

## HOW DO I NEGOTIATE SAFETY AND RISK?

### Overview

This Resource unpacks the issue of **Antisemitism** through the value of **Responsibility**.

### At-a-Glance

This resource provides an opportunity to probe the actions involved in taking responsibility and stepping up to act in cases of antisemitism. Taking responsibility in such cases requires navigating between our different potential responses, and creating controls of safety to enable us to consider taking more risks. Jewish law puts responsibility on each of us in cases where others are in danger, but recognizes deep limitations on how much risk is too much risk. Learners will have the chance to examine events in their own lives as a way of determining their own comfort levels of taking responsibility - balancing the risks involved in stepping up, with the desires and need to stay safe.



### MATERIALS AND SET-UP

**Time estimate:**  
50 minutes

**Materials Needed:**

- Digital Device to
  - Spin the Safety/ Risk Wheel
- Pens and paper for Make Meaning & Take Action prompts

**Best Uses:**

- For moments when antisemitism is in the news
- For informal settings
- To calm learners when emotions are charged



## FRAME THE ISSUE (10 MINUTES)

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**Use the prompts below to establish a connection with the topic.**

Acts of antisemitism are on the rise both globally and in our own communities, pressing us to face scary realities in ways we may not be used to.

Unfortunately, acts of antisemitism are increasingly presenting themselves very close to home and in our daily lives – in incidents at school, attacks in our community and through antisemitic comments and remarks on social media.

When this happens, we may ask ourselves the following question: Do we have a responsibility or obligation to respond? If so, at what cost to ourselves?

Let's surface some of the complicated factors involved in deciding when to stand up to antisemitism and when to hold back.

**Discuss with the full group:**

- ▶▶ When you read or hear the words “dirty Jew,” how does your body physically respond? Does your heart rate speed up?
- ▶▶ Have you ever witnessed an antisemitic attack or read comments and felt angry? What was your immediate response?

Securing personal safety (both psychological and perhaps even physical) while at the same time accepting risk for the greater good is at the crux of how so many of us choose to respond to antisemitic attacks, and take responsibility when we hear about them.

How does one balance the safety that comes with keeping quiet, with the risks involved in standing up for others? What should we do?

**We'll explore together the complicated tensions we may experience when we feel called to step in and take action in the name of responsibility.**



## JEWISH ANCHOR – DO NOT STAND BY WHILE OTHERS ARE THREATENED (15 MINUTES)

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**Judaism offers a context for us to think about how we should step in and exercise responsibility when we see others who are threatened. Jewish Law is sensitive to negotiating the need to secure one’s safety with the ability to take action and risk. Let’s explore the issues below and reflect together.**

Let’s start with a simple example: You are walking by a swimming pool and see someone who is drowning. Are you obligated to try and help save them? Should you jump in? Toss them a life preserver? Call 911? Find someone else to help? (*You may want to ask people to raise hands here to show how they would respond.*)

According to American law, there is no legal obligation to try and save them. One can but does not have to put themselves at risk in such a situation.

Jewish law, *halakha*, however, provides different guidance. According to the Torah one must act to try and save a person in such a situation, but within limits.

The Torah in Leviticus 19:16 commands that one *not stand by while others are threatened/lo ta’amod al dam re’echa*. The Talmud, the body of Jewish law which expands upon the laws in the Torah/Bible, gives color to and expands upon this obligation, saying that if someone sees a friend who is drowning, or being attacked by robbers, or wild animals, they must try and save them.

All of these situations raised by the Talmud pose some potential danger to the rescuer, yet we are still commanded to act. However, if the risk to one’s life is too great, they need not act.

Ultimately, Jewish law provides a framework for each of us to assess our own level of risk, demanding that we take some risk, but not go too far.

### Thought Questions:

- Why do you think the Torah phrases the obligation of “*lo ta’amod*” - “do not stand by” in negative form as opposed to the positive? [It says “do not stand by” when it could have said “go and do.”]
- What is the significance of the use of the word “stand”? What does it evoke for you?
- Have you ever found yourself in a position of putting yourself at risk to step in and save another, fulfilling the commandment of “*lo ta’amod*”? When? How did it feel?
- When witnessing antisemitic attacks what feels unsafe to you and what can you do to secure your own safety first?

### Summarize for the group:

Exercising responsibility in all cases – especially cases that pose physical or psychological danger – requires assessing risks, and acting from a place of personal safety. Jewish law is very conscious of the need to act from a place of safety, and yet demands of us to step up and exercise responsibility when someone is in danger. There are many Jewish texts that press us to figure out where exactly on the continuum of risk and safety our actions of taking responsibility can rest. Stepping in and taking action in cases of antisemitism in our current reality, can be viewed as an extension of this Biblical law.



## THE ACTIVITY: SPIN THE RESPONSIBILITY WHEEL – SAFETY OR RISKY? (10 MINUTES)



Let's spend a few moments exploring the different activities that call on us to act with responsibility – some related to anti-Semitism, some not – highlighting the relative safety and risks involved, and how they make us feel.

In this activity you will rank actions as being safe or risky on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the safest, and 10 the riskiest.

- ▷▷ Access the link to spin the Safety/ Risk Wheel here.
- ▷▷ In groups of 2-3, take turns spinning the Responsibility Wheel.
- ▷▷ You will land on an action that you can potentially take.
- ▷▷ Give a number to that action based on a scale of 1-10, assessing how risky or safe that activity feels to you.
- ▷▷ Discuss why you selected that number. Why not higher? Why not lower?
- ▷▷ Repeat, until you have gone through at least three different actions.

### Reflect together as a group:

Based on your results, try to think of some commonalities in terms of creating your own circumstances of safety.

- ▷▷ What are some things that make you feel safe, physically?
- ▷▷ What are some things that make you feel safe in the context of antisemitic attacks?
- ▷▷ How can you think about ways to take action towards securing your own safety when it comes to responding to antisemitism, so that you may ultimately be able to take more risk?



## MAKE MEANING & TAKE ACTION (10 MINUTES)

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Having assessed safety and risk in the context of taking responsibility, we will now look back at our own actions in order to be better equipped to take responsibility as we look forward. Use the following prompts below to think and then write down your responses which will be shared together with the larger group.

### Back-Looking:

- ▷▷ Review the events of your day in the past 24 hours.
- ▷▷ What is one risk you took in the name of responsibility – any act of responsibility – not necessarily as related to antisemitism?
- ▷▷ Who was it for?
- ▷▷ How did it turn out? Was it worth it?
- ▷▷ Have you witnessed any antisemitic activities in the last few months? What did you do (if anything) about them?

### Forward-Looking:

- ▷▷ Reflect on a past event, or think of an antisemitic incident that hit closely to you (either geographically, personally or emotionally). What is it?
- ▷▷ How did you react at the time?
- ▷▷ With some of the new ideas and safety considerations you surfaced in the conversation above, what are some ways that you can now consider stepping up to exercise responsibility as a response?
- ▷▷ In the space below write down concrete ways that you can secure your own safety before taking any risks in the name of responsibility for the event above.



## CLOSE WITH INTENTION (5 MINUTES)

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In the exploration we have just experienced, we took a contemporary issue – antisemitism – which is both age-old and new, and always scary and unpredictable – and explored it through the lens of responsibility. Integrating responsibility into our lives, and stepping up in cases of antisemitic attacks or comments, requires a clear assessment of the dangers and risks involved. We are required to stand up, and yet at the same time, we are never asked to put ourselves too far at risk to do so. Today's conversation provided a chance to explore why finding ourselves on the risk and safety spectrum is hard. It also can hopefully allow us to create conditions of safety for ourselves as we consider taking more risks.

### **End with a prompt:**

- ▶▶ What is one action you will take this week – either one to create more safety in your life, or one of risk – in light of the conversation above?