people who are LGBTQ+ who are disproportionately harmed by law enforcement. Keep the mission and culture of your community in mind in developing this plan, and use the Jewish values that are most essential to the character of your community to guide that process. Explain these values to the various outside partners that may be involved in the plan’s creation.

The implementation of the safety plan must be practiced on a regular basis, so review and update it annually. In doing so, consider reaching out to the URJ, your local Jewish Federation, or the Secure Communities Network o=for assistance. You will want to develop these relationships well in advance of an incident.

To develop a safety plan:

1. Contact your local law enforcement agency, SCN, and your preferred security partner or communal security organization to conduct a threat assessment and walkthrough of your building. Use this opportunity to educate your security partner about the fullness of the Jewish community, including Jews.
of Color, LGBTQ+ Jews, people with disabilities and community members with other intersectional marginalized identities.

1. During this walkthrough, ensure your designated security point person is present. While each assessment will likely differ, be prepared to provide information to the security professional about the physical make-up of your building or anything unique to your congregation or location. The assessor will likely have items to discuss, but it is important to be prepared with any unique information you believe is relevant to your congregation.

2. Implement as many recommendations from the security plan as possible. In the U.S., consider applying for a FEMA nonprofit security grant, which can help cover the costs of improving the physical security of nonprofit buildings. Many states offer similar programs. Congregations in Canada should consult with Public Safety Canada for more information about grants and other security support, including the Communities at Risk: Securities Infrastructure Program (SIP). Contact your closest Jewish Federation for assistance in applying.

3. Remember: Security plans cannot work unless your community is aware of the protocols and everybody participates in implementation. Involve your community members in security plan “fire drills” to increase their familiarity and awareness.

2. Make evacuation and shelter-in-place plans. Practice these plans multiple times per year with your staff members, security committee, lay leadership and all constituencies served by your organization.

3. Because it is generally easier to prevent someone from entering the building than it is to remove them once inside, consider having an usher (or someone else who knows your community well and is aware of the wide range of diversity it either currently encompasses or hopes to reflect in the future) observe or be aware of who enters the building. Ideally, the people in these roles will have completed implicit bias training. If appropriate, you may
consider asking them to wear specific clothes or an identifiable marker. Identifying the right balance between openness and safety for your community is critical.

4. Consider developing a plan to monitor, manage and/or remove a person who may be a security risk. If you are concerned about a person's behavior inside the building, consider saying, “I need to speak with you. Can I see you outside for a minute?” Have a plan if the person says no. Determine whether contacting law enforcement may be appropriate.

5. Have one designated entryway and make sure that all other doors and windows are secure. Ensure that all doors can be opened from the inside in case of a need to evacuate.

6. Provide a blueprint of your building to local law enforcement for use in a true emergency.

7. Have an active phone line accessible at all times.

8. Prepare for how you would continue your institution’s operations and services after an incident, such as being able to access important computer data and records off-site.

9. Establish an information security plan to protect sensitive data online and offline.

10. Ensure all technology, such as security cameras, is working properly. Make sure that cameras do not override video too quickly, as you may lose critical information. Consider adapting settings if you will be away from the building for a long period of time.

11. Ensure that everyone at your institution is familiar with suspicious mail indicators and what to do if they receive a suspicious letter or package. Print and hang this poster where mail is processed for quick reference.

12. Ensure that all members of your team are aware of bomb threat guidelines provided by the Department of Homeland Security.
Make sure that you, your community and any targets are safe and that the situation is under control. Depending on the severity of the incident, this may include activating emergency response procedures such as shelter-in-place or evacuation plans. It can also include calling emergency response services if anyone is hurt, calling 9-1-1 or local law enforcement to assess a threat or choosing not to enter the building until a security analysis has been conducted. In all circumstances, your top priority should be ensuring the well-being of your congregants, staff, and community.

Offer support to those directly and indirectly affected by an incident. In the aftermath of an incident of hate, targets and victims may feel isolated and afraid. There are various steps you can take to show support:

- Be clear about the presence of clergy or other communal staff who can serve as a resource for guidance and support. Pastoral care may come in the form of one-on-one conversations, being with the community for Shabbat services, or otherwise providing support as part of an organized Caring Committee or other small group.

- Talk to the individual(s) directly affected by the incident and ask how you can best help. Support can come in many forms, from being a shoulder to lean on to organizing an official response.

  - Remember: Some incidents can be very traumatic, and victims may enter a stage of shock or grief. Doing basic things may be challenging for victims of trauma, and as a community, it is important to provide support and reassurance. This is where a Caring/Chesed Committee can be quite useful.
- Encourage them to report the incident to ADL and, if they are comfortable, to law enforcement and SCN.
  
  - If there is an ongoing threat that may involve extremism, ADL’s Center on Extremism may be able to help research and analyze the situation.
  
  - If there is an ongoing problem online, ADL’s Center for Technology and Society may be able to help secure information or liaise with social media platforms, if necessary.

- Help them think through their options in response to an incident. They may want to speak to the press, explore legal action or organize the community.

- Encourage them to speak with a mental health professional or seek support from any of the resources enumerated in the “Whom to Call” section to help them process the incident.

**Documenting the Incident**

The third step is documenting the incident. When something happens near or outside a congregation, it can be tempting to jump to conclusions about motive, but your role as a leader in your congregation is to allow the appropriate investigatory party to collect facts to understand what happened. It is best to confirm that an incident is in fact antisemitic or bias-related before calling it so.

While waiting for responders to arrive on scene, do not touch anything; this includes resisting the urge to immediately remove graffiti or other types of vandalism. If the incident occurred in a highly visible area, you may want to consider covering it in a way that would not hinder any investigation or blocking the general public's access to that area.

Remember: No matter how big or small the incident is, be sure to document it with ADL. If you are unsure whether law enforcement should get involved, please call or submit an incident report to your local ADL office. You should immediately call
the police if you believe there is an ongoing physical or security threat. Please also reach out to the URJ so pastoral and community support can be provided.

When collecting facts and investigating, the appropriate investigatory party may:

- Document the incident by taking photos. If you take photos for your records or to include in your report to ADL and the URJ, please be sure to take close-up photos so those reviewing the incident can see the details, as well as photos from farther away so you can see the location of the incident.
- Ask who, what, when, where and how.
- Review security camera (CCTV) footage. Ask neighbors if they have camera footage to share.
- Collect as much information as possible about the suspected perpetrator.

At this stage, it is also important to keep the following in mind:

- If a congregant approaches you for advice on an antisemitic incident that has occurred in the community, ask for details about the situation, including: what steps they have taken to address the matter up to this point, if any; who else, if anyone, they have approached about this issue; and what the response has been up to this point.
- When communicating with the media and the community, choose language carefully. Do not call it an act of violence an antisemitic or bias incident until it has been confirmed as such by ADL or other investigatory authorities.

**Communicating Quickly and Clearly**

**Initial Communications with Congregants and Community**

Prompt, intentional and specific communication from your congregation or organization can make a big difference. Statements from leadership set the tone for the community.
Determine who in the congregation needs to be informed about the incident. Remember, word will get out and travel quickly. It is often better that the community hears from the congregation first to prevent miscommunications or unintentionally increase anxiety.

Initial communications should be timely and measured. They may include the following:

1. Describe the nature of the incident (e.g., “swastika on the bathroom wall”). Be transparent and specific. If slurs or offensive language were used, make sure to use censored words (for example, “N-word,” “R-word”) so you do not perpetuate the harm caused by using these words.

2. Use thoughtful, inclusive language, and choose terms that respect how affected communities self-identify.

3. Denounce the incident and reaffirm your congregational values. You can draw on religious texts for inspiration.

4. When appropriate, announce an immediate investigation of the incident.

5. When ready, present a clear plan of action moving forward. Are you hosting a community vigil? Are you planning a town hall? Opening Shabbat services to interfaith and community partners? Are you encouraging congregants to send supportive messages to the affected family? Include what you are doing to help the community heal. If there are victims or targeted individuals, please get input and confirm these plans with their loved ones before making any announcement. More suggestions for community healing are provided below.

6. Provide clear guidance and opportunities for allyship for individuals and organizations looking to help. Be explicit about your community's needs. You may ask people to post on a social media, write an op-ed or attend an event or worship service. More ideas for activating allyship are provided below.
7. Share resources, including mental health and educational resources, that will help different constituencies have conversations with loved ones. Resources for caregivers, teachers and the broader community are included below.

8. Be clear about what information congregants should be sharing on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as through interpersonal communications, blog posts and online and in-person social gatherings, to ensure that adequate messaging is being shared and to avoid unwanted attention.

Continue to send regular updates and plans for short- and long-term actions to various stakeholders.

Guidance for Respecting Individual Targets, Victims, and their Families
Communications in the wake of an act of hate against an individual should serve to support those who have been targeted. That said, it is important to ask the targets or victims of such an act what they need.

All outward communications should be respectful of the wishes of those targeted. If there are aspects of the incident that the targets or victims would like privacy, respecting these wishes in your communications is of the utmost importance.

Communicating with the Media
Before communicating with the media, consider the pros and cons of having the media involved, as the media can assist or complicate a response to an incident. Feel free to reach out to ADL or the URJ if you are unsure about whether to bring an incident to the press.

If you do decide to include the media in your response, have one or two people speak on behalf of your community. Consider identifying a congregant with media experience who can be point person, or a local firm that may assist on a pro bono
basis. Fielding media calls after an incident can be a time-consuming task that takes you away from the needs of congregants.

Communications with the media should be informative, clear and concise. If the incident requires law enforcement assistance, planning communications with law enforcement may be necessary.

If you are comfortable speaking with reporters:

- Reiterate the messaging in your communications to your congregation or come up with a few talking points you can refer back to. It can be useful to have a pre-planned message that includes information for congregants or other stakeholders.
- Describe to the reporter what has happened and your concerns.
- Describe the impact that the incident has had on your community.
- Consider writing an op-ed in the aftermath of an incident. (Learn how to write an op-ed.)

**Resources to Educate and Empower Your Community**

In the aftermath of an incident, it is important to encourage discussions of recent events among members of the community of all ages who can be impacted in a strong way by these conversations. When discussing an incident, keep in mind that people experience incidents differently depending on their background and identity. Because of this, it is important to keep an open mind and actively listen to the needs of each member of your community.

Below, we have compiled a few resources to help you have productive conversations and inspire others within the community to do the same. Consider including them in initial emails or communications so your community can turn to them for guidance.
Resources for Parents and Families:
ADL and the URJ have created various resources to empower parents to have conversations about current events with their families.

- Three general resources to turn to in the aftermath of incidents are:
  - "Talking to Young Children about Bias and Prejudice" provides best practices for engaging in these conversations with young children.
  - "Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate" guides caregivers in providing children and teenagers with the tools they need to understand what has happened and to take steps to challenge hate in safe and effective ways.
  - "Helping Children to Process Acts of Terrorism" - provides guidelines that can help children cope during tragic moments and their aftermath.

- ADL's Table Talks: Family Conversations about Current Events can be used to begin a conversation with children and teenagers about recent events. The following Table Talks cover some of the issues explored in this toolkit:
  - Antisemitism Today (ages 12 and up)
  - Propaganda, Extremism and Online Recruitment Tactics (ages 14 and up)
  - Slurs and Biased Language (in English and Spanish) (ages 10 and up)
  - Responding to Cyberhate (ages 12 and up)

Resources for Teachers & Educators:
When an antisemitic incident occurs in the community, educators should consider discussing them in the classroom. ADL’s free online lessons plans can help educators in your congregation discuss these topics with students of various ages. The following may also be helpful in the aftermath of an incident:

- "Antisemitic Incidents: Being an Ally, Advocate and Activist"
  The surge of antisemitic incidents in the United States is alarming to many.
In this lesson, middle and high school students examine antisemitic incidents and explore ways to be an ally and how their actions, whether on a large or small scale, can make a difference.

- **“Swastikas and Other Hate Symbols”**
  In this lesson, high school students consider the significance of symbols in our society and explore what can be done about the prevalence of hate symbols.

- **“Contemporary Antisemitism”**
  To increase middle and high school students’ awareness about antisemitism post-Holocaust, this lesson helps students learn about the persistence of antisemitism in its contemporary forms and consider the interconnectedness of all forms of oppression.

- **“Responding to Violence and Hate”**
  This multi-grade curriculum unit provides grade-specific lessons and resources for preschool, elementary school, middle school and high school to assist in addressing the difficult issues of hate and violence, such as school shootings or terrorist attacks, with children at home and in the classroom.

It is important to note that all educators and school community members must be committed to addressing all bias-related incidents in their schools and communities. Failing to effectively respond to bias incidents tacitly condones harmful words or actions, sending a message that safety and equity are not community priorities. By challenging harmful language and behaviors and helping students process bias incidents, educators can actively counter bias, cultivate inclusivity and model how students can do the same. In many cases, clergy members can be wonderful partners for educators in these situations.

ADL and the URJ can assist you in responding to school-based incidents. Consider implementing **ADL’s No Place for Hate** or **A World of Difference** programs in your school or connecting with colleagues who belong to **Association of Reform Jewish**
Educators (ARJE) or Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism (ECE-RJ) for guidance and suggestions for additional resources.

If your congregation has an affiliated school, we highly encourage you to review ADL’s detailed resource for school administrators and educators on best practices for responding to school-based incidents.

**Communicating with Other Organizations**

When communicating with the broader community and other stakeholders, it is OK to ask for help, support and solidarity from others. Other constituencies within your broader community can show their support by denouncing the act of hate and cosponsoring solidarity events; depending on the specific act, donations of material resources may also be warranted.

Providing opportunities for other communities to show solidarity and support can help prevent incidents from occurring in the future. Indeed, this type of unity sends a clear message to would-be offenders that the type of conduct underlying the incident is unacceptable and unwelcome in the community. Communications with the broader community should be concise and informative, especially in the immediate aftermath of an incident.

**Communicating with Elected Officials**

Elected officials can support congregations by denouncing antisemitic incidents and educating their constituents about antisemitism and bigotry. When communicating with local, state, provincial or federal elected officials, remember to be respectful and nonpartisan. In the United States, a provision of the federal tax code known as the Johnson Amendment prohibits 501(c)(3) organizations — including houses of worship — from engaging in partisan politics. While you may invite elected officials to speak at solidarity rallies or encourage elected officials to speak out against antisemitism, it is important to avoid endorsing or opposing candidates or engaging with an elected official’s campaign.
When reaching out to an elected official after an antisemitic incident, designate one person (perhaps a congregational president or clergy member) to be the primary point of contact. If someone in your congregation has a relationship with an elected official, consider leveraging that connection (with the individual's permission) to generate a faster response. You should also think about who the best contact is within the elected official's office. Federal officials, such as U.S. senators, U.S. representatives, and members of Parliament, typically have local offices in the district, state or province that focus on constituent relations, as well as offices in the capital that focus on legislative activity. While it may be tempting to contact the capital office, district offices are often better positioned to arrange community meetings or coordinate an elected official's attendance at a solidarity event. For more information, including guidance for scheduling in-district meetings, view the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's resources for contacting elected officials.

You should also encourage elected officials to refrain from politicizing antisemitism. Elected officials must identify and show solidarity against antisemitism regardless of its origin, even if it comes from those with similar political viewpoints. You can help guide elected officials on how to respond to antisemitism appropriately and proportionally, including by not misidentifying antisemitism, overstating antisemitism from political opponents or downplaying antisemitism from political allies. Politicizing antisemitism is not helpful and can even compound the pain and fear that communities experience after incidents of bigotry. For more information, see ADL's "Responsible Leadership Means Not Politicizing Antisemitism."

**Community Healing**
Acts of bias can send shockwaves of fear throughout the community and have a deep impact. People may seek support from their congregation and/or look for productive ways to channel their emotions and help. Your designated Community Healing Coordinator should keep the range of possible emotions and responses in
mind as they develop a plan for community healing. It is important to ensure that those who have been directly targeted are consulted regarding any planned community response.

Broad-based community healing can take many forms, and the response to an incident may incorporate one or more of the elements below. Not all incidents will require a large public response. Remember to keep the response proportionate to the incident itself. Of course, the list below is non-exhaustive; please consider adding items that resonate with your particular community.

- Coordinate listening circles or small group meetings to discuss what happened.

- Issue statements to denounce the act of hate and reinforce community values with broad community buy-in. You may wish to invite elected officials, interfaith clergy and other community groups to join in counter-messaging that shows compassion, encouragement and community support.

- Incorporate the incident and response into worship and general programming for people of all ages. Consider writing a d’var Torah using the Jewish texts below for support or holding space to discuss the incident during religious school or youth group gatherings.

- Organize a rally or vigil in support of those affected. Community vigils or rallies show that hate is unwelcome and provide an opportunity to come together as a community. Invite neighboring synagogues, your Federation and other community groups to participate, and encourage elected officials to attend or speak, if appropriate; consider inviting the media, as well. Welcome the participation of interfaith clergy or groups that represent other communities in denouncing acts of hate.

- Invite a member of your community to write a letter to your local newspaper about their thoughts and feelings about antisemitism and other manifestations of bias and hate. In the letter, explain what your community thinks should be done about it.
Turning to Religious Texts for Support

Throughout Jewish history, leaders have looked to our texts — Biblical, historical and contemporary — to guide us in responding to our communal experiences. They provide context for everything from comfort to agitation. The texts below can be shared to show the wisdom of Jewish tradition as you navigate acts of hatred and antisemitism in your community.

This frame from Mishle can be helpful in emphasizing the power of language for both healing and causing harm.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

If you would like to frame a message with a more theological, God-centered approach, consider the following two texts. It is important, however, not to encourage a message of vindictiveness toward others, but rather one that emphasizes trust and faith in God’s comfort, shelter and protection.

Numbers 10:35

When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say: Advance, Adonai! May Your enemies be scattered, And may Your foes flee before You!
Psalms 27 (excerpts)

(1) Of David. Adonai is my light and my help; whom should I fear? Adonai is the stronghold of my life, whom should I dread? (2) When evil people assail me to devour my flesh— it is they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and fall. (3) Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident. (4) One thing I ask of Adonai, only that do I seek: to live in the house of the Adonai all the days of my life... (14) Look to Adonai; be strong and of good courage! O look to Adonai!

This commentary speaks to both the perpetrators of hateful acts and our communal and individual response to them. Though not a simple request or expectation, in acknowledging an act of antisemitism, the text challenges us to be open to and invite an environment of learning to help break down obstacles to meaningful connection and to unite in a common struggle.

Avot DeRabbi Natan (A) 23

Ben Azzai says:

...Who is the strongest of the strong?
The text below asks that we be active participants in the pursuit of radical connection. This may take the form of proactive invitations to people and organizations that may have misconceptions about Jewish people or have never met Jewish people before, with the hope of furthering education, empathy and relationship.

Avot DeRabbi Natan (A) 12)

“Seek peace and pursue it” (Psalms 34:15). – Seek it out locally and run to make peace anyplace else it might be needed.

Using the framework of understanding the difference between antisemitism and anti-Israel/Zionist rhetoric, this quote can help put the dichotomy into context.

“What antisemitism does is turn the Jews – “the Jew” – into the symbol of whatever it is that a given civilization defines as its most loathsome qualities. And so, under Christianity, the Jew was the Christ-killer (“His blood be upon our
The following is an excerpt from a podcast and article from NPR, interviewing a handful of Jewish leaders about antisemitism and allyship. Rabbi Sandra Lawson speaks to the importance of remembering that allyship must be rooted in relationship. Her teaching can be used to gently challenge your community to think about how they build relationships and what they can do to strengthen them.

Rabbi Sandra Lawson approaches that question — “who is here for us?” — from multiple perspectives. As a Black, queer, female rabbi, Lawson is at the intersection of marginalized identities.

“People's allyship should not be conditional,” she said. “It should not be 'I showed up for you, or these groups — therefore you show up for me.' You should do it because it's the right thing to do.”

And it requires building real relationships, Lawson said.

Reflecting on the Jewish theologian Rabbi Abraham Heschel's storied alliance with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. In the civil rights movement, Lawson pointed out that “what gets left out of the story is that they were actual friends. And so if you want to show up for Black Lives Matter, that's fine, that's outwardly facing. But the hard work is the internal work that you have to do in yourself to understand racism, antisemitism, homophobia... And that's the work that people don't want to do.”
This poem by Israeli/Mizrachi poet Adi Keissar proposes a resilient and strong response in the face of the reality of the persistent nature of hate.

**Heaven Help Us / Adi Keissar***

You lift your hands

that you won’t fall into the sea

that you won’t crash

into the sidewalk

you place your hands into

the sun burning

your fingertips

you say the sky

has already fallen

it’s always falling

we are here

to stand up.

Translated from the Hebrew by Rabbi Reuven Greenvald (URJ)
Activating Allyship and Advocacy

Community healing involves activating and including your allies in the fight against antisemitism. Antisemitism is not a Jewish problem to be solved by the Jewish community, but a community-wide issue that needs to be addressed by all members of a community. Sometimes, though, allies may not understand the impact of a particular act, and you need to explain why your community is feeling a particular way. Other times, allies may not know what to do to be helpful. Providing clear guidance about what support your community needs is encouraged.

Remember: Allyship is a two-way street. The safety and freedom of the Jewish community is directly connected to the safety and freedom of all marginalized communities. Practice allyship for others, just as you want others to practice allyship for you — and if you do not know how to be helpful in the aftermath of a
bias incident, reach out to the targeted community and ask. Remind them that they are not alone.

Consider inviting allies to participate in your response in the following ways:

- Invite your local elected officials, town board, human rights commission or other representative body to issue statements and/or host emergency meetings to discuss the situation at hand and to discuss what can be done at the local level to combat antisemitism and all forms of bias.
- Arrange letter-writing campaigns or social media campaigns to show broad community support for those who have been targeted.
- Encourage people to display lawn signs or posters that voice support for the community targeted and/or their opposition to hate.
- Plan school or community events that educate the community about your congregation and foster broader cohesion. Education and awareness can prevent future incidents.
- Write a letter to your members of Congress, member of Parliament, state or provincial legislators or school board conveying your position about important issues and possible courses of action. Connect with ADL and the Religious Action Center to coordinate your plans and ongoing advocacy efforts, as there may already be relationships in place at the local, state and federal level that can be activated for this purpose.

Following an antisemitic incident, you may choose to contact your elected officials to urge them condemn antisemitism, combat religious bigotry, and protect houses of worship. Visit the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism’s webpage on antisemitism and hate crimes and its Legislative Action Center, as well as ADL’s advocacy webpage, to find updated information about how you can take action. The Religious Action Center and ADL also offer resources on contacting elected officials, including making phone calls, writing letters, and scheduling in-district visits.
Incidents by Type

The most common types of antisemitic incidents reported by synagogues to ADL fall into one of the following categories. Below you will also find checklists to guide your response process. Please note that these checklists are a starting point for your response and that responses may vary from incident to incident and community to community; not all of the steps below may apply. You may also expand these checklists to fit your community’s needs.

With regards to any of these scenarios, prioritize pastoral care from clergy and opportunities for community comfort. Personal connections are important, and in some cases, communal worship responses will be especially healing. Worship and study opportunities (for community members of all ages) can include divrei Torah that address what has occurred and how the community can respond.

Should it be necessary to communicate to the whole community, be sure to include Jewish grounding for what has happened and for what the response will be.

Emails, Letters and Phone Calls
Congregations sometimes receive antisemitic emails, letters or phone calls; occasionally, they include a bomb threat or other threat. If your institution receives such a threat, we recommend you follow the steps indicated by the Department of Homeland Security. Make sure everyone on your team is familiar with these steps.

Day of Incident:

1. Collect as much information as possible about the situation. For example, if you receive an antisemitic phone call, write down the phone number, caller ID information and any identifying information you might be able to glean from the call. Try to write down what the caller says word for word. Sometimes, the same person will call a series of Jewish institutions, and it
can be helpful to be able to connect the dots. If you receive a voicemail, do not delete it; if you receive a letter, preserve both the letter and envelope.

2. Let your synagogue professional team and administrative staff know about the situation in detail.
   1. Determine whether a call to law enforcement is warranted. It is a best practice to report threatening communications.
   2. Determine whether communication(s) to the greater congregational community are necessary. If so, see section on guidance for writing these messages.

3. Report this incident to ADL and the URJ at adl.org/reportincident-URJ and SCN, both of whom may be able to provide information about the caller or report on trends in your area.

4. Provide support for the affected community or staff member(s).

Week of Incident:

1. Continue coordinating with appropriate investigatory parties for updates.
2. Continue to check in on the affected community or staff member(s).
3. With appropriate professional staff and lay leaders, review your synagogue's protocols and procedures regarding bomb threats and harassing phone calls.
4. Review the after-action report of the incident and what transpired. Discuss with appropriate professional staff and lay leaders what can be improved in the future.
5. Respond to the pastoral needs of your community through learning and text, potentially calling for a special Shabbat practice that week.

Month of Incident:

1. Turn this incident into a learning experience.
   1. Provide educational materials and training for your congregation and/or staff based on the incident.
Propaganda Distribution by Extremist Groups

In recent years, ADL has documented an increase in the posting of flyers and stickers, particularly by white supremacist groups. The posting of such flyers on synagogue property and/or the targeting of Jewish families or institutions may be an antisemitic incident.

Day of Incident:

1. If possible and not disruptive to normal business, do not remove the propaganda.

2. If the propaganda must be removed, please be sure to first photograph the propaganda and make note of its location.

3. Report the incident to law enforcement to investigate. Sometimes such instances are part of pattern that law enforcement is tracking.

4. Report to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ.

5. Communicate with appropriate staff about the incident and notify building management for awareness.

Week of Incident:

1. Issue a communication to the congregational community about the occurrence, if necessary.

2. Notify other communal institutions in your area about the propaganda.
3. Reach out to other community groups that may have been affected by the propaganda.

4. **Reach out to the URJ** to connect with other congregations in your area or with other congregations that have experienced similar incidents.

5. Follow up on the investigation.

**Month of Incident:**

1. Turn this incident into a community learning and advocacy opportunity.
   
   1. Read ADL backgrounders regarding the extremist group or groups responsible and check out **ADL’s H.E.A.T. Map** to learn about the distribution of propaganda over time in your community.
   
   2. Hold a community conversation and invite other groups that have been targeted or may be impacted by the propaganda to participate. If you have a local human relations commission, consider asking them to host the conversation.

   3. Consider writing letters of concern to your local elected officials.

**Graffiti, Vandalism and Breaking and Entering (i.e. graffiti, broken windows, leaving pork products on the property, etc.)**

In the event that your congregation experiences vandalism or a break-in, it is always important to consider the context. Sometimes, there is no evidence of antisemitic animus or intent (e.g., multiple homes/buildings are vandalized in your neighborhood, and the local synagogue is one of many targets).

If, however, there is evidence that the property was intentionally selected because it is a Jewish institution (i.e., the graffiti includes swastikas, SS lightning bolts, white supremacist symbols, etc.), the next question is whether the underlying conduct constitutes a crime; note that sometimes Jewish symbols such as the Star of David or a menorah are used to target Jewish institutions, as well.

- If the underlying incident is not a crime (e.g., an isolated incident of leaving antisemitic flyers on the property, drawing hate symbols in the snow, etc.),
Just because a particular incident does not rise to the level of a hate crime does not mean it is less harmful or should be taken less seriously. Antisemitic incidents and hate crimes both have a lasting impact on a community, and both may require community responses.

**Day of Incident:**

1. Contact law enforcement and notify your security committee, president or executive director. Do not enter the building until a law enforcement assessment is complete, and follow their guidance regarding whether to enter the building.

2. Ensure that all staff are safe and provide support as needed for individuals impacted by the incident.

3. Take photos of any graffiti, even if it is drawn in dust or snow. Do not tamper with any evidence until law enforcement has assessed and investigated.

4. Report the incident to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ, as well as to your local Federation and SCN.

5. Communicate with your congregational community quickly and transparently. Your message should include:
   1. A clear description of what occurred
   2. Condemnation of the act
   3. Assurance that it is being thoroughly investigated
   4. Opportunities for community healing
Verbal Harassment

Verbal harassment can vary in intensity. If you are in conversation with someone and hear an antisemitic stereotype or trope, consider using one of the following strategies to address the comment, if you feel it is safe and productive to do so.

Strategy #1: Interrupt.

Week of Incident:

1. After receiving clearance from authorities, remove or clean up the vandalism.

2. Offer opportunities for gathering as a community to reflect and heal.

3. If local elected officials have not already been in touch, consider reaching out to alert them of the situation.

4. Continue to follow up regarding the investigation, keeping your community informed of developments as appropriate and continuing to offer resources and support.

5. Provide resources and materials for various age groups on how to discuss antisemitism. (See "Resources to Educate and Empower Your Community" section.)

6. Provide tangible ways in which other community groups or nearby synagogues can provide support.

Month of Incident:

1. Consider applying for a nonprofit security grant to improve your security system. Security cameras, digital doorbells and other visible safety measures may deter future perpetrators.

2. Review your response and assess what can be improved upon for future incidents.

Verbal Harassment

Verbal harassment can vary in intensity. If you are in conversation with someone and hear an antisemitic stereotype or trope, consider using one of the following strategies to address the comment, if you feel it is safe and productive to do so.

Strategy #1: Interrupt.
“Let’s pause the conversation here to reflect on something that was just said.”

“That sort of language/behavior is not acceptable in our congregation.”

“Ouch! Let’s talk about that a bit more.”

“What I just heard was not OK.”

**Strategy #2: Ask a question.**

- “What do you mean?”
- “What do you know about the meaning or history of the language you just used?”

**Strategy #3: Explain impact.**

- “Do you know how that symbol makes some people feel?”
- “When you say that, it is really damaging to an entire group of people.”
- “Statements like that have a long history of causing pain and fear for entire communities.”

**Strategy #4: Broaden to universal behavior.**

- “Do you mean everyone who is ____________, or are you speaking of someone in particular?”
- “I don’t think that’s a ____________ thing. I think lots of different people have that quality.”
- “You can’t make a generalization about a group of people based on your interactions with (or what you’ve heard about) one or a small number of people.”
- “Every human being deserves respect and decency.”

**Strategy #5: Connect to historical context.**

- “What you said feeds into an old stereotype. Let’s talk about where that comes from...”
Other incidents may require you to follow all or some of the steps listed in the checklist below.

**Day of Incident:**

1. If you are present when someone is verbally harassing another person, deescalate the situation, if you feel safe doing so, and move with the target to a safe place.

2. Make note of any descriptors or identifying features of the harasser. These can include physical characteristics such as hair color, skin color, eye color, tattoos, approximate height, body type, age and clothing.

3. Call your preferred security partner for guidance on next steps. They can help assess whether the harasser poses a threat to the community.

4. If the incident is reported to you, provide immediate support for the targets. Being on the receiving end of hateful slurs can be very painful.

5. Alert other appropriate staff of the situation.

6. Determine whether communication with the broader congregational community is appropriate.

7. Report the incident to ADL at [adl.org/reportincident-URJ](adl.org/reportincident-URJ), as well as to your local Jewish Federation and SCN.

**Week of Incident:**

1. Continue to provide support for those targeted through clergy connections and Caring/Chesed Committee involvement.

2. Consider taking additional security measures, if appropriate.
3. Create opportunities for prayer or learning for members of all ages.

**Month of Incident:**

1. Continue to provide support for those targeted.

2. Consider applying for a nonprofit security grant to improve your security system. Security cameras, digital doorbells, and other visible safety measures may deter future perpetrators.

3. Review your response and assess what improvements can be made.

4. Turn this incident into a learning opportunity:
   1. Provide de-escalation training for your community.
   2. Organize a showing of solidarity.
   3. Involve allies from other communities and/or interfaith organizations to provide support.

**Arson and Acts of Violence**

Every act of violence is different and warrants a unique response. However, in the wake of the shootings at the Tree of Life Synagogue and the Chabad of Poway and after other violent attacks on the Jewish community, we sadly must anticipate that this may happen in our communities and understand what to expect in terms of a response.

Many of the lessons shared throughout this guide are also applicable when preventing and responding to acts of violence.

**Prevention:**

In addition to the guidance provided in the previous “Prevention and Preparation” section, here are some specific tips that may be helpful in responding to violent incidents.
We cannot stress enough the importance of having multiple people carrying cellphones during services and other religious celebrations. Do not leave them in your office or your coat pocket.

Arrange a small group of volunteers who are willing and able to help with any task in the aftermath of a violent incident. This can be making phone calls, picking up meals or keeping someone company.

Consider creating a text messaging group with the leaders of synagogues and Jewish communal organizations for emergency use only. This can help streamline communications and keep everyone in the community informed.

Develop a relationship with Jewish Children and Family Services or other social service providers that serve your area. Trained social workers can help targets or victims and families process traumatic situations and provide emotional support. If necessary, their teams can provide additional support to help explain Jewish customs and practices to law enforcement and also explain law enforcement protocols to your community.

Consider asking your congregants with children to establish a safe gathering place outside of your congregation to meet in case they are separated.

**Response:**

As soon as you are aware of a violent incident, call 9-1-1. If you can, call ADL and the URJ. Both organizations will do their best to get representatives from their team to the scene, if necessary.

When law enforcement and emergency response services arrive, they will stabilize and secure the scene and set up a perimeter and command center. Their victims' assistance teams will come to offer support and guidance, as well.

Once the scene is secured, designate two people to be the main points of contact with law enforcement; one of these two people should always be at the scene. You will need to allow time for law enforcement to investigate. Your role during this
The media will likely rush to cover the story. You should have one or two spokespersons who can serve as their points of contact; you may want to engage an outside spokesperson for a major incident. Consider reminding congregants, victims, and others who were impacted that they do not have to engage with the media. Community members and even clergy do not have any responsibility to answer the media’s questions.

- Only share the information that law enforcement has advised you to share. You do not want to impede the investigation.
- Protect the privacy of your congregants. Do not volunteer names of congregants, victims, or people affected unless you have explicit permission to do so.
- Bring empathy to all communications. When violent incidents occur, the community's safety is violated. Emotions run high and people want answers. Make sure your communications convey the appropriate emotions, provide reassurance, and include useful information.
- Schedule routine press conferences at designated times so that people can know when to expect more information. This can also help keep the press at bay.

Assign one person to be in charge of organizing community responses. All calls or communication about how others can assist during this time should be directed to that person. They should provide clear directives on how other community organizations and individuals can be of assistance during this challenging time. This can include letter writing campaigns, arranging a vigil or memorial site or service, or making donations to support impacted families. Remember to keep in mind victim and family preferences before planning any community response.

Try to maintain community traditions and activities in the aftermath of an incident. Consider finding a temporary alternative venue for community
gatherings and be sure to communicate those location changes to your community.

**DOCUMENTING INCIDENTS**

The third step is documenting the incident. When something happens near or outside a congregation, it can be tempting to jump to conclusions about motive, but your role as a leader in your congregation is to allow the appropriate investigatory party to collect facts to understand what happened. It is best to confirm that an incident is in fact antisemitic or bias-related before calling it so.

While waiting for responders to arrive on scene, do not touch anything; this includes resisting the urge to immediately remove graffiti or other types of vandalism. If the incident occurred in a highly visible area, you may want to consider covering it in a way that would not hinder any investigation or blocking the general public's access to that area.

Remember: No matter how big or small the incident is, be sure to document it with ADL. If you are unsure whether law enforcement should get involved, please call or submit an incident report to your local ADL office. You should immediately call the police if you believe there is an ongoing physical or security threat. Please also reach out to the URJ so pastoral and community support can be provided.

When collecting facts and investigating, the appropriate investigatory party may:

- Document the incident by taking photos. If you take photos for your records or to include in your report to ADL and the URJ, please be sure to take close-up photos so those reviewing the incident can see the details, as well as photos from farther away so you can see the location of the incident.
- Ask who, what, when, where and how.
- Review security camera (CCTV) footage. Ask neighbors if they have camera footage to share.
At this stage, it is also important to keep the following in mind:

- If a congregant approaches you for advice on an antisemitic incident that has occurred in the community, ask for details about the situation, including: what steps they have taken to address the matter up to this point, if any; who else, if anyone, they have approached about this issue; and what the response has been up to this point.

- When communicating with the media and the community, choose language carefully. Do not call it an act of violence an antisemitic or bias incident until it has been confirmed as such by ADL or other investigatory authorities.

COMMUNICATING QUICKLY AND CLEARLY

Initial Communications with Congregants and Community

Prompt, intentional and specific communication from your congregation or organization can make a big difference. Statements from leadership set the tone for the community.

Determine who in the congregation needs to be informed about the incident. Remember, word will get out and travel quickly. It is often better that the community hears from the congregation first to prevent miscommunications or unintentionally increase anxiety.

Initial communications should be timely and measured. They may include the following:

1. Describe the nature of the incident (e.g., “swastika on the bathroom wall”). Be transparent and specific. If slurs or offensive language were used, make sure to use censored words (for example, “N-word,” “R-word”) so you do not perpetuate the harm caused by using these words.
2. Use thoughtful, inclusive language, and choose terms that respect how affected communities self-identify.

3. Denounce the incident and reaffirm your congregational values. You can draw on religious texts for inspiration.

4. When appropriate, announce an immediate investigation of the incident.

5. When ready, present a clear plan of action moving forward. Are you hosting a community vigil? Are you planning a town hall? Opening Shabbat services to interfaith and community partners? Are you encouraging congregants to send supportive messages to the affected family? Include what you are doing to help the community heal. If there are victims or targeted individuals, please get input and confirm these plans with their loved ones before making any announcement. More suggestions for community healing are provided below.

6. Provide clear guidance and opportunities for allyship for individuals and organizations looking to help. Be explicit about your community's needs. You may ask people to post on a social media, write an op-ed or attend an event or worship service. More ideas for activating allyship are provided below.

7. Share resources, including mental health and educational resources, that will help different constituencies have conversations with loved ones. Resources for caregivers, teachers and the broader community are included below.

8. Be clear about what information congregants should be sharing on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as through interpersonal communications, blog posts and online and in-person social gatherings, to ensure that adequate messaging is being shared and to avoid unwanted attention.

Continue to send regular updates and plans for short- and long-term actions to various stakeholders.
Guidance for Respecting Individual Targets, Victims, and their Families

Communications in the wake of an act of hate against an individual should serve to support those who have been targeted. That said, it is important to ask the targets or victims of such an act what they need.

All outward communications should be respectful of the wishes of those targeted. If there are aspects of the incident that the targets or victims would like privacy, respecting these wishes in your communications is of the utmost importance.

Communicating with the Media

Before communicating with the media, consider the pros and cons of having the media involved, as the media can assist or complicate a response to an incident. Feel free to reach out to ADL or the URJ if you are unsure about whether to bring an incident to the press.

If you do decide to include the media in your response, have one or two people speak on behalf of your community. Consider identifying a congregant with media experience who can be point person, or a local firm that may assist on a pro bono basis. Fielding media calls after an incident can be a time-consuming task that takes you away from the needs of congregants.

Communications with the media should be informative, clear and concise. If the incident requires law enforcement assistance, planning communications with law enforcement may be necessary.

If you are comfortable speaking with reporters:

- Reiterate the messaging in your communications to your congregation or come up with a few talking points you can refer back to. It can be useful to have a pre-planned message that includes information for congregants or other stakeholders.
- Describe to the reporter what has happened and your concerns.
In the aftermath of an incident, it is important to encourage discussions of recent events among members of the community of all ages who can be impacted in a strong way by these conversations. When discussing an incident, keep in mind that people experience incidents differently depending on their background and identity. Because of this, it is important to keep an open mind and actively listen to the needs of each member of your community.

Below, we have compiled a few resources to help you have productive conversations and inspire others within the community to do the same. Consider including them in initial emails or communications so your community can turn to them for guidance.

Resources for Parents and Families:
ADL and the URJ have created various resources to empower parents to have conversations about current events with their families.

- Three general resources to turn to in the aftermath of incidents are:
  - "Talking to Young Children about Bias and Prejudice" provides best practices for engaging in these conversations with young children.
  - "Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate" guides caregivers in providing children and teenagers with the tools they need to understand what has happened and to take steps to challenge hate in safe and effective ways.
  - "Helping Children to Process Acts of Terrorism" - provides guidelines that can help children cope during tragic moments and their aftermath.
ADL’s **Table Talks: Family Conversations about Current Events** can be used to begin a conversation with children and teenagers about recent events. The following Table Talks cover some of the issues explored in this toolkit:

- **Antisemitism Today** (ages 12 and up)
- **Propaganda, Extremism and Online Recruitment Tactics** (ages 14 and up)
- **Slurs and Biased Language (in English and Spanish)** (ages 10 and up)
- **Responding to Cyberhate** (ages 12 and up)

**Resources for Teachers & Educators:**

When an antisemitic incident occurs in the community, educators should consider discussing them in the classroom. ADL’s free online lessons plans can help educators in your congregation discuss these topics with students of various ages. The following may also be helpful in the aftermath of an incident:

- **“Antisemitic Incidents: Being an Ally, Advocate and Activist”**
  The surge of antisemitic incidents in the United States is alarming to many. In this lesson, middle and high school students examine antisemitic incidents and explore ways to be an ally and how their actions, whether on a large or small scale, can make a difference.

- **“Swastikas and Other Hate Symbols”**
  In this lesson, high school students consider the significance of symbols in our society and explore what can be done about the prevalence of hate symbols.

- **“Contemporary Antisemitism”**
  To increase middle and high school students’ awareness about antisemitism post-Holocaust, this lesson helps students learn about the persistence of antisemitism in its contemporary forms and consider the interconnectedness of all forms of oppression.
It is important to note that all educators and school community members must be committed to addressing all bias-related incidents in their schools and communities. Failing to effectively respond to bias incidents tacitly condones harmful words or actions, sending a message that safety and equity are not community priorities. By challenging harmful language and behaviors and helping students process bias incidents, educators can actively counter bias, cultivate inclusivity and model how students can do the same. In many cases, clergy members can be wonderful partners for educators in these situations.

ADL and the URJ can assist you in responding to school-based incidents. Consider implementing ADL’s No Place for Hate or A World of Difference programs in your school or connecting with colleagues who belong to Association of Reform Jewish Educators (ARJE) or Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism (ECE-RJ) for guidance and suggestions for additional resources.

If your congregation has an affiliated school, we highly encourage you to review ADL’s detailed resource for school administrators and educators on best practices for responding to school-based incidents.

Communicating with Other Organizations
When communicating with the broader community and other stakeholders, it is OK to ask for help, support and solidarity from others. Other constituencies within your broader community can show their support by denouncing the act of hate and cosponsoring solidarity events; depending on the specific act, donations of material resources may also be warranted.
Providing opportunities for other communities to show solidarity and support can help prevent incidents from occurring in the future. Indeed, this type of unity sends a clear message to would-be offenders that the type of conduct underlying the incident is unacceptable and unwelcome in the community. Communications with the broader community should be concise and informative, especially in the immediate aftermath of an incident.

**Communicating with Elected Officials**

Elected officials can support congregations by denouncing antisemitic incidents and educating their constituents about antisemitism and bigotry. When communicating with local, state, provincial or federal elected officials, remember to be respectful and nonpartisan. In the United States, a provision of the federal tax code known as the Johnson Amendment prohibits 501(c)(3) organizations — including houses of worship — from engaging in partisan politics. While you may invite elected officials to speak at solidarity rallies or encourage elected officials to speak out against antisemitism, it is important to avoid endorsing or opposing candidates or engaging with an elected official’s campaign.

When reaching out to an elected official after an antisemitic incident, designate one person (perhaps a congregational president or clergy member) to be the primary point of contact. If someone in your congregation has a relationship with an elected official, consider leveraging that connection (with the individual’s permission) to generate a faster response. You should also think about who the best contact is within the elected official’s office. Federal officials, such as U.S. senators, U.S. representatives, and members of Parliament, typically have local offices in the district, state or province that focus on constituent relations, as well as offices in the capital that focus on legislative activity. While it may be tempting to contact the capital office, district offices are often better positioned to arrange community meetings or coordinate an elected official’s attendance at a solidarity event. For more information, including guidance for scheduling in-district
meetings, view the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism’s resources for contacting elected officials.

You should also encourage elected officials to refrain from politicizing antisemitism. Elected officials must identify and show solidarity against antisemitism regardless of its origin, even if it comes from those with similar political viewpoints. You can help guide elected officials on how to respond to antisemitism appropriately and proportionally, including by not misidentifying antisemitism, overstating antisemitism from political opponents or downplaying antisemitism from political allies. Politicizing antisemitism is not helpful and can even compound the pain and fear that communities experience after incidents of bigotry. For more information, see ADL’s “Responsible Leadership Means Not Politicizing Antisemitism.”

Community Healing
Acts of bias can send shockwaves of fear throughout the community and have a deep impact. People may seek support from their congregation and/or look for productive ways to channel their emotions and help. Your designated Community Healing Coordinator should keep the range of possible emotions and responses in mind as they develop a plan for community healing. It is important to ensure that those who have been directly targeted are consulted regarding any planned community response.

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**Turning to Religious Texts for Support**

Throughout Jewish history, leaders have looked to our texts — Biblical, historical and contemporary — to guide us in responding to our communal experiences. They provide context for everything from comfort to agitation. The texts below can be shared to show the wisdom of Jewish tradition as you navigate acts of hatred and antisemitism in your community.

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One who overcomes one's inclination-to-do-harm? There are those who say: One who turns an enemy into a friend?
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Avot DeRabbi Natan (A) 12)

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The following is an excerpt from a podcast and article from NPR, interviewing a handful of Jewish leaders about antisemitism and allyship. Rabbi Sandra Lawson
speaks to the importance of remembering that allyship must be rooted in relationship. Her teaching can be used to gently challenge your community to think about how they build relationships and what they can do to strengthen them.

Rabbi Sandra Lawson approaches that question — “who is here for us?” — from multiple perspectives. As a Black, queer, female rabbi, Lawson is at the intersection of marginalized identities.

“People's allyship should not be conditional,” she said. “It should not be 'I showed up for you, or these groups — therefore you show up for me.' You should do it because it's the right thing to do.”

And it requires building real relationships, Lawson said.

Reflecting on the Jewish theologian Rabbi Abraham Heschel's storied alliance with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. In the civil rights movement, Lawson pointed out that “what gets left out of the story is that they were actual friends. And so if you want to show up for Black Lives Matter, that's fine, that's outwardly facing. But the hard work is the internal work that you have to do in yourself to understand racism, antisemitism, homophobia... And that's the work that people don't want to do.”

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**Heaven Help Us / Adi Keissar**

You lift your hands

that you won't fall into the sea

that you won't crash
into the sidewalk
you place your hands into
the sun burning
your fingertips
you say the sky
has already fallen
it's always falling
we are here
to stand up.

Translated from the Hebrew by Rabbi Reuven Greenvald (URJ)
Activating Allyship and Advocacy

Community healing involves activating and including your allies in the fight against antisemitism. Antisemitism is not a Jewish problem to be solved by the Jewish community, but a community-wide issue that needs to be addressed by all members of a community. Sometimes, though, allies may not understand the impact of a particular act, and you need to explain why your community is feeling a particular way. Other times, allies may not know what to do to be helpful. Providing clear guidance about what support your community needs is encouraged.

Remember: Allyship is a two-way street. The safety and freedom of the Jewish community is directly connected to the safety and freedom of all marginalized communities. Practice allyship for others, just as you want others to practice allyship for you — and if you do not know how to be helpful in the aftermath of a bias incident, reach out to the targeted community and ask. Remind them that they are not alone.

Consider inviting allies to participate in your response in the following ways:

- Invite your local elected officials, town board, human rights commission or other representative body to issue statements and/or host emergency meetings to discuss the situation at hand and to discuss what can be done at the local level to combat antisemitism and all forms of bias.
Following an antisemitic incident, you may choose to contact your elected officials to urge them to condemn antisemitism, combat religious bigotry, and protect houses of worship. Visit the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's webpage on antisemitism and hate crimes and its Legislative Action Center, as well as ADL's advocacy webpage, to find updated information about how you can take action. The Religious Action Center and ADL also offer resources on contacting elected officials, including making phone calls, writing letters, and scheduling in-district visits.

Incidents by Type

The most common types of antisemitic incidents reported by synagogues to ADL fall into one of the following categories. Below you will also find checklists to guide your response process. Please note that these checklists are a starting point for your response and that responses may vary from incident to incident and community to community; not all of the steps below may apply. You may also expand these checklists to fit your community's needs.

- Arrange letter-writing campaigns or social media campaigns to show broad community support for those who have been targeted.
- Encourage people to display lawn signs or posters that voice support for the community targeted and/or their opposition to hate.
- Plan school or community events that educate the community about your congregation and foster broader cohesion. Education and awareness can prevent future incidents.
- Write a letter to your members of Congress, member of Parliament, state or provincial legislators or school board conveying your position about important issues and possible courses of action. Connect with ADL and the Religious Action Center to coordinate your plans and ongoing advocacy efforts, as there may already be relationships in place at the local, state and federal level that can be activated for this purpose.
With regards to any of these scenarios, prioritize pastoral care from clergy and opportunities for community comfort. Personal connections are important, and in some cases, communal worship responses will be especially healing. **Worship and study opportunities** (for community members of all ages) can include divrei Torah that address what has occurred and how the community can respond.

Should it be necessary to communicate to the whole community, be sure to include **Jewish grounding** for what has happened and for what the response will be.

**Emails, Letters and Phone Calls**
Congregations sometimes receive antisemitic emails, letters or phone calls; occasionally, they include a bomb threat or other threat. If your institution receives such a threat, we recommend you follow the steps indicated by the Department of Homeland Security. Make sure everyone on your team is familiar with these steps.

**Day of Incident:**

1. Collect as much information as possible about the situation. For example, if you receive an antisemitic phone call, write down the phone number, caller ID information and any identifying information you might be able to glean from the call. Try to write down what the caller says word for word. Sometimes, the same person will call a series of Jewish institutions, and it can be helpful to be able to connect the dots. If you receive a voicemail, do not delete it; if you receive a letter, preserve both the letter and envelope.

2. Let your synagogue professional team and administrative staff know about the situation in detail.

   1. Determine whether a call to law enforcement is warranted. It is a best practice to report threatening communications.
2. Determine whether communication(s) to the greater congregational community are necessary. If so, see section on guidance for writing these messages.

3. Report this incident to ADL and the URJ at adl.org/reportincident-URJ and SCN, both of whom may be able to provide information about the caller or report on trends in your area.

4. Provide support for the affected community or staff member(s).

**Week of Incident:**

1. Continue coordinating with appropriate investigatory parties for updates.

2. Continue to check in on the affected community or staff member(s).

3. With appropriate professional staff and lay leaders, review your synagogue’s protocols and procedures regarding bomb threats and harassing phone calls.

4. Review the after-action report of the incident and what transpired. Discuss with appropriate professional staff and lay leaders what can be improved in the future.

5. Respond to the pastoral needs of your community through learning and text, potentially calling for a special Shabbat practice that week.

**Month of Incident:**

1. Turn this incident into a learning experience.

   1. Provide educational materials and training for your congregation and/or staff based on the incident.

   2. If you are part of an interfaith council, involved in conversations in The Tent (the Reform Movement’s collaboration platform) or part of a social action network or synagogue network through the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, start a conversation about experiences with bias and hate. Ask how other groups have handled similar situations.
2. If a suspect was identified and/or legal action needs to be pursued, continue conversations with law enforcement and/or legal counsel.

Propaganda Distribution by Extremist Groups
In recent years, ADL has documented an increase in the posting of flyers and stickers, particularly by white supremacist groups. The posting of such flyers on synagogue property and/or the targeting of Jewish families or institutions may be an antisemitic incident.

Day of Incident:

1. If possible and not disruptive to normal business, do not remove the propaganda.

2. If the propaganda must be removed, please be sure to first photograph the propaganda and make note of its location.

3. Report the incident to law enforcement to investigate. Sometimes such instances are part of pattern that law enforcement is tracking.

4. Report to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ.

5. Communicate with appropriate staff about the incident and notify building management for awareness.

Week of Incident:

1. Issue a communication to the congregational community about the occurrence, if necessary.

2. Notify other communal institutions in your area about the propaganda.

3. Reach out to other community groups that may have been affected by the propaganda.

4. Reach out to the URJ to connect with other congregations in your area or with other congregations that have experienced similar incidents.

5. Follow up on the investigation.
Month of Incident:

1. Turn this incident into a community learning and advocacy opportunity.

   1. Read ADL backgrounders regarding the extremist group or groups responsible and check out ADL’s H.E.A.T. Map to learn about the distribution of propaganda over time in your community.

   2. Hold a community conversation and invite other groups that have been targeted or may be impacted by the propaganda to participate. If you have a local human relations commission, consider asking them to host the conversation.

   3. Consider writing letters of concern to your local elected officials.

Graffiti, Vandalism and Breaking and Entering (i.e. graffiti, broken windows, leaving pork products on the property, etc.)

In the event that your congregation experiences vandalism or a break-in, it is always important to consider the context. Sometimes, there is no evidence of antisemitic animus or intent (e.g., multiple homes/buildings are vandalized in your neighborhood, and the local synagogue is one of many targets).

If, however, there is evidence that the property was intentionally selected because it is a Jewish institution (i.e., the graffiti includes swastikas, SS lightning bolts, white supremacist symbols, etc.), the next question is whether the underlying conduct constitutes a crime; note that sometimes Jewish symbols such as the Star of David or a menorah are used to target Jewish institutions, as well.

- If the underlying incident is not a crime (e.g., an isolated incident of leaving antisemitic flyers on the property, drawing hate symbols in the snow, etc.), the incident likely will be considered an antisemitic incident.

- If the underlying incident is a crime (e.g., antisemitic vandalism that causes damage to a synagogue, breaking and entering to damage Torah scrolls, etc.), hate crime charges may be warranted. In addition to reporting to ADL,
Just because a particular incident does not rise to the level of a hate crime does not mean it is less harmful or should be taken less seriously. Antisemitic incidents and hate crimes both have a lasting impact on a community, and both may require community responses.

**Day of Incident:**

1. Contact law enforcement and notify your security committee, president or executive director. Do not enter the building until a law enforcement assessment is complete, and follow their guidance regarding whether to enter the building.

2. Ensure that all staff are safe and provide support as needed for individuals impacted by the incident.

3. Take photos of any graffiti, even if it is drawn in dust or snow. Do not tamper with any evidence until law enforcement has assessed and investigated.

4. Report the incident to ADL at [adl.org/reportincident-URJ](http://adl.org/reportincident-URJ), as well as to your local Federation and SCN.

5. Communicate with your congregational community quickly and transparently. Your message should include:
   1. A clear description of what occurred
   2. Condemnation of the act
   3. Assurance that it is being thoroughly investigated
   4. Opportunities for community healing
   5. A Jewish textual frame for grounding in Jewish wisdom

**Week of Incident:**
1. After receiving clearance from authorities, remove or clean up the vandalism.

2. Offer opportunities for gathering as a community to reflect and heal.

3. If local elected officials have not already been in touch, consider reaching out to alert them of the situation.

4. Continue to follow up regarding the investigation, keeping your community informed of developments as appropriate and continuing to offer resources and support.

5. Provide resources and materials for various age groups on how to discuss antisemitism. (See “Resources to Educate and Empower Your Community” section.)

6. Provide tangible ways in which other community groups or nearby synagogues can provide support.

Month of Incident:

1. Consider applying for a nonprofit security grant to improve your security system. Security cameras, digital doorbells and other visible safety measures may deter future perpetrators.

2. Review your response and assess what can be improved upon for future incidents.

Verbal Harassment

Verbal harassment can vary in intensity. If you are in conversation with someone and hear an antisemitic stereotype or trope, consider using one of the following strategies to address the comment, if you feel it is safe and productive to do so.

Strategy #1: Interrupt.

- “Let’s pause the conversation here to reflect on something that was just said.”
- “That sort of language/behavior is not acceptable in our congregation.”
“Ouch! Let's talk about that a bit more.”

“What I just heard was not OK.”

**Strategy #2: Ask a question.**

- “What do you mean?”
- “What do you know about the meaning or history of the language you just used?”

**Strategy #3: Explain impact.**

- “Do you know how that symbol makes some people feel?”
- “When you say that, it is really damaging to an entire group of people.”
- “Statements like that have a long history of causing pain and fear for entire communities.”

**Strategy #4: Broaden to universal behavior.**

- “Do you mean everyone who is _____________, or are you speaking of someone in particular?”
- “I don't think that’s a _____________ thing. I think lots of different people have that quality.”
- “You can’t make a generalization about a group of people based on your interactions with (or what you’ve heard about) one or a small number of people.”
- “Every human being deserves respect and decency.”

**Strategy #5: Connect to historical context.**

- “What you said feeds into an old stereotype. Let's talk about where that comes from…”
- “You may not realize it, but that language has a long history of disrespect, violence and oppression...”
“Let me explain how that language was historically used to talk about people...”

Other incidents may require you to follow all or some of the steps listed in the checklist below.

Day of Incident:

1. If you are present when someone is verbally harassing another person, deescalate the situation, if you feel safe doing so, and move with the target to a safe place.

2. Make note of any descriptors or identifying features of the harasser. These can include physical characteristics such as hair color, skin color, eye color, tattoos, approximate height, body type, age and clothing.

3. Call your preferred security partner for guidance on next steps. They can help assess whether the harasser poses a threat to the community.

4. If the incident is reported to you, provide immediate support for the targets. Being on the receiving end of hateful slurs can be very painful.

5. Alert other appropriate staff of the situation.

6. Determine whether communication with the broader congregational community is appropriate.

7. Report the incident to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ, as well as to your local Jewish Federation and SCN.

Week of Incident:

1. Continue to provide support for those targeted through clergy connections and Caring/Chesed Committee involvement.

2. Consider taking additional security measures, if appropriate.

3. Create opportunities for prayer or learning for members of all ages.

Month of Incident:
**Prevention:**

In addition to the guidance provided in the previous “Prevention and Preparation” section, here are some specific tips that may be helpful in responding to violent incidents.

- We cannot stress enough the importance of having multiple people carrying cellphones during services and other religious celebrations. Do not leave them in your office or your coat pocket.

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1. Continue to provide support for those targeted.

2. Consider applying for a nonprofit security grant to improve your security system. Security cameras, digital doorbells, and other visible safety measures may deter future perpetrators.

3. Review your response and assess what improvements can be made.

4. Turn this incident into a learning opportunity:
   1. Provide de-escalation training for your community.
   2. Organize a showing of solidarity.
   3. Involve allies from other communities and/or interfaith organizations to provide support.

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**Arson and Acts of Violence**

Every act of violence is different and warrants a unique response. However, in the wake of the shootings at the Tree of Life Synagogue and the Chabad of Poway and after other violent attacks on the Jewish community, we sadly must anticipate that this may happen in our communities and understand what to expect in terms of a response.

Many of the lessons shared throughout this guide are also applicable when preventing and responding to acts of violence.
- As soon as you are aware of a violent incident, call 9-1-1. If you can, call ADL and the URJ. Both organizations will do their best to get representatives from their team to the scene, if necessary.

- When law enforcement and emergency response services arrive, they will stabilize and secure the scene and set up a perimeter and command center. Their victims’ assistance teams will come to offer support and guidance, as well.

- Once the scene is secured, designate two people to be the main points of contact with law enforcement; one of these two people should always be at the scene. You will need to allow time for law enforcement to investigate. Your role during this time is to keep the community informed and safe.

- The media will likely rush to cover the story. You should have one or two

- Arrange a small group of volunteers who are willing and able to help with any task in the aftermath of a violent incident. This can be making phone calls, picking up meals or keeping someone company.

- Consider creating a text messaging group with the leaders of synagogues and Jewish communal organizations for emergency use only. This can help streamline communications and keep everyone in the community informed.

- Develop a relationship with Jewish Children and Family Services or other social service providers that serve your area. Trained social workers can help targets or victims and families process traumatic situations and provide emotional support. If necessary, their teams can provide additional support to help explain Jewish customs and practices to law enforcement and also explain law enforcement protocols to your community.

- Consider asking your congregants with children to establish a safe gathering place outside of your congregation to meet in case they are separated.

**Response:**
As soon as you are aware of a violent incident, call 9-1-1. If you can, call ADL and the URJ. Both organizations will do their best to get representatives from their team to the scene, if necessary.
spokespeople who can serve as their points of contact; you may want to engage an outside spokesperson for a major incident. Consider reminding congregants, victims, and others who were impacted that they do not have to engage with the media. Community members and even clergy do not have any responsibility to answer the media’s questions.

- Only share the information that law enforcement has advised you to share. You do not want to impede the investigation.
- Protect the privacy of your congregants. Do not volunteer names of congregants, victims or people affected unless you have explicit permission to do so.
- Bring empathy to all communications. When violent incidents occur, the community’s safety is violated. Emotions run high and people want answers. Make sure your communications convey the appropriate emotions, provide reassurance, and include useful information.
- Schedule routine press conferences at designated times so that people can know when to expect more information. This can also help keep the press at bay.

Assign one person to be in charge of organizing community responses. All calls or communication about how others can assist during this time should be directed to that person. They should provide clear directives on how other community organizations and individuals can be of assistance during this challenging time. This can include letter writing campaigns, arranging a vigil or memorial site or service, or making donations to support impacted families. Remember to keep in mind victim and family preferences before planning any community response.

Try to maintain community traditions and activities in the aftermath of an incident. Consider finding a temporary alternative venue for community gatherings and be sure to communicate those location changes to your community.
COMMUNITY HEALING AND TURNING TO RELIGIOUS TEXTS FOR SUPPORT

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that you won’t fall into the sea

that you won’t crash

into the sidewalk

you place your hands into

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it's always falling

we are here
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Translated from the Hebrew by Rabbi Reuven Greenvald (URJ)

ACTIVATING ALLYSHIP AND ADVOCACY

Community healing involves activating and including your allies in the fight against antisemitism. Antisemitism is not a Jewish problem to be solved by the Jewish community, but a community-wide issue that needs to be addressed by all
members of a community. Sometimes, though, allies may not understand the impact of a particular act, and you need to explain why your community is feeling a particular way. Other times, allies may not know what to do to be helpful. Providing clear guidance about what support your community needs is encouraged.

Remember: Allyship is a two-way street. The safety and freedom of the Jewish community is directly connected to the safety and freedom of all marginalized communities. Practice allyship for others, just as you want others to practice allyship for you — and if you do not know how to be helpful in the aftermath of a bias incident, reach out to the targeted community and ask. Remind them that they are not alone.

Consider inviting allies to participate in your response in the following ways:

- Invite your local elected officials, town board, human rights commission or other representative body to issue statements and/or host emergency meetings to discuss the situation at hand and to discuss what can be done at the local level to combat antisemitism and all forms of bias.
- Arrange letter-writing campaigns or social media campaigns to show broad community support for those who have been targeted.
- Encourage people to display lawn signs or posters that voice support for the community targeted and/or their opposition to hate.
- Plan school or community events that educate the community about your congregation and foster broader cohesion. Education and awareness can prevent future incidents.
- Write a letter to your members of Congress, member of Parliament, state or provincial legislators or school board conveying your position about important issues and possible courses of action. Connect with ADL and the Religious Action Center to coordinate your plans and ongoing advocacy.
Following an antisemitic incident, you may choose to contact your elected officials to urge them condemn antisemitism, combat religious bigotry, and protect houses of worship. Visit the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism’s webpage on antisemitism and hate crimes and its Legislative Action Center, as well as ADL’s advocacy webpage, to find updated information about how you can take action. The Religious Action Center and ADL also offer resources on contacting elected officials, including making phone calls, writing letters, and scheduling in-district visits.

**Incidents by Type**

The most common types of antisemitic incidents reported by synagogues to ADL fall into one of the following categories. Below you will also find checklists to guide your response process. Please note that these checklists are a starting point for your response and that responses may vary from incident to incident and community to community; not all of the steps below may apply. You may also expand these checklists to fit your community’s needs.

With regards to any of these scenarios, prioritize pastoral care from clergy and opportunities for community comfort. Personal connections are important, and in some cases, communal worship responses will be especially healing. Worship and study opportunities (for community members of all ages) can include divrei Torah that address what has occurred and how the community can respond.

Should it be necessary to communicate to the whole community, be sure to include Jewish grounding for what has happened and for what the response will be.

**CHECKLISTS FOR RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS**
1. **Emails, Letters and Phone Calls**

Congregations sometimes receive antisemitic emails, letters or phone calls; occasionally, they include a bomb threat or other threat. If your institution receives such a threat, we recommend you follow the steps indicated by the Department of Homeland Security. Make sure everyone on your team is familiar with these steps.

**Day of Incident:**

1. Collect as much information as possible about the situation. For example, if you receive an antisemitic phone call, write down the phone number, caller ID information and any identifying information you might be able to glean from the call. Try to write down what the caller says word for word. Sometimes, the same person will call a series of Jewish institutions, and it can be helpful to be able to connect the dots. If you receive a voicemail, do not delete it; if you receive a letter, preserve both the letter and envelope.

2. Let your synagogue professional team and administrative staff know about the situation in detail.
   
   1. Determine whether a call to law enforcement is warranted. It is a best practice to report threatening communications.
   
   2. Determine whether communication(s) to the greater congregational community are necessary. If so, see section on guidance for writing these messages.
3. Report this incident to ADL and the URJ at adl.org/reportincident-URJ and SCN, both of whom may be able to provide information about the caller or report on trends in your area.

4. Provide support for the affected community or staff member(s).

**Week of Incident:**

1. Continue coordinating with appropriate investigatory parties for updates.

2. Continue to check in on the affected community or staff member(s).

3. With appropriate professional staff and lay leaders, review your synagogue's protocols and procedures regarding bomb threats and harassing phone calls.

4. Review the after-action report of the incident and what transpired. Discuss with appropriate professional staff and lay leaders what can be improved in the future.

5. Respond to the pastoral needs of your community through learning and text, potentially calling for a special Shabbat practice that week.

**Month of Incident:**

1. Turn this incident into a learning experience.
   
   1. Provide educational materials and training for your congregation and/or staff based on the incident.

   2. If you are part of an interfaith council, involved in conversations in The Tent (the Reform Movement's collaboration platform) or part of a social action network or synagogue network through the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, start a conversation about experiences with bias and hate. Ask how other groups have handled similar situations.

   2. If a suspect was identified and/or legal action needs to be pursued, continue conversations with law enforcement and/or legal counsel.

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**Propaganda Distribution by Extremist Groups**
In recent years, ADL has documented an increase in the posting of flyers and stickers, particularly by white supremacist groups. The posting of such flyers on synagogue property and/or the targeting of Jewish families or institutions may be an antisemtic incident.

**Day of Incident:**

1. If possible and not disruptive to normal business, do not remove the propaganda.
2. If the propaganda must be removed, please be sure to first photograph the propaganda and make note of its location.
3. Report the incident to law enforcement to investigate. Sometimes such instances are part of pattern that law enforcement is tracking.
4. Report to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ.
5. Communicate with appropriate staff about the incident and notify building management for awareness.

**Week of Incident:**

1. Issue a communication to the congregational community about the occurrence, if necessary.
2. Notify other communal institutions in your area about the propaganda.
3. Reach out to other community groups that may have been affected by the propaganda.
4. Reach out to the URJ to connect with other congregations in your area or with other congregations that have experienced similar incidents.
5. Follow up on the investigation.

**Month of Incident:**

1. Turn this incident into a community learning and advocacy opportunity.
Graffiti, Vandalism and Breaking and Entering (i.e. graffiti, broken windows, leaving pork products on the property, etc.)

In the event that your congregation experiences vandalism or a break-in, it is always important to consider the context. Sometimes, there is no evidence of antisemitic animus or intent (e.g., multiple homes/buildings are vandalized in your neighborhood, and the local synagogue is one of many targets). If, however, there is evidence that the property was intentionally selected because it is a Jewish institution (i.e., the graffiti includes swastikas, SS lightning bolts, white supremacist symbols, etc.), the next question is whether the underlying conduct constitutes a crime; note that sometimes Jewish symbols such as the Star of David or a menorah are used to target Jewish institutions, as well.

- If the underlying incident is not a crime (e.g., an isolated incident of leaving antisemitic flyers on the property, drawing hate symbols in the snow, etc.), the incident likely will be considered an antisemitic incident.
- If the underlying incident is a crime (e.g., antisemitic vandalism that causes damage to a synagogue, breaking and entering to damage Torah scrolls, etc.), hate crime charges may be warranted. In addition to reporting to ADL, congregations should always report antisemitic vandalism to law enforcement.

1. Read ADL backgrounders regarding the extremist group or groups responsible and check out ADL’s H.E.A.T. Map to learn about the distribution of propaganda over time in your community.

2. Hold a community conversation and invite other groups that have been targeted or may be impacted by the propaganda to participate. If you have a local human relations commission, consider asking them to host the conversation.

3. Consider writing letters of concern to your local elected officials.
Just because a particular incident does not rise to the level of a hate crime does not mean it is less harmful or should be taken less seriously. Antisemitic incidents and hate crimes both have a lasting impact on a community, and both may require community responses.

**Day of Incident:**

1. Contact law enforcement and notify your security committee, president or executive director. Do not enter the building until a law enforcement assessment is complete, and follow their guidance regarding whether to enter the building.

2. Ensure that all staff are safe and provide support as needed for individuals impacted by the incident.

3. Take photos of any graffiti, even if it is drawn in dust or snow. Do not tamper with any evidence until law enforcement has assessed and investigated.

4. Report the incident to ADL at [adl.org/reportincident-URJ](http://adl.org/reportincident-URJ), as well as to your local Federation and SCN.

5. Communicate with your congregational community quickly and transparently. Your message should include:
   1. A clear description of what occurred
   2. Condemnation of the act
   3. Assurance that it is being thoroughly investigated
   4. Opportunities for community healing
   5. A Jewish textual frame for grounding in Jewish wisdom

**Week of Incident:**

1. After receiving clearance from authorities, remove or clean up the vandalism.

2. Offer opportunities for gathering as a community to reflect and heal.
3. If local elected officials have not already been in touch, consider reaching out to alert them of the situation.

4. Continue to follow up regarding the investigation, keeping your community informed of developments as appropriate and continuing to offer resources and support.

5. Provide resources and materials for various age groups on how to discuss antisemitism. (See "Resources to Educate and Empower Your Community" section.)

6. Provide tangible ways in which other community groups or nearby synagogues can provide support.

**Month of Incident:**

1. Consider applying for a nonprofit security grant to improve your security system. Security cameras, digital doorbells and other visible safety measures may deter future perpetrators.

2. Review your response and assess what can be improved upon for future incidents.

**Verbal Harassment**

Verbal harassment can vary in intensity. If you are in conversation with someone and hear an antisemitic stereotype or trope, consider using one of the following strategies to address the comment, if you feel it is safe and productive to do so.

**Strategy #1: Interrupt.**

- "Let’s pause the conversation here to reflect on something that was just said."
- “That sort of language/behavior is not acceptable in our congregation.”
- “Ouch! Let’s talk about that a bit more.”
- “What I just heard was not OK.”

**Strategy #2: Ask a question.**
“What do you mean?”

“What do you know about the meaning or history of the language you just used?”

**Strategy #3: Explain impact.**

- “Do you know how that symbol makes some people feel?”
- “When you say that, it is really damaging to an entire group of people.”
- “Statements like that have a long history of causing pain and fear for entire communities.”

**Strategy #4: Broaden to universal behavior.**

- “Do you mean everyone who is ____________, or are you speaking of someone in particular?”
- “I don’t think that’s a ____________ thing. I think lots of different people have that quality.”
- “You can’t make a generalization about a group of people based on your interactions with (or what you’ve heard about) one or a small number of people.”
- “Every human being deserves respect and decency.”

**Strategy #5: Connect to historical context.**

- “What you said feeds into an old stereotype. Let’s talk about where that comes from…”
- “You may not realize it, but that language has a long history of disrespect, violence and oppression…”
- “Let me explain how that language was historically used to talk about people…”

Other incidents may require you to follow all or some of the steps listed in the checklist below.
Day of Incident:

1. If you are present when someone is verbally harassing another person, deescalate the situation, if you feel safe doing so, and move with the target to a safe place.

2. Make note of any descriptors or identifying features of the harasser. These can include physical characteristics such as hair color, skin color, eye color, tattoos, approximate height, body type, age and clothing.

3. Call your preferred security partner for guidance on next steps. They can help assess whether the harasser poses a threat to the community.

4. If the incident is reported to you, provide immediate support for the targets. Being on the receiving end of hateful slurs can be very painful.

5. Alert other appropriate staff of the situation.

6. Determine whether communication with the broader congregational community is appropriate.

7. Report the incident to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ, as well as to your local Jewish Federation and SCN.

Week of Incident:

1. Continue to provide support for those targeted through clergy connections and Caring/Chesed Committee involvement.

2. Consider taking additional security measures, if appropriate.

3. Create opportunities for prayer or learning for members of all ages.

Month of Incident:

1. Continue to provide support for those targeted.

2. Consider applying for a nonprofit security grant to improve your security system. Security cameras, digital doorbells, and other visible safety measures may deter future perpetrators.

Review your response and assess what improvements can be made.
3. Turn this incident into a learning opportunity:
   1. Provide de-escalation training for your community.
   2. Organize a showing of solidarity.
   3. Involve allies from other communities and/or interfaith organizations to provide support.

### Arson and Acts of Violence

Every act of violence is different and warrants a unique response. However, in the wake of the shootings at the Tree of Life Synagogue and the Chabad of Poway and after other violent attacks on the Jewish community, we sadly must anticipate that this may happen in our communities and understand what to expect in terms of a response.

Many of the lessons shared throughout this guide are also applicable when preventing and responding to acts of violence.

### Prevention:

In addition to the guidance provided in the previous “Prevention and Preparation” section, here are some specific tips that may be helpful in responding to violent incidents.

- We cannot stress enough the importance of having multiple people carrying cellphones during services and other religious celebrations. Do not leave them in your office or your coat pocket.
- Arrange a small group of volunteers who are willing and able to help with any task in the aftermath of a violent incident. This can be making phone calls, picking up meals or keeping someone company.
- Consider creating a text messaging group with the leaders of synagogues and Jewish communal organizations for emergency use only. This can help streamline communications and keep everyone in the community informed.
- Develop a relationship with Jewish Children and Family Services or other social service providers that serve your area. Trained social workers can help targets or victims and families process traumatic situations and provide emotional support. If necessary, their teams can provide additional support to help explain Jewish customs and practices to law enforcement and also explain law enforcement protocols to your community.

- Consider asking your congregants with children to establish a safe gathering place outside of your congregation to meet in case they are separated.

Response:
As soon as you are aware of a violent incident, call 9-1-1. If you can, call ADL and the URJ. Both organizations will do their best to get representatives from their team to the scene, if necessary.

When law enforcement and emergency response services arrive, they will stabilize and secure the scene and set up a perimeter and command center. Their victims’ assistance teams will come to offer support and guidance, as well.

Once the scene is secured, designate two people to be the main points of contact with law enforcement; one of these two people should always be at the scene. You will need to allow time for law enforcement to investigate. Your role during this time is to keep the community informed and safe.

The media will likely rush to cover the story. You should have one or two spokespeople who can serve as their points of contact; you may want to engage an outside spokesperson for a major incident. Consider reminding congregants, victims, and others who were impacted that they do not have to engage with the media. Community members and even clergy do not have any responsibility to answer the media’s questions.

- Only share the information that law enforcement has advised you to share. You do not want to impede the investigation.
- Protect the privacy of your congregants. Do not volunteer names of congregants, victims or people affected unless you have explicit permission to do so.

- Bring empathy to all communications. When violent incidents occur, the community’s safety is violated. Emotions run high and people want answers. Make sure your communications convey the appropriate emotions, provide reassurance, and include useful information.

- Schedule routine press conferences at designated times so that people can know when to expect more information. This can also help keep the press at bay.

Assign one person to be in charge of organizing community responses. All calls or communication about how others can assist during this time should be directed to that person. They should provide clear directives on how other community organizations and individuals can be of assistance during this challenging time. This can include letter writing campaigns, arranging a vigil or memorial site or service, or making donations to support impacted families. Remember to keep in mind victim and family preferences before planning any community response.

Try to maintain community traditions and activities in the aftermath of an incident. Consider finding a temporary alternative venue for community gatherings and be sure to communicate those location changes to your community.

When advising congregants or responding to online incidents that impact your community, it is important to keep in mind that online incidents have offline implications and can cause trauma just like incidents that occur in person.

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and others are regularly used to spread antisemitic and other oppressive ideas. As a general best practice, we recommend that you use the process enumerated in the ADL Cyber-Safety Action Guide, including taking screenshots of problematic content; reporting it through
the platform’s reporting mechanisms, and report the incident(s) to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ.

Social media sites can be weaponized in other harmful ways, as well. Familiarize yourselves with the conduct described below and take steps to prevent these situations from happening in your community.

**Cyber Harassment:** When someone engages in electronic communication that harasses, torments, terrorizes, offends or threatens a target. This term is used both to describe individual acts and as an umbrella term to broadly describe types of internet-enabled abuse.

**Cyberstalking:** When someone uses the internet and technology to stalk a target. Most often cyberstalking refers to a pattern of online activity, amounting to a course of conduct, targeted at or concerning a particular person, which would cause a reasonable person to fear for their safety (or the safety of their family). Cyberstalking may include: sending continued and unwanted messages; secretly tracking someone’s location with geolocation technology, to hacking accounts using secretly installed password trackers; and sending a barrage of messages to an individual or their network from fake accounts.

**Deep Fakes:** A technique that combines multiple authentic images, videos and/or audio with machine learning technology to create a new, synthetic piece of media (e.g., image, audio and/or video). This technique has been used to create machine-made media of all kinds, including some with the intention of deceiving audiences. Some examples of deceptive “deep fakes” include videos of politicians depicted in situations that never happened or fabricated pornographic videos targeting specific individuals. Audio deep fakes could lead to serious forms of fraud and identity theft.

**Doxxing:** The broadcasting of private or identifying information about an individual, group or organization with the intent that the information be used
against the target for an unlawful purpose. This sometimes involves releasing a private phone number or address and inciting harassment.

**Hacking** *(sometimes known as “cracking”):* This refers to a practice by which a person seeks to access digital devices and networks without permission. This is sometimes done by depositing malware onto a computer, and the purpose of hacking is often malicious. Hacking can also be used to describe someone forcefully gaining access to a social media account.

**Malware:** Short for “malicious software,” malware describes software that is specifically designed to disrupt, damage, or gain unauthorized access to a computer system. Malware interferes with or inhibits normal computer functioning. There are a number of different types of malware:

- **Adware:** This is designed to put unwanted advertisements on your screen. While some programs are designed to make the advertisements look real or benign, in some cases adware can also be used to collect information about the user.

- **Ransomware:** This prevents access to certain files on a computer and, as the name suggests, asks for a payment in order for the user to regain access to those files.

- **Spyware:** This kind of software gathers information about its user, such as downloads, highly visited websites, passwords, and credit card numbers.

**Nonconsensual Distribution of Intimate Imagery (NCII):** Also known as non-consensual pornography (NCP) or “revenge porn,” is the distribution of sexually graphic images of individuals or depicting individuals in a sexually graphic way without their consent.

**Swatting:** The act of falsely reporting an emergency to someone’s home with the goal of having a police unit (usually a SWAT team) deployed to their residence. This can result in injury to the target or other witnesses and has even caused death. People of Color, people with disabilities, and people who are LGBTQ+ may
feel especially endangered by the possibility of this kind of unwarranted encounter with law enforcement since they are disproportionately the targets of police brutality.

**Trolling:** In the context of this report, trolling is the repeated posting of inflammatory, hateful, derisive or offensive content on a particular platform with the intent of provoking a reaction from the reader.

**Phishing:** The act of deceiving a person, typically by assuming a false identity, into revealing personal or sensitive information over the internet. This is usually achieved through realistic, but fake, emails or text messages. Often, these messages include urgent pleas or concerning alerts designed to cause the target to reveal sensitive information (such as credit card details) without sufficient forethought.

**Zoombombing:** The act of interrupting a videoconference (often a public one, like a religious service or funeral) with inflammatory and/or hateful rhetoric or images.

**PREVENTING ONLINE INCIDENTS**

As with in-person incidents, prevention is the first step in addressing incidents that take place online.

**Reviewing your Online Footprint**

We live in a world where we consistently share information about our personal lives on social media and other digital mediums. We tend to share important moments in our lives such as graduations, the purchase of new home, and weddings; congregations may also post information about lifecycle events such as b’nai mitzvah, funerals, onegs, etc. However, people often fail to realize that important information can be gleaned from these public announcements, including where you live, where your children go to school, or who your loved ones are.
Unfortunately, ADL has seen rising numbers of incidents in which perpetrators weaponize publicly shared information, including information shared on social media accounts as well as information collected from synagogue websites. Tools such as Google Image Search also assist bad actors in running searches and drawing dangerous connections.

Perhaps your personal information must be public, as part of your profession or other affiliation; that means it is difficult to ensure that your personal address, phone number and other contact information remains private. Review your digital footprint to make sure that you have not inadvertently shared information that can be exploited.

**Online Best Practices**

Because incidents regarding publicly shared information are becoming more common, it is important to take preventative steps to ensure that you or your organization are not unintentionally overshar­ing information online. You can analyze your organization's digital footprint by searching for yourself or your organization on a variety of search engines. Make sure to be comprehensive: look for images and documents that may include your or your congregation's name and review your social media presence to understand the types of information others can access. Consider setting up a [Google Alert](https://www.google.com/alerts) for the name of your congregation or your address so you can immediately be aware of any new online references to your institution.

Once you have an idea of your organization's online footprint, there are a number of preventative measures you can take in order to reduce or minimize this presence. Consider consulting with the Secure Communities Network or another security partner for additional recommendations.

- Create a members-only password-protected section of your website for photos, family and congregant event information such as b'nai mitzvah or shivas, clergy biographies, and other personal information that can be used
against you or your congregants. Work to ensure that any photos, videos, or other media is only shared privately across other social platforms. Ensure that those settings are set to private.

- Do not share any information online about individual members without consent, including images. Keep in mind that People of Color and people who are LGBTQ+ experience disproportionate amounts of online bullying and harassment.

- Adopt strict privacy settings on your browsers, search engines (i.e., searching in an incognito window) and social media accounts. Consider reviewing app preferences and limiting location sharing of apps on your devices.

- Create strong passwords and change them regularly (we recommend using a password manager like 1Password or LastPass and changing your passwords every 3-6 months). Try to ensure that these passwords do not contain publicly available information (for example, the name or address of your synagogue).

- Keep your devices’ software up to date to deter hackers and viruses.

- Deactivate old accounts and delete apps you do not use. You can also limit the types of data that apps can collect in the privacy settings of your devices. Learn more about deleting unused accounts.

- Ask information-gathering websites to delete their information about you or your organization. Learn how to delete or disassociate your information from them.

- When possible, use private browsing or incognito mode in your web browser.

- Don’t post sensitive or personal information to social media. Even if you have controls limiting the audience for your posts, it is still possible for others to access this information. (Note that because organizational social media accounts are often public, it is even more important, when managing these accounts, to limit the posting of personal information.)
- Create spam email addresses to sign up for non-essential services online. Just make sure to use a different password for this account than your normal account.

- Check the type of websites you use. If the address does not begin with "https," don't use it; if this is not possible, avoid entering personal or organizational information while using that website. Most modern browsers will show a lock or some other symbol in the address bar to help you to know if you are using a secure connection.

- Enter personal or organizational information online only if you are on a private Wi-Fi network or using VPN software.

- If you suspect an account has been hacked, change all of your passwords as quickly as possible.

- Sign up for “two-factor authentication” on as many services as possible, especially the sensitive ones, such as financial services. Two-factor authentication uses a second connection, like an SMS or an authentication hardware device that gets “pushed” to you whenever you attempt to log in. This provides for greater security, as an attacker would not only need your password but also the device or hardware key in order to impersonate you.

Reducing the likelihood of incidents of hate that target your community is of the utmost importance. These steps are meant to minimize the amount of publicly available person information online, and by doing so, it will be less likely that a perpetrator can target you, your organization, or your community.

**Safety Considerations for Zoom Meetings**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other compounding factors, congregations and institutions use Zoom and other videoconferencing services such as Microsoft teams and Google Meet more than ever. The uptick of Jewish events taking place online unfortunately correlates with a steep rise in antisemitic Zoombombing attacks.
As defined earlier in this resource, Zoombombing is when a virtual meeting is suddenly disrupted by an unknown individual who shows, says or shares something threatening, vulgar or graphic, which may include hate speech. In 2020 alone, 196 antisemitic Zoombombing incidents were reported to ADL, with 114 of them targeting Jewish institutions.

With the continual rise in antisemitic incidents, including those taking place over Zoom, it is important to follow safe practices when hosting virtual meetings. Review Zoom's security website for best practices regarding keeping your online meetings safe.

**RESPONDING TO ONLINE INCIDENTS**

**Day of Incident:**

1. If you feel like you are in danger, call 9-1-1 and file a report with the FBI's Cyber Incident Reporting.

2. Document the incident by taking screenshots and saving web addresses and any other materials and chats.

3. Try to stop the harassment by blocking and muting users and disengaging from the conversation. Block and mute buttons are usually hidden to the right of the post within a grey arrow, three dots or three lines. Though your impulse may be to engage, such interactions usually go poorly and prolong the issue.

4. Report the harassment to the digital platform of origin. Include as much information as possible in a single report; don't forget to mention the historical context of the harassment. Save any case numbers, claim numbers or correspondence you receive from the platform.

5. Refer to ADL Cyber-Safety Action Guide, which includes information on how to report antisemitism and hate to numerous popular social media and online game platforms.
Week of Incident:

1. Report the incident to ADL at adl.org/reportincident-URJ and include all the information you have collected (e.g., screenshots, web addresses and case numbers).

2. If your incident involves ongoing antisemitic hate and harassment, consider using third-party tools to manage online harassment or contacting organizations that specialize in providing direct support for targets of online abuse:

3. Mass harassment: squadbox.org and tallpoppy.com


5. Personal counseling/support: gameshotline.org

6. Depending on the severity and public nature of the incident, consider offering a communal prayer or gathering opportunity to help the community respond and heal through a Jewish framework.

7. Be sure the education department in your synagogue has been briefed on the incident allowing training for teachers, and potentially sending letters to parents to help offer guidance.

Month of Incident:

1. Read ADL's nationally representative surveys of harassment on social media and in online games to better understand how your experience fits into the experiences many people are having online.

2. Hold a community conversation about people's experiences with online hate and harassment. Reach out to and join local groups representing a variety of communities impacted by these harms and invite staff at tech companies who work in your community (especially local offices of large tech companies such as Facebook and Google) to attend and listen.
3. Consider writing letters of concern to your local or state/provincial elected officials to highlight legislation around holding perpetrators of online harassment accountable and giving targets of online harassment access to justice through ADL’s Backspace Hate campaign.