

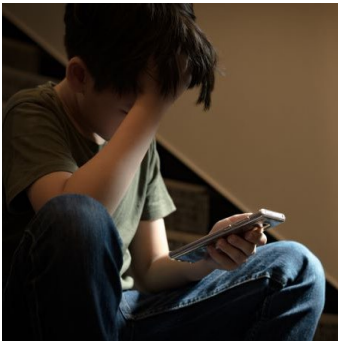
# Addressing Antisemitic Bullying

A Resource for Catholic Leadership & Formation

# Conversations

The insights that follow, from conversations with members of Australia's Jewish community, explore the problem of **antisemitic bullying**, particularly in schools.

As Catholics seeking to listen, learn and understand, we asked:



From your experience

- What does an antisemitic incident 'look' like?
- What helps (in incident-response)?
- What is to be avoided?

What follows is a contributing voice, from one of Australia's minority communities, to the ongoing discussion about bullying in schools.



A parent's  
perspective



The following words\* are those of a  
mother of a five-year-old who was  
bullied in an Australian school...

... **bullied for being Jewish.**

\*Source: evidence given to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues  
Committee - Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections | 25 June 2020

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“Our son is an incredible little boy. He is the kind of child who is friendly to everyone. He loves all sports and is a mad-keen fisherman. He is the child who walks in anywhere and starts a conversation.

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“So when my son told me I should not love him because he is a ‘worthless Jewish rodent’ you will understand I was without words. I still have no way to describe the feeling, and just saying the words makes my eyes fill with tears.


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“Anyone feeling worthless is horrible, but for your five-year-old child, who you love and care for and adore, feeling those feelings is something that stays with you forever and is something which should never occur.”



“We discovered that a boy in his prep class did not like him and had enlisted his older brother and his friends to target and bully our son.

They used awful language, insults and physical intimidation after discovering that he was Jewish and continued to harass him, specifically in the bathrooms and playground, throughout term 1.”






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“The bullies focused on the fact that our son’s penis was circumcised and would follow him into the bathroom to harass him continually and comment on his genitalia.

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“When asked if he shared this with the principal he indicated he could not as she was not Jewish and she would not understand.”





Let's enter into  
an exercise of  
**listening**  
for deeper  
understanding...

# Our conversation partners



**Prof. David Hall FMS**  
Dean, La Salle Academy for Faith  
Formation & Religious Education,  
Australian Catholic University



**Vic Alhadeff**  
Former CEO of the NSW Jewish Board of  
Deputies and a consultant to schools on  
leadership that addresses prejudice



**Julie Nathan**  
Research Director, Executive Council of  
Australian Jewry



**Alissa Foster**  
Former president, Australasian Union  
of Jewish Students (AUJS)



**Peter Wertheim AM**  
Co-CEO, Executive Council of Australian Jewry



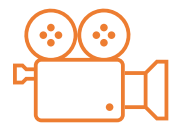
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Antisemitic bullying in schools has an historical and present-day context.

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**Video:**  
**An interfaith conversation.**



**50 minutes**

Downloads:

- Facilitator's Guide
- Discussion Questions

**Catholic educator Prof David Hall FMS in conversation with prominent members of the Australian Jewish community, Peter Wertheim AM and Vic Alhadeff.**

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Antisemitic incidents in schools have a context: antisemitic incidents in Australia are on the rise.

What are the sources and expressions of antisemitism?

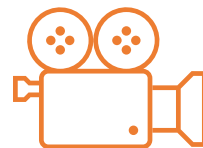
By what criteria is an incident identified as antisemitic?

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**View data & excerpts from antisemitism reports.**



**Video:  
Julie Nathan  
(Brief clips of 1-6 mins)**



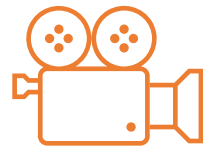
Julie Nathan  
Research Director,  
Executive Council of Australian Jewry

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Antisemitic incidents are occurring on university campuses.

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**Video:**  
**Alissa Foster**  
**(2 minute clip)**



Alissa Foster  
Former president,  
Australasian Union of Jewish Students

# Discussion Questions

Sample questions to assist reflection on the preceding conversations

# Approaching the topic

## **WHAT DOES AN ANTISEMITIC INCIDENT 'LOOK' LIKE?**

Have I ever witnessed an antisemitic incident? What did it 'look' like, 'sound' like?

Was I adequately equipped to respond?

## **SPECIFIC INDICATORS**

Can I recognise a remark or gesture as antisemitic?

Discuss both overt and covert expressions of antisemitism.

# Analysing the problem

## **STEREOTYPES**

Can I name some common antisemitic stereotypes? Am I aware of their historical background?

## **VALUES**

*“No individual is an abstract ‘other’. Each person is unique and has dignity and worth.”*

In what ways do we consciously and actively show respect for the dignity of each person in our school community?

Are our staff/students aware that the Christian teaching of respect for human dignity is anchored in the Book of Genesis – i.e., in the Jewish Scriptures which Christianity has inherited?

# Responding to an incident

## **THREE COMPONENTS**

*Punitive, Remedial, Educational* – Three components of a response to an antisemitic incident.

Discuss the meaning of each term in your school context – e.g., an appropriate ‘punitive’ response instils a healthy understanding that our choices and actions have consequences; it is training for life.

## **STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES**

Discuss the challenges entailed in each component.

In what ways have we seen these three components implemented in school life?

Which do we implement effectively as a school? Which could be done better?

What practical steps would help us to improve our overall response to an antisemitic incident?

# Touchstones

## **THREE TOUCHSTONES FOR RESPONDING TO AN INCIDENT**

1. Early, direct, decisive intervention by principal/authority figure.
2. Clear explanation that actions have consequences.
3. The needs of the 'bully' do not eclipse the injustice done to the victim.

**Talk about the practical integration of these touchstones in dealing with an incident.**



# Messaging

## **CATHOLIC TEACHING**

The Catholic Church “decries hatred, persecutions, displays of antisemitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” (*Nostra Aetate*, 4).

Am I aware of this teaching of the Catholic Church, stated in a key document\* of the Second Vatican Council? What can I do to make it better known?

## **WHAT MESSAGE ARE WE SENDING?**

As a school, do our words and actions send a clear message to students: that antisemitism is wrong and has no place in a Christian community or in any respectful, harmonious society?

What are we doing ‘right’ in this regard? What could we do to improve our messaging?

\* Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (28 October 1965)

# History & the present

## **ANTISEMITISM: 'THE WORLD'S OLDEST HATRED'**

What do I know of the long history of antisemitism? Have I ever had the opportunity to learn about this persistent form of hatred and prejudice in human history?

## **THE IMPACT OF THE HOLOCAUST ON PRESENT-DAY JEWISH FAMILIES**

Am I aware of the personal losses borne today by Jewish families in Australia, as a result of the Holocaust? Have I ever met a Holocaust survivor, or the descendants of a Holocaust survivor?

Have I ever visited a Holocaust museum or attended a memorial service for the six million Jewish people murdered by Hitler's regime? If so, share something of this experience and its impact.

# Personal identity

## IDENTITY

*“Antisemitic bullying attacks personal identity, not just religion.”*

*“Antisemitic bullying goes to the core of personal identity and impacts not just the student, but the student’s family.”*

Discuss in light of the video conversation.

# Leadership

## **LEADERSHIP VERSUS POPULARITY**

*“Leadership is not a popularity contest. Leadership is about leadership.”*

Discuss this statement. Describe an example of authentic leadership that you have witnessed.

## **EMPOWER STAFF TO CALL OUT WHAT IS WRONG**

How can we support one another in the task of calling out antisemitism and other forms of prejudice and bigotry? Brainstorm three practical steps.

## **ENGAGING STUDENT LEADERS**

How can we engage student leadership in addressing these issues? Brainstorm three practical steps.

# Questions for school executive leadership

## **REVIEW OF POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS**

What policies and documentation do we need to earmark for attention in relation to this issue?

## **CURRICULUM & STAFF FORMATION**

Regarding how the curriculum is taught in our school, what steps could be taken to strengthen our teaching about the dignity of the human person, the past and present realities of antisemitic prejudice, and the importance of leadership in the face of prejudice?

## **COLLABORATION**

Who can assist our efforts? Consider, for example, parent body, parish community, diocesan community, education programs that promote social cohesion, other contacts in the wider community.

# Objections

'Kids will be kids.'

Bullies need pastoral care as much as victims.

Your expectations of schools are unrealistic.

Jewish communities are being hypersensitive.

**How would you respond?**



# Quotable quotes

“Antisemitism: the Longest Hatred” (Book title, Robert S. Wistrich)

“A swastika is not just graffiti. It represents a regime that sought to destroy the entire Jewish people on the face of the planet.” (Vic Alhadeff)

“To defend a country, you need an army. But to defend a civilisation, you need schools.” ([Jonathan Sacks](#) - pictured)

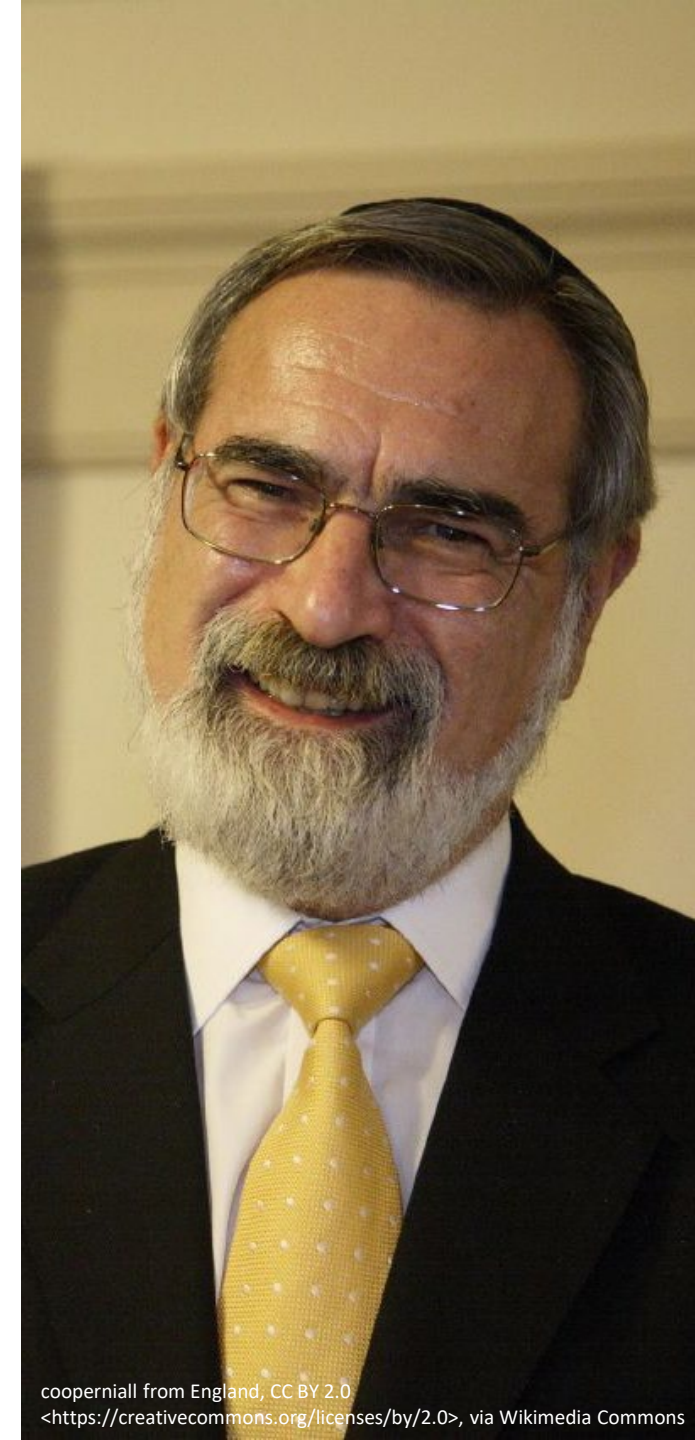
“Be proactive, not just reactive. Look at the curriculum! Yes, teach respect in RE lessons, but also critically examine the antisemitism in the works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Chaucer.” (Peter Wertheim)

“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” (Elie Wiesel)

“How long should we keep trying?” someone asked Robert Schreier CPPS. His reply: “For as long as it takes.”

“It’s not up to you to complete the task. But neither are you free to desist from it.” (*Pirkei Avot*, “*Ethics of our Fathers*”)

**Share a thought about one or more of these statements.**



# A Strategic Response

Based on recommendations of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry



# Three ways to address antisemitism

## **1. LEADERSHIP**

The right messaging from political leaders, academics, journalists, faith and community leaders, and others in positions of power or influence.

## **2. LEGISLATION**

Federal, state and territory legislation that is comprehensive and effective against vilification and advocacy of violence, along with the establishment of a national database of hate-motivated crime.

## **3. EDUCATION**

Education that informs people about the particularities of antisemitism itself, its history and the various ways in which it manifests, so people can recognise it and act against it when they see it.

# Where **schools** can have an impact

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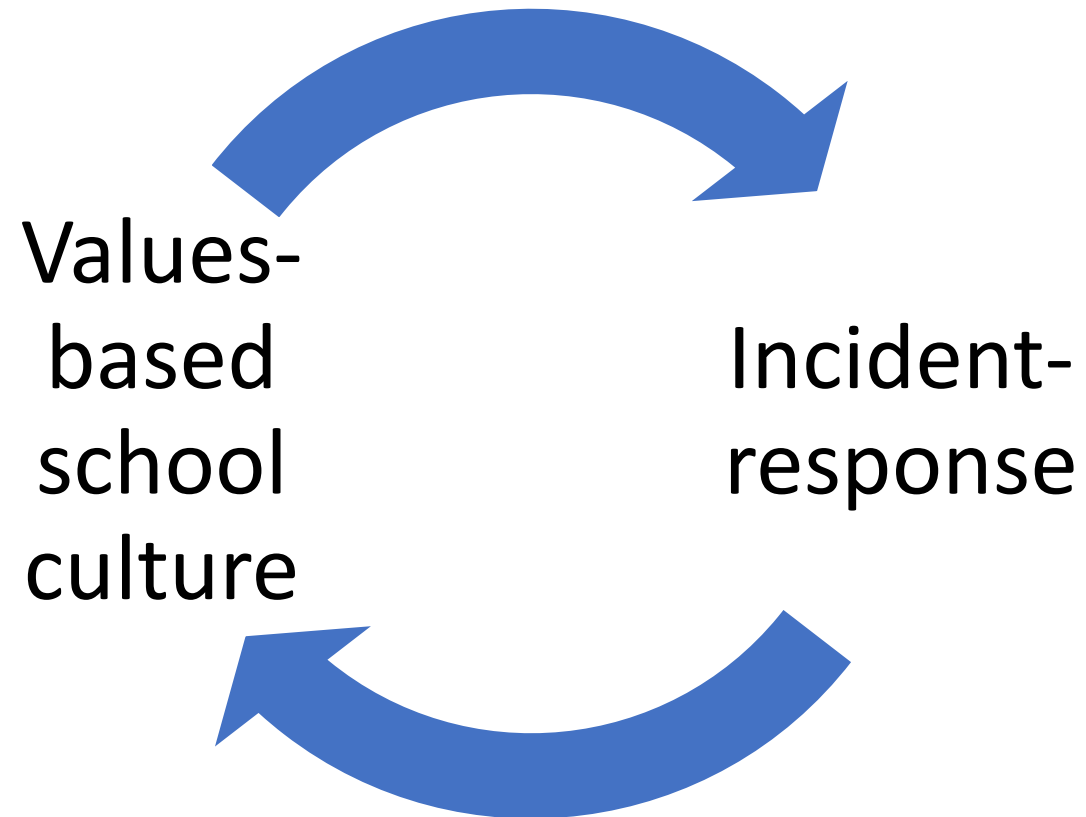


# Strategies

Towards a strategic response to antisemitic incidents in schools and community settings:

- What helps?
- What is to be avoided?

# Two foci



# Incident-response measures

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Early, direct intervention by Principal

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Clear acknowledgment of antisemitism in communications

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Clearly-explained consequences

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Rejection of a culture of equivalence

# Incident-response measures

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Special measures to address gang-related bullying

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Mobilise student leadership

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Review and update policies

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Maintain a log of all incidents

# School Culture

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Experiential learning

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Family engagement

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Parish engagement

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School culture supportive of  
interfaith cohesion

# School Culture

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Formation: head & heart

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Critical thinking

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Religious literacy

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Responsible use of social media



Further  
resources



# Programs promoting social cohesion

[Together for Humanity](#)

[Interfaith Encounters](#)

[Respect Understanding  
Acceptance \(RUA\)](#)

[Courage to Care](#)

For more information:  
Click on the **links at left**.

# Concluding messages

- Antisemitic bullying is a specific problem, requiring a targeted response
- School communities can make a difference through
  - Leadership
  - Education
- Awareness is the first step – recognising antisemitic prejudice in its past and present-day guises
- The importance of human agency and leadership in our choices for good
- Resources and help are available
  - Incident-response
  - Preventative measures
- See CRA webpage for further information and links

[catholicreligious.org.au/resources](https://www.catholicreligious.org.au/resources)

# Make a start today

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Share this  
resource

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With staff and  
colleagues



# Image credits

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