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## Immediate Response Curriculum

### *The Conflict in Israel: The Emotional Impact*

Once again we find ourselves in shock over a series of senseless bombings in Israel and a situation with no foreseeable solution in sight. Graphic pictures, detailed news reports and eyewitness accounts of the tragedies are bombarding our children and their families. Children (and even adult staff) are often confused about the news, and sometimes filled with emotions that they cannot deal with alone.

The Curriculum Resources Department of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC) has developed this brief resource as a supplement to the *Israel Now Solidarity Curriculum* available through the JECC website <http://www.jecc.org/Curriculum/>. Click on “Response Curriculum” at the top of the page. This mini-response curriculum is intended to help Jewish educators in any number of settings (school, camp, teen tour) better respond to the varied emotions emerging from the current situation in Israel.

For up-to-date information, check this annotated list of Israeli newspapers:  
<http://www.dailyearth.com/IntnNews/israel.html>

**As an educator, it is important to recognize that you are probably not trained to deal with intense emotions. This means you should choose carefully from the curriculum suggestions, below, and know when you need to refer issues to:**

- Your director or rabbi
- A mental health professional (social worker, psychologist, therapist)
- A child’s parent or guardian

**Please Note:** This curriculum contains a number of sacred words. We ask that you treat it with appropriate respect.

### Supporting students emotionally

Children (and adult staff) react with a wide range of emotional responses to tragedy. Some, depending on age or lack-of-personal-connection, are oblivious to the current situation in Israel. Others may have some idea of the events, but treat the information like “just another” world news story. Others, sensitive to tragedy, may show deep empathy to those hurt by the events. And still others, with family members in Israel or with other strong connecting factors, may be very concerned.

In *Teaching Your Children About G-d* (NY: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1993), Rabbi David Wolpe offers insight into helping youngsters in the face of violence. He says:

- Adults must remember that younger children view violence as unfair, and since children want to view the world as a fair place, this may be the first challenge of their worldview.
- There is often not an answer to “why?” Teachers must recognize that this question is an indication of the children’s fears. They need to be reassured not just of their safety, but of their worth. Children often feel that if they are “bad” they will get hurt as well.
- A way to bring G-d into the picture is to remind the children that G-d gave us the gift of being able to make choices. Some people make choices that hurt or sadden others. The consequences of freewill granted by G-d may seem unfair to children (and adults).

Social workers and other mental health experts offer these additional thoughts and suggestions:

- When tragedy strikes, younger children will sense the emotional responses of the adults around them, understanding that something bad has happened. This is not to suggest that adults must hide their emotions (though keeping a calm voice is important), but that they should at least be alert to effects on children.
- Children might find themselves reacting to a specific situation because of a number of factors:
  - It might remind them of a past loss.
  - They might know someone living in the vicinity.
  - They might be personally familiar with the location.
  - They might have seen a picture or heard a graphic description of the event.

Without treading into therapeutic-territory, educators might need to help children identify why they are reacting in a particular way to a news event. The program’s director, parent, or rabbi may need to be informed of any issues.

- It is important to be honest with children. While the adults in their lives may choose to omit information (such as graphic details), acknowledging a tragedy, its issues and tumultuous emotions is crucial. Adults need to reassure children that their feelings are appropriate and normal. Most importantly, the adult’s role in a situation of this nature is to give full attention to a child’s

concerns, anger, frustration or sadness, by listening carefully and acknowledging feelings.

- Children need to be reassured that "they are in a safe place," even though the situation where the fighting has occurred is less safe. Adults always do their best to keep children safe and healthy.
- Older youth will understand the broader intellectual implications of the political situation and may have feelings about the conflict that need to be dealt with.
- Sadness and anger can be exacerbated by feelings of helplessness. Finding ways to empower students (see below) begins to ameliorate overwhelming emotional responses.

### **Responses Through our Tradition**

- Light *yizkor* (memory) candles for those killed through terrorist activities or military situations.
- Say *Kaddish* (the traditional prayer recited for someone who has died) after funerals have taken place.
- Pray *El Malei Rahamim* (a prayer sung at a funeral). Study the words with students.
- Recite *Tehillim* (psalms), long seen as a source of comfort in times of tragedy.
- Write letters of condolences to the families using the phrase:  
*Ha-Makom y'naḥem eṯhem b'toḥ sha'ar evlei Tzion v'Yerushalayim*  
 May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.
- Study a section from the *Mishnah* (a central piece of rabbinic literature) in memory of the departed souls.
- In light of the situation in Israel, study, discuss and/or pray the following:
  - *Al hanissim*; ("for the miracles"), which is recited in the middle of the
  - *Amidah* (the "standing silent" prayer) on *Hanukkah* and *Purim*.
  - *Aḥeinu kol beit Yisrael* (our relatives are all Jews), a prayer found in the *Torah* service.
  - *Raḥem al Tzion* (have mercy on Israel), which is part of the final *Haftarah* blessing.
- Sing *Shir l'shalom* (sing to peace) or other songs related to peace.
- Distribute *maḥzorim* (High Holiday prayer books) and to examine the High Holiday liturgy. Why is so much of the language written in plural form? How does the world-view expressed in these prayers relate to how we might respond to Israel in a crisis situation? As friends of Israel, what are our responsibilities at this time?

### **Responses Through the Spoken Word:**

- Assure children that they are safe and that the adults around them will continue to do their best to keep them so.
- Discuss what children have heard, read and/or seen about the situation in Israel. Encourage them to respond to each other (e.g., “What might you say to Hannah to help her feel better?”) and to search out the information that would better help them understand the situation.
- We are created *b'tzelem elokim*; in G-d's image. As we praise G-d as a maker of peace (*oseh shalom*), we too need to think of ourselves as having the ability to make peace. What roles can we take on to bring about peace, not just in the Middle East, but in school, camp or home?

### **Responses Through the Arts**

- Draw a picture of what the Middle East (or just Israel) would be like if there was peace. Tear off a corner of the page as a parallel to *k'ri-ah*, the tearing of a garment we do as mourners.
- After studying a prayer (see above, page 3) or a Psalm, make illustrative or contrasting collages using newspaper articles, headlines and pictures.
- Create a “tear-art” picture. Distribute 12x18 white paper and glue sticks. Provide sheets of black and red paper from which to tear images that express their feelings of the situation in Israel.
- Create a bulletin board or display titled *Yizkor* (remembrance). Ask participants to write on a paper *yizkor* candle a prayer in response to the military situation in Israel; post these on the board.
- Create a *Shalom* quilt. On squares of construction paper (or fabric), have youth illustrate life in Israel (or the Middle East) with peace. Add blank squares to fill out the shape of the quilt and make sure that the Hebrew word **שלום** (*shalom*) is in the center.

### Responses Through the Written Word

• Write letters, e-mail or phone government officials in support of Israel. See the United Jewish Communities' website [http://www.ujc.org/content\\_display.html?ArticleID=7600](http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=7600) for a list of ways to get involved.

Addresses:

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500  
Fax: (202) 453-2883  
E-mail: [president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov)

U.S. State Dept.  
Washington, D.C. 20520  
Fax: (202) 262-8577  
E-mail: [secretary@state.gov](mailto:secretary@state.gov)

Contact your congressional delegation  
See <http://capwiz.com/aipac/dbq/officials>  
for contact information.

Secretary General of the UN  
The Honorable Kofi Annan-Sec. Gen.  
United Nations  
NY, NY 10017  
E-mail: [inquiries@un.org](mailto:inquiries@un.org)

• Develop a pen pal writing program with a school, camp or program in Israel. (For further information, see **Let's Twin**, a project organized by The Department for Jewish Zionist Education, [www.jajz-ed.org.il/twin/index.html](http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/twin/index.html) or contact your Federation or sponsoring organization to find out about school twinning opportunities through Partnership 2000.) Move beyond correspondence that says, "Hi, I have 3 brothers, dog and cat," to focus on letters of support and concern.

• Encourage students to e-mail family members and friends in Israel, offering words of support.

• Place a large sheet of bulletin board paper on a wall for child and staff "graffiti" of responses to Israel's situation or wishes for peace.

• Share poetry written in response to the continued situation in Israel and encourage children to write their own, either free-form or structured, such as a cinquain (below):

- A person, place or thing
- An adjective
- Three words that end in -ing
- A phrase that describes the first word of the poem
- A repetition of the first line, or a synonym