

Guidance for Parents/Caregivers of Jewish Children in Independent K-12 Schools

Across the country, antisemitism continues to be on the rise. According to our [2024 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#), ADL tabulated 9,354 antisemitic incidents across the United States, which is the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents 46 years ago. This represents a 5% increase from the 8,873 incidents [recorded in 2023](#), a 344% increase over the past five years and an 893% increase over the past 10 years.

Unfortunately, our schools are no exception. Despite slight decreases in antisemitic incidents in K-12 schools in 2024, we have recorded a 434% increase in K-12 school incidents since 2020. Of particular concern is 2025 research on experiences of parents/caregivers with Jewish children in independent K-12 schools (not Jewish day schools). This report surfaced that many Jewish children had witnessed or experienced antisemitism at their school, and many of the parents who weighed in about their school's response to antisemitism indicated that it was not very adequate.

In a time of rising antisemitism, many families with Jewish students are feeling isolated and unsupported in K-12 schools. The concern isn't limited to high-profile incidents—it includes schools overlooking antisemitic bullying, promoting biased curricula, or failing to meaningfully engage with and recognize Jewish students and their identities. Jewish students – like all students – deserve to be and feel safe, accepted and respected in every school setting.

Whether you have experienced antisemitic issues at your school or want to proactively support your school by addressing antisemitism and ensuring Jewish inclusion, we want to support your advocacy efforts.

ADL has created this resource, which provides information about some common antisemitic issues that may take place in independent K-12 schools and how families can support their children and partner with their school to address antisemitism and help it be a more inclusive community for Jewish and all students.

Supporting Your Child

After an antisemitic incident occurs, the first step is to provide care and support for your child. This includes listening to them, hearing and acknowledging their feelings and concerns, exploring what they need, and understanding what happened. While you may feel inclined to quickly move into problem-solving mode, take the time to listen to your child, allow them to describe what happened, express their feelings, explain what they need and assess their level of physical safety. Be sure to tell them this is not their fault. To learn more about the mental health impact of antisemitism on young people and how you can help, use our guide, [Conversations that Matter: Understanding and Discussing Antisemitism with Young People](#).

After you have supported your child's needs and assured them of your support, you can consider following these steps:

- When they're ready to share more details, ask specific questions about the incident in a non-judgmental way.

- Document as many details as possible--what happened, who was involved, where the incident took place, whether there was anyone who witnessed what happened, whether anyone (student or staff) said or did anything to help.
- Ask your child what you can do to help them feel safe and supported. Rather than trying to solve the problem yourself, engage your child in a thoughtful discussion about options for responding. You could suggest ideas such as reporting to a teacher, counselor or advisory teacher, writing an email to school leaders, offering to speak or share their experience at a grade meeting or school assembly or turning to ADL for outside expertise.
- Tell them you may need to share what happened with their teacher or school administrator and therefore, make sure they are comfortable with that, reassuring your support. Remember that many young people don't report incidents for fear of retaliation and the situation getting worse for them.

Reporting Incidents

Reporting incidents, even to their parents and families, is not easy for some young people; they may feel hesitant to report bias and bullying to any of the adults in their lives. Data shows that the older the student, the less likely they are to report. The reasons vary, but students, like adults, may worry that reporting an incident will make them more vulnerable to ridicule or bullying, and that the situation will worsen.

Speak with your child and make the decision of when and how to report the incident together. Young people should have agency in this process. Parents, families, and other trusted adults can help provide the conditions where young people can feel safe to report. This will depend on the age of the child, severity and frequency of incident, and the school's practice in dealing with incidents.

We encourage you to report the incident to ADL at www.adl.org/report-incident. ADL aims to assess the information provided and offer support or resources. ADL cannot guarantee that any action regarding an incident reported will be taken and if action is taken, what the outcome will be.

Please remember that in any situation that involves a potential crime (such as hate-motivated violence, vandalism, repeated harassment, etc.), notify the school and law enforcement immediately!

Communicating with Schools

Unless an incident involves violence, threats, or harassment, after you have supported your child and assessed their comfort with next steps, we encourage parents to consider this sequence to outreach with school:

1. If your child wants to take the lead, ask what they need to prepare for a conversation with a classroom teacher, advisory teacher, counselor or faculty member. See [Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate](#) for extra support, or assurance that the reporting process is safe and confidential. Keep in mind that some young people may want to speak directly with their teacher, especially if the incident was an isolated one that occurred in the classroom. Self-advocacy is a useful life skill and should be encouraged; high school is the optimal age for self-advocacy, especially on this topic. At the same time, make sure your child has the support

and tools to do so. Keep in mind their age and their ability to handle the conversation. Share guidance with them and practice the conversation together in advance.

2. If appropriate, ask for a meeting with the appropriate staff member at your child's school. If this was an incident isolated to the classroom, start with the classroom teacher. If it happened outside the classroom, connect with the relevant faculty member or your child's guidance counselor or advisory teacher, who can liaise with other staff or administrators. Recount what you know about the situation, share any documentation and details, describe what happened rather than making accusations, and then explain the incident's impact on your child. Ask questions about the school's policies in addressing these kinds of incidents and insist the policies are enforced consistently. Convey that you want to work together to solve the problem rather than taking a confrontational tone. Ask for next steps before leaving, and follow up for a status update if you do not receive a response in a reasonable, timely manner. If the problem is not resolved or continues, contact the department chair or curriculum specialist for instructional-related concerns; the grade-level advisor or dean of students for inter-personal concerns. Copy the division head/principal for awareness.
3. If and when the situation is resolved, thank the school for their partnership and offer your support in their efforts to continue to address antisemitism in a more comprehensive way. In particular, they can follow guidance outlined in ADL's Six Asks for Independent K-12 Schools.

In some cases, you may discover from other families that their children are experiencing or witnessing similar behaviors and incidents. Share with other parents your experience and learn about what they're seeing and hearing. However, be thoughtful about approaching a teacher or administrator together. Balance the need and moment for collective voices with partnership, cool-headed insight and respectful dialogue. Group outreach can overwhelm teachers and administrators and put them in a defensive posture.

School Policies

Schools develop their own policies around bullying, bias, incidents, harassment, and discrimination. It will be helpful to become familiar with those policies when addressing issues in your child's school. You can likely find the relevant policies by accessing your student-parent/guardian handbook.

Common Antisemitic K-12 Incidents & How to Respond

Individual Targeting*

What is antisemitic targeting?

Individual antisemitic targeting is when someone is targeted with unwelcome, offensive, harmful, or biased comments and/or behavior based on that person's Jewish identity (or perceived Jewish identity).

Individual targeting can be physical, emotional, and/or social. It can include teasing, name-calling, using slurs, pushing, shoving, hitting or other physical violence, threatening, making assumptions or stereotypes about the target, directing antisemitic and belittling "jokes" at the target, and excluding the target based on their Jewish identity. It can also include Holocaust-related "jokes" and symbols, including using the Nazi or Hitler salute, "jokes" that glorify Hitler, "jokes" about the

events of the Holocaust, or belittling the tragedy of the Holocaust. Holocaust-related "jokes" and statements are intended to demean the memory of the Holocaust, to attack Jewish people and institutions, and to perpetuate hurt and harm to Jewish people. They also trivialize the Holocaust, which is particularly serious given the percentage of young adults who think the Holocaust was a myth.

Being targeted is harmful and potentially dangerous. It can cause physical, emotional, or mental harm to the person targeted. It can also result in fear, anxiety, and intimidation among other students – that they could be the next target – especially if they also identify as Jewish.

Further, individual targeting can put others, even those who don't identify as Jewish, on edge because if a Jewish student isn't protected, it's likely that others in marginalized identity groups will not be protected. This behavior also impacts the whole school community. If a classroom or school isn't safe and inclusive for one group of students, it's not safe and inclusive for all.

If this issue is part of a pattern and other students are experiencing the same thing, you may choose to talk with other parents/families about it and think together about how to address it with the school administration. Again, take a problem-solving and collaborative approach rather than a confrontational one.

Some recent examples of antisemitic targeting include:

- A Jewish middle school student was harassed at school by classmates who stated, "Jews don't believe in Christ. You're going to hell!" and called the student an antisemitic slur.
- A Jewish student was taunted for wearing a kippah and punched on the head.
- An elementary school student approached a Jewish classmate and stated, "Jews are bad people" and "Israel is bombing everyone."
- A high school student photoshopped a classmate's face on an image of bodies from a concentration camp, posted it on social media, tagged the classmate and wrote "why she playing with me like I won't put her back in the gas chamber."
- A boy said to his Jewish friend, "They're going to put you back in the oven."
- A girl began bullying a Jewish student, saying "Israel is horrible. Anybody who supports Israel is a horrible human being. They don't deserve to live."
- A faculty member told a Jewish student to seek counselling when the student raised concerns about the faculty member celebrating 10/7.
- An Adolf Hitler book in the library was repeatedly dropped on the desks of Jewish students sitting in the library.
- Two Jewish students were followed around after October 7th by someone holding a phone in their face saying, "you're genocidal, your people are genocidal."¹

Swastikas and Other Antisemitic Graffiti

What are swastikas and other antisemitic graffiti?

¹ Note, targeting does not include bullying and cyberbullying. Although there is some overlap with the behaviors included in bullying and those for individual targeting, bullying has a specific definition, components and school responses.

Swastikas and other antisemitic graffiti, symbols, and words send messages of hate, bias, and antisemitism. The swastika is the most significant and notorious of hate symbols, antisemitism, and white supremacy.

Examples of graffiti include images of swastikas written on walls, notebooks, and locker rooms.. Examples also include graffiti of derogatory slurs and other offensive, hateful, and vulgar language about Jewish people, or language that blames all Jews for what's happening in Gaza. Additionally, graffiti can be language that is threatening to the safety of Jewish people and anti-Jewish stereotypes.

Some recent examples include:

- Swastika vandalism was found on a Jewish high school student's car.
- Graffiti was found in a high school bathroom depicting a scorecard that read, "Hamas: 1, Jews: 0."
- A Holocaust exhibit at a middle school was vandalized.
- Swastika vandalism was drawn on a Jewish student's desk by another student.
- Desks were carved with swastikas in a classroom.

These incidents can often be traumatic for students (Jewish and non-Jewish) and staff, creating an environment of fear and intimidation.

What can parents and families do?

If your child tells you about a swastika or other antisemitic graffiti in the school or directed at them specifically, see the above guidance about talking and listening to them first so they can express their thoughts, feelings and describe what happened. In gathering details about the graffiti, be very specific about where it is, and advise them not to cover it up, so school leadership can see it. Taking a photo of the graffiti is also helpful documentation.

If the classroom teacher or school doesn't already know about the swastika or other graffiti, inform them about what you know, providing documentation, its whereabouts, or photos. Express to the teacher or administrator the impact these hateful symbols and messages have not only on your child, but all students and on the school culture as a whole. As mentioned above, when these incidents are acts of vandalism, notify the school immediately for school officials to elevate to law enforcement as necessary. In your conversations with the teacher or school administrator, ask about the extent to which this has happened before, what interventions were used, and what is the prevention plan moving forward.

In the aftermath of incidents like these being resolved, encourage the school to provide opportunities for all members of the school community to discuss and process their thoughts and feelings about the incident and bias more generally. While some young people know the meaning and origins of the swastika and other hate symbols, many do not. While prioritizing students who are directly harmed and impacted, encourage your school to be intentional about teaching about hate symbols – their origins, historical significance, meaning and impact.

Antisemitic Content or Programs

What makes academic content or programs antisemitic?

When teachers assign work, present content, or offer special programs that have antisemitic elements, all students are impacted. This can include assigning antisemitic reading material or writing assignments that may incorporate underlying Jewish stereotypes and tropes, have an antisemitic premise as part of the assignment, ask students to take a viewpoint that is rooted in antisemitism, or assign work or a project that puts students in the position to defend or advocate for an atrocity like the Holocaust.

One of the dangers of antisemitic assignments from teachers is that students may not realize there's an antisemitic or offensive premise to the assignment. They may get an uncomfortable feeling but don't understand why, or they may not see it as problematic at all. Antisemitic assignments impact Jewish students directly and these assignments can cause harm, spread misinformation, and/or perpetuate stereotypes to all students. They can be emotionally upsetting or damaging for students who may identify with the victims or for other reasons. In addition, they may put students in the uncomfortable and upsetting position of defending and/or identifying with the oppressors or perpetrators, inadvertently sending the message that harming Jewish people is okay. In addition, assignments like these can prevent critical thinking skill development by oversimplifying complex historical events and human behavior.

Some recent examples include:

- A school assignment was given at a high school that instructed students to play the role of a "pro-Hamas student organizer."
 - A middle school teacher reportedly instructed students to write a paragraph about how Hitler was "good for the German economy" and taught students how to draw a swastika.
 - A well-meaning history teacher, known to be supportive of the Jewish community, used a Turkish government video to explain Zionism during a comparative religions class. The video portrayed Zionism in a negative light.
 - A teacher made her students recite the pledge of allegiance while doing the Nazi salute.
- What can parents and families do?

If your child tells you about an antisemitic assignment, see the above guidance about how to talk and listen to them first so they can express their thoughts, feelings and share what happened. They may not realize the assignment is antisemitic and if they don't, you can share with them why and how you see it that way. While you don't want to make the child feel worse, it's important they understand that the assignment is harmful.

Because this is likely an assignment from a classroom teacher, after talking with your child, reach out to the teacher to have a conversation. If your child is in high school and wants to have the initial conversation themselves, encourage that and make sure they have what they need to do so. Start by asking the teacher to share their thoughts and intentions with the assignment. Then explain your point of view, how you think it's inappropriate, and the dangerous message that is conveyed through the assignment. Just as students may not realize the assignment is antisemitic, teachers may also not realize it. If relevant, you can also share ADL's resource on [Why Simulation Activities Should Not Be Used](#).

If the teacher continues to insist on using the assignment, you may need to escalate the situation to the department chair and academic dean or division head.

Rallies, Walkouts, Arts and Literature with Anti-Zionist Language

What are rallies, walkouts and literature with anti-Zionist language?

Rallies, school walkouts, arts, and literature with anti-Zionist language include events and materials that use language, symbols or rhetoric that opposes Zionism, which is the movement for self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland of Israel. These events and materials may also use tropes and language that is antisemitic or that demonizes Jewish people because of the Jewish connection to Israel. Be mindful that there's a difference between legitimate criticism of Israel's government and its policies and criticism that crosses the line into antisemitism. Rhetoric is antisemitic when it delegitimizes the State of Israel, holds Israel to a double standard, and/or demonizes Israel, including comparing Israelis to Nazis.

Some examples include:

- At an anti-Israel high school walkout, student protesters allegedly stated, "We should bring Hitler back" and "Kill the Jews."
- After finding out a teacher had attended a pro-Israel rally, high school students protested in the halls, attempted to push their way into her room, shouted anti-Zionist chants, called her expletives and damaged school property.
- A high school's newspaper published an article claiming that: "The ongoing killing rate suggests that the death toll [in Gaza] could surpass that of the Holocaust."
- In one school, many teachers cancelled office hours leading up to finals week because they were trying to make a point about the war or because they were going to anti-Israel protests and encouraging students to meet them there.

The language used during these activities, especially rhetoric that attacks, demonizes, and threatens Jewish people, is very harmful to Jewish students. It can create an environment that is both frightening and intimidating and can cause students to feel scared and anxious about coming to and being in school.

What can parents and families do?

If your child tells you about rallies, walkouts, literature, or other events or activities that use anti-Zionist language, see the above guidance about talking and listening to your child first so they can express their thoughts, feelings and share what happened. Learn as much as you can about the walkouts, rallies or written materials.

It is likely that these situations impact the whole school community and aren't isolated to a specific classroom. If so, review your school's parent-student handbook policies to help guide your approach to the situation. It's possible they have sent out written communication about situations like these previously. Ask the school administration what they can say and do to affirm, support, and protect all students in the school community. While some students may be engaging in these activities, request administrators to remind students not to attack or use harmful language to describe others, especially related to students' identities – including their Jewish identity. This doesn't mean those students may not have the right to engage in these activities, but students should be aware of and sensitive to how their words and actions may negatively impact other staff and students, particularly Jewish students.

For Parents of Students in National Association of Independent Schools Member Schools

As an independent school and a member of [National Association of Independent Schools](#) (NAIS), your voice matters. You can join the chorus of voices urging NAIS to take the necessary steps to address antisemitism in their member schools to lead by example and offer best practices and guidance on antisemitism education, Holocaust education and protection of Jewish students. You also can contact your [local or regional independent school associations](#) about parent committees and appeal to them to integrate ADL's Six Asks of Independent K-12 Schools into their accreditation process.