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Teacher Guide: Political Positions and Language Sensitivities

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

The effects and trauma of the situation in Palestine-Israel can be far-reaching and people in Britain can be touched and experience emotional and mental pain because of it. It can also, occasionally, spill over into incidents of physical violence.

We want to live in a fair, educated and compassionate society in Britain where we celebrate diversity and protect one another from harm. This includes those who have different beliefs, faiths or opinions from ourselves. As well as caring about Israel-Palestine, we also care about each other. We believe it is possible to have discussions and carry out activism on this issue without hurting one another in the process, and we hope this guide will help educators in Britain to support their students to do so. We seek to raise awareness through this resource about how various views and words may impact upon Palestinians, Israelis, Jews, Muslims, and others. How people then proceed once they have this awareness is their own decision.

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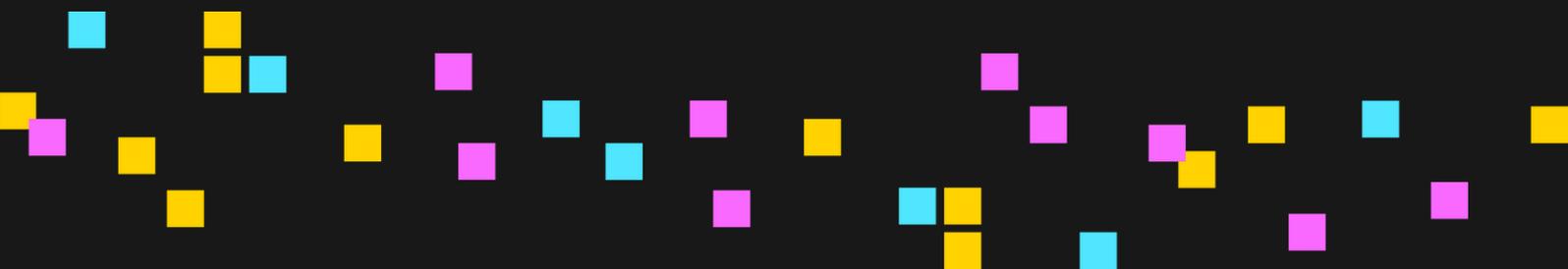
Introduction cont...

This guide has been developed through listening to alumni from among our student participants, particularly Jewish and Muslim, and our Palestinian and Israeli speakers. Their voices and stories are featured at various points throughout this guide, represented by the speech bubbles and featured in the films. As this guide is based on real experiences of our speakers and participants, it offers approaches related to what they have faced.

Different topics and words are addressed simultaneously in this guide, however that is not to suggest a uniform response to these issues, or an equivalence between those words and issues that are presented together in this guide. It is designed to help you encourage your students to think critically and understand the potential impact before discussing and forming opinions on Palestine-Israel. It is based around the values of: Non-violence Equality for all Rejection of hatred. It is also based around three critical-thinking questions as they reflect on their position: Is the goal a win-win outcome? Is it fair? Is it constructive?

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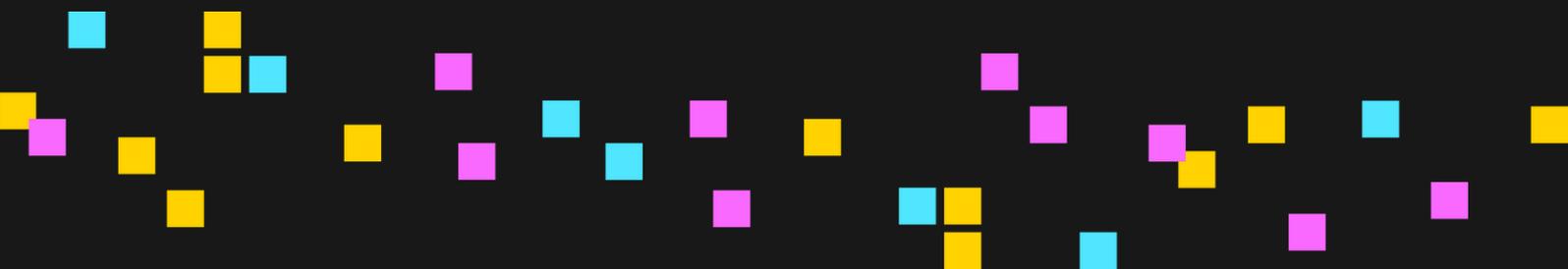
Positions: aiming for win-win

Let's start with the first and most important question to encourage your students to ask themselves: "What is the intended goal of the position I am taking? How will it affect Palestinian and Israeli people? Might it endanger others if I proceed in a certain way with my words?" What outcome is being proposed for Israelis and Palestinians? If the end result means the eradication of either the Palestinian or the Israeli national identity and/or people, then it is win-lose*, which will likely lead to lose-lose and means a continuation of the human loss and suffering that has been going on for decades. This is precisely why we chose our organisation's name, to encourage people to remember the value of human life and not support one side to win against the other. Click on the picture below for a short film that is helpful for illustrating the true impact of a win-lose approach.
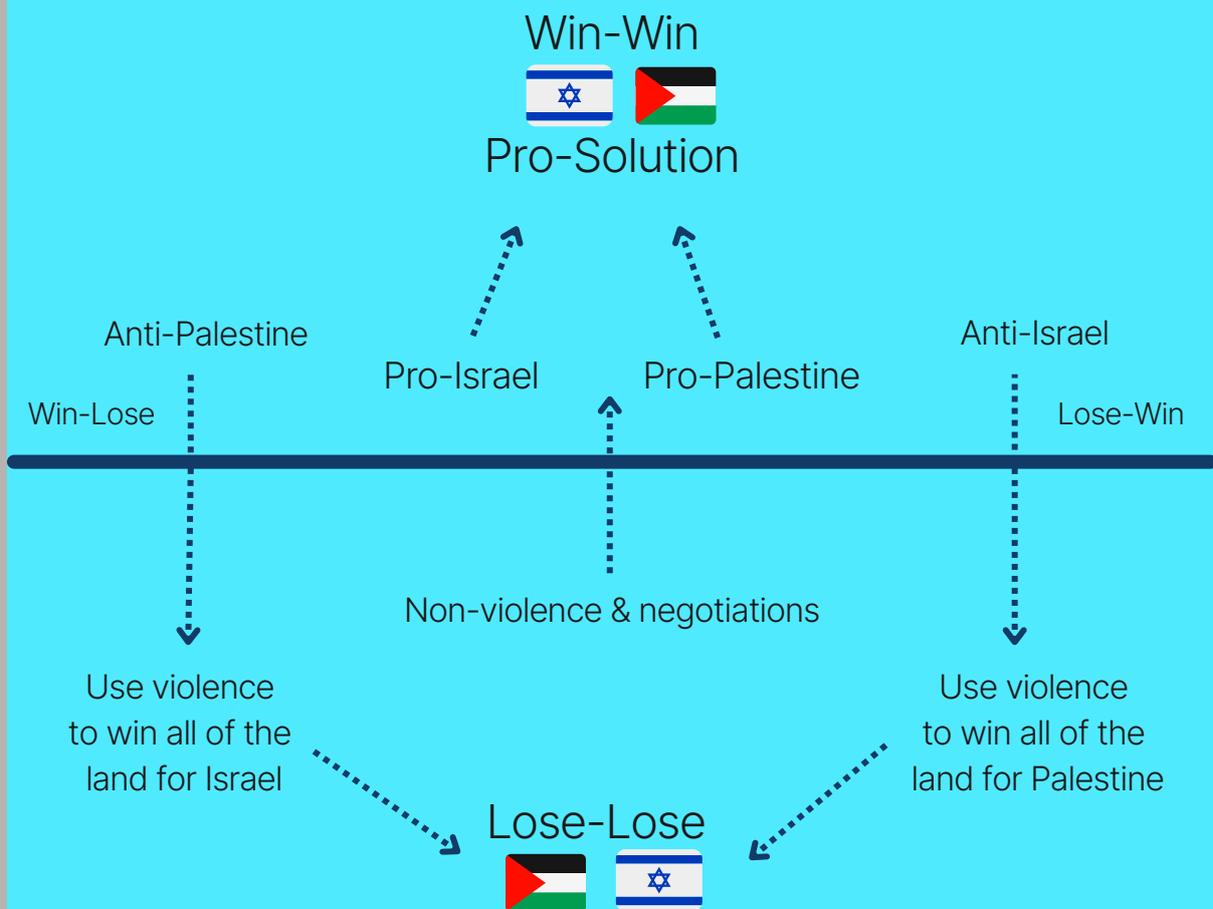

*Information on the UN principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples - Article 1 (2): Both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples have that right under the UN Charter. Currently, Israel is a fully recognised member state of the UN, Palestine has observer, non-member status at the UN.SNS does not prescribe what an agreed-upon solution should look like, but encourages critical thinking through listening to what Palestinians and Israelis say they need.

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Win-win cont...

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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Win-lose language

Language is important when talking about this topic, and certain terms or expressions can be interpreted as promoting a win-lose outcome. The result will likely be entrenchment of those on the other side of the win-lose spectrum, and a win-win outcome will be harder to achieve. If your students want to avoid this, we suggest the following:

Why?

DO: Talk about the importance of Palestinian human rights and self determination. Palestinians should be free.

DON'T say: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" or call for an "intifada".

"Because I and many other people may interpret this as: 'Israel should be destroyed', which may hinder the cause of Palestinian freedom and won't help any of us."

Why?

DO: Talk about the importance of Israeli security and self determination. Israelis should be safe.

DON'T say: "Palestine as a state has never existed" or refer to the modern-day West Bank as "Judea and Samaria".

"Because I and many other people may interpret this as: 'Palestine should never be established as a state', which may hinder the cause of Israeli security and won't help any of us."

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Win-win language

In SNS, we believe in listening to Palestinian and Israeli people about what they need, and how we can help them have a better future. Both national aspirations need to be fulfilled in this piece of territory through a negotiated agreement if this is to happen. If political leadership of both nations comes together to talk about what their people need and what can be done to overcome challenges, as well as to seek fair and equitable solutions with the aid of international actors, a win-win outcome is possible.

Reciprocity will be key - the principle that whatever right one people claims for itself, it cannot reasonably deny to the other. What do the Israeli and Palestinian speakers in our programme say they need that they don't currently have?
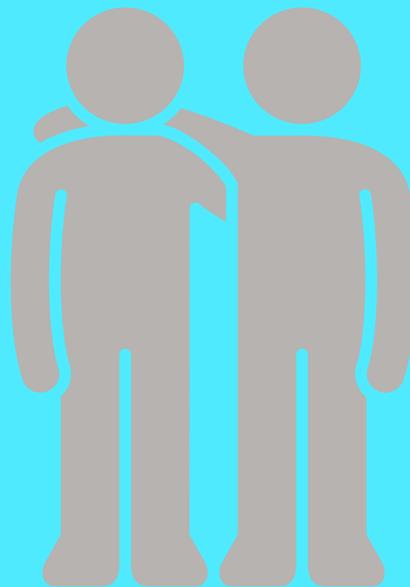
Palestinian

- End of occupation and military law
- End of violent attacks
- Freedom of movement (removal of checkpoints, the wall, etc.)
- Control of economy and resources
- The right of return for Palestinian refugees to be addressed
- No more settlement expansion
- No more racism
- End to violent attacks against unarmed civilians
- Access to holy sites
- Jerusalem as the capital
- An airport, sea port and economic growth
- Self-determination in historical homeland
- End to the Gaza blockade and air strikes
- Justice for Palestinians who have been wronged

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Israeli

- End to violent attacks against unarmed civilians
- End to rocket attacks from Gaza by Hamas
- Self-determination in historical homeland
- End to calls for Israel's destruction
- No more racism
- Acknowledgement of the suffering of Jewish refugees from Arab countries
- Access to holy sites
- Jerusalem as the capital
- No more building of tunnels from Gaza into Israel
- Normal relations with neighbouring Arab and Muslim states
- Fair and equal treatment in UN bodies
- No more need for mandatory military service
- Justice for Israelis who have been wronged

"We're people just like you with real needs. Don't talk about us, without us."

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Is it fair ?

Encourage students to reflect on the fact that it is important to care about Israel-Palestine and each other in our various communities and wider society. Is the position they are taking fair to all parties involved? Some questions to ask:

- Why the focus on this particular issue? Are you personally connected to this issue? Why is it important to you?

- Are you taking a similar approach to other causes involving similar issues that you are passionate about?

- Are you targeting your opinions towards a particular group of British people because of an assumed/perceived connection between that group and Israel or Palestine?

- Are you using national flags/symbols of Palestine or Israel to represent a different or separate cause?

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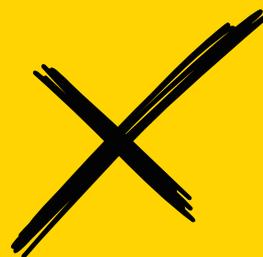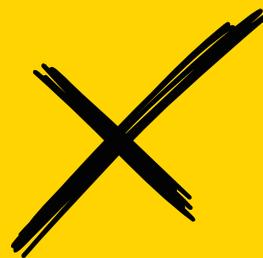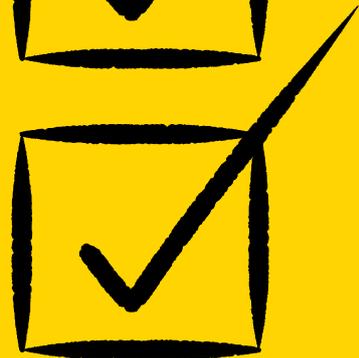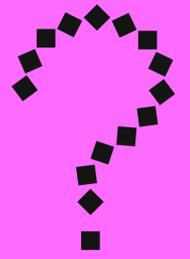
Why is this important ?

It is important to check the answers to the above questions because British Jews and Muslims experience increased discrimination as a direct result of attitudes and opinions around the issue of Israel-Palestine, particularly when the issue hits our media headlines.

Oct-Dec 2023, according to the CST, antisemitism increased 589%

NUMBER OF INCIDENTS | MONTH BY MONTH | 2023
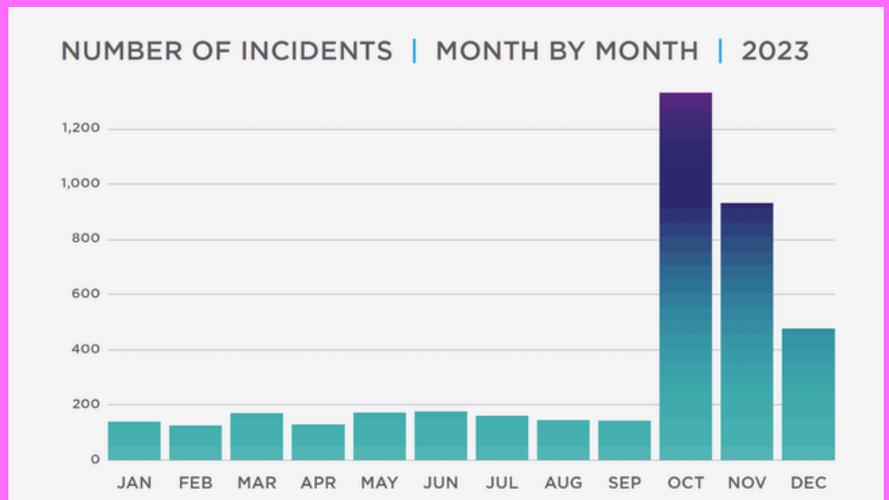
Between Oct 2023 and Feb 2024, according to TellMAMA, Islamophobia increased 335%

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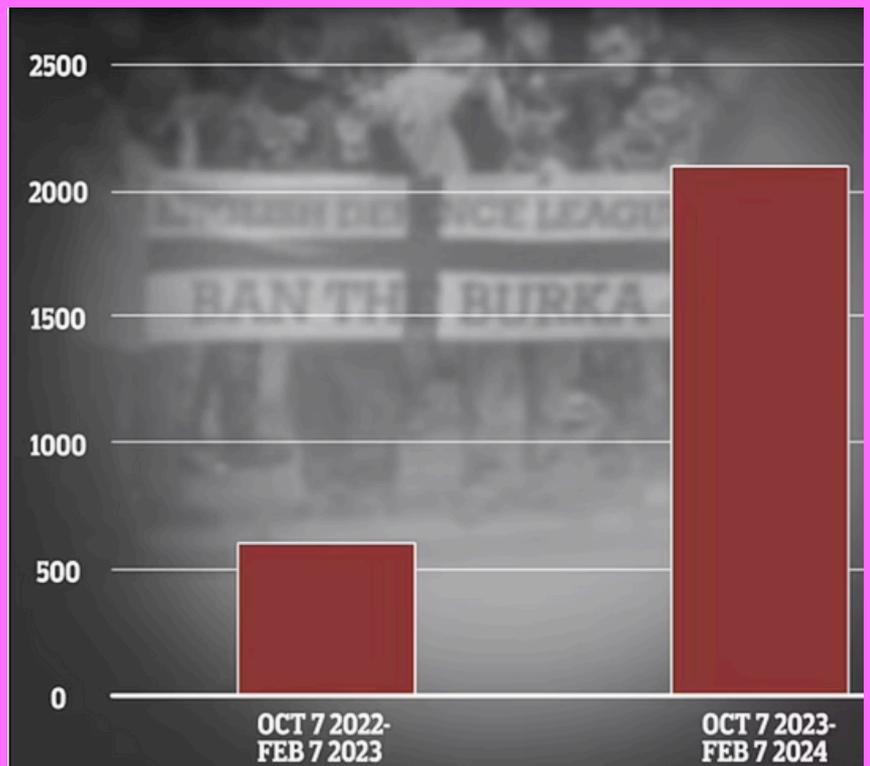
Identifying racism

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'

Is it constructive ?

Caring about each other when we express our views and positions on any issue is part of being in a fair and compassionate society. The following language is likely to kindle defensiveness and opposition to your own position in people who hold a different position.

Why ?

"Apartheid" (often directed as an accusation towards Israel's actions):

"I live with the fear of a rise in Jewish persecution and I need Israel to exist as a safe haven for me. I fear that behind this accusation is the demonisation of Jewish people and a call for Israel to be destroyed".
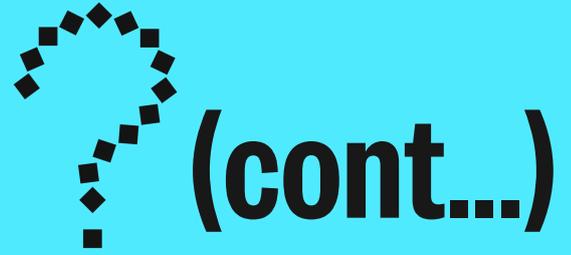
Why ?

"Terrorism" (often directed as an accusation towards Palestine's actions):

"I live with the constant suspicion of society around me that just because I am Muslim, I must support terrorism. I fear that behind this accusation is the demonisation of Muslim people and that Palestine will never be recognised as a state."

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Is it constructive ? (cont...)

Rather than using these and other legal terms such as 'genocide' in passing, it would be better to properly define them and think about how to use them in a way that will encourage engagement rather than shutdown in a discussion.

Try discussing the following questions:

i. What was the original context of usage of the term?

ii. What is its current definition in International Law?

iii. Is the term being applied accurately based on the lived experience of people on the ground?

iv. Why might some people around you find this difficult and become more entrenched in a counter-viewpoint?

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Actions related to triggers

1. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

Boycotts are a legitimate, non-violent tool for political change. However, think of the person above who reacted to the language of Apartheid. Could this be triggering? Ask students what they can use from this guide to reassure and care for that person.

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. It may be triggering for some who see this violence as necessary for Israeli security and/or who desire a win-lose outcome in favour of Israel.

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. It is likely to be very triggering for a large number of people, particularly Jewish communities who feel a connection with Israel, and Israel advocacy groups.

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 here.

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 here.

Actions related to triggers cont...

2. Protests about terrorism

Protests are a legitimate, non-violent tool for political change. However, think of the person above who reacted to the language of terrorism. Could this be triggering? Ask students what they can use from this guide to reassure and care for that person.

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. It may be triggering for some who see this violence as necessary for achieving freedom for Palestinians and/or who desire a win-lose outcome in favour of Palestine.

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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