

● Understanding Our Reactions

to Conflict in The Middle East and Antisemitism



JEWISH CARE

Jami



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Introduction

Jami (part of Jewish Care) is a mental health service based in the Jewish community. In response to the outpouring of shock, anxiety and grief following the 7th October attacks, we delivered a psycho-educational programme to communities and organisations to help people make sense of their feelings.



As the conflict and hostage situation continues, the Jewish community has been facing an unprecedented challenge in dealing with the impact of the tragic events on their mental health.

As antisemitism rises and the community faces hostility, this compounds people's already high anxiety levels.

The situation in the Middle East is complex and it is likely that the

psycho-educational information in this leaflet will continue to be helpful to many people beyond the current crisis.

Alongside this leaflet, you can also see **mini films presented by mental health professionals** who explore our psychological responses and provide some ideas to help us deal with the stress. Watch the videos online via: jamiuk.org/understand-our-reactions



● Impact of the news

Feelings and everyday life

We know that traumatic news has a knock-on effect on people's mental health – for those already dealing with mental illness and distress, and for those who have an emotional connection or identification with the events reported.

Many of us will have struggled with complex and strong feelings since the news of the attacks. The nature of the situation makes it especially challenging as it is ongoing, and we don't know when it will end. Our brains perceive the situation as a continuous threat and many of us respond with high levels of anxiety. This may have affected our sleep, our relationships and our day-to-day functioning.

Noticing our reactions

Although it is painful and disorientating to be in a state of anxiety, it is an understandable and natural response to the situation. It is useful to be able to identify the feelings we are having so we can begin to understand them and gradually find ways to deal with them.

Psychological responses and feelings you may be having include:

- Sorrow
- Anger
- Anxiety – perhaps feeling constantly on edge
- Fear and living in dread of the news – both world and local events
- Helplessness
- Disorientation

If we have had, or currently live with, an anxiety disorder such as OCD, Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder or high levels of anxiety, we may feel particularly overwhelmed by news from the region. We might also find ourselves using unhelpful coping mechanisms, including overusing alcohol or food to seek comfort and escape.

Limiting our exposure to the news may help us feel less anxious. However, if we are closely connected to what is happening in the news, we may find it difficult to adopt these boundaries and can find ourselves in a constant cycle of seeking information and growing more anxious.

The human response to threat

When we are anxious, our brains are hardwired to scan for signs of threat in the environment. We quickly spot any signs of potential danger, and this triggers the flight and fight response. Humans do this as it has helped us to survive. But we can become trapped in this way of being and when friendly faces or safe places are offered to us, it can be very hard to drop our suspicions and allow ourselves 'off the hook'. Ruminating and worrying are circular activities – we can get stuck. They can get in the way of us doing useful and constructive things.



Community



Relationships

Our relationships with others are always important and when we are living in a state of anxiety they can take on an even greater significance in our minds.



The attacks on 7th October and the ensuing conflict has put pressure on many of our relationships. At times we may have felt our support network is not functioning as we would hope.

We may feel loneliness and even a sense of abandonment by people who have expressed different views to us. Some of us may have been victims of antisemitic abuse.

Hopefully, we have also been surprised, moved or heartened by messages of support and kindness from our friends and colleagues. Don't forget, not everyone feels confident to comment on world events. They may feel they don't understand or know 'enough' about what has happened historically and in more recent years. If we want more support from others, we might need to tell them that, using 'I' statements about how we are feeling.



Supporting young people

Be prepared to listen to their concerns and worries, and be empathic. These worries are real for them. Loop in the school counsellor or other services if their feelings are overwhelming.

Tailor your responses and share information in an age-appropriate way. However sophisticated they may sound, you need to remember their age and stage.

Be prepared to discuss social media and the impact it's having. Young people are regularly being exposed to the conflict and to political arguments. This may be having a profound impact on their sense of identity, confidence and their understanding of current affairs. Young people, who are at university or getting ready to go, may also be feeling worried about the hostilities that have been reported on some university campuses.

Our history, our experiences today

The Jewish community has a long history of trauma, displacement and exposure to antisemitism. This history lives with us and we carry the consequences of this loss and experience, which is sometimes too painful to put into words.

The 7th October was particularly triggering for people descended from Holocaust survivors who may have experienced a sense of helplessness, as if history was repeating itself.

It can be helpful to talk to others with whom we feel a connection. Perhaps there's a group of people we can bring together to share our thoughts. If it feels safe enough, we could join a conversation at our synagogue or other group we are affiliated with. You'll probably be surprised to hear from others who feel similar to you, and this can bring comfort and connection.





● Looking after ourselves and others



The use of a routine

We get used to our daily patterns which keep us contained and grounded. When we are anxious, trying to maintain our routines can be incredibly healing and containing for us. Here are some of our tips:

- Maintain your routine, which might include attending synagogue, clubs etc.
- Keep your usual connections with others as this can help to reduce isolation, which can lead to further anxiety.
- Ensure you are eating and sleeping as usual, regularising life.
- Limit your exposure to news.

Self-care

Self-care is not a luxury; it's a basic necessity for coping with life. It can be easy to say and harder to do, especially when our brains may be scanning for threats in our environment due to our high anxiety levels. We, therefore, recommend the following:

- Show yourself kindness.
- It's important to try and soothe ourselves with activities that we know can help ease our stress.

How long will I feel like this?

Time is usually the healer after exposure to traumatic news or shocking events. However, this conflict has put communities under particular strain because of the ongoing nature and wide-ranging impact on several areas of life. There will be ups and downs in our recovery and ongoing management of living with the situation.

We should not forget our personal and communal resilience and should use our usual coping mechanisms to help us manage at this time.

If we find that our sleep, mood or day-to-day activities have been affected over a prolonged period of time, we might consider seeking more support.

● Sources of mental health support



If your mental health has been affected by the situation and you would like some support, please contact Jami.

Jami's mental health services for the Jewish community include talking therapies, practical and emotional support, peer-led services, and support for carers and families.

To access Jami services, go to www.jamiuk.org or call 020 8458 2223.

Text Jami to 85258, Shout's 24/7 crisis text service for immediate help.

Your GP can also signpost you to mental health support in your area and provide advice.

Jewish Care also offers a range of social care and other support services, including services for Holocaust survivors. For further details, visit www.jewishcare.org or call 020 8922 2222.

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www.jewishcare.org



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For when mental illness and distress
makes everyday life a struggle

With thanks to the London Jewish Forum and London Jewish Health Partnership who have supported the development and creation of this booklet and the accompanying films.



Thrive LDN
towards happier, healthier lives



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This booklet and the accompanying films have been funded and supported by the Mayor of London. The development of these resources follows London's public mental health partnership, Thrive LDN's engagement with communities in London who have been affected and impacted by the war and violence in Israel and Gaza. Thrive LDN is continuing to gain further insights and understanding about where mental health support would be most effective to those impacted across the capital.