

Discussing Antisemitism

A Guide for Classrooms and Families

Introduction

ADL recorded 3,697 antisemitic incidents in the United States in 2022-- a 36% increase from 2021. Incidents of harassment, vandalism and assault all increased since 2021. There were no assaults on the United States Jewish community that resulted in mass casualties or victims, however one victim of assault died from his injuries. Antisemitic rhetoric, harassment, vandalism and assault in 2022 contributed to an increased climate of fear for Jewish people and communities, as well as for other individuals and groups. Notably, ADL recorded 494 antisemitic incidents at K-12 schools in 2022 (not including Jewish schools), a 49% increase from 2021. More than half of these K-12 school-based incidents included examples of harassment, including both one-time incidents and reoccurring bullying behaviors directed at Jewish students or the Jewish community. It is likely that the actual number of instances of harassment is higher, as experts believe young people may not report all instances of harassment. Preventing all incidents of antisemitism or other forms of bias from taking place in schools is impossible, but educators and community members can take steps to ensure young people feel safe and supported.

For more information on responding to school based incidents, refer to [A Guide for Responding to School Based Incidents](#).

For more information, refer to [Antisemitism: What Do Educators Need to Know?](#)

With this increase in antisemitic attacks, it is necessary for all adults who work with and care for young people to reflect on their own knowledge and mindset about antisemitism and to build their capacity to initiate family and classroom discussions. **Antisemitism is the marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.** Before engaging in a discussion or learning experience with young people, adults should spend time evaluating what they know about antisemitism and constructing questions to guide their learning. ADL EDU's newest on demand learning tool is a useful place to start.

The Audit of Antisemitic incidents accounts for assaults, vandalism, and harassment, but we know that there are many unreported incidents of antisemitism, from "jokes" to microaggressions to insensitive comments, all of which normalize antisemitic rhetoric. The 3,697 incidents that ADL logged in 2022 is the highest number of incidents recorded per year since ADL began tracking incidents in 1979. Antisemitic incidents took place across society, including on college campuses, in K-12 schools, and at Jewish institutions. The complete dataset of antisemitic incidents for 2016-2022 is available on ADL's H.E.A.T. Map, an interactive online tool that allows users to geographically chart antisemitic incidents and extremist activity nationally and regionally.

While many factors contributed to the increase in antisemitic incidents in 2022, ADL's experts noted that organized white supremacist activity contributed significantly to the increase in all categories of incidents. White supremacist networks engaged in coordinated efforts to spread antisemitic propaganda, often in the form of fliers, posters, stickers, banners and graffiti. Groups use propaganda to spread their message and recruit more people to their ideology. Antisemitic propaganda often uses phrases, symbols and images to communicate antisemitic tropes.

Tropes are common or recurring patterns, messages and devices that repeat throughout history. Exploring the history of common antisemitic tropes can help learners to recognize antisemitism when it shows up in games, on social media and in their communities.

Many people, including educators and caregivers, view antisemitism through the lens of their personal political ideology and perspective. Before checking in with and discussing antisemitic incidents with young people, adults, including those who are Jewish, should take care to reflect on their own attitudes and assumptions about the Jewish people, Israel and antisemitism. **Stereotypes** about Jewish people are widespread—and a person does not need to consciously hate Jewish people to accept or perpetuate these ideas. **A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.** It is especially important to raise one's awareness of antisemitic stereotypes and ideas when it comes from groups or individuals with whom one is closely aligned. Antisemitism is an ideology and system that permeates all parts of society. These long held and deeply entrenched stereotypes, tropes and falsehoods are seen across the political spectrum, in entertainment and sports, and in schools and workplaces. A key lesson to understanding the rise in antisemitism is acknowledging that in today's society, everyone is exposed to antisemitic rhetoric, myths and tropes. By talking about antisemitism with a learner's mindset, adults can model reflecting on and challenging one's biases or assumptions about the Jewish people, Judaism, Israel and Zionism.

Discussing these disturbing trends with children and young people can be challenging, but these conversations are necessary. ADL's tools and resources can help. In order to better understand and unpack antisemitism, this guide provides a way to initiate conversations about how antisemitism impacts both the Jewish community and the United States at large and what we as ordinary people can do about it. This resource is intended to enable adults—educators and parents or caregivers—to initiate conversations with young people about antisemitism and other forms of hate.

Learn more about these and other myths in the Antisemitism Uncovered Video Series.

Learn more about how to recognize and discuss extremism with young people using this toolkit.

Discussion Guide

Setting the Stage

In the classroom

- Reflect on who is in your classroom, and consider how they will feel discussing this topic.
- Set **ground rules** to ensure a comfortable environment for all students.
- Review the roles in bullying situations and other relevant **definitions** (target, ally, aggressor, bystander, antisemitism, prejudice and discrimination).
- Tap into the prior knowledge of your students, and research answers to questions together.
- Acknowledge different perspectives, and supply students with sentence starters and guidelines to support sharing their views respectfully.
- Honor students' questions and opinions; rephrase or reflect what your students say to confirm that you understand them.
- Allow for independent reflection time, such as drawing or writing to allow students time to process the conversation and pose any further questions they have.

In your home

- Consider initiating the conversation by reading an **article**, viewing a **video**, or reading a **book** together.
- Create an environment where your children can feel safe, and avoid stoking fears unnecessarily.
- Honor your children's questions and opinions; rephrase or reflect what your child says to confirm that you understand them.
- Be honest about what you know and don't know; research information together.
- Communicate to your child that your experiences, emotions and perspectives are your own; allow space for your child to express their own perspective, and acknowledge that it's okay to feel and see things differently.
- Save any related family history or experiences with antisemitism for the end of the conversation.

Note:

Some children and young people who have learned about the Holocaust will hyperfocus on Holocaust history. It's important to remember that antisemitism did not begin or end with the Holocaust. For these students/children, this conversation should serve to broaden their understanding of antisemitism as a more complex and enduring ideology.

Discussion Questions

Looking at data/current events

- What were your initial thoughts and feelings while looking at this information?
- Do you know what antisemitism is? What do you know about antisemitism?
- Who is targeted by antisemitism? Who do you think are the aggressors in antisemitic incidents?
- What have you seen or heard on the news about antisemitism?
- What have you seen or heard about antisemitism online, including on social media?
- What other forms of hate or bias have you been hearing about recently?
- What do you know about stereotypes? What stereotypes have you heard about Jewish people? What questions do you have about these stereotypes?
- What do you know about **antisemitic symbols**? Do you know what they (a swastika, 1488, etc.) mean?
- Have you heard people talk about Zionism in your life and/or online? What do you know about Zionism? What views have you heard expressed?
- Are you having conversations about antisemitism or other forms of bias and hate with your peers? What is that conversation like?
- What questions do you have about antisemitism or other forms of hate?

Incidents in our community

- Have you seen or heard people in our community express views about Jewish people or groups? How does that make you feel?
- What concerns do you have about antisemitism or other forms of hate in our community? In other parts of our country or the world?
- Have you heard any biased or antisemitic remarks in your school? Have you seen any online?
- Have you seen any antisemitic symbols (or other hate symbols) in your school or our community? Online?

How to act as an ally/taking action

- What would you do if you heard someone make an antisemitic joke or insult? What about another biased joke or insult?
- What would you do if you saw an antisemitic or other hate symbol in school or the community?
- Who in your school could you speak to if you were worried about antisemitic incidents (language, vandalism, bullying, etc.)?
- What can you do when you see antisemitism or bias online?

- Who might need our support when antisemitic incidents happen?
What about other acts of hate?
- What do you think we should do to make our community more inclusive?
What about leaders in our town? Our state? Our country?

Opportunities for Follow-up & Extended Engagement:

In the classroom

- Balance lessons of antisemitism, discrimination and prejudice with diverse and nuanced stories of Jewish peoplehood, culture and history; ensure that lessons about antisemitism are not the only times that students learn about Jewish people at school.
- Incorporate [lesson plans](#) that address antisemitism and other forms of hate into your classroom curriculum.
- Use books that tackle antisemitism or other forms of hate in read aloud lessons, whole class literature units, or independent reading initiatives. Check out ADL's [Books Matter](#) for a curated list of children and young adult literature.
- Plan independent or class research projects that enable students to explore various forms of hate and oppression, including antisemitism.
- Teach about the [Pyramid of Hate](#).
- Arrange for a speaker (virtual or in person) with expertise or personal experience in antisemitism or other forms of hate to speak to your class.
- Send home information and [discussion questions](#) for students to continue the conversation with their parents or caregivers.

In your home

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