

## Family Focus on Israel

Developed by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland

Over the last couple of months, while our children enjoyed all that North American kids do in the warmth of the summer sun, war raged between Israel and the Hezbollah. With bombs falling in northern Israel, Israeli families either uprooted and fled to the south, or lived for long stretches at a time in bomb shelters. At the moment, a cease fire is in place; we hope and pray for continued peace in the region.

However, as our children return to school this fall, it is possible that they will encounter difficult conversations about Israel, either in the classroom or on the playing field. Here are some steps parents can take to make the transition easier and to help answer questions or deal with high emotions that may find their way home:

### Stay Informed.

- Read and listen to different perspectives. Seek multiple sources of information. Attend lectures and special events. Be wary of unsubstantiated information and propaganda. The more you know, the better you will be able to help your child.
  - For an annotated listing of Israeli news sources, go to: <http://www.dailyearth.com/IntnNews/israel.html>
  - For background on the recent conflict go to: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006\\_Israel-Lebanon\\_conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Israel-Lebanon_conflict)
  - For short news articles, videos, and personal accounts go to: <http://www.ujc.org>
  - For a weekly fax or e-mail briefing from the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland contact [israelresponse@jcfcleve.org](mailto:israelresponse@jcfcleve.org) or 216-566-9200 x346.
  - For a variety of information ready to just pick up, stop by the Israel Action Center at the JCC, in your synagogue, or at the Cleveland Hillel Foundation
  - For relatively easy-to-understand information about the Middle East read Mitchell Bard's *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Middle East Conflict* (Alpha, 2005).
  - For an interesting look at Israeli society behind the political headlines and news read Donna Rosenthal's *Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land* (NY: Free Press, 2003).
- If you hear or read news that seems inaccurate (or if your child brings home a faulty statement made by another adult), check the facts or the conclusions drawn and then correct the misinformation. Older children can do this research with you. If you're not sure what is accurate, contact your rabbi, school director, librarian or the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Community Federation (216-566-9200)

### Help your child respond.

- Pay attention to what your child knows and asks, then build your conversation from there. If you are stumped, consider using reflective questions ("what do you think?" "why do you ask that?" etc.). These will help you better understand your child's ideas so you can offer a targeted response.
- Ask your child what teachers, fellow students, club leaders, etc. may be saying about Israel. If your child brings home a social studies textbook, photocopies of websites or other teacher-provided resources, read through the material for anti-Israel bias. [For more on the latter, read "Lies in the Library," by Andrea Rapp (*Reform Judaism Magazine*, Summer 2005), located at: [http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1038&page\\_id=1090](http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1038&page_id=1090)

Help your child learn to

- Listen carefully
- Bring to you, to a rabbi, cantor or Jewish educator, any information that is confusing or possibly incorrect.
- Learn to respectfully correct any misinformation.

Your child does not have to feel like "THE" spokesperson for the Jewish People, and may actually choose to not respond during the situation. But s/he should learn to bring any issues to someone for further clarification and understanding.

- As a parent, read the article, "Talking to Jewish Children about the War in Israel," by Sharon Duke Estroff: <http://snipurl.com/vgjx> . It provides a variety of ways parents can help children better understand the situation.

## Advocate.

- Learn how to help your family become an effective advocate for Israel.
  - Practice short, simple responses. Think in terms of “sound bytes” or metaphorical “elevator conversations” (to-the-point-statements that could be delivered between the time of stepping on and then off an elevator).
  - Write letters, faxes, e-mails and make phone calls to elected officials.

## Connect your family to Israel.

- Bring books, music, photos/pictures and DVDs about Israel into your home or car. Check your local library, a Jewish book or video store. Have family night and enjoy!
  - Consider ordering for your child an age-appropriate Jewish magazine such as:
    - *Babagabewz* - <http://www.babaganews.com> (for upper elementary and middle school grades; some of our local Jewish schools already order this for their students)
    - *JVibe* - <http://www.jvibe.com> (for younger teens)
    - *Israel Messenger* - <http://jnf.org/im> (for 8th - 12th graders)
    - *Israel Highway* – <http://israelhighway.org> (for high school)
  - Make a special effort to attend any Israeli cultural events scheduled in Cleveland.
  - If you have relatives or friends in Israel, include your children when you call or write to say “hello.”
  - Connect to Cleveland's extended family in Israel. Write a letter, send a holiday greeting, or put together a small package to send to Israel through one of the Jewish Community Federation's partnership programs:
    - *Cleveland/Beit Shean Partnerships* - Connects individuals and organizations in our two communities. View the Partnership 2000 website at <http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/Israel/Partnerships/Regions/Beitshean/About+Us>
    - *PACT (Parents and Children Together)* - Provides pre-school and supplemental programs for Ethiopian-Israeli children between the ages of 0 and 6.
    - *IDF (Israel Defense Force) Education Corps/Havat HaShomer* - Works to raise the level of achievement for young men and women in the IDF.
    - *ISHA (Israel Health Advancement for Women)* - Helps improve health care for women all over Israel, whether Jewish, Arab or Bedouin.
- Contact the Jewish Federation at (216) 566-9200 for more information.
- Consider sending Israeli and American friends and family (yourself included!) holiday flower arrangements, fruit baskets, music, food, books, calendars, wine, etc. [Check out [www.shopinIsrael.com](http://www.shopinIsrael.com) or [www.israelexport.org](http://www.israelexport.org) to ship to either the US or Israel]
  - Plan a family (or even adults-only) trip to Israel
  - On behalf of your children, join *A Gift of Israel*, a savings program for Israel educational trips with the participation of the family, the synagogue or school and the Jewish Community Federation. For more information, contact Helen Wolf at the JECC (216-371-0446)
  - Send to your favorite teenager or college student to Israel! Helen Wolf at the JECC (216-371-0446) has information on a number of programs, as do local synagogues and youth groups. For college students check out <http://www.birthrightisrael.org> and <http://www.masaisrael.org>.

## Spread the word.

- Speak about Israel regularly at the dinner table or in the car.
- Display an Israeli flag or wear a blue ribbon.

## Give.

The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland has chosen to open an Israel Emergency Campaign, along with its regular one, beginning now. Clevelanders are asked to make their 2007 campaign pledge now (payable by December 2007) AND to make a separate donation to the Israel Emergency Campaign (payable by December 2006). One “ask” and one “act of pledging.”

- Give generously when asked to participate in this special campaign
- Help your child anticipate an appropriate donation during the schools campaign, scheduled for November, 2006.
- Consider using family *tz'dakah* funds to help support Israel at her time of need.