

The Impact of Rising Antisemitism on Children

By Larry Marx, CEO, December 21, 2023

No aspect of a child's identity – or any adult's identity, for that matter – should ever be a source of distress, fear, shame, or bullying, let alone outright hate. A person's ethnic, racial, and religious heritage and beliefs should be cause for celebration, not concealment. Given that identity is so key to a child's healthy development and well-being, The Children's Agenda has long committed our advocacy and public statements towards antiracist policies, programs and practices, as well as affirming gender expression and sexual orientation.

Now, given the press of current events, it's also time for The Children's Agenda to forthrightly address the rising tide of hate channeled as antisemitism and Islamophobia. Our organization strives to walk our talk and lead by example. The Children's Agenda has separate but similar statements about both targets of hate. This statement is specific to antisemitism.

As they grow up, children ideally learn a sense of pride about their family's distinctive identity. For Jewish families -- in Rochester, in New York, in the United States, and around the world -- that sense of pride is increasingly eclipsed by fear. Shockingly, since Hamas' October 7th terrorist murders of 1,200 Jewish children, women and men in Israel, there has been a surge of antisemitism around the world. Antisemitic content has increased more than 900 percent on X (formerly Twitter) and there have been more than 1,000 incidents of real-world antisemitic attacks, vandalism and harassment in America, according to the Anti-Defamation League — the highest number since the human rights group started counting.¹ As CNN wrote:

Outbursts of antisemitism have often been harbingers of societies in deep trouble and omens that extremism and violence are imminent. So the wave of global hatred directed against Jews – intensified by Israel's indiscriminate response in Gaza to horrific Hamas terrorist murders of Israeli civilians on October 7 – should not just be seen as a reaction to the Middle East yet again slumping into war. Recent antisemitism is also a reflection of destructive forces tearing at American and western European societies, where stability and democracy are already under pressure.²

This past October, FBI Director Christopher Wray warned Congress that antisemitism is reaching “historic levels” in the U.S. “In fact, our statistics would indicate that for a group that represents only about 2.4% of the American public, they account for something like 60% of all religious-based hate crimes,” Wray said of the Jewish American community in a Senate hearing.³

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/11/19/antisemitism-internet-elon-musk-israel-war/>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/31/politics/antisemitism-unstable-world-analysis/index.html>

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/31/politics/fbi-director-antisemitism-wray/index.html>

These are traumatic times for Jewish people. I speak as a Jew myself and as the son and grandson of Holocaust survivors. No parent wants to have to tell their child that there are mean people in the world who hate them just for who they are. But, of course, there is a long and painful history of antisemitism across the ages and in nearly every country -- and children need to know. Sometimes it's easy to identify who the mean people are -- they'll carry signs, hold torches, wear swastikas or white hoods that make them recognizable. But what of the other mean people? What of the people who type out threats on social media, or casually drop conversational stereotypes about Jewish people's looks or economic power, or leave voicemails dripping with hate?

The spectrum of antisemitism includes all of the above. And while legitimate conversation of any country's government, including Israel is acceptable, anti-Zionism and anti-Israel rhetoric that dehumanizes Jews is antisemitism. But despite all the complications and many forms antisemitism may take, and despite how scary it can be for children to learn that there are people in the world who hate others simply for who they are, the ugly rise in antisemitism worldwide is now an urgent topic parents need to discuss openly with their children -- **all** parents, with **all** children. There are excellent resources out there to hold those conversations, like this [fact sheet from the national Child Traumatic Stress Network](#).

But antisemitism -- like racism -- isn't just a problem for those targeted and hurt by it. And it won't just go away if Jewish people act differently somehow. Eliminating the policies, actions and speech that keep antisemitism alive is primarily the responsibility of all those parents and families who are not subjected to it. Ultimately, the only way antisemitism will finally become extinct is for generations of non-Jewish people to extinguish that flame, whenever and wherever it flares up.