



Solutions Not Sides



RESPONDING

to conversations



FREE RESOURCE



A guide to responding to conversations about Israel-Palestine

www.solutionsnotsides.co.uk ——— team@solutionsnotsides.co.uk

INTRODUCTION



This free document has been created to help childminders, nurseries and schools engage in conversations about the ongoing situation in Israel and Palestine.

As educators, we will uphold the right of young people to learn about political issues in an impartial space. We will keep that space free from hate, inequality and violence. We will teach skills of critical thinking, communication, active listening and conflict resolution so they can learn to navigate these issues for themselves.

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WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The effects and trauma of the situation in Palestine-Israel can be far-reaching and children at your setting or school can experience emotional and mental anguish because of it. We know that many children see and hear about the impact of the conflict, whether in their homes, in the playground, or on the news, and they may also have a personal connection to the situation and the region. We want to live in a fair, educated and compassionate society in Britain where we celebrate diversity and protect one another from harm. This includes those who have different beliefs, faiths or opinions from ourselves. As well as caring about Israel-Palestine, we also care about each other.



We believe it is possible to have discussions on this issue without hurting one another in the process, and it is through learning, listening, and mutual respect that this can be possible.



WHY BRITISH PEOPLE

CARE

Whilst you will likely encounter people from all backgrounds who feel affected by the conflict in one way or another, there are certain people who may feel more emotionally connected to the conflict and may bring the conflict into their identity and emotional well-being, and some who feel nothing at all. Who may be most affected here in the UK:

Many people will be emotionally affected by this because of a sense of connection to the issue and these people may need additional support:

- Muslim
- Jewish
- Christian
- Refugees
- Politically Active

Jews, Muslims, and Christians have historical and current connections to the land that we now know as Palestine and Israel, especially Jerusalem. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish people here in the UK may feel pushed into taking positions, judged, or discriminated against, for their perceived views on the Middle East. Asking people to take positions or discriminating against people because of their religion or ethnicity is never okay.

Another group of people who may be particularly vulnerable to sensitivities related to the conflict are refugees and those of refugee background; the majority of Israelis and Palestinians have heritage rooted in refugee experiences and many people see reflections of their own heritage and stories in Palestine and Israel. The final group of children to highlight here are those whose families and/or communities are particularly politically active. Israel-Palestine is also a political issue here in the UK, often dividing people along the lines of left and right wing. Please note that this is a generalisation, and there are plenty of activists and politicians who do choose to work to support both peoples, and advocate justice and safety for all.

UNDERSTANDING



EMOTIONS RELATED TO THE CONFLICT

War, conflict, violence, discrimination, and oppression can all contribute to strong emotions and it is understandable that many people feel sadness, anger, frustration, anguish, and other emotions, when thinking about the situation of Israel-Palestine.

It's important that we never assume we understand what people are going through, how they feel, or why they feel this way. If appropriate and there is consent, you may feel comfortable offering support and validating the emotions of the person you are speaking with, without asking them to share anything personal.

In order to understand why people feel such strong emotions related to Palestine-Israel, we often use the concept of an iceberg. We see the tip of the iceberg as the position that people hold, but the majority of the iceberg is hidden under the water. People often express their positions when they have strong emotions, and under the water there may be many reasons why they are feeling particularly emotional around this.

Resolving conflict can be challenging when people hold strong positions and feel very emotional. Using the iceberg model can help us explain why people believe certain things, without trying to justify or excuse those positions. If we can understand where people are coming from, we can be more effective in having conversations and supporting people.

DEFINITIONS



Jews, Muslims and Christians have all had significant proportions of their history in the land we call Israel-Palestine. The monotheistic religions all began at different times over the last 3,500 years and have consistently been wedded to the region throughout their histories.

Whether this be where the binding of Isaac took place, where the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) ascended to heaven or where Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected. The three monotheistic religions have a deeply ingrained connection to the land.

Israel

Israel has been a fully recognised and legally established state since 1948. Whilst the borders of the country are subject to disagreement and a conflict with the Palestinians, which includes an illegal military occupation of the West Bank & East Jerusalem, and a blockade on the Gaza strip, Israel has clearly demarcated borders according to international law. However, some pro-Israel positions may refer to Israel as the whole land between the river and the sea, including the West Bank, and some pro-Palestine positions may claim that Israel doesn't or shouldn't exist and is an illegal entity.

Palestine

Palestine under International Law and in accordance with the agreements signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and Israel refers to the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. These are the proposed legal parameters of the Palestinian state, even though Palestine currently has only observer status at the UN. Before the establishment of Israel in 1948, Britain was in control of this land and it was referred to as the British Mandate of Palestine. For Palestinians who were living all over the area that we know now as Israel and Palestine, Palestine was the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Some pro-Palestine positions refer to the entire land as Palestine and some pro-Israel positions may claim that Palestine doesn't or shouldn't exist.

DEFINITIONS CONT.



Jewish

The term Jewish generally refers to someone of the Jewish faith, but Jewish is also an ethnicity. There are Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews, who herald from North Africa, the Middle East and southern Spain, there are African Jews, particularly from Ethiopia and Eritrea, and many other origins.

Muslim

Muslim refers to people who follow the religion of Islam. Because the majority of Palestinians are Muslim, sometimes people misrepresent the conflict as Jews vs. Muslims, or use the words Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim interchangeably, which is incorrect as not all Arabs are Muslim, not all Muslims are Arab, not all Palestinians are Arab, not all citizens of the Middle East are Arab, and so on.



AVOIDING ANTISEMITISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Be clear about what you mean when using labels:

Jewish and Muslim

refers to two minority groups in Europe and some other regions who experience racism, and this tends to get worse when violence in the Middle East hits our news headlines.

Palestinian or Israeli

are national identities.

Zionism

is the belief in the right of the Jewish people to self-determination (and not all people who call themselves Zionist share the same opinion about the exact territory, principles, etc. of the state of Israel). 'Zionist' or 'Zio' should not be used as a term of abuse.

Arab

is a grouping of people whose mother tongue is Arabic and there is great diversity across the Arab World (e.g. Jordan can't simply become Palestine just because they are Arabs).

Islamism

is an academic term with French origins that refers to a broad spectrum of political ideologies. Islamism is not a synonym for terrorism and should not be used as such



Don't transfer accountability:

- Do not hold Jews responsible for the decisions of the Israeli leaders, or Muslims responsible for the decisions of the Palestinian leaders.
- Do not demand that Jews or Muslims must take a certain political position on the issue.
- Do not assume that all Palestinians or Israelis support the actions of their governments.
- Anti-Zionism is not always antisemitic (for example if someone is generally anti-nationalism and believes in abolishing nation-states), but it can be, for example if criticism of Israel goes beyond that of its government policies and uses antisemitic tropes (these are stereotypes about Jewish people being connected to wealth, power and global domination).

Don't demand population transfer:

Do not state that Muslims should leave Palestine because they have the whole of the rest of the Middle East, or that Israeli Jews should 'go back to where they came from'.

Reject conspiracies and demonisation:

Israel is not a conspiracy to take over the Middle East or the World, and Palestine is not a conspiracy to enforce a Caliphate on Israel/Europe/the World. These are two national identities who both want to exist in the same piece of land.

Israel is not Nazi Germany. Palestine is not Daesh/ISIS.

Please **be sensitive** towards people who are pro-Israel and/or pro-Palestine at this time - they may have friends/family involved in the situation, or Israel/Palestine may represent something important to them such as their own sense of struggle or oppression or a place of safety in times of persecution. Solidarity with one side or the other is not a crime; they can be pro-Israel/pro-Palestine and still be pro-solution

NAVIGATING NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA



In an age of information overload, separating fact from fiction has never been more critical. Misinformation, rumours, and false claims can spread like wildfire, impacting our understanding of the world and our ability to make informed decisions.

Diverse sources of information:

obtain news from a variety of sources in order to minimise bias and gain a well-rounded perspective.

Critical Thinking:

use critical-thinking skills to evaluate the credibility & reliability of sources.

Fact-Checking:

with the rise of misinformation circulating in the media, take the time to fact-check using reputable fact-checking organisations and tools.

Question Everything:

ask critical questions about the sources, claims, and evidence presented in the media/social media.

Ethical sharing:

take responsibility of sharing accurate information and understand the potential consequences of spreading misinformation.

REFLECTING AS A TEAM



Conversations with one another about how we navigate news and social media can help us reflect on the impact these sources of information can have on us. Being able to trust what we're reading and make our own decisions from this, determines the conversations we have with each other: the less we trust our news, the less we trust one another. How often do we hear these kinds of statements:

Well, the mainstream media would say that...

My sister shared this video on TikTok that shows...

I trust my friends more than I trust the news on TV...

That's just fake news...!

Possible responses to those statements...

Do you trust mainstream news more or less than social media?

Do you find something more reliable if your friends or family share it?

Do you know what 'fake news' is and how to spot it?

Good fact checking sites:

www.snopes.com - Internet's definitive resource for fact-checking misinformation, debunking fake news, and researching urban legends.

www.bellingcat.com - Netherlands-based investigative journalism group that specialises in fact-checking and open-source intelligence. It's a collective of researchers, investigators, and citizen journalists.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/reality_check - A BBC News service dedicated to fact-checking, verifying video, countering disinformation, analysing data and explaining complex stories.

www.fullfact.org - UK's leading independent fact-checking organisation dedicated to checking and correcting facts reported in the news, as well as claims that circulate on social media.

WHEN LANGUAGE CROSSES THE LINE



You may find yourself in a conversation with a colleague or a parent/carer about Israel-Palestine where you feel the language and tone is inappropriate. The easiest thing may be to ignore it, but it is vitally important to recognise and tackle prejudice. You may have a parent picking up a child from your setting, who engages you about Palestine-Israel and it makes you uncomfortable, or you may have a child who asks you to explain more about the war because they have heard it being talked about at home.

Empathy vs shame

A healthy approach to tackling prejudice that comes from implicit bias is to use empathy rather than shame. Shame is a social mechanism that evolved as a way to pressure individuals in society to comply with certain rules and expectations of the group. Empathy is also an emotion that binds us together, but a community built on empathy will have a much more natural and authentic compliance with countering prejudice than one that uses shame to achieve the same result. A good reminder for children, families and colleagues in a setting/school is that we care about Israel-Palestine, but it's also important to remember that we care about each other. We need to listen and understand each other's sensitivities around the topic – not to excuse or justify differing positions or to try and reconcile them, but to explain and understand why we hold those positions.

Process language vs static language

In addition, as those in positions of responsibility dealing with people's biases, it is helpful to use what we call 'process language' rather than 'static language' when drawing attention to racist statements or behaviour. For example, 'he is racist' is a static statement, while 'he said something racist' is a process statement.

TALKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN



While these are extremely complex issues that are challenging even for adults, we know that young children will be exposed to language and opinions all around them and that they are capable of thinking very deeply. The following phrases are designed to help you reflect with a young child about the language they use, how people might have different opinions, and how it is important to listen to each other. Notice how they include checking in with how everyone involved is feeling. These are just a guide, you know your children. Remember story books can be a starting point for conversations.

Some reading suggestions:

The Hueys in: It Wasn't Me (2016) by Oliver Jeffers

The Sandwich Swap (2019) by Kelly DiPucchio and Rania Al Abdullah

The Banana Leaf Ball: How play can change the world (2017) by Katie Smith Milway

Language

There are some words that make others feel sad or upset, even if we didn't mean to hurt them. Sometimes we hear words and we don't know what they mean but we still use them. It's good to be curious about words.

What do you understand by the word <insert word>?

How do you think those words made [insert name] feel?

How do you feel?



Opinions

Sometimes it can be hard to think about how other people think and feel. We don't all think the same. But we think we are right and the other person is wrong.

Why do you think [insert name] feels they are right?

Why do you think you are right?

When people are fighting, I wonder how they feel? I wonder how their families feel?

Listening to each other

We care about each other, and it's important to listen to each other so we can check how another person is feeling. Shall we ask them how they are feeling, and listen carefully to what they say?

If you hear something that worries or upsets you, what can you do?

If any staff, children or parents in your setting/school community have experienced an incident of Islamophobia or antisemitism, two services we recommend are TellMAMA and the CST.

Report Anti-Muslim hate or Islamophobia

<https://tellmamauk.org/>

Report Antisemitism to the Community Security Trust

<https://cst.org.uk/>

CHILDREN DIRECTLY AFFECTED



You may have children in your setting/ school who are directly affected by the conflict and who may have family in the region who are going through an extremely difficult time. It may be that you did not know that these children had Israeli or Palestinian family or heritage, and they may only be telling you this now, or you may see them feeling particularly emotional at this time. Although it may seem easier to ignore the context of Palestine-Israel when talking with children, remember it is really important to acknowledge their feelings in the context in which they have shared them with you.

- Validate their emotions and give them a safe space to feel them:

I can see you are feeling some difficult emotions like angry/worried/scared/confused. That sounds really hard. It is normal to feel worried when your family are not safe. Would you like to talk about it?

- At a young age, they are likely to only have a basic level of knowledge about the situation, and it may be one-sided. This is an opportunity to support them and make sure that they feel heard, rather than a learning opportunity to educate them about the conflict, so be prepared to hear language, stories, or events that may seem one-sided, upsetting, or incorrect.
- You may want to consider offering mindfulness support to the child through breathing exercises or calming poses:

When I am feeling worried or scared, I take deep breaths and think of something that makes me feel calm and safe.



- If you feel comfortable and the child seems open to this, you could use the currency of hope to comfort the child; there are over 160 different organisations in Israel-Palestine working for peace and conflict resolution, and many delivering humanitarian aid, and they haven't given up. You may wish to let the children know about the brilliant and brave people who are working to make the situation much better and keep children safe.
- Finally, there is an organisation called [The Bereaved Families Forum](#), who support those in Palestine and Israel who have lost their loved ones to violence. If it surfaces that a child is mourning a family member, do follow your setting/school's advice on how to deal with this, and if it is appropriate to recommend external organisations, TBFF may be a useful one to know about.

TALKING WITH PARENTS AND COLLEAGUES



You may find yourself in the position of talking with another adult, such as a parent or colleague, in your workplace about Israel-Palestine. How might you respond?

Remember the definitions and history described earlier in this guide. Hold the iceberg image in your mind – you won't know everything a person is thinking or feeling.

The most important thing is not to avoid these conversations. Give them the opportunity to acknowledge their feelings. Ask them 'How are you?' in the context of the Palestine-Israel situation.

Active Listening

Active listening is the skill of concentrating and working to understand what is being said by those who are speaking or communicating. It is about:

- Listening to the words being said
- Being aware of your body language
- Giving the speaker your full and undivided attention
- Listening without judgement
- Trying to decipher the meanings, intentions, and perspectives behind the words
- Understanding the body language of others
- Pausing before responding

Many things distract us in modern life, and active listening is a skill that many adults do not yet practice. After reading this, why not try to engage in active listening in the next conversation you have and see what difference it makes to that interaction?



Critical Thinking

Take the time to pause and think critically about what is being said. Understand that not everything that is said is necessarily true, and that there is bias behind certain sources, media, social media, and those communicating messages. Whilst we all have access to diverse narratives, different media sources, and opposing viewpoints to the ones we hold ourselves, we rarely actually look to engage with multiple perspectives and we rarely go outside of our own comfort zone. We all have 'confirmation bias' - seeking out information that confirms our already firmly held beliefs or perspectives.

The skill of critical thinking gives us the chance to take a step back and look at what we are understanding and what we are thinking. It gives us the skills to assess the sources of our information and analyse the interests and bias behind them, as well as pushing us towards looking at different perspectives.

Empathy

Empathy involves stepping into the shoes of someone else, and understanding their perspectives and emotions. It does not require you to become that person or take on their feelings as your own, but simply to understand and accept those feelings and perspectives. A helpful way to look at empathy is to think about stepping into someone else's shoes whilst keeping your own socks on. The premise of empathy is that every human is good and to understand their needs and emotions better helps us to understand where they are coming from.

FURTHER READING



Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training:

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a224c235-4843-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Media Literacy Case for Educators:

<https://tacticaltech.org/news/latest/media-literacy-resources-for-educators/>

SNS resources:

<https://solutionsnotsides.co.uk/blog/2023/sharon-navigating-information-war>

<https://urlr.me/7CLs1>





Thank You

Contact Us



- +44 (0)20 7074 4357
- team@solutionsnotsides.co.uk
- www.solutionsnotsides.co.uk
- West Hampstead, London.

