

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

Addressing Antisemitic Incidents with Allyship and Advocacy

Lesson Plan and Overview

Lesson Plan: Antisemitic Incidents: Being an Ally, Advocate and Activist

For the past several years, the number of antisemitic incidents across the U.S. has surged. These incidents include vandalism, swastikas and other antisemitic graffiti, bomb threats, harassment and assaults. K-12 schools have also experienced a steep increase in antisemitic incidents. This activity helps students understand what these incidents are, where they take place and their impact on individuals and society. It invites them to explore ways that they and others can engage in allyship and advocacy when facing or seeing these concerning incidents

Grade Level

Grades 6-12

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand what antisemitism is.
 - Students will reflect on the prevalence of and surge in antisemitic incidents.
 - Students will identify ways to act an ally or advocate when facing antisemitic incidents in their school, community or society
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Materials Needed

- [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022](#)
 - [Subway Riders Scrub Anti-Semitic Graffiti, as 'Decent Human Beings'](#)
 - Paper and art supplies for poster making
 - [A Guide for Responding to School-Based Bias Incidents](#)
 - [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022: Executive Summary](#)
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Words You Might Use

Advocate: Someone who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy.

Ally: Someone who speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying, either themselves or someone else.

Antisemitism: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.

Bias: An inclination or preference, either for or against an individual or group, that interferes with impartial judgment.

Marginalization: The treatment of a person, group or concept as secondary, unimportant, inferior or abnormal compared with those who hold more power in society.

Oppression: A system of mistreatment, exploitation and abuse of a marginalized group(s) for the social, economic or political benefit of a dominant group(s). This happens within a social hierarchy where people are ranked according to status, often based on aspects of social identity.

Core Activity

First, engage students in a discussion about antisemitism. Ask students: *What is antisemitism?* Elicit/explain a definition of antisemitism as: “The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.” Explain that antisemitism, like other “isms (i.e., sexism, ableism, racism) is a system of bias. Ask: *What does a system of bias mean?* Elicit/explain that a system of bias is when the bias is part of and embedded into all parts of society. Systems of bias are the combination of rules, laws, history, institutions and other factors that advantage some people or groups over others. For other people or groups, the system of bias causes widespread harm and disadvantages in access and opportunity. You can explain that individual acts of prejudice, bias and discrimination are informed by and contribute to these systems of bias, but the systems exist whether or not there are individual/interpersonal acts of bias. You can further elaborate by writing the following on the board/smart board and explain that these three elements are part of any system of bias.

- The system of bias (in this case, antisemitism) has been present not only in recent times but also throughout history and has taken place in the rules, laws and institutions (e.g., education, criminal justice, media, work, healthcare, etc.) of the society.

- The system of bias advantages (gives more benefits to or puts in a better position) one group of people and disadvantages (disrespects, harms, mistreats) other group(s) of people.
- The system of bias is also present and seen in interpersonal communication and behavior (e.g., slurs, bullying, offensive language, stereotypes) that maintain and support inequities and injustice.

Second, share that one of the ways that antisemitism shows up in schools and communities is antisemitic incidents. Ask: *Can you think of and share an example of an antisemitic incident?* Ask students to share examples of antisemitic incidents they have faced, seen, or heard about from someone else or in the news. The list might look something like this:

- Antisemitic or Anti-Jewish graffiti, including swastikas (on buildings, lockers, hallways, cemeteries, other public spaces).
- Nazi symbol or doing a Nazi salute.
- Throwing a penny at a Jewish person.
- Making comments that perpetuate stereotypes (e.g., “all Jews are greedy and/or cheap,” “Jews have too much power”).
- A Jewish person being assaulted or attacked based on their Jewish identity.
- “Jokes” about the Holocaust.
- Vandalism in synagogues and Jewish cemeteries.
- Bomb threats.
- Antisemitic comments or memes on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok).

Share that every year, ADL tracks incidents of antisemitic incidents including harassment, vandalism and assault in the U.S. and that in 2022, ADL tabulated 3,697 antisemitic incidents. This number is a 36% increase from the incidents in 2021 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. There was a 49% increase in incidents in K-12 schools. Share a few points from the [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022](#) in the Executive Summary (pages 5-6) or alternatively have students read it—[see below](#). Then engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:

- Why do you think these incidents are happening?
- Why do you think there’s been an increase in incidents over the past several years?
- Who are the targets of these incidents? Do these incidents impact Jewish or non-Jewish people or both? Please explain.
- What do you think the aggressors/perpetrators of these incidents are trying to say or do?

- What impact do these incidents have on people who are Jewish and the Jewish community? What is the impact on others and the larger community or society?
- As individuals, what can we do about it?
- As a community and society, what should we do about it?

Finally, discuss with students how people can act as allies or advocates when it comes to antisemitic incidents. Elicit/explain definitions of ally and advocate:

Ally: Someone who speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying, either themselves or someone else.

Advocate: Someone who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy.

Then share this story that illustrates how a group of people acted as allies when encountering antisemitic graffiti. Read aloud [Subway Riders Scrub Anti-Semitic Graffiti, as 'Decent Human Beings'](#) or share this summary: In 2017, as friends entered a subway car in New York City, they saw that the windows and posters on the car were covered with anti-Semitic graffiti, Messages like “Jews belong in the oven” and “destroy Israel, Heil Hitler,” had been written over the subway maps. Swastikas were drawn in black marker on the doors and windows. There was shock and horror on the faces on the passengers on that car and one person asked, “Do you think there’s any way we can erase it?” Someone suggested using hand sanitizer because they remembered that hand sanitizer has alcohol in it, which would help remove the offensive writing. The commuters began using the hand sanitizer to erase the antisemitic graffiti. One passenger said: “I’ve never seen so many people simultaneously reach into their bags and pockets looking for tissues and Purell. Within about two minutes, all the Nazi symbolism was gone.”

(Note to Educator: This is a helpful and illustrative story about the power of acting as an ally. In specific situations like these where antisemitic or other biased graffiti is discovered, we typically recommend that those who witness it in a school should document it by taking a photo and then notify the school administration and if it happens in the community, contact law enforcement.)

With students, brainstorm ideas they have about how to act as an ally or advocate when facing or hearing about antisemitic incidents in their school, community, online or society. The list might look something like this:

- Educate students about antisemitism (as we’re doing now) and about Jewish people and identity.
- When you hear antisemitic “jokes” or slurs, speak out about it.

- Help clean up swastikas and other antisemitic graffiti.
- Report what you see on social media (to find out how, use [Cyber Safety Action Guide](#)).
- If you encounter antisemitic tropes, “jokes,” or other biased language online, say or do something.
- Hold community events about antisemitism and other bias.
- Create a study or book club to learn more about the Jewish community and antisemitism.
- Challenge and dispel antisemitic myths, stereotypes and misinformation in person and online, both publicly and in private.
- Reach out to your elected officials and ask them to take actions on antisemitism in your community.
- Participate in community and political forums to raise the issue of antisemitism and encourage the press to cover these events.
- Encourage your school or community library to carry books that feature the Jewish experience and that address antisemitism.

Have students take one of the ideas and create a poster or create a short video that elaborates on the suggested action.

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

NOTE: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- Based on some of the ideas generated in the Core Activity above, have students work in classes or small groups to create an action plan to bring some of the allyship and advocacy ideas to fruition. The action plan should include the following: (1) a statement with the overall goal, (2) what success looks like (i.e., expected or desired outcomes), (3) tasks needed to reach the goal, (4) who is responsible and who needs to be involved, and (5) timeline and workplan. For each group, assign an adult liaison (school staff, parent/family member) and have students meet regularly to plan their project(s), which could take weeks or months. Before launching into the action plan, have each group present their recommendations and plan to the school’s administration or the NPFH Committee.
- Depending on what is happening in your school or community in terms of biased incidents, explore another form of bias incidents (e.g., anti-Muslim bias, racism, heterosexism). Invite students to go through a similar process where they reflect on examples, learn more about the facts with data and examples, and brainstorm different ways to address those bias incidents with allyship and advocacy.
- Engage students in a process where they create their own audit of antisemitic incidents, another kind of biased incidents most prevalent in their school/community, or a combination of all biased incidents. The survey should also include questions about the impact these incidents have on individuals and their community. You can

develop the survey with a committee (or use the NPFH committee and build out from there), decide what you want to learn, develop a survey tool to collect the data, identify ways to get a strong response, collect data and then analyze the data. When the data is collected and analyzed, use the data to reflect (as a school or community) on what's happening in terms of biased incidents and what you can do about it, acting as ally or advocate.

- Use ADL's [A Guide for Responding to School-Based Incidents](#) to engage in a school-wide process to strengthen your school's response to bias-based school incidents.

Home Connection

(optional)

Share ADL's Table Talk [Antisemitism Today](#) with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will learn about and reflect on the rise in antisemitic incidents in schools, communities and society. They will then explore the different ways people can act as allies and advocates in order to address and challenge antisemitism. This will help set a foundation for exploring other systems of bias and how students can engage in allyship and advocacy in order to make a difference.

Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022: Executive Summary

Each year, ADL (Anti-Defamation League) tracks incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism and assault in the United States. Since 1979 we have published this information in an annual *Audit of Antisemitic Incidents*.

- **In 2022, ADL tabulated 3,697 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States.** This is a 36% increase from the 2,717 incidents tabulated in 2021 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. This is the third time in the past five years that the year-end total has been the highest number ever recorded.
- Incidents increased in each of the major Audit categories: antisemitic harassment increased 29% to 2,298; antisemitic vandalism increased 51% to 1,288 and antisemitic assaults increased 26% to 111. The vast majority of antisemitic assaults (107 out of 111) were perpetrated without the use of a deadly weapon. There was one fatality. Notably, visibly Orthodox Jews were targeted in 53% of the assault incidents nationally. This year, no assaults perpetrated against the Jewish community resulted in mass casualties.
- The dramatic increase in antisemitic incidents in 2022 in almost all categories cannot be attributed to any one cause or ideology. Significant surges in incidents include high volume increases in organized white supremacist propaganda activity (102% increase to 852 incidents), K-12 schools (49% increase to 494 incidents) and college campuses (41% increase to 219 incidents), as well as deeply troubling percentage increases in attacks on Orthodox Jews (69% increase to 59 Incidents) and bomb threats toward Jewish institutions (an increase from eight to 91 incidents).
- In 2022, 241 incidents involved references to Israel or Zionism. This is a decline from 345 such incidents in 2021, which was an unusually high year due to antisemitic reactions to the May 2021 military conflict between Israel and Hamas. This number is still 35% higher than the number of Israel/Zionism-related incidents in 2020. Of 2022's 241 anti-Zionist/anti-Israel-related incidents, 70 incidents could be identified as having been perpetrated by individuals associated with hostile anti-Zionist activist groups, most commonly Witness for Peace and Students for Justice in Palestine and its affiliates. Forty-six incidents took the form of white supremacist groups' efforts to foment anti-Israel and antisemitic beliefs. For more on how ADL determines which Israel-related incidents to include, please see our Methodology section.
- In 2022, there were 589 incidents logged at Jewish institutions such as synagogues, Jewish community centers and Jewish schools, an increase of 12% from 2021. The vast majority of those incidents took the form of harassment, but there were 86 incidents of vandalism and nine assaults. Bomb threats towards Jewish institutions were unusually high, with a total of 91. This is the highest number of bomb threats since 2017.
- In 2022, 494 incidents took place at non-Jewish K-12 schools, an increase of 49% from 2021. Incidents on college campuses also increased, by 41%, with 219 incidents.

- This escalation in antisemitic incidents comes just as ADL has reported on Americans' highest level of antisemitic attitudes in decades. According to ADL's 2023 report [Antisemitic Attitudes in America](#), 20% of Americans believe six or more antisemitic tropes, which is significantly more than the 11% that ADL found in 2019. Although a causal link between antisemitic attitudes and antisemitic activity has not been proven, it would not be surprising if some antisemites have become emboldened to act on their hatred in the current environment. This dramatic increase also occurs just as the FBI released its 2021 hate crime data (a year behind this report) showing that Jews remain the single most targeted religious minority in America.
- The complete dataset for antisemitic incidents for 2016-2022 is available on ADL's [H.E.A.T. Map](#), an interactive online tool that allows users to geographically chart antisemitic incidents and extremist activity nationally and regionally. Some details have been removed from the incident listings to protect victims' privacy.