

How to Talk about the War in Israel:

Why do some American Jews care about this so much?

- Jews not only believe and practice the religion Judaism, but we are also a People with a beginning together at Sinai, and an ancestral home in the land of Israel. So, right now, our family is under attack in our home.
- Many Jewish people have direct family or friends who have been killed or kidnapped, who are living in shelters or were called up in the reserves. Our families are at war.
- Throughout history, the Jewish people have been outsiders. Most of us grew up with dozens of stories about unfairness, persecution, and violence against Jews. The current violence stirs up these collective memories.

Do all Jews love the State of Israel?

- A state is a political entity. Based on our history of persecution, and through multiple legal and legitimate means, the Jewish people decided we needed a state, with an army to guarantee our freedom. This was ratified in a UN Resolution in 1947, despite significant opposition from many Arab countries.
- Lots of younger Jews with freedom guaranteed by the United States feel less of a need for this, but Jews elsewhere (North Africa and the Middle East, France, Argentina, Russia) feel it more strongly.
- Israel is far away, and some Jews have no relatives or friends there. However, visits to Israel can be profoundly powerful for most Jews, usually inspiring a deep affection. Israel also serves as a symbol of post-diaspora Jewish normalcy and serves as a refuge for persecuted Jews across the world.
- States and governance are complicated. People everywhere—including here in the U.S.—may disagree with the policies and politics of their government, but still love and support the nation itself.

Who are the Palestinians, what is Gaza, what is Hamas and what happened this week?

- The land between the Jordan Valley and the Mediterranean also contains the Palestinian people, a diverse group of mostly Muslims and some Christians. Through many wars, the State of Israel controls all the land, but Palestinians experience vastly different degrees of freedom or oppression depending on where they live, from full Israeli citizens to military Occupation, to total blockade and isolation.
- American Jews have a range of opinions—from strong support to outright protest—about how Israel treats Palestinians in the name of Israeli security.
- Complicating this is that Palestinian self-government has been highly self-serving, corrupt, internally violent, and divided, ineffectively meeting the needs of their people. In addition, other countries in the Middle East use the Palestinians as proxies in larger regional rivalries and distractions from domestic governance failures.
- Hamas is an extreme Palestinian group dedicated to the elimination of Jews from the entire land of Israel, and they use violence against civilians (what the entire world calls “terrorism”) as a way to protest the very existence of Israel.
- Gaza is a tiny piece of land with 2.2M people, that was first occupied by Egypt in 1948, and then by Israel in 1967. Israel completely withdrew from Gaza in 2005, and following democratic elections Hamas took power, and defended their control in a short civil war with the Palestinian Authority in 2007. Since then, Hamas has been attacking Israel with missiles and kidnappings.
- On 10/7/23, Hamas attacked with horrific violence against civilians, killing over a 1,000 people, including babies and the elderly, and kidnapping 130 hostages. These actions are called crimes against humanity.

Is this about Islam or Judaism?

- No.
- While the majority of actors in this conflict profess either one faith or the other, and while some will publicly declare that their positions or actions are related to their faith (by chanting “God is Great,” for example), serious scholars of both religions outlaw violence, vengeance, humiliation, and civilian suffering.
- Nationalism—the belief in the preferential treatment or superiority of my group over other groups—is easy to confuse with religious faith or pride, especially because nationalists often use slogans or rituals to promote their views. But this is a distortion.

- Judaism and Islam, like all of the world's religions, are very long-standing attempts to create civilizations that promote human flourishing, not violence.

Why is my social media so pro-Palestinian?

- Social media works by collecting simple, binary choices to predict a user's future preferences. This gets users hooked and generates advertising revenue. Many people make this conflict a simple binary—Israel oppressing, Palestinian oppressed—which makes content more likely to go viral.
- People online do not differentiate Hamas from all Palestinians.
- Many people see Israel's occupation and governance of the Palestinians as oppressive and unjust, and share these opinions online.
- Hamas has become expert at creating situations that look simple, like lopsided casualty counts, in order to make it easier for the outside world to blame Israel for excessive force. That is why Hamas puts its military targets next to schools, mosques, and hospitals, which normal militaries do not do.
- Israel/Palestine receives a much higher degree of attention from journalists than any other conflict on the planet, and therefore more content about it exists online.
- The 10/7/23 attacks included a massive global social media blitz, using bot-farms and misinformation tools, to simultaneously promote Hamas' violent military success, and the legitimacy of their cause.
- Parents should consider blocking social media or monitoring more carefully in the next few weeks as these apps can automatically load offensive and violent video content before they can be stopped by users.

I am concerned for my safety as a Jew:

- Our synagogue and almost all Jewish institutions receive regular security briefings and take a variety of measures to make sure our sites are safe. The Department of Homeland Security and local law enforcement are very proactive at protecting religious institutions.
- At school, children and teens should immediately report offensive statements or graffiti to teachers or administrators (especially if the comments come from teachers), parents, or clergy.
- Especially at this time, statements against Israel are extremely insensitive. Outward displays of Jewish identity should be respected as personal expressions of one's faith. Insults directed at students based on events in Israel are acts of anti-Semitism and should be reported.
- The issues between Israel and Palestinians are very complicated and schools should be places for serious investigations of facts and narratives to stimulate learning. Broad accusations and carelessly used words shut down learning.

How can I respond?

- Condemn Hamas' acts as atrocities. They are illegitimate forms of protest on behalf of the Palestinian people.
- Tell people that support for Palestinians must not include terrorism.
- There is a trend across the world to legitimize the pursuit of justice, "by any means necessary," which some use to permit obviously evil behavior. Remind people that basic morality rejects the idea that the ends justify the means.
- Remind everyone that the protection of human life is a universal principle and that violence only begets more violence.
- Parents can model three important human experiences: grief, fear, and confusion. This is a situation where the answers are extremely unclear, but the suffering is extremely clear.
- Take time for grief. Arguments about facts or rushing to solutions will trample feelings that are raw right now.
- Differentiate dialog from debate. We can all learn, but nobody is going to have a perfect answer.

What can I do?

- Call Jews or Israelis you know and express concern and support. Just be kind because people are afraid and sad.
- Demand the release of the hostages immediately.
- Give money to the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington's [Israel Crisis Fund](#).
- Tell non-Jews you know to do all of the above too. Crimes against humanity affect all of us.