

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, October 17, 2023 8:11 AM EDT

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: [NNHS Discussions] Supporting our NNHS Jewish community

Hello colleagues,

I deeply appreciate the outpouring of support, both in person, and in this forum. [REDACTED], I thank you for having the courage to share your experience and make yourself vulnerable. I am reminded yet again of the compassion and fervent care my coworkers bring to the building. I am fortunate to feel safe in where I live, and that my American Jewish family and friends, to the best of my knowledge, feel the same. I am okay.

The last week and a half have been difficult, partly for the obvious feelings of revulsion and dismay at another atrocity on a world scale, and partly because I feel a deep sadness for what will surely be further loss of life as a result. Hamas committed unconscionable acts of terrorism against Israel and against Israelis. As someone who was raised Jewish, who is ethnically Jewish, I manage to identify more with that pain than with other horrible events. But I cannot claim to love Israel.

In my adult lifetime, the State of Israel has made policy decisions and committed acts of discrimination and violence, many of which have been condemned worldwide, in the name of Jews and Judaism, and with the stated purpose of protecting itself. No doubt more will follow in the coming weeks. I recognize that Jewish students and colleagues need time to grieve, and that it is important to publicly call out acts of terrorism, but I cannot separate those horrible acts from what led to them, unjustifiable as those acts are. And while I mourn the loss of innocent Israeli lives, and worry about the fates of those captured and held hostage, I cannot help but also see how Israel is killing innocent Palestinians, cutting off power, food, and water to Palestinians, forcing Palestinians to leave their land, bombing schools and hospitals full of Palestinians, many of whom are also babies, and women, and men who are trying to do nothing more than survive in unconscionable living conditions regulated by Israel.

The last week and a half have been harder for me because I hear "I stand with Israel" from all corners. It was shocking to watch Senator Markey get booed for calling for de-escalation, and then Congressperson Auchincloss (who unrelatedly spoke at our school the next day) respond with "Israel did not ask America to deescalate on September 12, 2001." I see what happened as a result of our actions after 9/11. Lives lost, soldiers and civilians and yes, terrorists, too. Twenty years of war. The Patriot Act. What acts will Israel justify in the name of rooting out terrorism? How much more autocratic will it become? It must be possible to be critical of the actions of a country without equating those actions with terrorism. There must be room for at least that level of nuance and understanding.

I will repeat: the acts of terror committed by Hamas, a terrorist organization, are unjustifiably wrong, and should and have been rightly condemned, without equivocation. But my heart aches a little more every time I hear that condemnation from someone with a microphone, be that an elected official or a superior or a colleague or a student, without also calling out the reprehensible conduct of the State of Israel. It has been hard to be a Jew these last days, but it has also been hard to be proud to be a Jew.

What kind of a Jew am I if I let reprisals take place in my name without voicing my objection and my disgust? Without waiting. I need time to grieve, and I mourn for the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives already lost. And I also cannot wait to voice my dissent, though it has taken me many days to find the words and the strength to voice it. I stand wholeheartedly with the people of Israel and of Palestine, those innocent victims of this fresh chapter in a long and bloody story. Many Jews believe in the idea of *tikkun olam*, that the world is broken and it is incumbent upon Jews to work to make it better. And, to me, that means publicly recognizing where Hamas' attacks are situated in historical context, and advocating for courses of action that will minimize the further loss of innocent life. Immediately.

Thank you for listening. As [REDACTED] said, please check in with your colleagues. As I have heard from many of you, and from people working toward peace in the U.S. and in the Middle East, dialogue is so important right now.

With peace, love, and understanding,

[REDACTED]

On Mon, Oct 16, 2023 at 5:01 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

Hi [REDACTED],

I don't know you personally but I want to say, though I'm not Jewish myself, that I unequivocally stand in solidarity with my Jewish and Israeli colleagues. Thank you for beginning this forum.

On Mon, Oct 16, 2023 at 3:27 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

Y'all are amazing! I feel the solidarity. You have no idea how much it has meant to me that you've written here, come by my office or stopped me in the hall to ask how I'm doing.

I also understand that it's easy to feel paralyzed by tragedy. In fact, it's only taken a week for this to become what feels like "yesterday's news" given how quickly I've been hearing "what about-isms." However, my personal trauma continues.

If you can bear reading one more story I'd like to share mine.

My sister and her family live in Israel. My nephew and nephew-in-law were both called up for Reserve Duty last week. They both leave pregnant wives at home, one of whom is due on Halloween. My nieces have gone to my sister's house because her "safe room/bomb shelter" is the biggest and most easily accessed. Meanwhile, my mother (the grandmother and soon to be great-grandmother), my daughters and my husband and I live from one WhatsApp message to the next.

Please know that my politics and my personal life don't always converge. I am critical of many Israeli government policies. And also, I stand with my Jewish brothers and sisters and assert my right to exist.

I, too, hope for peace for all.

Peace, pace, paz, shalom, salaam, [REDACTED]

On Mon, Oct 16, 2023 at 9:30 AM [REDACTED] wrote:
To My Very Dear Jewish Friends and NNHS Colleagues,

I want you to know that I am sending you all hugs, prayers and love during this difficult time. I came to Newton Public Schools because I have a strong affinity for the Jewish Community (growing up in Scarsdale NY) and have found the experiences of navigating my own Muslim American identity based largely on finding support from my Jewish American Friends. Violence against civilians is never ok. No religion advocates this.

I pray that things get better in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and that we find a way to navigate and heal from our pain here. Through our bonds of compassion, ability to empathise, and educate perhaps we can shape a better, more peaceful future.

[REDACTED]

On Sun, Oct 15, 2023 at 10:55 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

Hi [REDACTED],

Thank you so much for sharing this. Your words are so poignant and personal which resonates with me as a Jew.

The inhumanity and terrorism against Israel and what is happening to innocent Palestinians is just numbing and horrific.

My friend, who is not Jewish, sent me this:

“Hey, just wanted to reach out and let you know I’m thinking about you. I’m heartbroken by such evil in the world and I know it must be hitting you so hard. Sending my love and a big hug.”

It meant so much to hear those words from my friend. It was also so meaningful to talk to you on Friday and with other colleagues and students last week. We all need to continue these conversations and I can’t think of a better place to do that than Newton North High School.

Take care, [REDACTED]

On Sun, Oct 15, 2023 at 6:41 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

[REDACTED], thank you for sharing this with all of us. It takes courage to share your story and experience. I cannot imagine this was easy to be vulnerable and take a risk in a climate where it has not felt safe. I am sure there are other staff and students who share your experience. I am here as an ally.

I have to admit, during this last week, I have felt uneasy at times when approaching this conversation with staff and students. But your email and call to action has reminded me the importance that we must work through the discomfort in this work.

You have always been an ally to the students we serve and proud to call you a colleague. We should never have to hide who we are due to feeling unsafe. Last week, I heard this sentiment from several students who identify as Jewish and have ties to the Middle East.

Personally, I will be more intentional this week to check in with both students and colleagues.

It's important to create a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. Your support and starting this conversation with colleagues is a positive step in promoting solidarity and understanding.

In solidarity
[REDACTED]

On Oct 15, 2023, at 6:22 PM, [REDACTED] wrote:

Thanks for sharing your truth [REDACTED]. This is really important and thank you for helping understand how we can provide better support.

On Sun, Oct 15, 2023 at 5:46 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

Dear colleagues,

Last week was perhaps the hardest of my teaching career. So many of my people were slaughtered in a terrorist attack. Many of those people chose to live close to Gaza in an effort to promote peace and to devote their lives to making relationships with innocent Palestinians living under the Hamas terrorist regime.

At every step of my people's almost 6000 year history, we have been expelled and denied entry at best, and at worst, systematically murdered. This level of antisemitism runs deep and every attack on a Jew affects the entire community and triggers the intergenerational trauma we all feel. Antisemitism is alive and well, and

we feel it acutely in this moment.

Everyone who knows me knows I am a proud Jew and I love Israel - I have been there 3 times. The first was when I was in high school myself. It was a youth group trip in which we first spent 10 days in Poland, studying Holocaust history. The elation of leaving that horrid past behind and going to Israel - the very place that exists both as a result of that dark history, as well as a place that could finally be a home where Jews would be safe after the world turned their cheek on us, was like no other I had felt in my young life.

The second time was spending an entire year there after I graduated college. It was during that year that I felt the energy and excitement of teenagers, and it was because of them I decided to become an educator. It was also during that year that I worked and volunteered in underserved communities - in particular, in communities where Arabs and Jews lived side by side peacefully. I also worked at a boarding school for children whose families could not support them. During that time, the school gave refuge to around 40 teenagers who themselves were facing atrocities in Yugoslavia.

The third time was with my family, just 3 years ago. The joy and pride I had in sharing our beloved country with my family is indescribable. We learned living and breathing history and had many conversations with friends and family about the deep flaws of the government, as well as the necessity of a Jewish state that needed to protect itself. We heard firsthand how our dear friends and family protest the government, and work tirelessly towards peace and a 2 state solution.

On Oct. 7, we made sure that we knew where our passports were as a 'just in case' precaution. Our family scrambled to call our friends and relatives in Israel to make sure they were alive.

On Tuesday, I gathered with my Jewish literature class and tried to make sense of what is beyond reason. I heard the pain in students' voices when many of their teachers did not mention a terrorist attack of this level, or the hostages - including elderly, women, children - currently being held. I tried my best to remain an educator in that moment, when I myself felt that silence of many of my colleagues so profoundly. And truthfully, I would have preferred silence to others who said "this is terrible, and let's talk about what led to it."

There is a time for history, and a time for understanding a conflict that is complex and nuanced, and there is a time to recognize the inhumanity of slaying babies as they lay in their cribs. I wish that Jews had been given that time to grieve and to be comforted.

On Wednesday, I attended a lecture on antisemitism in Newton where I didn't want to add my name of people in attendance because I did not want my home address on a list of where Jews live in this community.

On Thursday night, my husband took down our outside mezuzahs from our doorposts.

I do not feel safe.

Our Jewish colleagues and our Jewish students deserve to feel safe, as does every student in Newton North. We need to know that indiscriminate and murderous acts of inhumanity are never ok or justifiable.

Please check in with your Jewish colleagues and more importantly, your students. We are not ok right now. So many of us are one step away (if that) to Jews in Israel. Many of us know someone who knows someone who is directly impacted or lost their life last week. Your concern for our well being will go a long way. This transcends politics. If you do not know how to approach this, just your concern will be enough. The

long standing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is a complex issue that has been unsolvable by some of the greatest minds - it will not be solved by conversations here and now. I make no pretense to having answers. But, I do know that silence cannot be the answer, now or ever, to acts of terrorism.

The weeks and months ahead will be long ones, not just for our Jewish students, but for all students affected, as well as those that are asking difficult questions. This is a chance to lead with empathy and understanding and to support our kids' social and emotional needs, in a way that we have always done for students in our Newton North community.

Thank You.

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NNHS
321C

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■
he/him/his ([Why is this here?](#))
Newton North High School

[Family Technology Resources](#)

Family tech support email: ftsupport@newton.k12.ma.us