

# MOMMY, WHY DO THEY HATE US? DISCUSSING ANTISEMITISM WITH OUR CHILDREN

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As we struggle with the staggering rise of antisemitism, all of us have an obligation to address it ourselves and only then with our children. The following are some guidelines to help in this personal and painful process. They are followed by representative questions and suggested answers, based on inquiries to the Ohel Trauma team.

- 1** Give your child a balanced and accurate awareness of the level of antisemitism that actually exists even in light of its recent escalation. Media reports, internet features, and the general tendency to focus on that which is negative, may prompt a distorted view of both the presence and danger of this painful development. Access data from responsible sites and provide your child with a realistic sense of prejudice that actually exists. Inform them of the presence of politicians and speakers who are condemning these disturbing developments and standing side by side with the Jewish community.
- 2** It is ok, especially for older children, to admit your own distress about the long-standing hatred for Jews. Such hateful sentiments have existed for centuries and defy explanation. Nevertheless, acknowledge for your child how painful and scary this is.
- 3** Before you do this, it is important to check in with yourself to see whether you're in a healthy place to interact with your child. You may not be able to do so, and that's ok for now. Take the steps that you need to feel calmer and in a better position to spend that kind of time with your children. Seek support from people who you believe will be able to provide the compassionate response that you deserve.
- 4** Others offer portraying this hatred as a form of jealousy either because of the Jews status as a "chosen people" or because we are, for our numbers, disproportionately successful. For example, while Jews constitute 0.2% of the world population, they account for 22% of Nobel Prize recipients between 1901 – 2023. If this is conveyed, it should be done so with pride and the accompanying message that resenting others for their good fortune is not a sentiment we approve of.





**5** Another idea is to cast this upsurge in hatred for Jews in the broader context of our history and mission in life. This approach is grounded in much of the research that demonstrates how an awareness of one's ancestry, family, and national history nurtures resilience. In other words, families that share stories of ancestors overcoming hardship and discuss their nation's enduring history, manage challenges better than those who don't. Letting your child know that persecution has been part of the family legacy and the miracle of Jewish survival will help them see these recent developments as just one chapter in a long book replete with triumph and hardship. One can supplement this narrative with reminders of our mission to bring about time honored values and the ultimate redemption. The current hardships and our responses to them are part of this sacred and even Divinely ordained journey.

**6** Many are struggling with the question of being so obviously Jewish by wearing a yarmulke during such times of increased hatred and persecution. This is a very individual decision that should be made based on you and your child's tolerance for hostile encounters, need to express Jewish pride, or refusal to be intimidated, as well as the neighborhood you live in and advice from law enforcement. Please do not be judgmental of anyone's decision and make sure that both you and your child are on the same page.

**7** The frequency and intensity of hatred may have reached a point in which Jews should learn precautionary measures and self-defense. This needs to be taught in a responsible manner by security or martial arts experts. If there are reported instances of physical assault, it may behoove local neighborhoods and schools to increase patrols and teach responsible but effective measures of safety and self-defense.

**8** It is impossible to predict events, but history dictates that times of persecution are usually episodic with periods of serenity. Share with your child that experiences of antisemitism will eventually recede, allowing for our overall sense of security and safety to return.

**9** Encourage yourself and your child to take measures to counter this and all forms of hatred through political action, protest, communication with others, and devotional action and prayer with the aim that the world will, ultimately, become cleansed of all hatred and persecution.



## Questions and Answers

### “Mommy, why do they hate us?”

First of all, not everybody hates us. There are a lot of people out there who are not Jewish but very much on our side. They share our worries about Israel and are just as angry about what happened. However, there are many others who actually wish us and Israel harm. It is hard to understand why this hatred exists. It is very upsetting. For now, we are going to be more careful and take precautions. Know that there are lots of people protecting us and making our safety their #1 priority. We are also praying that all hate will disappear and everyone can feel safe.



**“Daddy, I was walking home from school and a car sped by. There were a bunch of teenagers in the car and they shouted hateful comments and threats to harm us. I’m so scared and angry. Can you pick me up from now on?”**

Of course, you’re scared and angry. So am I. The first thing we are going to do is call the police and report this. It is a crime to shout hateful words that are aimed to upset someone based on their religion or race. We are also going to notify the school and local organizations. No one has a right to do that to any person. Right now, because of what is going on in Israel, there is more hatred towards us, and we are doing everything we can to protect ourselves. Thankfully, our police and leaders are committed to keeping us safe. I will speak to the school and the police. If there is an increased danger for you to walk home, we will make arrangements for you to be picked up or escorted.

**“Mom, I’ve been watching a lot of the videos and reading a lot on the internet about Israel and Gaza. So much of it is scary. I am having trouble sleeping and paying attention in school. Should we run away? Move to Israel?”**


Yes, a lot of the news and what is being said and written is alarming. When I watch too much, it makes it hard for me to concentrate and sleep, too. We have to be careful how much we watch and read as well from what sources. We need to be aware of what is going on, but that information has to be accurate. We should obtain information so that we’re knowledgeable but not so overwhelmed that we can’t go on with our day. Let’s see what sites you are reading and practice filtering the information. Let’s also see how busy you are with this, and learn to limit it. You may need more breaks or healthy outlets. This is a good lesson for life as well.

**“Dad, I’m reading so many lies about Jews and Israel even from very well-known and respected sources. There are even so-called experts and professors spouting such lies. How can they get away with that? Why isn’t someone correcting them?”**

I know what you mean. It is very frustrating when half-truths or outright lies about Israel and the Jewish people are portrayed as facts. But we can do something about that. We can write to our politicians and to media outlets and let them know how they are wrong and how much this bothers us. We can also replace these news sources with ones that are more accurate and balanced. Lies about Jews and our practices have been part of our history for generations. We dealt with it then and we’ll deal with it now.

**“Mommy, Is there Hamas in America? Will they come and kill or kidnap us?”**

I understand your fears and I am so glad you shared them with me. It is true that antisemitism is on the rise and it’s scary. So far, nothing close to what happened in Israel has happened here. Rest assured that we, our local leaders, and the police are following what is going on very carefully. We are taking the necessary measures to ensure our safety. Israel is very strong and doing what it can to make sure that something like this will never happen again.



**“Daddy, Mommy, why can’t things be like they used to?”**

You know, the clock moves forward not backwards. We’ve had many good years and some hard times. As a nation, we’ve had years of devastating persecution. We have also had times, such as here in America, during which we have flourished. Remember all the stories you have heard from your grandparents or those that we tell during the Passover Seder of survival and triumph? We have to be grateful for the good times and grow from the challenging times. Sometimes when I am sad or worried, I sing a song from our prayers or Psalms. Is there one you’d like to say with me?

**“Mom, since I entered high school I always planned to do my “gap year” in Israel and then attend the best college I get into. Will the year in Israel still be an option? Is it safe for me to go to any college when I am reading about so much antisemitism on many campuses of even elite schools?”**

You’re right that Israel and college campuses are not the same since October 7. All this is a very fluid situation that can change overnight for better or worse. It’s my impression that most of the young people studying in Israel have stayed and feel safe. It is also true that there are many protests on college campuses and the administrations have been accused of not doing enough to protect Jewish students. It may not improve but there is also a possibility that things will take a turn for the better. I think we have to take a wait-and-see attitude. Apply to your Israel programs and colleges but include some that are known to be more hospitable to Jews and supporters of Israel. These may include some of the more exclusively Jewish settings that you hadn’t considered previously. We’ll discuss this further as we see where you get accepted and what the situation is like then. Our goal is for you to get the best education possible without fearing for your safety.

**“Daddy, can I have a weapon to protect myself in case I am attacked? Can I learn Karate or Krav Maga?”**

Owning and carrying a weapon is a big responsibility that should be done by someone mature and properly trained. I don’t think that there is such a danger where we live that children have to be armed. However, learning self-defense is something you can benefit from even if you never need it. It’s good exercise and teaches you self-protection. I’ll be happy to arrange those lessons but keep in mind that takes a lot patience and practice before you master these skills.

**We hope this model has been useful and welcome feedback by reaching out to [trauma@ohelfamily.org](mailto:trauma@ohelfamily.org).**