

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about ANTISEMITISM

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Antisemitism is anti-Jewish racism. Incidents in the UK remain far higher than before 7 October 2023, with CST recording 3,700 antisemitic incidents in 2025. Like all racism, antisemitism treats people not as individuals, but as stereotypes. It also often imagines Jewish people as 'all-powerful', turning real concerns about injustice and the world's problems into blame, hostility, and conspiracy thinking rather than solutions.

NORMALISING STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes embed racist thinking. Instead of treating people as individuals, they reduce them to examples of alleged group traits. Antisemitism interacts with other forms of racial stereotyping, meaning different racisms can reinforce each other. Stereotypes may seem openly negative or superficially positive, such as 'Jews are clever', but both kinds of stereotyping are harmful and dehumanising. Stereotypes have been normalised in our culture for centuries and may appear in canonical texts studied in school, including Dickens's 'Oliver Twist' and Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'. These examples need thoughtful discussion that helps children and young people understand the historical context, recognise anti-Jewish racism, and identify the wider dangers of dehumanising others.

HOLOCAUST DISTORTION

All UK school children learn about the Holocaust, which is essential, but this knowledge can also be abused. The internet and social media contain Holocaust distortion, including fake news, the denial of historical evidence, and offensive jokes, all designed to cause harm. Such content can minimise Jewish suffering and make antisemitic ideas seem as though they are acceptable or entertaining. Certain groups often use codes to promote allegiance to neo-Nazi ideology. Numbers that represent letters of the alphabet, such as 88 for 'Heil Hitler', are particularly common. These codes can create the illusion of belonging to an 'initiated club', set against mainstream thinking. For some children and young people, this can be presented as being 'edgy, rebellious, or cool'.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Social media constantly exposes children to conspiracy theories, which can then seep into everyday conversation. Many recycle antisemitic tropes, falsely claiming that Jewish people are rich, powerful, or use money and influence to control governments, banks, and the media. This wrongly presents one group as responsible for the world's problems. Some conspiracy theories name Jewish people explicitly, sometimes using coded language such as 'Juice' or similar terms. Others target prominent Jewish families, including George Soros or the Rothschilds, or refer vaguely to 'those people who'. These theories risk placing Jews as 'tools of a global power', dehumanise Jewish individuals, undermine meaningful discussion, prevent the formation of real solutions, and fuel wider hate and anger.

DISCUSSING THE MIDDLE EAST

Global events should never be used to justify racist hatred. Ethnic minority pupils are often targeted by racial stereotypes, but Jewish individuals are routinely blamed for the actions of the state of Israel. The Hamas attack on Israeli civilians on 7 October 2023 was followed by a sharp rise in anti-Jewish hate in the UK, framed as resistance against Jewish 'power', for which Israel is a symbol. Criticising the Israeli government is not antisemitic. However, the IHRA definition explains that applying standards to Israel that are not expected of any other democratic nation, or holding Jewish people collectively responsible for the actions of the Israeli government, can be antisemitic. Real concerns about violence, injustice, or humanitarian crises must not become hostility towards Jewish pupils, families, or communities.

Advice for Parents & Educators

CHALLENGE ALL STEREOTYPING

It is essential to be alert to the dangers of all stereotyping. Explain the interconnectedness of different forms of racism. The Nazis used the legacy of centuries-old anti-Jewish propaganda and tried to turn it into modern 'race science'. To be anti-racist, we must also challenge antisemitism whenever we see it. The legacies of antisemitic thinking can be found in many places, including texts pupils may read at school or stories they encounter in films and popular culture. It is important to be alert to problems in our own heritage and to be as vigilant about anti-Jewish racism as we would be about other racist representations.

EXPLAIN THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust was the attempt by the Nazi regime to eradicate the world's entire Jewish population forever. It was implemented across all territories occupied by the Nazis during the Second World War, including countries in Europe and North Africa, and led to the systematic mass murder of six million Jewish men, women and children. Around 1.5 million Jewish children were murdered in the Holocaust. These Jewish communities had been part of these countries for centuries and had made huge cultural contributions. The Holocaust was unprecedented in scope and ambition, and many Jewish families in the UK have ancestors who were affected by these events. It is deeply hurtful when it is minimised, miscompared to other events, or made light of through jokes or casual comments.

UNPICK CONSPIRACY THINKING

Conspiracy theories are difficult to counter directly. Rather than only responding to false claims with facts, try to shift the conversation towards why conspiracy thinking can seem attractive. Ask why it might feel easier to imagine one small ethnic group (0.2% of the world population) as the root of all evil, and what purpose that thinking serves. Explain that scapegoating is not only unjust, but also prevents the search for practical solutions to real problems. Replacing meaningful problem-solving with conspiratorial blame games harms everyone, including the children and young people who are drawn into these ideas.

DISCUSS GLOBAL EVENTS CAREFULLY

Acknowledge that it is entirely normal to be concerned about global injustice. However, ask why the Middle East can play such a central role in some discussions, when other conflicts and humanitarian crises, including in Yemen, Sudan, China, or Myanmar, may receive far less attention in the UK. Familiarise yourself with the IHRA definition of antisemitism. Question the idea that Jewish UK citizens are collectively responsible for the government of Israel. Use careful analogies: would it be fair to blame a British person of non-Jewish heritage for the actions of another country's government? If not, the same principle should apply to British Jewish citizens.

Meet Our Expert

The National Holocaust Centre & Museum is the only national museum in the UK dedicated to teaching and learning the lessons from the Holocaust, including education for younger children. The centre's statement of purpose is to provide a permanent memorial to the victims of the Holocaust.

See full reference list on our website



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