

Teacher Guide: Understanding How Students Can Be Affected

What gives
you hope?

What does
peace look
like to you?

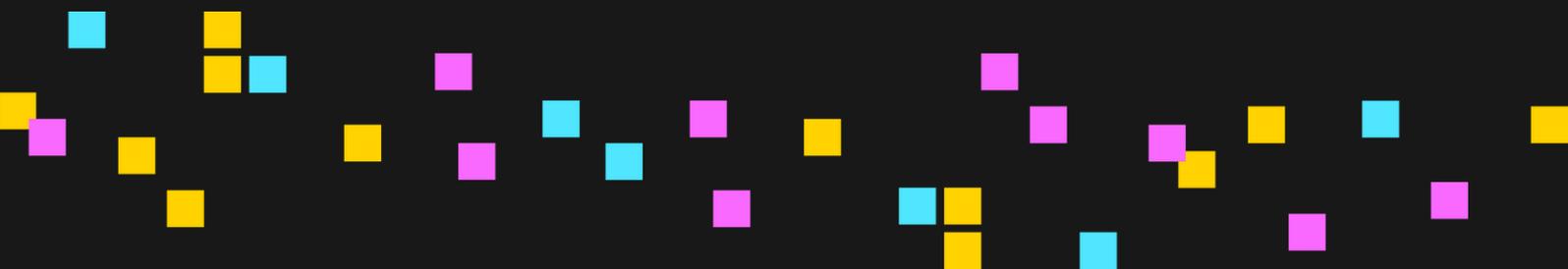
How do you
cope with fear
or anger?

How do
you react
to hate?

Introduction

This guide has been created to help schools and other educational bodies understand how and why students may be affected by the conflict in Palestine-Israel.

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. This resource is designed to build understanding and empathy for the various communities impacted by the issue of Israel-Palestine here in Britain. On the following pages, we will set out the reasons why you need to support your students and how their background may link to the conflict.



Students most affected

Many students will be emotionally affected by this because of a sense of connection to the issue for personal reasons. The following students may need additional support:

- Muslim
- Jewish
- Christian
- Arab
- Refugee
- Politically active



Considering Jewish students

Jewish people trace their origin back to this land, to over 2,000 years ago, where various Jewish tribes, settlements, communities, and nations lived and were exiled from. Jerusalem is particularly important in Jewish prayer traditions and is referred to as 'Zion' in the Hebrew Bible—the place of return for the exiled Jewish people. Today, Israel is referred to as a Jewish state—the modern-day state of Israel was created to be a safe place for Jewish people from all over the world to go and live in and be citizens of, at a time when they were not safe elsewhere. Many Jewish people around the world today support the existence of Israel as a Jewish state and feel some sort of affection and/or support for the country because of this. A small minority of Jewish people do not agree with the existence of the modern nation-state of Israel on religious, Messianic grounds or from their own political reasoning, and students who hold this perspective may also need some extra support around how they feel about this and any opposition to their opinion from other members of their community.

There are still high and rising levels of antisemitism in the UK, and these often flare up when there is conflict between Palestine and Israel. Many British people who are Jewish experience antisemitism related to Israel-Palestine; they are blamed for the actions of the Israeli military or government, assumed to be loyal to Israel and not to Britain, accused of antisemitic conspiracy theories such as drinking the blood of Christian children, holding the world's political and economic power in their hands, and not caring about the lives of Palestinians, or Muslims. For British teenagers who are also Jewish, the prejudice, discrimination, and racism against them can be extremely difficult to deal with. Added to this, they may be experiencing other pressures from within their communities in relation to Israel and how they should think or feel about it. They are particularly vulnerable to having an emotional reaction to discussing the conflict.

Considering Muslim students

Muslim people also have strong historical roots in this land. Jerusalem is a particularly important place in Islam due to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the history of Islam which has its origins in the Middle East, over 1,300 years ago. Jerusalem was under Muslim rule for centuries—first, under the Arabs for the first half of the seventh century, then under subsequent Muslim empires, the most recent being the Ottoman Empire. Muslims believe that Jerusalem is where their prophet, Mohammad (PBUH), was transported on a winged creature in a night journey. They call the foundation wall ‘Al Baraq wall’, and it’s a very sacred place for Muslims. Jerusalem is also important to Muslims as having been the first direction to face for prayer, before it changed to Mecca. In addition, the majority of Palestinians are Muslim, and within the state of Israel there are also Israeli citizens who are Muslim or Christian of Palestinian, Syrian, Druze, and other origins.

The Palestinian people also trace their origins to this land. Because the lands assigned to be a Palestinian state by the United Nations—and under agreements between Israel and the Palestinians—are still under an illegal occupation by Israel (the West Bank and East Jerusalem), or under blockade by Israel and Egypt (Gaza), Palestinians do not have political or physical freedom. Many British students who are Muslim may have feelings of sympathy, sadness, desperation, and anger over the current situation for Palestinians. They may feel helpless regarding the situation and unsure where to turn for support. They may also, like Jewish students, feel pressure from within their own communities to think or feel a particular way towards Palestine and Israel and need emotional support if they hold a different political view from those around them. There is also discrimination and prejudice towards British Muslims regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; for example, the view that because British Muslims may support Palestine it automatically makes them antisemitic or that they support terrorism or are in danger of ‘radicalisation’, that they support or are somehow part of the political decisions that some Palestinian leaders make, that they want to destroy Israel, or that they are more loyal to Muslim countries than the UK. They, too, are particularly vulnerable to having an emotional reaction when discussing the conflict.

Considering Christian students

British students with a Christian background also experience vulnerability when discussing the conflict and should be supported in this process. Christianity originated in the region, and there are many Christian holy sites. However, there are also many Christians living in Palestine and Israel who experience discrimination and often do not feel safe. As they are such a minority, the same focus is not given to them, and their issues and experiences aren't particularly well-known here in the UK.

British students in the UK who are Christian may feel sadness, desperation and empathy for the Christians living in Israel and Palestine and may also feel frustrated about the lack of media coverage for their plight. Furthermore, different denominations may show solidarity with either Palestinians or Israelis. For example, Methodists and Catholics tend to support the Palestinians. Protestants may express solidarity with the Palestinians if they focus more on a theology of human rights, or the Israelis if they focus more on a theology of 'Christian Zionism' or come from Northern Ireland.

Considering Arab students

British students with an Arab background may belong to one of a number of different faiths or none, and may feel a strong sense of belonging or connection to the land and/or to people who live there. They may be affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through increased incidents of anti-Arab racism, emotional distress, and the need for support services to address these challenges.

Considering refugee students

Another group of students who may be particularly vulnerable to sensitivities related to the conflict are refugees and those of refugee background. The majority of Israelis and Palestinians have heritage rooted in refugee experiences. For Jewish Israelis, most fled or were forced out of their homes in Europe, Russia, North Africa, or the Middle East. Few British students will realise that around one million Jews who were expelled from their ancient homelands around the Middle East made their way to British-Mandate Palestine and think only that Jews fled from Europe, especially after the Holocaust. This increased the Jewish population in British-Mandate Palestine, although the total number still remained a minority at this time.

For Palestinians, the 1948 Nakba (meaning catastrophe in Arabic) saw the expulsion and flight of around 780,000 Palestinians from their homes as a result of settlements and violent campaigns led by Jewish militias to clear areas of Palestinians. Many Palestinians still have refugee status today and live scattered across Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and other places around the world. There are now around six million Palestinians with refugee status, so refugees in the UK may see their own experiences and stories reflected in those of Israelis and Palestinians.

Furthermore, many Palestinian refugees who have been displaced in refugee camps in Syria since 1948 have had to flee Syria due to the war there, and some are now residing in the UK. You may have Syrian refugees in your school whose heritage is Palestinian but have never visited there nor spoken much about this.

Considering politically active students

The final group of students to highlight here are particularly politically active students. Israel-Palestine is also a political issue here in the UK, with the tendency of left-wing activists and politicians to side with the Palestinians, and right-wing with the Israelis.

Please note that this is a generalisation, and there are plenty of activists and politicians who do not simply pick a side but choose to work down the middle and advocate justice and peace for all. Please see below for some examples of how various political causes get connected to Palestine-Israel.

Far right

Expressing support for Israel

Why?

Views Israel-Palestine through worldview that sees Palestinians as part of a global so-called 'Islamist' terror threat

Far left

Expressing support for Palestine

Why?

Views Palestine-Israel through worldview that sees Israel as merely an extension of European colonialism

Northern Ireland Catholic

Expressing support for Palestine

Why?

Views Palestine-Israel through the lens of their own conflict

Northern Ireland Protestant

Expressing support for Israel

Why?

Views Israel-Palestine through the lens of their own conflict

Pakistani Kashmir supporters

Expressing support for Palestine

Why?

Views Palestine-Israel through the lens of their own conflict

Indian Kashmir supporters

Expressing support for Israel

Why?

Views Israel-Palestine through the lens of their own conflict

*Not all Jewish or Muslim groups are involved with or support Israel/Palestine, it's important not to make that assumption

N.B. SNS is not drawing equivalence or otherwise making any comment on these various causes, the point is simply to highlight that Palestine-Israel should be approached critically in its own right

Some groups claiming to represent Muslim interests*

Expressing support for Palestine

Why?

Views Palestine-Israel through worldview that sees Israel as merely the long arm of the USA in a war against Islam

Some groups claiming to represent Jewish interests*

Expressing support for Israel

Why?

Views Israel-Palestine through worldview that all Palestine solidarity is merely an extension of centuries-old antisemitism

Thank you

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