Cultural Considerations to Support Students Affected by the Violence in Israel and Palestine

This resource serves as a companion to “Supporting Youth Affected by the Violence in Israel and Gaza: Tips for Families and Educators,” guidance that was published following the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and the ongoing military response in Gaza. In the weeks since, the American public and the international community have been closely following developments out of Israel and Gaza. Since the escalation of violence, incidents of antisemitic, anti-Arab, and Islamophobic bigotry have increased significantly in communities, in schools, and on college campuses throughout the United States. NASP strongly condemns terrorism, violence against civilians, all hate speech and crimes, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and any behavior that threatens the sense of personal safety for millions of people impacted in the United States and around the world. We also denounce any behavior that targets Arab, Israeli, Jewish, Muslim, or Palestinian people with hate, harassment, or violence based on their real or perceived connection to this conflict.

School psychologists have a responsibility to help students and families feel safe and secure and to practice cultural responsiveness and humility with students and families. This resource provides cultural considerations to support young people impacted by the violence taking place in the Middle East, as well as the ongoing domestic impact. NASP recognizes that there are conflicting and perhaps irreconcilable viewpoints on the current crisis and affirms that communities on each side of this conflict have unique needs that should not be conflated. NASP acknowledges that Arab, Israeli, Jewish, Muslim, and Palestinian heritage students are being affected the most acutely in the United States. These young people require support from school psychologists, graduate educators, families, and other caregivers who are sensitive to their unique cultural heritages, histories, and lived experiences. This resource provides best practices for delivering culturally responsive support to these populations during this time. We encourage NASP members, educators, and caregivers supporting these young people to review trusted sources and be well informed about these matters to be best equipped to provide culturally responsive care.

K–12 SETTINGS

- Consider the impact of collective and cumulative grief and look to students, school staff, and affected communities to center their needs rather than making assumptions about how best to serve them. If appropriate, provide grief support opportunities for affected students, families, and school staff such as restorative processing circles, grief counseling groups, affinity spaces, and provision of relevant NASP resources.
- Recognize that impacted students may demonstrate behavioral dysregulation, decreased academic functioning, and difficulty attending to classroom expectations. Provide appropriate supports if necessary, including providing space for coping.
- Understand and recognize the history and ongoing trauma of displacement and refugee experiences for Palestinians and the continued impact of 9/11 and Islamophobia on Muslims and those of Middle Eastern heritage.
- Understand and recognize the history and ongoing impact of antisemitism and the Holocaust on the Jewish community, and their own history of displacement and ongoing intergenerational trauma.
• Recognize the diversity within Arab, Israeli, Jewish, Muslim, and Palestinian populations. None of these groups is a monolith, and cultures can be vastly different within communities.
• Seek to understand the role that religion, ethnic background, and other intersecting identities play in an individual’s coping strategies and preferred ways of accessing and receiving support.
• Advocate for evidence-based equity practices such as embedding multiple perspectives, narratives, lived experiences, and positive representation of Arab, Israeli, Jewish, and Palestinian people and culture into classroom lessons and activities (e.g., English, Social Studies, Civics, International Night).
• Recognize that views and beliefs about the conflict in Israel and Gaza may vary, even among individuals of the same ethnic or religious background. Consider how these views, and their consistency (or lack thereof) with those of others in the community, may affect the individual’s experience.
• Ensure that school-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts include a focus on antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab bigotry, and center the voices of students and families who hold these identities.
• Foster a sense of psychological safety by clearly communicating antibias policies and by providing concrete descriptions of what the school is doing to keep students safe.
• Openly acknowledge that the situation in the Middle East is causing much pain for many individuals and families. Also validate the anxiety that the uncertainty is creating and teach strategies to help manage difficult feelings.
• Remind and reinforce district and school policies and practices around antibullying, acceptance, and respecting individual differences.
• Clearly communicate to students, families, and staff how to access support if needed and how to report if they are the victim of harassment or bullying, or if they observe this happening to others.
• Widely disseminate information to students, faculty, and staff about mental health and other supports available to them.

COLLEGE CAMPUSES

• Campuses should be places where students can express their first amendment rights, but demonstrations that endanger individuals with opposing viewpoints should not be supported.
• Reinforce respect and inclusion, mitigate harmful speech or behaviors, provide needed support, and facilitate improved understanding of and self-reflection regarding historical and lived experiences of minoritized individuals.
• Consider intersectionality when supporting students, as there are various identities that individuals in these groups may hold (e.g., Black Jews, Black Muslims, Jewish and Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals).
• Understand the ways that social justice and equity affect student safety and the building of supportive learning environments on campus. Through this lens, ensure an inclusive program climate that does not perpetuate disenfranchising or marginalizing language that ignores the way power and privilege affect student experiences.
• Facilitate listening sessions where students process their emotions and find appropriate support systems by creating space in which they can come together and share their experiences in a supportive environment.
• If they do not yet exist, support the development and implementation of affinity groups for Arab, Israeli, Jewish, Muslim, and Palestinian graduate students to connect with others holding similar identities.
• Ensure students and staff know how to report incidents of discrimination, hate speech and violence. If you feel safe to do so, confront and report Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, and antisemitism on your campus, at your training program or institution, and in the public.
• Clearly and consistently articulate bias-response protocols to enable students to take action if they experience discrimination, harassment, hate speech, or violence.
• Widely disseminate information to students, faculty, and staff about mental health and other supports available to them.
SELECT NASP RESOURCES

- Addressing Grief: Tips for Caregivers and Educators
- Care for the Caregivers: Tips for Families and Educators
- Promoting Compassion and Acceptance in Crisis
- Responding to Civil Unrest
- Supporting Vulnerable Students in Stressful Times: Tips for Parents
- Lesson Plan, Student Psychoeducational Groups in School Crisis Intervention: The PREPaRE Model
- Resources to Support Students Who Are Displaced Persons, Refugees, or Asylum Seekers
- NASP Social Justice Resources

Editor’s Note: This resource was developed by NASP and reviewed by members and leaders representing the affected communities and a wide range of perspectives on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

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