

Taking a Stand Against Antisemitism

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INCIDENTS OF ANTISEMITISM CAN OCCUR AT UNEXPECTED MOMENTS AND OFTEN WHEN WE LEAST ANTICIPATE THEM.

To experience hostility and discrimination from others because of religion, race, and/or ethnicity is traumatic for adults and children alike, and fear can make it hard to speak up and stand up for oneself. It's a difficult topic to discuss, and for many of us, navigating this terrain feels daunting and explosive. How do we speak, whether in person or via social

media, to family members, close friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and, most importantly, our children about such an ugly and painful subject? What is required for each of us to feel confident to enter this conversation and feel as if we are on sturdy ground?

To effectively combat antisemitism, it is important to understand what it is and its historical manifestations. Hatred toward Jews has transformed over time. It began as hatred toward Judaism, then morphed to focus on Jews as a people, and now it also includes hatred toward the Jewish state of Israel. It is incumbent upon each of us to understand these manifestations and to engage in meaningful discussion about the ways in which Jew hatred rears its ugly head. Creating opportunities to correct misinformation and ill-informed positions is the first step in the educational process.

I know that is not always easy, but the way in which we, as grown-ups, model combatting antisemitism for our children truly matters. They watch us and notice. Ask yourself: Did you shirk from responding to an antisemitic comment? Did you sidestep your way out of a confrontation? Our children pay close attention to see if we create brave spaces for these difficult and uncomfortable moments.

Though my children have not yet experienced Jew hatred directly, my husband and I know it is not a question of if, but rather when. As a child, I had several personal encounters with antisemitism, including when a classmate etched a swastika into my locker. For my children, it might look different — and will likely be technology-based — such as peers excluding them from an online chat group or posting hurtful and derogatory antisemitic comments, photos, or videos on social media. It is becoming so prevalent in society today that I can't imagine my children not experiencing some form of discrimination.

It's important for my kids to know how they can react confidently and directly in these tough moments and what they can do, like calmly sharing their perspective with others to educate them and explaining why someone's words or actions may be harmful. And I want them to

feel comfortable asking questions and talking about these types of antisemitic incidents with me and their father, even if it's tough and scary. But I do want them to stand up for who they are and not remain silent.

We regularly communicate to our four children that Jews have faced hatred and that we cannot be silent, not only when hatred is directed toward us but also toward other communities. We are commanded 36 times in the Torah to protect the *ger*, or stranger. It is a core principle of Judaism by which my family lives. We know what it means to be a *ger* and feel a sense of responsibility to protect others.

Children's books can facilitate these difficult conversations. Part of the beauty of PJ Library is that it provides an opportunity for parents to read with their children from the safety and comfort of home about moments when Jews have faced intimidation, discrimination, and persecution. Through the process of reading, we can help our children understand what was, what is, and what remains. We can engage in developmentally appropriate discussions about what to do if we encounter hatred toward Jews in our own communities.

It is necessary to prepare our children for a future in which they will face hard moments, whether on social media or in real life; teaching them the lessons of history is a prerequisite to readiness. Antisemitism should not be socially acceptable, and we cannot tolerate it any more than we would other forms of bigotry and prejudice. Together, let's choose to embrace opportunities to dismantle ignorance while encouraging difficult conversations.

Rachel Fish is the Founding Executive Director of the Foundation to Combat Anti-Semitism and leads the Together Beat Hate initiative. Together Beat Hate promotes sensitivity, awareness, and education about ethnic, racial, religious, sexual, gender, and cultural identities through collaborative community engagement and education, utilizing communication platforms that young people interact with most: the internet and social media. For more information about Together Beat Hate, visit togetherbeathate.org.