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Teacher Guide: Tackling polarisation and building resilience

What does peace look like to you?

What gives you hope?

How do you cope with fear or anger?

How do you react to hate?

Introduction

This guide has been created to advise schools on building a culture of empathy and resilience that remains open for brave and confident dialogue on the topic of Israel-Palestine, and protects school community members from alienation or harm.

A series of approaches and scripts are provided as tools to help navigate the challenges that arise when discussing sensitive topics, and schools may wish to consider joining our Olive Branch Community for further support (please visit our website on the last page of this guide).

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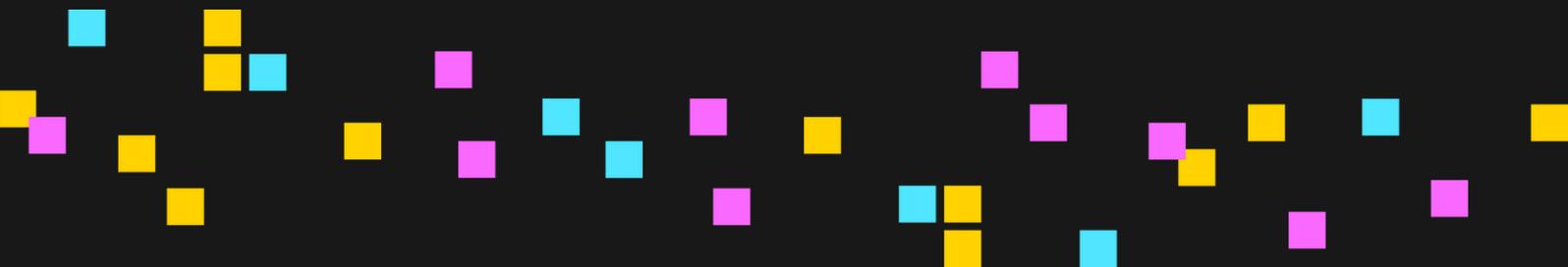
Shame vs. empathy

As a school, we care about Israel-Palestine, and each other.

Shame is a social mechanism to induce compliance and keep the group together.

Empathy is also an emotion that binds communities together, but compliance becomes authentic rather than forced.

Much of the harmful and polarising rhetoric around this issue from teenagers comes from ignorance, and an educational approach is needed.

We want to build an empathy culture where we can talk about Palestine-Israel confidently, and without causing harm.

Suggested approach for confronting a situation:

- Take a deep breath and steady your mind

- Address emotions

- State a need

- Make a request

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What does that look like in practice?

(Breathe)

Address emotions:

"It may not have been your intention and you're not in any trouble, but what you have just said may be hurtful to members of our school community"

State a need(s):

"We are a school that cares about Israel-Palestine and it's important that we can talk openly about our opinions, but also in a way that doesn't hurt one another"

Make a request:

"For that reason, I would like us to talk about exactly what you meant when you said that, and also how others may have understood what you said"

(If not already in a suitable setting for an in-depth discussion, arrange for a time for that to happen before proceeding)

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Identifying racism

Apply the three D's:

1 Demonisation

Are negative tropes and stereotypes being used?

2 Delegitimisation

Is Israel/Palestine being delegitimised in terms of the UN-granted equal right to self determination for nations/peoples?

3 Double-standards

Is Palestine/Israel being held to a different standard than that same person applies to other political issues and causes that they are involved with?

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Identifying racism cont...

- Is the intention deliberate hatred towards Jews, Muslims, Palestinians or Israelis?*

- Even if unintentional, are negative stereotypes and tropes about these people groups being used?

*NB: not all Israelis are Jewish and not all Palestinians are Muslim, these are separate, but often related forms of prejudice

Antisemitic:

- Domination and control
- Holocaust denial
- Blood libel
- Dirt and disease
- Wealth and greed
- Demonisation
- Deicide

Islamophobic:

- Culturally incompatible
- Oppression of women
- Terrorism
- Monolithic
- 'Islamisation or threat of a 'Muslim take-over'

Click on the links in the lists above to learn more information about recognising each of these tropes. This information is from a collaboration of European partners for countering online racism called 'Get The Trolls Out'

GET the **TROLLS** OUT

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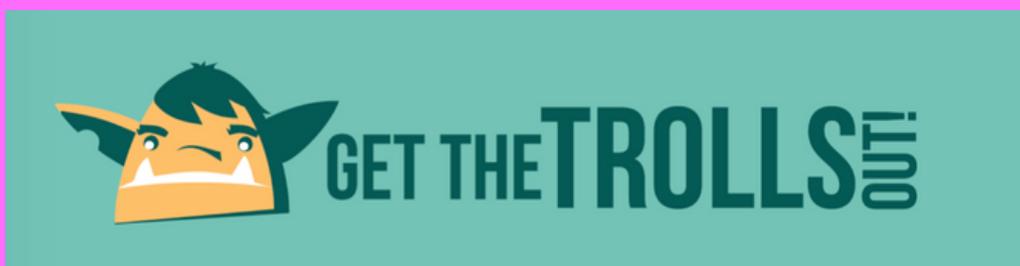
Suggested approach for tackling demonisation

- Are tropes or sterotypes listed above being used by the student?

- If it was a comparison with Nazi Germany or Al Qaeda/ISIS, or contained racist tropes or conspiracy theories, explain that such a comparison is hurtful for many Jewish/Muslim people

- Try bringing a member of staff (if there is one) who can gently explain why it is painful, or have a couple of personal stories ready from Muslim/Jewish people

- Tell the students you would like to empower them to express their concern and opinions about Israel/Palestine that will say everything they want to say without causing hurt

- Empower the students by asking them if there is any way they think they could express their view without incorporating tropes, conspiracies or comparisons

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Dealing with conspiracy theories

In general, it is best to close down the discussion of conspiracy theories/disinformation — but in an appropriate way. The conversation can be picked up with the student(s) after the class or at a later time by the teacher, if needed. The reasons to close down the conversation (but possibly the teacher picking it up later) include:

- A student may have detailed 'knowledge' about a particular event e.g. 9/11, and it can be hard for a teacher to meaningfully counter ideas on the spot

- Repeating disinformation is spreading disinformation (technically it becomes misinformation if the intent is not harmful)

- To entertain serious discussion of conspiracy/disinformation is to give debunked ideas or theories too much credit and actually serves to spread these ideas

- Many conspiracies are either openly or covertly racist. It is important that other students do not feel attacked, so racist ideas, such as antisemitic and Islamophobic conspiracies should be closed down, and the student raising the conspiracy spoken to at a later point by their teacher

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Suggested script for conspiracy theories

1. Acknowledge the idea
2. Give some sort of general counter/or caution (but not overly dismissive)
3. Park the topic

Example 1:

Pupil: Palestinians are just like all the other Muslims, having big families to play their part in the great replacement
Teacher: Interesting perspective. Is this something you have read online?
Pupil: It's everywhere on Reddit
Teacher: It's just that there is a lot of misinformation put out there online, often by people with hidden agendas. It's important to look at the overall evidence from many different sources, and anything this specific that is attributed to millions of people in a generalised way is highly unlikely to be true.

Example 2:

Pupil: But ISIS was created by Israel and the CIA
Teacher: It's good to question events, but there is no credible evidence for this, and we need to follow the evidence.
Pupil: But there is evidence, I've seen videos on YouTube
Teacher: Yes, there are videos on YouTube, but this is not the same as credible evidence. If there were credible evidence then someone could bring a case to court or a newspaper could run a big story, but 20 years later no one has so it is highly unlikely to be true. It's good to acknowledge that there are conspiracy theories, but now we need to move on with the session we have planned for today.
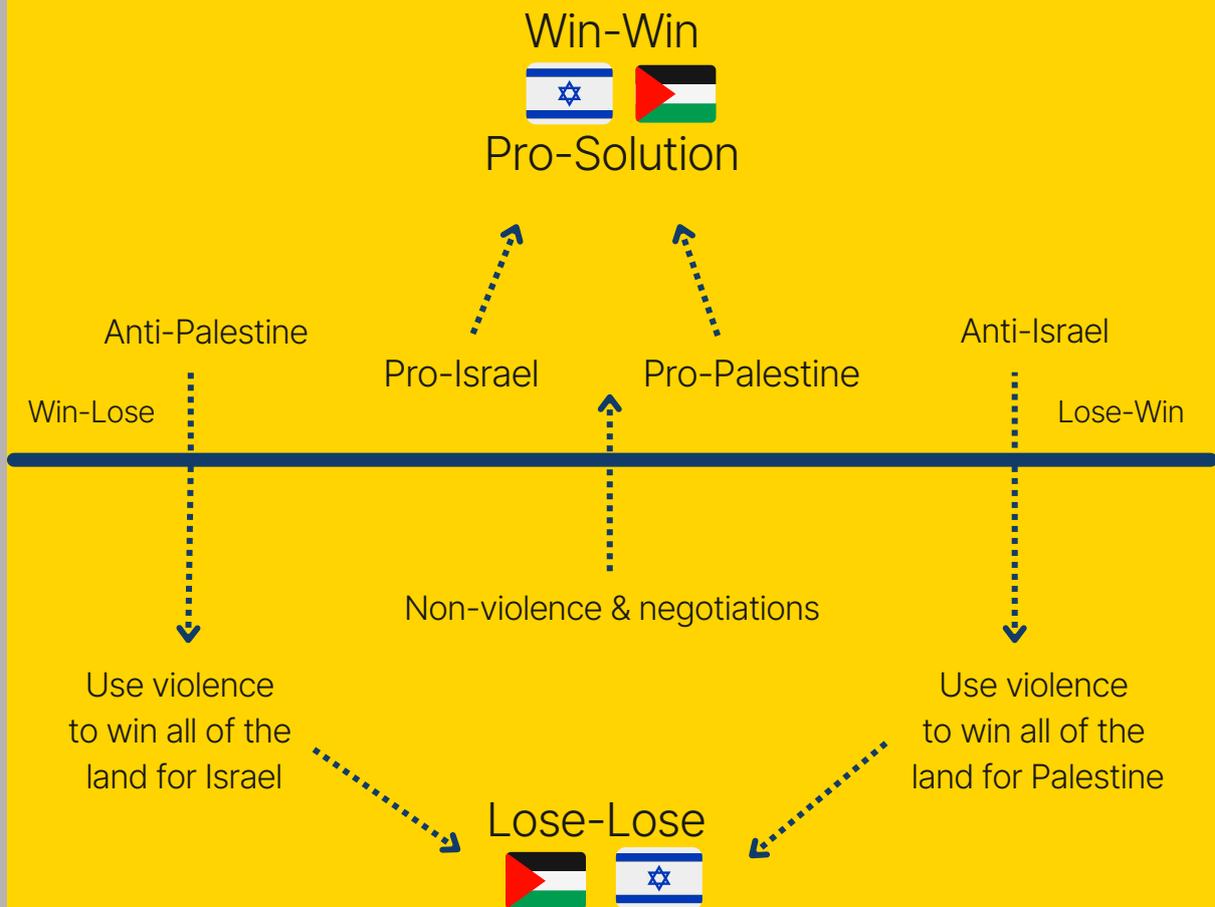
Suggested approach for tackling delegitimisation

- If it was a win-lose opinion against Israel or Palestine, give the students the chance to think through/express why they hold that opinion

- Explain to the students that you would like them to be aware that it is painful for some members of the school community

- Try bringing a member of staff (if there is one) who can gently explain why it is painful to them personally when their identity is delegitimised or have some personal stories ready

- Talk through the dangers of lose-lose if the conflict continues and ask them what they think a win-win outcome could look like. They could also watch 'Rage, Revenge & Repair'

- Using the spectrum of positions (see below), suggest exploring the full spectrum and considering where they would like to position themselves within that context

- End by asking the students if there is any way they think they could express their view whilst also showing that they have empathy for those who may find their view painful

Exloring win-win

Rather than simply being 'pro-Israel' or 'pro-Palestine', perhaps more important is the direction of travel towards peace and justice for all people and not towards a win-lose outcome. Use this chart and help your students to identify where their views may lie on this spectrum, and particularly what the direction of travel is.

The Human Cost of Long-Term Conflict

Win-Win

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Pro-Solution

Anti-Palestine

Win-Lose

Pro-Israel   Pro-Palestine

Anti-Israel

Lose-Win

Non-violence & negotiations

Use violence
to win all of the
land for Israel

Use violence
to win all of the
land for Palestine

Lose-Lose

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Suggested approach for tackling double standards

- If it was a call to boycott Israel or protest against what the students view as 'Palestinian terrorism', give the students the chance to think through/express why they hold that opinion, they may have good reason

- Gently ask them to explain or consider why they are particularly targeting Israel or Palestine for this action as part of this discussion, are they also involved in other boycotts or protests against countries that are similarly going against international law, or that are using violence against unarmed civilians? If not, why only Palestine/Israel? They may have good reason

- If reasons given contain double standards, conspiracy theories or antisemitic tropes, refer back to the demonisation script

- Encourage the students to understand more deeply the possible approaches for activism and their impact on others around them. Use the information below to assist the discussion and encourage empathy for those in school who might perceive their activism differently

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Understanding boycotts

1. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

Boycotts are a legitimate, non-violent tool for political change. However, they should be used strategically and with care.

There are several forms of boycott that we have been seeing in the context of this issue:

a) **Economic boycotts against Israel**, particularly targeted at companies that operate in the occupied territories and/or are profiting from the occupation, or products produced in settlements. This is usually aiming towards ending the occupation of the Palestinian Territories as outlined by the UN.

b) **Boycotts of everything Israeli**, including Israeli academics, artists and civilians in any field. This is ambiguous. It could be interpreted as prejudice against Israeli people, or delegitimising Israel's existence.

c) **Boycotts of non-Israeli companies** just because they are owned or founded by Jewish people. Just because a company is somehow connected to Jewish people (such as Starbucks or Marks & Spencer) doesn't mean it must be supporting the Israeli occupation. Making such an assumption is antisemitic and will be hurtful for a large number of people, particularly Jewish communities. Advise students to do careful research. For example, Starbucks' official statement on this can be found <u>here</u>.

d) **Boycotts of global US corporations** such as McDonalds, Pepsi Cola, etc. to help the Palestinians. Stereotypes of Jewish people being associated with wealth, power and global domination, or having control of the US Government/economy are antisemitic. Assuming that these companies support the Israeli occupation simply because they are American or large corporations will be hurtful for a large number of people, particularly Jewish communities. It's fine to boycott these companies if you are anti-Capitalist or don't like their ethics on tax etc., just keep these issues separate from Israel-Palestine and advise students to do careful research. For example, information about McDonalds' positioning on this issue can be found <u>here</u>.

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Understanding protests

2. Protests about terrorism

Protests are a legitimate, non-violent tool for political change. However, they should be undertaken strategically and with care.

There are several types of protests connected with this issue:

a) **Protests against Hamas** rocket fire, bombings and stabbings. This is usually criticism of a political organisation that is using violence against unarmed civilians for its aims and calls for the destruction of Israel.

b) **Joining protests in solidarity with Hindus and India or the far right** just
because you are pro-Israel. This is conflating the issue of Kashmir with Israel-Palestine, creating an alliance that has opposition to a majority Muslim country as its common theme in the name of counterterrorism. This is anti-Muslim and deepens tensions between Hindus, Jews and Muslims here in the UK. In addition, supporting far right voices, who often use anti-Muslim rhetoric whilst expressing support for Israel, is also likely to be very hurtful for a large number of people, particularly Muslim communities.

c) **Accusing activists who are campaigning for Palestinian human rights** of supporting terrorism or being antisemitic. This is equating the exercise of a democratic right with terrorism and racism and is unjust. It is likely to be triggering for a large number of people, particularly those in Palestine solidarity groups.

d) **Criticising Muslim people for supporting the Palestinian cause.**
Underlying assumptions that Muslim people are terrorist because they support the Palestinian cause, and making statements such as: "This is why people in this country start to not like Muslims", is Islamophobic and likely to be very hurtful for a large number of people, particularly Muslim communities.

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Thank you

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