Introduction

In 2018, the United States witnessed the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in its history when a white supremacist entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and opened fire, killing 11 congregants and wounding two more. The shooter allegedly later told police that he wanted to kill Jews, and in his online social media posts reportedly fulminated against Jews for bringing immigrants into the country. This did not happen in a vacuum; a history of anti-Semitism in the United States and around the world built a foundation for this event to occur. The anti-Semitic myths and tropes used today echo the same myths and tropes used for the past thousand years or more.

Anti-Semitism is prejudice and/or discrimination against Jews, often based on stereotypes and myths that target the Jews as people or their religious practices and beliefs.

Anti-Semitism is not only about defaming and attacking the Jewish community; it’s a symptom of a larger issue. Those that hold ideologies of hatred against the Jewish people generally also hold ideologies of hatred against other peoples and communities.

ADL has been tracking anti-Semitic incidents in the United States since 1979. The Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents accounts for assaults, vandalism and harassment, but we know that there are many unreported incidents of anti-Semitism, from jokes to microaggressions to insensitive comments that normalize anti-Semitic rhetoric. In 2018, ADL logged 1,879 anti-Semitic incidents in 46 states and the District of Columbia, including 344 incidents in K-12 schools. The 2018 total number of incidents was the third highest number recorded since ADL started tracking this data four decades ago. In order to better understand and unpack anti-Semitism, this guide is intended to enable adults — educators and parents or caregivers — to initiate conversations with young people about anti-Semitism and other forms of hate.

Discussion Guide

Setting the Stage:

In the classroom

- Set ground rules to ensure a comfortable environment for all students.
- Review the roles in bullying situations and other relevant definitions (target, ally, aggressor, bystander, anti-Semitism, prejudice and discrimination).
- Tap into the prior knowledge of your students, and research answers to questions together.
- Allow for independent reflection time, such as drawing or writing to allow processing time and a chance to ask further questions.

To read ADL’s Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2018, please visit: www.adl.org/audit2018
In your home

• Initiate 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.

• Be honest about what you know and what you don’t know; do research together.

• Save any family history or experiences with anti-Semitism for the end of the conversation.

• In any setting: Honor your children’s questions and opinions.

Note: Some children and young people who have learned about the Holocaust will focus on Holocaust history. Remind them that anti-Semitism did not begin or end with the Holocaust. This conversation should serve to broaden their understanding of anti-Semitism as a more complex and enduring ideology.

Discussion Questions:

Looking at data/current events

• Do you know what anti-Semitism is? What do you know about anti-Semitism?

• Who is targeted by anti-Semitism? Who do you think are the aggressors in anti-Semitic incidents?

• What have you seen or heard on the news or online about anti-Semitism?

• What other forms of hate or bias have you been hearing about recently?

• What do you know about anti-Semitic symbols? Do you know what they (a swastika, 1488, etc.) mean?

• Are you having conversations about anti-Semitism or other forms of hate with your peers? What are these conversations like?

• What questions do you have about anti-Semitism or other forms of hate?

Incidents in our community

• What concerns do you have about anti-Semitism or other forms of hate in our community?

• Have you heard any biased or anti-Semitic remarks in your school? Have you seen any online?

• Have you seen any anti-Semitic 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 a classmate say an anti-Semitic (or other bias-related) joke or insult?

• What would you do if you saw an anti-Semitic or other hate symbol in school or the community?

• Who in your school could you speak to if you were worried about anti-Semitic incidents?

• What can you do when you see anti-Semitism or bias online?

• What do you think we should do to make our community more inclusive? What about leaders in your town? Your state? Your country?
Opportunities for Follow-up & Extended Engagement:

In the classroom

- Incorporate lesson plans and resources that address anti-Semitism and other forms of hate into your classroom curriculum.
- Use books that tackle anti-Semitism or other forms of hate in read aloud lessons, whole class literature units, or independent reading initiatives.
- Arrange a visit by a speaker with expertise in anti-Semitism or other forms of hate.
- Send home information and discussion questions for students to continue the conversation with their parents or caregivers.

In your home

- Visit a historical or cultural institution that educates about anti-Semitism and other forms of bias, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant bias.
- Encourage participation in interfaith and other intergroup events in your community.
- Model examining media with a critical eye and using strategies for civil dialogue.
- Advocate for anti-Semitism, and other forms of bias, to be addressed in the school curriculum.