



ASSERTING YOURSELF WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW HOW

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource explores our ability to respond to **Antisemitism and Israel** through the value of **Authenticity**.

At-a-Glance:

In our polarized and argumentative society, it can be hard to know how to respond to a comment when the person seems more knowledgeable or confident than you. This activity explores how the value of Authenticity can buttress our response, through a thought experiment about Israelites in ancient Egypt responding to early antisemitism, and through the “worst case scenario game” set in the present day. Note that this is about responding to real people you know, not anonymous online antisemitism or impersonal antisemitism like graffiti.



Time Estimate:

45 minutes



Materials Needed:

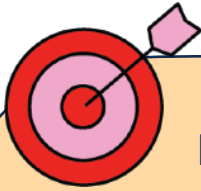
- Index cards or post-its, one per participant.
- Writing implements (pens, etc.)



Best Uses:

- Best for high school, college, young adult
- Better in person but could be adapted for online with relative ease

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

In our polarized and argumentative society, it's not uncommon for someone to say something hurtful in a conversation—perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps out of malice, perhaps just to be dramatic and draw attention. Not even online—just in real life.

Facilitator prompts the group:

By a show of hands, how many of you have experienced a moment like that? Keep your hand up if you feel like, when this happens, you always know exactly what to say.

If anyone keeps their hand up, say to them:

How do you feel in those moments, and how do you know what to say?

It's not surprising to see so many hands down. It's rare for us to always have the answers, no matter how much knowledge we have. If you imagine yourself in this situation, how do you feel?

In today's activity, we're going to explore the value of Authenticity and how it might help us respond in those moments when someone has said something hurtful and we feel [*insert several of the adjectives the group just offered, or if you can't remember them, try "flustered, slow, embarrassed"*].

5 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE: AUTHENTICITY

30 min



At its simplest level, authenticity means being true to yourself.

Facilitator prompts the group:

What does that mean to you? *(Take several suggestions from the group. Look for answers like: not being afraid to say what you think, staying grounded, being the real you, not going along with the crowd)*

- What does it feel like when you are your authentic self?
- What makes it hard to be authentic? *(Look for answers like: Fearing the consequences, lacking confidence you are right, wanting to fit in/not stick out, being conflict-avoidant.)*

JEWISH WISDOM

To explore this value together, we're going to look at a few verses from the Torah and do a thought-experiment with them. These might be familiar because they are the beginning of the Passover story.

(Hand out writing implements and the following text. It is fine to print it on strips or quarter-sheets to save paper. Invite a volunteer to read aloud.) As this is read aloud, pay special attention to the first verse, where the Torah seems to describe the Israelites fearfully, the way the Egyptians saw them.

The Children of Israel bore fruit, they swarmed, they became many, they grew mighty [in number]—exceedingly, yes, exceedingly; the land filled up with them.

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who had not known Yosef.

He said to his people: Here, (this) people of the Children of Israel is many-more and mightier [in number] than we!

(Exodus 1:7-9, translation by Dr. Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*)

Some consider these verses the first antisemitic comments in history. Imagine yourself as an Israelite in Egypt. You're not enslaved yet, but you are starting to hear your Egyptian neighbors muttering comments like this under their breath or maybe even saying them out loud to you.



Facilitator prompts the group:

How do these comments make you feel?

Now imagine yourself, as an Israelite, responding to one of these comments from an Egyptian you know. What might you say?

How does the value of authenticity, being true to yourself, shape your imagined response to these ancient Egyptians?

Authenticity means sticking to your truth, but it doesn't mean you always have to know what to say. Sometimes the most authentic thing you can say is, "I don't know," or "Maybe, but..." So for instance, I can imagine saying to an Egyptian, "Listen, I'm not an expert in statistics, so for all I know you may be right about how many of us there are. What I do know is that I've lived here all my life, you and I know each other, and I belong here."

How do you feel when you hear me say that?



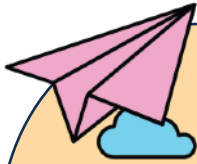
ACTIVITY

Now we're going to do a short activity that takes the scenario we've just been playing with and transfers it to the present-day, to the real world.

Think of a comment about antisemitism that you might hear in real life that you are intimidated to respond to—a worst case scenario. It can be one you've actually experienced, one you've heard about, or one you just worry about. Turn your piece of paper over and write it down, then hold it up so I can collect it.

In full or small groups, tell the group:

Take turns drawing a card at random and reading it to the group. After you've heard the comment read, take 60 seconds to independently draft your response. No self-editing required; free-writing is encouraged. Then, you will each have another 60 seconds to share your response aloud.



PROMPT ACTION



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Was the exercise of authentically responding easier or harder than expected? Why?
- What about your responses felt authentic? What didn't?
- What do you now understand makes it easier or harder for you to be authentic?
- What might you do next time someone challenges you with an obnoxious comment?

Thank you for being part of this conversation and for exploring authenticity together today.

10 min

