

RESPONDING TO THE FALLOUT FROM OCTOBER 7TH: FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY

A SURVEY OF JEWISH EDUCATORS AND
ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלַיךְ הַדְבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ׃

**“Because the matter is very close to you,
in your mouth and in your heart to do it.”**

(Deuteronomy 30:14)

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the harrowing events of October 7th, 2023, Jewish educators worldwide find themselves navigating a new and challenging landscape. This crisis is sending ripples through the global Jewish community, and educators are at the forefront of helping students make sense of this moment in history. With emotions running high and political complexities unfolding, Jewish educators have a vital role in guiding their learners and communities through a period of healing, reflection, and engagement.

Our focus, amid the uncertainty and emotional upheaval, is a need to deepen the connection between learners and Jewish life, particularly their relationship to Israel. The fallout from October 7th may be traumatic for many, but also offers Jewish educators a unique chance to reaffirm the centrality of Israel for Jewish belonging, while simultaneously grappling with the diverse perspectives and generational shifts among their learners. This research report shows that most Jewish educators are not equipped to rise to the challenge. Learning from those who are confident in their response, we offer guidance and insight on how to meet the moment and improve Jewish education in the future.



Pro-Israel Rally in London ([left](#)). Discussing differences about Israel ([middle](#)). Anti-Zionist Jews demonstrate for ceasefire ([right](#)).
Click on links to open source of pictures.

THE RESEARCH

In the two months following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, Jewish educators, clergy and other engagement professionals expressed feelings of isolation and confusion regarding the events unfolding in Israel and their local communities. This was the major take-away of the first survey we conducted in November 2023.¹

Faced with an event of historical magnitude, there was across-the-board recognition of the need to respond, coupled with uncertainty about the best course of action. These Jewish professionals were seeking clarity, facts, safety, and hope while grappling with fundamental questions about the unfolding events and their implications.

Given the intensity of the post-October 7th events unfolding both inside and outside of Israel, where did we find Jewish professionals nine months in (June/July 2024)? As with the original research we asked:

- ❖ Do Jewish professionals continue to consider October 7th as an event of historical proportions?
 - If so, what are the implications they perceive for their work?
- ❖ Do they continue to agree that there is a need to respond?
 - If so, what are the big issues?
- ❖ What is their confidence and ability to respond?
 - In which areas do they need support, and what is the nature of that support?

The research is sponsored by the Jim Joseph Foundation in partnership with The Jewish Education Project and M2: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education.²

¹ Ezra Kopelowitz Ph.D., Hadar Franco Galor Ph.D. and Jake Gillis M.A. (2023, November) Responding to this Historical Moment: Jewish Educators, Clergy, Engagement Professionals and the War in Israel. November 2023. M2: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education and the Jim Joseph Foundation. [Link](#)

² We'd like to thank Rabbi Dena Klein, Chief Jewish Education Officer of The Jewish Education Project who served as a thought partner, providing invaluable feedback and support.

METHODOLOGY

Surveys

This report draws on two surveys.

- ❖ **Wave 1:** Fielded in November 2023, one month following the October 7th invasion. 1125 responded.
- ❖ **Wave 2:** Fielded from June 6 to July 31, 2024. 1281 educators or engagement professionals responded.
- ❖ 147 answered both Wave 1 and Wave 2. This report includes comparisons based on these responses.
- ❖ Unless otherwise noted, the data cited in this report draws from the Wave 2 survey.

Wave 2 Survey Distribution:

- ❖ 16 organizations sent a survey to their educators and engagement professionals.³
- ❖ The survey was also sent to the 599 individuals who responded to the first survey and left contact information, requesting to receive updates on the research, 147 (25%) of whom responded.
- ❖ 86% of respondents live in the United States. The remaining respondents are from: Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Paraguay, Poland, South Africa, and Spain.
- ❖ Respondents represent a wide range of educational sectors, learners by age group and denominational affiliation (see following page).

Details for the Wave One survey are found in the Wave One report (see footnote 1).

The full frequency reports for each survey can be downloaded using these links. Wave One: [Link](#) . Wave Two: [Link](#).

Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 senior professionals who work in the field of Jewish education in August 2024. Five of the interviewees were nominated by the Jim Joseph Foundation and The Jewish Education Project due to their thought leadership in the field, five were selected due to the depth of their response to the survey and diverse approaches to Israel in Jewish education. The interviews focused on the educators':

1. Personal assessment and perceptions of the situation
2. Shifts in educational approach and response to October 7th as experienced in the interviewee's sector, community, experience.
3. Practical implications:
 - a. What is expected of educational leaders during such times?
 - b. What does success look like and what is required in order to get there?
4. Insights on ideological perspectives and their implications for education.

Summaries of the Interviews are available upon request. A list of those interviewed is found in Appendix I.

Educator Focus Groups

In September 2024, three online focus groups were conducted with senior Jewish educators. Organized and moderated by The Jewish Education Project, the focus groups involved Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz presenting top level findings from the research with the goal of receiving feedback as to the implications for, and use of the findings for the field of Jewish Education. 64 Educators participated in the focus groups.

³ Supporting organization include: ADCA, BBYO, For the Sake of Argument, Hillel International, The Jewish Education Project, Moishe House, M², NCSY, Pardes, Society for Humanistic Judaism, The Lookstein Center, UnitedEd, URJ (includes NFTY), USCJ, USY, and the Wexner Foundation.

Survey Respondents

Respondents represent a wide range of educational sectors (exhibit 1), learners by age group (exhibit 2) and denominational affiliation (exhibit 3). They span the full range of working aged adults with 40 to 49 years old being the median age (exhibit 4). Three quarters have worked 10 or more years in the field (exhibit 5).

Exhibit 1. Which of the following best describe the sector of the Jewish community in which you work? Select all that apply

Synagogue / congregation / minyan / religious organization	43%
Jewish day school/yeshiva	23%
Jewish supplementary school (e.g. Hebrew school, Sunday school, after-school program)	22%
College campus Jewish organization (e.g. Hillel, Chabad on Campus)	14%
Jewish youth group / movement	11%
Engagement	11%
Jewish preschool or early childhood center	7%
Something else	7%
Jewish summer camp	6%
Social justice / service learning	6%
Self-employed / independent contractor / "gig" worker	6%
Jewish Federation / foundation	5%
Israel education / advocacy organization	4%
JCC	4%
Innovation	4%

Exhibit 2. With which populations of learners do you work most intensively? Select all that apply

Early childhood	18%
Elementary school age	42%
Teens (middle and high school)	55%
College Age	23%
Young Adult learners (20's and 30's)	23%
Adults (40+)	35%
Families	28%
Seniors	19%
Other	4%

Exhibit 3. Thinking of the institution(s) where you work, with which denomination, if any, is it (or are they) most identified?

Haredi	1%
Chabad	0%
Orthodox (other than Haredi or Chabad)	11%
Conservative	15%
Reform	28%
Reconstructionist	2%
Other	6%
More than one	13%
None – it's non-denominational	25%
Total	100%

Exhibit 4. How old are you?

18 to 21	1%
22 to 24	4%
25 to 29	8%
30 to 34	9%
35 to 39	11%
40 to 49	27%
50 to 59	20%
60 or older	20%
Total	100%

Exhibit 5. For how many years have you worked as a Jewish educator, in any way, either full-time or part-time?

Less than 5	12%
5-9	13%
10-14	15%
15-19	15%
20 or more	46%
Total	100%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the events of October 7th, 2023, Jewish educators have found themselves at the center of an unprecedented challenge, guiding learners through a landscape shaped by intense emotions and complex questions. The research findings show that Jewish educators are experiencing considerable emotional strain, with many expressing anxiety and despair as they navigate teaching in the post-October 7th environment. Educators also report their learners experiencing similar negative emotions including confusion, anger, and isolation in response to the unfolding events. Many feel unprepared for addressing the crisis within their existing frameworks, revealing gaps in training and resources to navigate these challenging topics.

A CALL TO ACTION

This moment, while difficult, offers a unique opportunity for rethinking how Jewish education responds to crisis and challenge whether involving Israel, or other areas of life that involve emotional challenge and/or the need to address diversity of opinion and behavior. In such moments, individuals must respond to the world around them, and Jewish educators should see themselves as a resource and guide for doing so. Our focus here is the post-October 7th crisis, and the way Jewish educators are responding.

The power of the events playing out is such that educators realize they need to respond. Events include the war in Israel, the ideological prism through which the war is covered in the media and accompanying public discourse amplified by the 2024 Presidential election, the increased diplomatic isolation of Israel, and the sharp rise of antisemitism. **The post-October 7th events are existential in nature**, causing many Jews to assess their relationship to the Jewish People, to the society around them and to Israel.

As with any crisis or challenge there are diverse Jewish reactions as to how to understand and respond. Drawing on the survey data we show there are currently three approaches among Jewish educators to Israel.

1. **Solidarity:** A focus on nurturing a love for Israel, meaning positive emotional bonds.
2. **Criticism:** A mirror image of the solidarity approach with the emphasis on enabling criticism of Israel as legitimate Jewish expression.
3. **Complexity:** A third approach, which works to strike a balance arguing that to educate a love of Israel, requires learners not only to form positive emotional bonds but also to formulate their opinion and ability to discuss with others Israel in all its social and political complexity.

The tendency of most educators is to embrace one of the solidarity, complexity or criticism approaches, which we argue is not productive for forging a constructive response to the post October 7th crisis, or any other emotional crisis or challenge. Either solidarity or criticism when taken alone cannot enable education to strengthen emotional bonds between Jews who hold different opinions in the face of crisis. Alternatively, complexity cannot stand as a goal unto itself, as the creation of positive bonds between Jews and Israel is a core goal of Jewish education.

Currently the dominant approach to Israel in Jewish education only emphasizes “solidarity,” educating for love of Israel. The result is that many Jewish educators are unprepared for responding to intensely negative events that require consideration of a complex social, moral and political reality and divisive Jewish communal environment. **Many Jewish educators are expressing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, unsure of how to tackle the negative intensity of their personal emotions and those of their learners.**

We call for an integrative approach that emphasizes forging positive emotional bonds between Jews while recognizing the need to enable learners to grapple with both complexity and criticism. **Our call is for educators to lead the integration of Israel into Jewish life as a positive force for Jewish belonging and identification.** In a moment of crisis, can Jewish educators bring learning and engagement with Israel to serve as a source of constructive bonding between Jews, rather than a catalyst for division?

For this purpose, we draw on the research data to advocate for an integrative model of Jewish education in which Israel is integrated into all areas of the discipline. In so doing educators facilitate (1) Jewish bonding and (2) complex thinking.

Educators nurture their learners' consciousness of belonging to the Jewish People and enable each to develop a robust self-understanding of their desired Jewish life in relationship to other Jews, Israel and the society in which they live.

BEYOND TRADITIONAL ISRAEL EDUCATION

For most Jewish educators, prior to October 7th, Israel integrated into their educational work as a means for reinforcing Jewish solidarity and mutual support. Educational work focused on ceremonies and learning with the goal of inculcating and reinforcing a “love of Israel.” Dominant educational foci include acquiring knowledge about Israel from biblical times to the present, the story of the Zionist movement, and the creation of the State and its miraculous survival in the face of its enemies and contemporary positive themes such as “Israel: the Startup Nation.” These areas of knowledge are complemented and reinforced by ceremonies focusing on the celebration of Israel’s Independence, Israeli music and culture, or commemoration and contribution having to do with Israel in times of war or tragedy. **The research findings point to the limitations of this “traditional” approach to Israel in Jewish education, which leaves educators lacking the knowledge and skills to address politically and emotionally charged topics.**

STRUGGLING TO RESPOND TO AN EVENT OF HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

The comparison of responses from the survey conducted following October 7th, 2023, and nine months later in June and July 2024 shows the enduring significance of the October 7th events and the challenges Jewish educators face in confidently fulfilling their roles. At the time of the second survey, Jewish educators continued to view October 7th and the resulting fallout as a historical event and recognized the importance of their role in guiding their communities. However, they also continued to feel underprepared, underscoring the need for sustained support and development to meet these new demands effectively.

The research findings also show that most Jewish educators find themselves less than fully aligned with their institutions' educational priorities on matters touching on the fallout from October 7th. Value conflicts between educators and their supervisors can create tension and hinder their ability to respond to complex issues. This lack of alignment also affects collegial interactions, with only 45% feeling fully able to engage in productive dialogue with colleagues. Many of the written comments also include references to pressure from lay leaders, parents and other stake holders.

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT AND ADAPTING TO MEET THE MOMENT

Despite the challenges, the aftermath of October 7th has sparked renewed engagement with Jewish life, as current events underscore Israel’s centrality to the collective Jewish experience. For many Jews, this crisis is a catalyst for exploring their Jewishness more deeply, prompting both introspection and dialogue about Israel’s role in their lives. Jewish educators report that learners who were previously disconnected or indifferent are now seeking a meaningful connection to organized Jewish life, sometimes exploring questions about their Jewishness for the first time. This surge in interest is also visible within Jewish institutions, where the educators report that people who were less engaged are now participating more actively. In response, educators are rethinking their approaches, adapting their practices to build on this heightened engagement. Many are seeking to deepen their knowledge and creatively address the emotional, intellectual, and practical needs of their learners and communities.

BALANCING JEWISH BONDING AND COMPLEX THINKING IN EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Drawing on calls by Jewish educational researchers spanning decades and this research, we argue that the angst generated by the current crisis is an opportunity to accelerate the long called for move towards integrative Jewish education. This approach encourages educators not to treat “Israel education” as a distinct discipline; but, rather to view Israel as integral to their area of specialization. How when teaching Bible, Talmud, prayer, Jewish history, or current events etc., can educators view Israel as a source for (1) Jewish emotional bonding and (2) complex thinking, enabling their learners to see Israel as a nuanced, multifaceted part of their Jewish lives? The goal is to foster a deeper, reflective engagement with Jewish life in which Israel is apart. Such an approach can strengthen Jewish communal life by enabling learners to deepen their sense of collective Jewish belonging in relation to the moral and ideological diversity within the Jewish community.

We learn that only 27% of respondents chose both Jewish bonding and complex thinking educational goals in their response to October 7th, meaning that the large majority prioritize either Jewish bonding (35%) or complex thinking (38%) goals. **The long-term goal is to bring Jewish educators to embrace both bonding and complex thinking.**

DIVERGING APPROACHES BY DEMOGRAPHICS AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

Approaches to Israel in Jewish education vary according to educators' demographics, experience, and political orientation. Younger, less experienced, and more politically liberal or progressive educators are more likely to prioritize complex thinking goals, focusing on helping students explore and/or critically analyze complex topics surrounding Israel. Older, more experienced educators and the more politically conservative are more likely to emphasize Jewish bonding, aiming to foster a strong sense of commitment and participation in Jewish community.

Notably, no matter the demographic, political orientation or educational sector only a minority of Jewish educators adopt a fully integrated approach that combines both Jewish bonding and complex thinking.

The integrated approach, we argue, is essential for being able to respond to crisis and challenge in a manner that enables Israel to serve as a force for strengthening engagement with organized Jewish life in a time of crisis.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION

Key areas where Jewish educators report the need for support include:

1. **Curriculum resources** that cover knowledge for essential topics. Depending on their educational goals, educators seek resources that include Peoplehood, Zionism, and both Israeli and Palestinian narratives. Additionally, educators are requesting support for facilitating discussions across diverse viewpoints, especially in dialogues with non-Jews and individuals critical of Israel.
2. **Peer support systems** are another priority, with educators expressing the value of connecting with colleagues to share ideas and develop emotional resilience. Opportunities for professional collaboration, such as peer trips to Israel, are seen as helpful for educators' personal and professional growth.

Drawing on interviews with educators four areas emerge as particularly important: (1) curriculum integration of Israel into different areas of Jewish education, (2) professional development for that purpose, (3) support for navigating institutional pressures, and (4) the ability to offer learners ethical guidance.

RECOMMENDATION - BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION

To advance the field, we recommend building on existing work, knowledge and resources in the field. Collaborative working groups should bring together philanthropic partners, educational institutions, and community leaders who are already working to advance integrative Jewish education with Israel as a focus. These groups would focus on developing the following frameworks and delivery of resources:

- ❖ **Curricula** focusing on 1) emotional knowledge, 2) Jewish Peoplehood, 3) historical and 4) contextual understanding, and 5) ethical inquiry.
- ❖ **Pedagogic strategies** for integrating Jewish bonding with complex thinking including: 1) **Collective rituals** and actionable engagement to help students connect personally and communally with Jewish life and Israel through shared practices like singing, prayer, and volunteer work for fostering a sense of belonging. 2) **Experiential learning**, such as role-playing, immersive learning and discussions with diverse perspectives, to deepen students' understanding of Israel's complexities while celebrating Jewish diversity. 3) **Dialogue skills** for encouraging respectful engagement with differing views along with group activities that show how grappling with diversity, cultivating empathy leaves one inspired to embrace and deepen a commitment to the good of the Jewish People. And 4) **personal relationships with Israelis** building on those interactions in an intentional manner to both enable emotional bonding and complex thinking.
- ❖ **Emotional support frameworks** to reduce burnout and foster resilience, allowing educators to feel supported and better prepared to guide their students through challenging times. These include: 1) **community-building initiatives**, such as peer support groups, mentorship programs, and retreats. 2) **Developing professional**

support networks that acknowledge the emotional challenges educators face—like grappling with difficult questions and conflicting values. And 3) **professional development trips** to Israel with a focus on emotional renewal, deepening connection to Israel and peer networking.

- ❖ **Navigating communal pressure** exerted by their supervisors, lay leaders, parents and other communal stakeholders. Jewish educators face challenges in aligning with their institutions' educational goals, particularly on sensitive issues, creating tension and feelings of isolation. To address this, it is recommended that 1) institutions **develop support structures** that encourage open, respectful conversations and provide emotional support. 2) **Peer networks**, including mentorships, support groups, and immersion trips (see previous recommendation). And 3) **encouraging active support from leadership** to foster institutional cultures that value complex thinking and empower educators to lead community-building processes.

Moving Forward: Seizing the Opportunity

The crisis following October 7th presents the field of Jewish education with a unique opportunity to strengthen Jewish engagement, particularly around Israel. Inspired by the wisdom of Jewish tradition, we advocate helping learners not only understand but also act, feel, and reflect deeply on their identification with the Jewish People and the Jewish life they wish to embrace. The verse from Devarim, "the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it," reminds us that, despite the challenges, the answers lie within reach. This moment calls for teaching that blends heart with complex thought, fostering resilience, purpose, and belonging. Through collective efforts, educators can shape the future of Jewish education, nurturing a thoughtful, engaged, and connected Jewish community.

ISRAEL IN JEWISH EDUCATION – CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

The events following October 7th raise deep questions about the place of Israel in Jewish education.

EDUCATING FOR LOVE OF ISRAEL

For most Jewish educators, prior to October 7th, Israel integrated into their educational work as a means for reinforcing Jewish solidarity and mutual support. Educational work focused on ceremonies and learning with the goal of inculcating and reinforcing a “love of Israel.” Dominant educational foci include acquiring knowledge about Israel from biblical times to the present, the story of the Zionist movement, and the creation of the State and its miraculous survival in the face of its enemies and contemporary positive themes such as “Israel: the Startup Nation.” These areas of knowledge are complemented and reinforced by ceremonies focusing on the celebration of Israel’s Independence, Israeli music and culture, or commemoration and contribution having to do with Israel in times of war or tragedy.⁴

THREE CURRENT APPROACHES – SOLIDARITY, COMPLEXITY, CRITICISM

The field of Jewish education is currently divided into three general approaches.

SOLIDARITY

The majority of Jewish educators’ associate educating for love of Israel as one and the same as expressing solidarity. As illustrated in the quotation side-right the focus is on nurturing positive emotional bonds with Israel.

Solidarity

• "We continue to teach children about Israel in a positive light without dwelling on the war. We initially did age-appropriate discussions about what was going on. Then we proceeded to teach love of Israel as part of our curriculum. Truthfully, the kids don't talk much about the war. We are very focused on solidarity with Israel, bringing shinshinim to do programming, and singing hatikvah and am yisrael chai every school session."

CRITICISM

A second approach is the mirror image of the solidarity approach, in which the emphasis is on enabling criticism of Israeli government policy as legitimate Jewish expression.

Criticism

• "Helping my students and their parents see the humanity in all victims of Hamas' terror because some families just want to see all Palestinians suffer and die regardless of their actual complicity. ...We ran a 3-session lesson on having difficult conversations with our 8th grade students. Part 1 actually showed a video about reconciliations between Tutsi and Hutu people *Rwandan Genocide). Part 2 was a highly structured conversation about the war in Israel where students expressed views and responded to views from other peers. Part 3 was a slightly less structured follow-up conversation, where students could also express views and where they were a bit less reserved in their sharing and this shared more of their 'real and raw' feelings."

COMPLEXITY

A third approach works to strike a balance arguing that to educate for the love of Israel, requires learners not only to form positive emotional bonds but also to formulate their personal opinion and ability to discuss with others Israel in all its social and political complexity.

Complexity

• "While I agree we should teach a love for Israel we should also help our students understand that it's okay to disagree. Mainly how important it is to have meaningful conversations and listen to others."

⁴ On the focus on “love of Israel” in Jewish education see: Novak Winer (2024) 283-285, Zakai, 2016, Kopelowitz and Pitkowsky (2024) pp. 313-315, Grant and Kopelowitz (2012) pp. 7-8., Pomson et al., 2009.

Emotions, Questions and Goals Associated with Solidarity, Complexity and Criticism

Solidarity, Complexity and Criticism are distinct educational worldviews that include the educators' goals, the emotions they attribute to their learners and the questions they report their learners asking. The table below shows how goals, emotions and questions associated with each approach correlate with one another.

- ❖ **Solidarity:** This educational approach emphasizes Jewish mutual support and supporting Israel. These are the largest group representing 59% of the survey respondents.
- ❖ **Complexity:** These are 25% of the respondents, whose educational strategy is to balance support for Israel with enabling critical engagement regarding the Israeli government's policies, embracing the diversity of opinions and need for holding complexity.
- ❖ **Criticism:** These are educators who place a strong emphasis on empathy towards Palestinian suffering and negative critiques of Israeli government policy in general and the way the war is being waged in Gaza. They represent 16% of survey respondents.

Table shows the respondents who are categorized as solidarity, complexity and criticism educators, with a focus on the percentage of each group that selected a given educational goal, learners' emotions and questions.⁵

Type of Question	Solidarity Items	59% are Solidarity Educators	25% are Complexity Educators	16% are Critical Educators
Attribute learners' emotions	Identification with Israel	71%	19%	27%
Attribute learners' questions	How can I best support Israel at this time?	60%	8%	11%
Attribute learners' questions	Why do people hate us?	59%	25%	12%
Educator's goal	To nurture a sense of connection to Israel	42%	4%	6%
Attribute learners' questions	How can I explain to others Israel's moral high ground in executing this war?	29%	5%	5%
Attribute learners' questions	To support advocacy for Israel	20%	0%	2%
Complexity Items		Solidarity	Complexity	Critical
Attribute learners' emotions	Confusion	56%	80%	68%
Attribute learners' questions	How can I maintain relationships with Jews who think differently than I do about Israel?	23%	57%	52%
Educator's goal	To facilitate respectful conversation and allow for expression of opposing viewpoints	20%	56%	49%
Educator's goal	To encourage complex thinking	22%	50%	42%
Attribute learners' questions	Are Israel's actions in Gaza morally defensible?	17%	46%	49%
Attribute learners' questions	How do I stand for my own people while not closing my heart to the Palestinians?	14%	36%	22%
Critical Items		Solidarity	Complexity	Critical
Attribute learners' questions	How can we hold Israeli and Palestinians lives as equally valuable?	6%	18%	66%
Attribute learners' emotions	Antipathy towards Israel	4%	10%	62%
Attribute learners' questions	How can I identify with the Jewish people when Israel is inflicting pain on the Palestinians?	2%	8%	53%
Attribute learners' questions	How can I protest Israel's actions in Gaza?	1%	1%	38%
Educator's goal	To convey empathy for Palestinians' suffering	1%	4%	35%
Educator's goal	To support protest of Israeli policy	0%	0%	15%

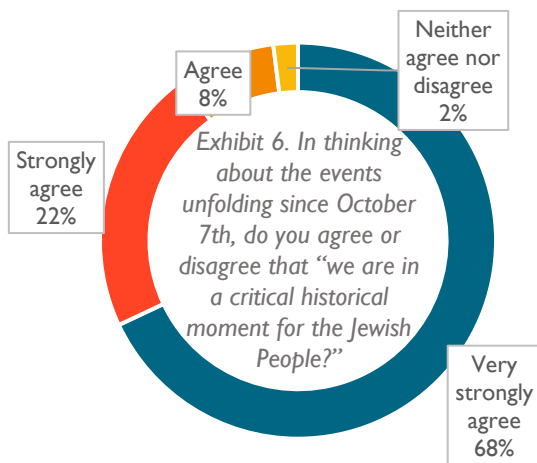
⁵ Respondents were assigned to one of the 3 educational strategies if they scored positively on at least two of the 6 items grouped in the table below. 10% qualified on none of the educational types. 13% qualified on more than one. If so, they were assigned to one of the types based on the following priority order: Critical, Solidarity, Complexity.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH IS NEEDED: SOLIDARITY ALONE LEAVES EDUCATORS UNPREPARED TO RESPOND TO ISRAEL AND A WORLD IN CRISIS

The tendency of most educators is to embrace one of the solidarity, complexity or criticism approaches, which we argue is not productive for forging a response to the post October 7th crisis, or any other emotional crisis or challenge for that matter. Either solidarity or criticism when taken alone cannot enable education to strengthen emotional bonds between Jews who hold different opinions in the face of crisis. Alternatively, complexity cannot stand as a goal unto itself, as the creation of positive bonds between Jews and Israel is a core goal of Jewish education.

Currently the dominant approach to Israel in Jewish education emphasizes “solidarity,” educating for love of Israel. The result is that many Jewish educators are unprepared for responding to intensely negative events that require consideration of a complex social, moral and political reality and divisive Jewish communal environment. **Many Jewish educators are expressing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, unsure of how to tackle the negative intensity of their personal emotions and those of their learners.**

An Event of Historic Magnitude



98% of the respondents agree that that we are in a critical historical moment for the Jewish People, with 90%, “very strongly agreeing” (68%) or “strongly agreeing” (22%).

Exhibit 6. Comparison between Wave 1 and Wave 2

	Wave One (November 2023)	Wave Two (June/August 2024)
Very Strongly Agree	79%	73%
Strongly Agree	17%	19%
Agree	2%	6%
Neither agree nor disagree	1%	2%
Disagree to very strongly disagree	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%

The comparison between wave one and wave two responses shows little difference in terms of the perceived magnitude of the event. 8 to 9 months later, October 7th is still perceived as powerful an event as was the case in the second month following the outbreak of the war. The following quotations provide diverse examples of the emotional intensity that continues to see October 7th and the ensuing fallout as an historical event.

What is your greatest challenge post-October 7th?

"Helping students to make sense of a world that is newly frightening; provide historical context to the contemporary moment. Doing the best I can to teach others what I know."

"The hardest challenge has been raising parents' awareness of the conflict, connecting them to antisemitism education, Israel education and equipping them with the necessary tools to listen to and guide their children while managing their own emotions. **The generation of parents in their mid-30s to 40s did not experience this level of anti-Semitism in American colleges or society; therefore, they have no tools to deal with it."**

"I feel that I am on a sinking ship alone with people floating along next to me just watching or ignoring me as I bail out the water, to no avail. The anger that is filling me only increases when I hear people say they are being critical of politics, but they never use the politician's name, and use the country and its people as the blame."

I Have an Important Role to Play

Eight to nine months in, Jewish educators continue seeing themselves playing an important role. 94% agree that “I have an important role to play in helping my learners grapple with this historical moment,” with 75% either “very strongly agreeing” (44%) or “strongly agreeing” (31%).

Here too the comparison between wave one and wave two responses shows little difference in terms of the perceived importance of the role that the respondent feels as a Jewish educator or engagement professional.

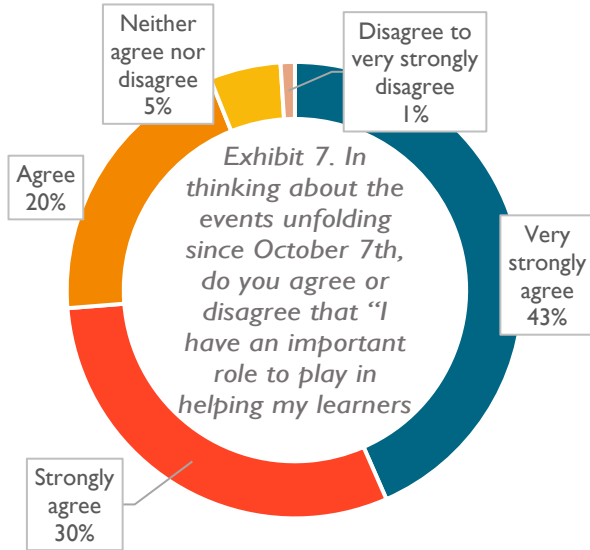


Exhibit 8. Comparison between Wave 1 and Wave 2

	I have an important role to play in helping my learners grapple with this historical moment	
	Wave One (November 2023)	Wave Two (June/August 2024)
Very Strongly Agree	54%	47%
Strongly Agree	28%	33%
Agree	16%	18%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	1%
Disagree to very strongly disagree	0%	1%
Total	100%	100%

Confidence in Responding to the Challenge

18% feel fully confident responding - “very strongly agreeing” that they “feel able to take on this important role.” An additional 22% “strongly agree,” leaving 60% who are less than very confident.

Respondents to wave one and wave two show similar levels of “feeling able to take on this important role”.

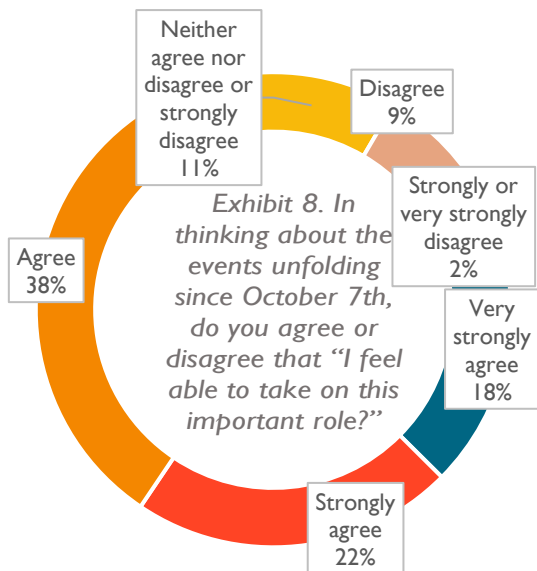


Exhibit 8. Comparison between Wave 1 and Wave 2

	I feel able to take on this important role	
	Wave One (November 2023)	Wave Two (June/August 2024)
Very Strongly Agree	16%	18%
Strongly Agree	19%	24%
Agree	44%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%	5%
Disagree	9%	12%
Strongly disagree or very strongly disagree	2%	2%
Total	100%	100%

ANXIETY AND DESPAIR, LACKING CONFIDENCE AND CLARITY

Negative Emotions Dominate

Educators most often report experiencing “anxiety” (64%) and “despair,” (55%) while least often reporting “confidence” (14%) and “clarity,” (12%) signifying a widespread need for support in these challenging times (exhibit 9).

The educators also perceive their learners sharing their own negative emotions (exhibit 10). Learners – at least in the minds of their Jewish educators -- find this novel and disturbing set of events confusing, unfamiliar and unsettling. Asked to name up to 3 emotions felt by their learners:

- ❖ **Negative Emotions Dominate:** 60% cited “confusion,” followed by anger (46%), despair (39%), concern for physical safety (37%), concern for emotional wellbeing (30%), “feeling isolated” (29%) and alienation (28%).
- ❖ **Identification and Solidarity:** The intensely negative/ambivalent emotions (cited above) mix in, and the broader analysis shows, drive identification with Israel (46%) and solidarity (43%).
- ❖ **Positive Emotions are Low:** Emotions such as curiosity (17%), hope (16%), feeling connected (15%) and “clarity” (4%), which often are the goals for educators and drive identification and solidarity with Israel, are in this case low on the list of what they perceive their learners experiencing.
- ❖ **Indifference is Low:** Notably just 10% cite “indifference,” which in “normal” times is a primary challenge for Jewish educators. The fallout from October 7th makes indifference a luxury.

Exhibit 9. In your role as a Jewish professional in these difficult times, which of the following feelings do you frequently experience? Check all that apply

Educators’ Emotions	%
Anxiety	64%
Despair	55%
Solidarity	50%
Supported professionally	38%
Confusion	37%
Isolation	36%
Hope	36%
Insecure professionally	20%
Clarity	14%
Confidence	12%

Exhibit 10. In the post-October 7th context, what, in your opinion, are the dominant emotions your learner/constituents are expressing at this point in time that as a Jewish professional you need to consider? Select up to 3 choices

Learners’ Emotions, as reported by the educators	%
Confusion	60%
Identification with Israel	46%
Anger	46%
Solidarity	43%
Despair	39%
Concern for physical safety	37%
Concern for emotional well being	30%
Feeling isolated	29%
Alienation	28%
Curiosity	17%
Hope	16%
Feeling connected	15%
Antipathy towards Israel	13%
Indifference	10%
Clarity	4%

"My greatest challenge is setting aside my anxiety when I enter the classroom. I am able to set aside my anxiety since post-Oct. 7 and teach my 2nd and 3rd grade students. It is emotionally exhausting. I have also deeply listened to my students and acknowledged their feelings. I've also been honest and let them know when I don't know the answer to one of their questions."

Confident Educators are More Likely to Express Positive Emotions

Regardless of the educators' level of confidence, a majority report emotions of "anxiety" and "despair." However as seen in exhibit 11 the more confident an educator is the less likely they are to express feelings of "anxiety," "despair," or other negative emotions, and are more likely to express positive emotions. For example, those who "strongly" or "very strongly" agree that they "feel able to take on this important role" are far more likely to report feeling emotions such as "solidarity," "hope," feeling "supported professionally," "clarity" and "confidence."

Exhibit 11. In your role as a Jewish professional in these difficult times, which of the following feelings do you frequently experience? Check all that apply

	I feel able to take on this important role		
	Very strongly agree + Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree + Disagrees
Anxiety	60%	66%	75%
Despair	52%	60%	59%
Isolation	33%	40%	42%
Confusion	30%	41%	52%
Insecure professionally	14%	20%	35%
Solidarity	58%	48%	37%
Hope	45%	33%	27%
Supported professionally	43%	40%	26%
Clarity	20%	12%	4%
Confidence	20%	8%	3%

Teaching to curiosity

- "Creating a curriculum for Israel Education that keeps pace with the ever changing details of the matsav [situation] while inspiring curiosity and not fear."

Focusing on the Positive

- "We try to build on the positive things children can do - pray, fundraise, bear witness, learn and strengthen their Jewish identities."

Doing good for the world

- "What we do need to start pushing collectively is ways to bring out Jewish joy authentically... maybe more stories of Jews doing good things in the world, more ways for teens and educators to be together in a way that's not just responding to the dumpster fire that's happening around them."

TURNING CRISIS INTO OPPORTUNITY: BUILDING ON INCREASED JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

ADAPTING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Amid the difficulties, there is a silver lining: the crisis triggered by October 7th is sparking increased engagement with Jewish life. The force of current events drives a renewed sense that Israel is a presence in Jewish life that requires our attention. For some, the crisis has ignited a desire to explore their Jewishness, while for others, it has brought a sense of urgency to discussions about Israel and its place in their lives. Many Jews are asking Jewish questions and seeking answers, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Some of the less engaged are showing up at Jewish institutions to connect with Jewish communal life; some are intensifying their engagement.⁶

- ❖ **Seeking Connection:** Many Jewish educators report that learners who were previously disengaged or indifferent to their sense of Jewish belonging are now seeking a deeper connection to their heritage.
- ❖ **Adapting Practice:** Educators are adapting their practices to meet this moment, seeking to enrich their own knowledge and find creative ways to build on the heightened interest in Jewish life. In some cases, they are reexamining how they address Israel, placing greater emphasis on the emotional, intellectual, and practical dimensions of Jewish engagement.

51% of the educators' report increased participation in their organization's programs and services.

40% report people who previously had low levels of participation in organized Jewish life showing up.

57% report that because of increased or changed participation since October 7th, they have adapted their professional practice in some manner.

Examples of Adapting Practice

Community programming to enable teens to ask questions about Israel

• "My colleagues and I have done our best to offer educational resources and 1:1 support with our teens at this time as they navigate these challenges. This has included emotional support, opportunities to express community solidarity and more. A big role I have played this year is in the public schools attending to issues with teachers and administration as a representative of the Jewish community. We have developed a community program for teens to engage with questions about Israel, be equipped with knowledge to fight misinformation and antisemitism and more."

Recognizing Passion as Caring

• "Holding together a completely diverse group of community members in how they are in relationship with Israel. Leaning in, not shying away. Holding a lot of pastoral conversations when it comes to Israel. Understanding that people are passionate, and it's because they care. Reading as a community 'Can We Talk About Israel?' by Daniel Sokatch."

Expanding the Tent

• "My response is to enlist the help of a wide range of adults on campus to try and build bridges and relationships, which can get more people in a room. Especially university folks and spaces that can see more 'neutral' or safe for different constituencies."

⁶ See Dias (2024), Bryfman (2024, September 26), Hersch (2024).

EDUCATING FOR EXPANDED JEWISH CONSCIOUSNESS

The crisis sparked by October 7th is taken by some educators as an opportunity to shift gears, with focus on taking a wider view of Israel, antisemitism, the experience of being a minority, political divisions within the Jewish community and other cardinal challenges of Jewish life. The goal is to use crisis and life's challenges to enable deep and meaningful engagement with being Jewish and Jewish life in this moment. An approach to Jewish education that is about promoting a holistic awareness of oneself as a Jew and a person in relation to the world around us. **How through a Jewish lens can "I can tackle the big issues and challenges of this moment?"** The following are examples.

Antisemitism
through the lens of
Jewish history

• "Helping the students put the conflict and the anger at Israel and American Jews in historical context. Students don't have enough background. I teach a lot of history through primary sources. I've gone back to the early Zionist writing of the late 19th early 20th Centuries to show how intense the antisemitism was then without a Jewish state as a refuge."

Grappling with the
Complex Nature of
Being a Minority

• "Personally: Not detaching from non-Jewish friends who don't understand the depth of the fear & sorrow, and not detaching from Jewish friends who just want to cultivate a sense of fear and anxiety. I have constantly emphasized Jewish education as the antidote to the potential alienation and fear I've seen. I keep telling parents and teachers that our job is to show the students WHY to be Jewish. Honestly, I just dug deeper into what I would typically do, and along the way I would point out to parents and funders that *this* event/course/etc was part of maintaining a joyful Jewish life for the generations to come."

Expanding Moral
Perspective

• "How to lead my congregation in ways that support individuals and the congregation, while allowing for diverse perspectives and maintaining moral and intellectual integrity. Leading with three principles: 1. We must not surrender our intelligence and ability to analyze complex matters thoughtfully. 2. We must not surrender our moral integrity. We must keep our eyes and hearts open to the human suffering involved. 3. Moments of destruction, such as this offer rare opportunities for learning. We must take every opportunity to learn and broaden our perspectives. I'm running community discussions for this purpose."

Tackling Jewish
Polarization

• "The divide in the Jewish community - particularly felt with staff and alum. The rise of antisemitism that our alum face in high school and college. Clarifying our values/missions within the school - facilitating discussion with alum - trying to be a listening ear for struggling faculty while staying within professional boundaries. Equipping students to take on antisemitism/anti-Zionism upon graduation by educating them and role playing. Middle School Israel class - meets once a week in 7th and 8th, and once a week for a semester in 5th/6th. Gives students a safe place to process difficult conversations about Israel and gain skills for thinking critically."

INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION = EMOTIONAL BONDING + COMPLEX THINKING

MOVING BEYOND AN EXCLUSIVE FOCUS ON SOLIDARITY

Researchers on Jewish education urge moving beyond an approach that teaches “a love of Israel” with an exclusive focus on Jewish solidarity. An educational message focused exclusively on Jewish solidarity ignores generational change and diversity of opinion regarding social and political changes occurring among both Israeli and non-Israeli Jews.⁷

To expand Jewish education, and integrate Israel meaningfully within it, we need to shift from treating Israel as an isolated or one-dimensional subject towards embedding it in every aspect of Jewish learning. This approach helps students see Israel not as an occasional topic but as a constant, complex part of Jewish belonging, one that complements themes of Jewish continuity, collective memory, and communal responsibility. Success requires an expanded vision of Jewish education where Israel isn’t confined to celebratory moments like Yom Ha’atzmaut but woven into the entire Jewish calendar, narrative, and experience. The following quote provides an example of strengthening students bond to Israel, while also integrating consideration of conflict and socio-political diversity.

"For Yom Haatzmaut this year we focused on personal stories from the State of Israel and the children interviewed parents and staff who lived in Israel at historically important times (ie Operation Moses) and they are creating a magazine based on these stories. This connects children in a personal way with Israel and demonstrates its importance to our school community. I work with 4-11 year olds. My focus is on teaching connections of the Jewish people to the State of Israel but also for the older children that there is conflict that was there before the 7th October and that different types of people live in Israel and we need to learn to live together peacefully, that is what we pray for everyday in our tefillot."

FROM “JEWISH SOLIDARITY” TO FOSTERING “JEWISH BONDING”

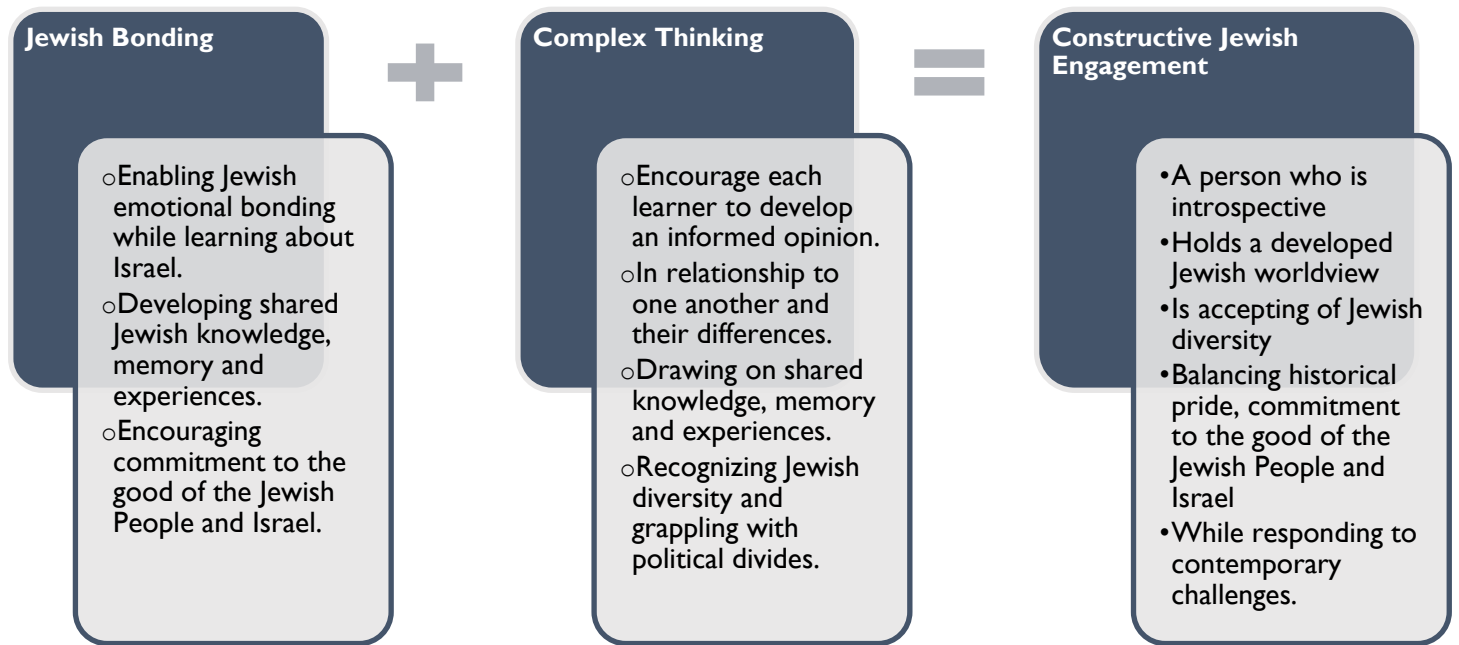
Educational approaches that integrate Israel throughout Jewish education encourage students to think in an expansive or holistic way about Jewish identification. Learning that involves complex narratives—such as Israel’s role in Jewish history, the ongoing Israeli Palestinian conflict, or diversity within Israeli society—requires students to engage with challenging questions. **This approach recasts the idea of “Jewish solidarity” to focus on “Jewish bonding;” it encourages the development of a Jewish self that is introspective, aware of Jewish diversity, and able to balance emotions of historical pride and commitment to the good of the Jewish people with a diversity of Jewish response to contemporary challenges.** It helps students reconcile complex perspectives as integral to collective Jewish identification, a practice that is especially vital in a world where students encounter many different narratives about Israel.

Jewish educators are being asked not only to address the traditional bonding role of Israel in Jewish life but to do so in a way that acknowledges the emotional, generational, and political complexities their students are experiencing. How do you at once enable both Jewish bonding and complex thinking?

1. **Jewish Bonding:** Provide Jewish education in which Israel is a force for positive engagement with being Jewish, promoting commitment to and identification with the Jewish People; and,
2. **Complex Thinking:** Recognize that many Jews are wrestling with critical questions about the Israel’s politics, its role in the broader Middle East conflict and the impact of Israel on Jews who live in other countries, as well as on Palestinians and Arab Israelis.

⁷ Horowitz (2024), Chazan (2016), Sinclair (2013), Grant and Kopelowitz (2012), Pomson et. al. (2009). Many of the chapters in Zakai and Reingold (2024) address this topic from different angles.

Israel in Integrative Jewish Education



A Synagogue Rabbi

Your greatest challenge post-October 7th

• “As an individual I have felt deep Jewish loneliness and have found meaningful sources of connection, I think we have taken the connection of Jewish Peoplehood for granted over the years and we are now seeing a fraying. I realize my connection to the Jewish people is strong and that not everyone has that. My participation in several key experiences (DC rally, Pan-America Maccabi games as a parent, and travel to Israel) have helped me see and experience the importance of Jewish Peoplehood and the connection to Jewish life larger than the 475-household synagogue I serve. The challenge I feel for many average congregants is that we do not connect Jewish beyond our synagogue and that can be isolating.”

Your professional response to the challenge

• “In the immediate aftermath of October 7th I was creating weekly programs to respond to the complexity of Jewish life after the attacks. These programs had diverse focuses including educational, psychological, responding to antisemitism, and connecting to Israel. I just didn't have the capacity as a solo rabbi to keep up with the demand, the diversity of needs and the many demographics needing to be served.”

Please describe one effective or useful program, or piece of educational content or initiative you have put into place .

• “In the fall we partnered with other synagogues, the JCC, federation, the ADL, and the AJC, on responding to antisemitism. The program was for teens and parents.”

Drawing on the research findings, we propose Jewish educators approach the post-October 7th reality through a model that integrates Jewish bonding and complex thinking into their work.

Jewish Bonding

Jewish education at its core fosters a sense of belonging with other Jews in the context of local community and beyond - to both the historical and global Jewish People. Emotional Jewish bonding occurs when learners recognize one another as Jewish, viewing themselves as both part of a local and global community. By intentionally working to cultivate emotional connection, educators strengthen their students' sense of Jewish belonging both to one another and the Jewish People, both in "normal" times and times of crisis. **Without powerful and meaningful bonding experiences, of which Israel is a part, it is unlikely that an individual will arrive at a "positive" answer to questions of: Why does Israel matter to me? How do I relate to the challenges facing the Jewish People today, especially after October 7th?**

TRANSCENDENCE

Bonding moments often trigger emotions of transcendence in which one is lifted out of everyday life, experiencing a consciousness of belonging to a historical and global Jewish People. These are moments when one feels at one with other Jews.

"I was in a camp, and one of the Shlichim had just lost a friend in Gaza. It was the day before Shabbat. And I said to him, if you need help getting home, I can help you get a flight. And he said, this is my home, this camp is my home. There's actually nowhere else I want to be."

SHARED MEMORY, KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE

Bonding moments are anchored and inculcate that which Jews have in common with one another, including shared historical memories, knowledge, and experiences. Moments in which we acquire and experience such knowledge are rooted in actions that are done together as a group, for example through ceremonies involving singing or religious ritual, or other moments in which being Jewish is experienced together.

"When I ask 'where do we face when we're praying?' every single kid in my program can say 'we face where the sun comes up in Jerusalem.'"

"Part of connecting to Jewish peoplehood is about telling the stories... celebrating Shabbat, engaging with Torah, and doing the holidays. These experiences deepen our commitment, and I think we need to foster these connections to strengthen Jewish identity, especially after the challenges we've faced."

Through shared Jewish knowledge and memory, one learns to read the world through Jewish eyes, gaining an understanding of one's personal life, issues of relevance to contemporary Jews, in relationship to Jewish history and the collective Jewish experience.

I designed a program that reflected on the 1983 Eurovision performance in Munich of the song "Chai" by Ofra Haza. The performance commemorated the killing of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. 11 years after the Munich attack... she sang Chai [live]. They all wore yellow to signify the yellow stars in the Holocaust. It's like: 'you tried to kill us, and here I am in Munich singing a song about Jewish resilience.'"

KEY LIFE EVENTS

Bonding moments are present at key points in the life of an individual, their Jewish family and community, often expressed through life cycle (celebrating or mourning), commemoration and other types of ceremony.

"The Rabbi had the names of all the hostages... printed onto small pieces of paper... We read those names simultaneously. We didn't do it as a linear reading, 287 names... and we do it every Friday to this day."

[An Israel camp shaliach speaking of another summer camp counselor] "...She gave me a hug and said, 'Yuval, tomorrow when we say the mourner's Kaddish, we're going to say it for your friend [a soldier who fell in Gaza].'... It was just such a powerful moment of human connection, coming together and supporting one another."

"We dedicated so much of our school year to teaching about Israel and commemoration... helping our students understand the emotional and historical significance, not just through events but through their own families' stories. It's about connecting them to the past and the present."

EMPATHY AND COMMUNITY

Bonding occurs through community, when people feel seen and supported.

"The number one thing young Jews are looking for is someone who sees them—I see you, you are okay the way you are."

"People are showing up, looking for spiritual guidance... They're not looking for programs; they're looking for one-on-one relationships and support. They need a connection, especially when they feel they don't have that in other parts of their life."

Complex Thinking

The ability to identify emotionally with other Jews - locally and globally, includes complex thinking and reflection. In this approach, **educators create space for discussions, encouraging deep and meaningful Jewish identification without pressuring learners to adopt a singular narrative that often occurs when only Jewish bonding is the focus.**

Jews develop their personal answer to "why is it important for me to identify as a Jew?" by considering themselves in relation to the diversity of Jewish perspectives, including perspectives on Israel. These are educational moments in which individuals develop a self-understanding as to what type of Jewish life they wish to lead. Individuals develop their personal worldview rooted in values and ideologies through conversations with others in family, friendship, collegiality and community, and formal and informal educational contexts.

Education for complex thinking is vital for fostering an environment where learners can also engage with big questions and challenges that life brings. With a focus on Israel in Jewish education, the goal is to foster a balanced and thoughtful understanding of "Israel's place in my world," helping learners form their own informed opinions.

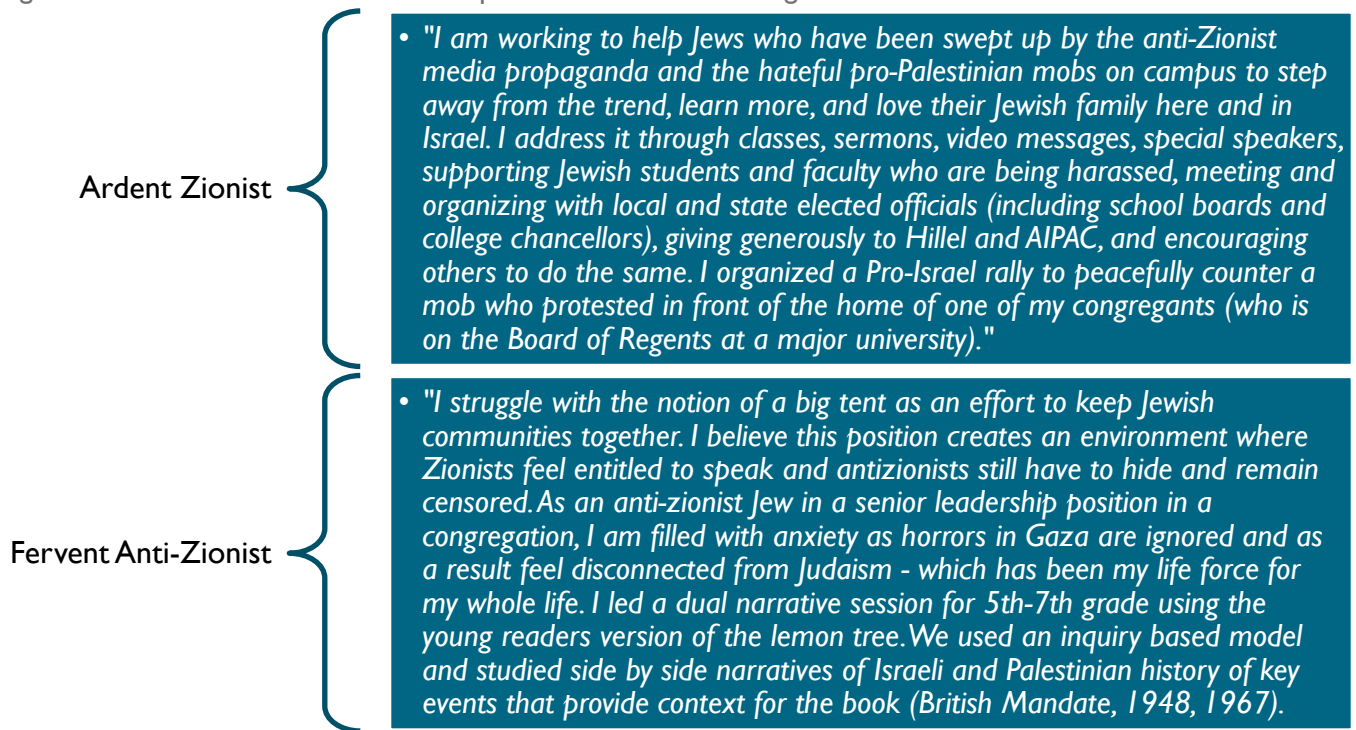
How does the post October 7th period compare to past crises in Jewish history? How did Jews react then? How should we react now? What are the Jewish values and narratives that can help me grapple with this moment? What are the values and narratives of Palestinians or others – Jewish or non-Jewish - who think differently than me are using?

"We believe that by giving our teens more education, more perspective, it gives them more nuanced language so that they can approach any conversation or argument about Israel more equipped... even if it's hard, or especially if it's hard."

Educational moments involving complex thinking might be cordial or not, they can involve conversation, debate and argument, in which each offers an opinion about the way that human and Jewish life *should* be. Self meets society, a moment in which I reflect on who I am, what I want for myself, my family, my community and the society in which I live.

AN IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM – ARDENT ZIONISM ↔ FERVENT ANTI-ZIONISM AND ALL THAT IS IN BETWEEN

Zionist ↔ Anti-Zionist: At the book ends of the Jewish ideological spectrum are ardent Zionists and anti-Zionists who regard each other with intolerance and speak in dualistic terms of good and evil.



In between the polar positions, are a range of approaches that accept varying degrees of interpretation or acceptance of alternative points of view, while trying to nurture Jewish bonding. The following are three examples often voiced among survey respondents: 1) teaching multiple or dual narratives, 2) a big tent approach to enable communication across differences and 3) distinguishing between the actions of the government of Israel and Israel the country.



A Big Tent: Working to Enable Communication Across Differences

- Your greatest challenge post-October 7th

 - *The monolithic/defensive approach of the organized Jewish Community that is NOT behaving in alignment with Jewish values of pikuach nefesh and 'elu v'elu'. Most Reform Jews believe in tikkun olam but suddenly even the Reform movement has become unidimensional and shaming of diversity.*
- Your professional response to the challenge

 - *"I am working to create spaces for healing and connection, to honour diversity but I feel hampered by the one-sided/not Jewish responses of most people who are scared to question because even the Reform movement has become Orthodox in its response. Where is the big tent that we say we are trying to build????"*
- Please describe one effective or useful program, or piece of educational content or initiative you have put into place

 - *"Interfaith dialogue with a focus on each person bringing one text that helps them to stay hopeful in an increasingly binary/divisive world where religion is weaponized."*

Distinguishing the Government of Israel from Israel the Country

- Your greatest challenge post-October 7th

 - *"How can I continue to be a Zionist in the diaspora when the government of Israel is doing terrible things IN MY NAME. I feel powerless and angry. How has the meaning of Zionism changed? How can I help people separate Judaism as a religion and Israel as a political entity."*
- Your professional response to the challenge

 - *"Remain open minded. Trust the citizens of Israel to step up and get rid of the Netanyahu government and forced expansionism. Facilitate conversations in which people feel safe to express their opinions without fear of rejection from other Jews."*
- Please describe one effective or useful program, or piece of educational content or initiative you have put into place

 - *"On Shabbat mornings, I lead a minyan for 3rd - 6th grade. There is time each week to share the current news, ask for responses to the matzav [situation], and answer student questions about the situation. We also talk about WHERE people get their news and how to decide if the news source is trustworthy."*

ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE WHILE DEEPENING JEWISH RELATIONSHIPS

A cross-cutting theme in the diverse examples of pedagogy provided above for the purpose of Jewish emotional bonding and complex thinking is the interaction between “knowledge acquisition,” and the development of “interpersonal relationships between learners.” The knowledge learned takes on meaning from the discussions and other types of interactions between the learners and/or the learners and their educator.

The following are five general approaches respondents the survey respondents take that we identify as bringing both Jewish bonding and complex thinking, each emphasizes a particular body of knowledge with a focus on: (1) **emotional engagement**, (2) **Jewish peoplehood**, (3) **historical knowledge**, (4) **contextual understanding**, and (5) **politics and moral knowledge**. Each approach is outlined below with a few examples.

I. Emotional Knowledge: Bridging Bonds and Critical Reflection

The emotional connection to Israel is critical in fostering a strong sense of belonging. Educators are helping students build empathy and emotional awareness while also encouraging them to reflect on their feelings about the conflict and in the process acquiring knowledge about Israel or other related issues.

"My colleagues and I have done our best to offer educational resources and 1:1 support with our teens at this time as they navigate these challenges. This has included emotional support, opportunities to express community solidarity and more. The greatest challenge has been helping the teens feel safe and supported outside of Synagogue/BBYO as they deal with rabid Antisemitism/Anti-Zionism, hate, harassment and so much more. A big role I have played this year is in the public schools attending to issues with teachers and administration as a representative of the Jewish community. We have developed a community program for teens to engage with questions about Israel, be equipped with knowledge to fight misinformation and antisemitism and more."

2. Jewish Peoplehood: Strengthening Collective Belonging through Secular and Religious Rituals, Culture and Text

Educators emphasize the role of **Jewish peoplehood** and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, using this as a platform to foster both emotional connections. This helps students understand their place within the broader Jewish collective, both historically and in the present day. The work includes Jewish rituals both religious and secular, such as prayers and songs and the study of sacred and other texts to reinforce the connection between students and the broader Jewish world. The emphasis is on shared Jewish culture and experiences of Jews worldwide. While fostering emotional bonds to Israel and the Jewish People – those bonds can range from feelings of solidarity, to grappling with complexity or criticism of Israel.

Text and Prayer

- *"We discussed a Hillel teaching in our first open sanctuary after 10/7. We reminded ourselves of where we were as Americans on the evening of 9/11, and then looked at the text. It was much easier now for most to prioritize, as we did in 2001, the need to be for ourselves, yet not completely having to question who we are by not abandoning completely our concern for others. The greatest discussion focused on our realization that both of these events moved our understanding from an imperative for timely action to a rueful prayer that when the time became right again, we could recalibrate back towards the ideal of these words."*

Popular Culture

- *"I've used a lot of songs that came out since October 7 to show a range of Israeli reactions to the massacre and the war."*

Singing and Learning

- *"I implemented daily and then weekly gatherings of our entire student body (675 students) for prayer, hearing speakers and singing together."*

Singing and Protest

- *"We led a Ceasefire march in November where the students were able to create their own messaging for peace and justice and we walked through our neighborhood singing protest songs and being visible players in the Jewish resistance during this time of extreme bigotry in our community."*

"Teaching the students the information that they need to understand the situation and develop their own opinions about the situation. It felt very rushed as they had no Israel history until that point. I want to teach them in a way where it feels more important than a regular history class. I gave a basic outline of the most important information needed and then filled in the rest as questions arose and as the more creative and interactive lessons were given. I created a version of the changing map of Israel to help my students understand the importance of each of the events we learned about."

4. Contextual Knowledge of the Current Conflict: Media and Critical Thinking

Educators help students understand the current political landscape, focusing on media literacy and contextualizing the conflict in a way that allows for both bonding and complex thinking. Addressing media portrayal of Israel encourages students to think about the narratives they consume, fostering both intellectual engagement and emotional connection to Israel's current challenges. Simplifying current events for younger students helps them form a basic connection to the Jewish people and Israel, while also laying the foundation for more complex thinking as they grow older.

“Working out what information I need to disseminate to my students. What's appropriate and what's inappropriate? I also discuss with colleagues in order to provide a framework and tools for my students that include information but not opinion. An amazing program which I did for 8th grade involved them sending me videos and images that they had seen on social media, and we reviewed them as a class, clarifying the agenda of the poster. The qualifications and information that they may have, whether there is education and knowledge or simply a media following. We encourage the students to ask where does this person know this information from. It was very valuable and didn't insist on one perspective to be taken.”

5. Political and Moral Knowledge as a Tool for Critical Engagement and Connection

Political and moral knowledge helps students engage critically with Israel's role in the modern world, while also fostering a sense of responsibility and connection to the Jewish people. Maintaining open dialogue with students about political beliefs, even when they differ, helps foster connection and understanding, while also engaging with the complexities of contemporary Jewish identity. Ethical discussions around Israel's political actions challenge students to reflect on moral dilemmas, helping them develop critical thinking skills while also deepening their commitment to Jewish peoplehood and Israel's centrality.

“I am a strong Zionist but am furious that there's been no disavowal of Kahanism from major American Jewish institutions, despite Kahanism's role in so much of the current horror show. Meanwhile I am watching my students who engage with Olami get pulled to a rightwing constituency that dehumanizes Muslims. I make sure to maintain good relationships with all students and don't ostracize them when I struggle with the political beliefs they're acquiring because if our organization ostracizes them, it will make them even more steely.”

“My challenge are teens learning the slogan 'the only good Arab is a dead Arab' at another Israel oriented club in our community and then bringing that viewpoint to my group. I have shared that unlike that club, the organization I work for is pluralistic and we do not make such blanket statements. I worked with our Shinshinim [young Israeli working for year in the community] to have meaningful conversation, but I told the students that were only filled with hatred for Muslims that their attitude is not welcome in my organization. We ran a program at a convention highlighting alumni who have died in the war so far. Instead of focusing on how they died, we did community service projects for causes each person was connected to in life.”

INTEGRATIVE EDUCATIONAL GOALS – JEWISH BONDING + COMPLEX THINKING

Ideally Jewish educators engage their learners with Jewish life and Israel, through Jewish bonding and complex thinking. The result is, in the ideal, a deep sense of connection, feeling of Jewish belonging and mutual support while also fostering each individual’s stance toward Israel. This stance can range across a spectrum of opinions, from strong support for the policies of the Israeli government to critical perspectives.

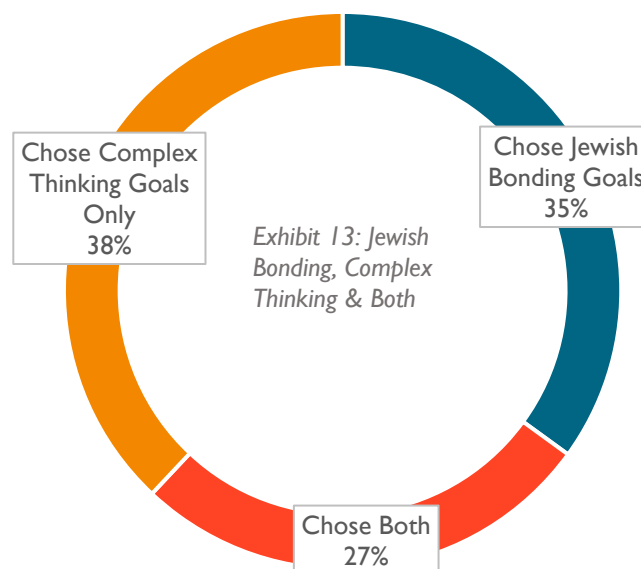
When asked about their educational objectives in responding to fallout from October 7th:

- **Complex Thinking:**
 - 58% of the respondents cite complex thinking goals
 - 41% of these respondents also cite Jewish bonding goals.
- **Jewish Bonding:**
 - 55% cite Jewish bonding goals.
 - Of these 44% also cite complex thinking goals.

Exhibit 12. In the post-October 7th context, which of the following are your principal educational objectives? Select up to 3 choices

	Educational Goals	%
Complex Thinking Goals (selected at least one)	To facilitate respectful conversation and allow for expression of opposing viewpoints	58%
	To encourage complex thinking	
	To encourage grappling with moral challenges	
	To help learners make sense of the situation through a values lens	
Jewish Bonding Goals (selected at least one)	To strengthen a sense of Jewish solidarity	55%
	To nurture a sense of connection to Israel	
	To support advocacy for Israel	
	To promote a commitment for the welfare of other Jews	
Other Choices	To provide knowledge	37%
	To strengthen our community	25%
	To convey hope, and counteract despair	23%
	To convey empathy for Israelis’ suffering	7%
	To convey empathy for Palestinians’ suffering	7%
	To stimulate curiosity	6%
	To support protest of Israeli policy	2%

Overall, 27% choose at least one of the complex thinking and Jewish bonding goals among these three choices (exhibit 13).



JEWISH BONDING AND COMPLEX THINKING BY EDUCATIONAL SECTOR, AGE, GENDER AND POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Approaches to Israel in Jewish education differ based on educator demographics and political orientation regarding both American politics and Israel. We learn that the overall trend shows a strong correlation between age, years of experience and socio/religious/political orientation. The younger, least experienced and more politically left-wing are more likely to only chose complex educational goals, the opposite is the case for those who only choose Jewish bonding goals. Age of learners and institutional sector also show distinct trends. **Note that in no case are those choosing both Jewish bonding and complex thinking goals the largest group. In other words, the majority of Jewish educators tend to emphasize one or the other approach, rather than integrating Jewish bonding and complex thinking.**

Beyond the tables shown here, also see appendix 2 for more detailed information.

AGE

Younger educators are more likely to prioritize complex thinking, while older are more likely to emphasize Jewish bonding. The youngest educators are the least likely to adopt both bonding and complex thinking goals.

Exhibit 14: Age	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
22 to 24 + 18 to 21	39%	6%	55%	100%
25 to 29	30%	21%	49%	100%
30 to 34	24%	28%	48%	100%
35 to 39	26%	20%	54%	100%
40 or 49	28%	28%	44%	100%
50 or 59	38%	33%	29%	100%
60 or older	43%	27%	30%	100%
NET	33%	26%	41%	100%

GENDER

Female and male educators are similar in terms of their educational goals, with those choosing an alternative gender formulation standing out as far more likely to emphasize complex thinking goals only.

Exhibit 15: Gender	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Woman	32%	28%	40%	100%
Man	39%	23%	38%	100%
Non-Binary + Gender Fluid + Gender Queer + Prefer not to say + Other	16%	16%	68%	100%

YEARS IN PROFESSION

Educators with fewer than five years in the profession lean towards complex thinking (59%), while veteran educators are more likely to choose both Jewish bonding and complex thinking goals.

Exhibit 16 Years in Profession	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Less than 5	30%	11%	59%	100%
5-9	32%	23%	44%	100%
10-14	29%	27%	44%	100%
15 – 19	31%	27%	42%	100%
20 or more	36%	31%	33%	100%

AGE OF LEARNERS

Educators working with college age and young adult learners are far more likely only choose complex thinking goals and are far likely to choose Jewish bonding goals.

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Exhibit 17: Age of learners				
Early childhood	38%	28%	34%	100%
Elementary school age	38%	27%	35%	100%
Teens (middle and high school)	36%	27%	37%	100%
College Age	21%	25%	54%	100%
Young Adult learners (20's and 30's)	21%	25%	54%	100%
Adults (40+)	31%	23%	46%	100%
Families	32%	29%	39%	100%
Seniors	35%	25%	40%	100%
Other, or more than one of these	33%	23%	44%	100%

to
less

EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

Significant variations exist across the sectors. Jewish day school educators are the most likely to only choose Jewish bonding practices and are among the least likely to only choose complex goals.

In contrast, and in line with the findings on educators working with young adults (see above), those working on college campuses are among the most likely to only choose complex thinking goals. Social Justice/Service Learning and Innovation sectors also stand out as being far more likely to only choose complex thinking goals.

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Exhibit 18: Sector of Jewish Education				
Jewish day school/yeshiva	45%	26%	30%	100%
JCC	41%	15%	44%	100%
Jewish youth group / movement	40%	20%	40%	100%
Jewish Federation / foundation	39%	22%	39%	100%
Jewish preschool or early childhood center	38%	29%	33%	100%
Israel education / advocacy organization	36%	33%	30%	100%
Jewish summer camp	36%	17%	47%	100%
Jewish supplementary school (e.g. Hebrew school, Sunday school, after-school program)	35%	28%	37%	100%
Synagogue / congregation / minyan / religious organization	34%	26%	40%	100%
Social justice / service learning	27%	14%	59%	100%
Something else	21%	26%	53%	100%
Engagement	20%	30%	49%	100%
Innovation	19%	23%	58%	100%
College campus Jewish organization (e.g. Hillel, Chabad on Campus)	18%	21%	61%	100%
Self-employed / independent contractor / "gig" worker	13%	31%	56%	100%

DENOMINATION

As one moves from working for an Orthodox to more liberal denominational institutions so one is more likely to only choose Jewish Bonding goal to only choosing a Complex Thinking goal.

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Exhibit 19: Denomination				
Haredi + Chabad + Orthodox (other than Haredi or Chabad)	52%	24%	23%	100%
Conservative	40%	28%	32%	100%
Reform	35%	27%	38%	100%
More than one	30%	24%	46%	100%
Reconstructionist	15%	31%	54%	100%
None / Other	23%	25%	52%	100%

ISRAEL AND POLITICAL WORLDVIEW

Feeling Attached to Israel

Jewish educators are, having chosen to work in the field, highly identified Jews. Thus, it is not surprising that, on Israel the large majority “feel emotionally attached to Israel.” Among those only choosing bonding goals and those choosing both almost all “strongly agree” that “I feel emotionally attached to Israel. That drops to two thirds of those who only chose complex thinking goals. However, even among this group almost all at least “somewhat agree.”

Support – Ambivalence - Criticism and Political Worldview

In line with the broader thesis of this report, feeling attached to Israel does not mean that all hold a singular understanding of what Israel, and the actions of the Israeli government mean to them. As we move from those who only choose bonding goals to who only choose complexity goals, we move from less to more ambivalent, more supportive to more critical. Those who choose both are consistently in the middle.

- ❖ **Proud of Israel:** When asked their reaction to the statement “In general, Israel makes me proud to be Jewish,” we see greater ambivalence as we move from those only choosing Jewish bonding goals to those who only choose complex thinking goals. Just 25% of those who only choose complex thinking goals “strongly agree” that “Israel makes me proud to be Jewish” (exhibit 20 below).
- ❖ **Political Worldview:** We see a similar dynamic on issues touching on critique of Israel’s military response in Gaza and political worldview both on American and Israeli politics. Those who only choose Jewish bonding goals are more supportive of Israeli war conduct and to the right of the political spectrum, and the opposite for those who only choose complex thinking goals. Those who choose both are more likely to take a middle or moderate position (exhibits 21, 22 and 23 below)

Exhibit 20: Attachment to Israel		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I feel emotionally attached to Israel	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	90%	7%	1%	2%	0%	100%
	Chose Both	86%	13%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	64%	24%	5%	3%	4%	100%
In general, Israel makes me proud to be Jewish	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	72%	17%	8%	3%	1%	100%
	Chose Both	57%	32%	6%	6%	0%	100%
	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	25%	31%	14%	16%	14%	100%

Exhibit 21: Israel’s military response in Gaza has:	Gone too far	Been about right	Not gone far enough	Total
Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	12%	39%	49%	100%
Chose Both	26%	35%	38%	100%
Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	60%	20%	19%	100%

Exhibit 22: Identification on American Political Spectrum	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Very conservative	71%	14%	14%	100%
Conservative	66%	21%	13%	100%
Moderate	44%	27%	29%	100%
Liberal	29%	33%	38%	100%
Very liberal	23%	20%	57%	100%
Progressive	9%	18%	73%	100%
Other	10%	20%	70%	100%
I prefer not to state	57%	19%	24%	100%

Exhibit 23: Identification on Israeli Political Spectrum	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
The right (Likud, Bibi) + The far right (e.g., Ben Gvir)	73%	15%	12%	100%
Religious-Zionists	61%	24%	14%	100%
The center or center-left (e.g. Lapid, Gantz)	37%	29%	34%	100%
The left (e.g., Labor, Meretz)	8%	26%	65%	100%

SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION

Jewish educators are the frontline leaders guiding students and communities through one of the most challenging periods in recent history. The events of October 7th may be challenging, but they also offer Jewish educators a unique chance to reaffirm the centrality of Israel for Jewish belonging, while simultaneously grappling with the diverse perspectives and generational shifts among their students. We learned in the previous sections that most Jewish educators do not feel equipped to rise to the challenge. The surveys asked educators for input into two relevant areas: 1) curriculum and pedagogical support and 2) and workplace environment.

CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGIC SUPPORT

The survey respondents indicated the need for curriculum and pedagogic support across four areas shown in exhibit 24 below, including:

1. **Curriculum** in general, and for Peoplehood/Zionism/Jewish Ideas, understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives, and for greater knowledge of Israeli history, society and current events.
2. **Communication across differences** in general, and support for discussions with non-Jews, and for those with antagonistic perspectives towards Israel.
3. **Educator peer support** including connecting with other educators to share ideas, community engagement and dialogue and trips to Israel with peers.
4. **Processing Crisis:** Help in supporting students with emotional processes.

Exhibit 24. With respect to the educational support you need to best help your learners grapple with the post October 7th events, which of the following would be most useful to you? Select up to 3 choices.

Support needed*	%	
Curriculum	Ready-to-use curricular materials + Approaches to discussing the situation with children	43%
	A framing of the relationship of Peoplehood and Zionism today + Jewish ideas and texts	33%
	Resources on understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives	30%
	Facts and information about Israel + Learning more about the history, context, and events having to do with the war	23%
Communication Across Differences	Approaches to discussing the situation with non-Jews + Resources for working with learners who hold antagonistic perspectives towards Israel	32%
	Enhanced communication skills, particularly around contentious issues	14%
Educator Peer Support	Connection with other educators to share ideas + Community engagement and dialogue	29%
	A trip to Israel for educators or community professionals	14%
Processing Crisis	Help in supporting students with emotional processing	18%

* Note some of the answers are grouped using factor analysis

Exhibit 25 below shows the areas of requested support for which there are significant differences between those who only chose Jewish bonding goals, those who only chose complex thinking goals and those who chose both. We learn:

- ❖ **Jewish Bonding Focused:** To the extent that educators emphasize bonding so they are more likely to seek general curricular support and for learning that is focused on Israel's history, society and current events.
- ❖ **Complex Thinking Focused:** For understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives the opposite is the case. To the extent the educator is focused on complexity, so that are more likely to want curricular support in this area. Very few of those who only focus on complex thinking goals are interested in educator trips to Israel.
- ❖ **Choose Both:** Those who choose both Jewish bonding and complex thinking goals are the most likely to focus on communication across differences.

Exhibit 25		Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Choose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only
Curriculum	Ready-to-use curricular materials + Approaches to discussing the situation with children	54%	48%	35%
	Facts and information about Israel + Learning more about the history, context, and events having to do with the war	31%	22%	20%
	Resources on understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives	19%	32%	42%
Communication Across Differences	Approaches to discussing the situation with non-Jews + Resources for working with learners who hold antagonistic perspectives towards Israel	28%	40%	34%
Educator Peer Support	A trip to Israel for educators or community professionals	20%	18%	8%

SUPPORT FOR INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION

The in-depth interviews provide an understanding of how the above-mentioned areas integrate in practice into educators' work and organizational environments, covering four areas: 1) Curriculum integration, 2) professional development, 3) institutional support and 4) ethical guidance.

1. Curriculum for Integration of Israel into Jewish Education

Expanding “traditional” Israel education to address historical and political complexities, engaging students with nuanced topics such as Israel's history, social dynamics, and current issues. Professional development frameworks like accessible synchronous or asynchronous online seminars that are accessible or in-person immersive experiences such as professional development trips to Israel.

"What we're trying to do is get camps to shift their Israel education. And to think about how do you teach the history of Israel, the importance of Israel to the Jewish community and to the world with complexity and with nuance and with great care? ... Israel education before October 7th in North America has not done what it needed to do... It was hummus, it was Israeli dance, it was Israeli music... It was really surface... And what it did... those young adults are like 'you lied to us! You didn't tell us how bad the government was! You didn't tell us about the occupation or the settlements... And so now instead of just seeing that there's nuance and complexity, they're thinking we hate Israel. We're now anti-Zionists."

Jamie Simon, Chief Program Officer, Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC)

3. Professional Development for Responding to Crisis and Conflict

Professional development to help students process emotions related to conflict and crisis. These include training programs that provide tools to meet students' immediate emotional needs, as many grapple with antisemitism, community divisions, and isolation.

"What was clear to us is that we needed to talk about what the judicial reform represented. What does it mean to be a Jewish democracy? What are the competing values and ideas at the heart of this debate?"

Dr. Jonathan Golden, Founder, HeartStance Education Consulting

4. Institutional Support for Dialogue and Community Cohesion

Institutions create community spaces for open dialogue on challenging topics, fostering inclusive environments where differing views on Israel coexist without deepening divisions. The goal is to strengthen Jewish bonding and values amid diverse ideological perspectives.

"We need to ensure that our educational content doesn't just dwell on the heavy aspects, but also includes elements that uplift and inspire... It's about finding that balance, so our teens don't feel overwhelmed."

Liron Lipsky, Director of Education, BBYO

"Our clergy held a series of sessions for high schoolers and their parents to tell them specifically about Israel... to give them some tools to understand and to talk about how they were feeling about all of this."

Sharon Tash, Director of Education, Temple Micah, Washington, D.C.

5. Support for Providing Ethical Guidance

Educators guide learners offering both intellectual and emotional support while learning content that addresses Israel's political and cultural-historical significance. Learning includes ethical guidance and community-building, providing a holistic framework that helps students and families navigate the crisis.

"We have to start to figure out how to relate to Israel beyond the politics... It's the people, it's the land, it's the history, it's the culture. ... We have to help define what it means to stand with Israel... Israel has to be more than what the government is, right?"

Rabbi Rick Kellner, Rabbi of Congregation Beit Tikvah, Columbus, OH

WORK ENVIRONMENTS AND FEELING SUPPORTED

A minority of respondents feel fully aligned with their colleagues and/or supervisors (exhibit 26).

- ❖ 36% feel that their personal views on the Israel-Hamas war largely align with those of their supervisors.
- ❖ 45% feel able to talk with their colleagues about their opinions on the Israel-Hamas war “in a manner that makes a productive contribution to my work.”

Exhibit 26. With a focus on your place of work, or immediate circle of colleagues, do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Very strongly disagree or strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Very strongly or strongly agree	Total
My personal views on the Israel-Hamas war differ from those of my supervisors	36%	23%	18%	13%	11%	100%
I am able to talk with my other colleagues about our opinions on the Israel-Hamas war in a manner that makes a productive contribution to my work	7%	6%	15%	27%	45%	100%

Feelings of being out of synch with one’s supervisors and/or unable to speak in a productive fashion with colleagues increases as respondents move from those who only choose Jewish bonding goals to those who only choose complex thinking goals (exhibits 27 and 28)

- ❖ 70% of those who only choose Jewish bonding goals hold personal views on the Israel-Hamas war that largely aligned with their supervisors, in comparison to 45% of those who only chose complex thinking goals.
- ❖ Those who only choose Jewish bonding goals are twice as likely to “very strongly agree” that they can engage in productive conversations with their colleagues.

Exhibit 27. My personal views on the Israel-Hamas war differ from those of my supervisors

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Choose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only
Disagree (all answers)	70%	62%	45%
Agree (all answers)	30%	38%	55%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Exhibit 28. I am able to talk with my other colleagues about our opinions on the Israel-Hamas war in a manner that makes a productive contribution to my work

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Choose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only
Disagree (all answers) or Neither agree nor disagree	26%	27%	29%
Agree	24%	25%	33%
Strongly agree	23%	27%	24%
Very strongly agree	27%	22%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

What is your greatest challenge post-October 7th?

Colleagues

- "Moral certainty, and the lack of the American Jewish world to recognize that we have no influence on Bibi's policies. Fighting just to get my colleagues to recognize that Palestinians are people is exhausting and terrifying."
- "Feeling like I'm making a big enough difference. Frustrations with colleagues who criticize Israel without understanding the context of where we are in time."

Organization

- "I am feeling pressure holding the values of predominantly Zionist donors and Ant-Zionist participants, continuing programmatic work under the 'big Jewish tent' that Jewish people don't see their values reflected in at this moment."
- "How do I balance my own political views on the issue, the views of my organization, the views of my learners, and the views of other key stakeholders.."

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We are Implicated in the Story of the Jewish People

The intense emotional reaction of Jews in general, and Jewish educators in particular to October 7th and the ensuing fallout places a spotlight on the urgent need for integrative Jewish education.

The Need to React: Jews, whether they want it or not, are implicated by this historical moment. For almost all, there is no choice but to take notice: “I am Jewish, what do I do?” Do I ignore what is happening around me and suppress my Jewishness? Do I react and accentuate my Jewishness? The emotional intensity of the moment means that there is a need to form an opinion and take an action. In these moments the potential contribution of Jewish educators is large.

Jewish Lens: As Jews, each one of us are inculcated with a Peoplehood consciousness⁸ - shared memory, knowledge and emotional associations, which affect the way we understand and respond to the world around us. In “normal” times those who are not engaged in Jewish life only notice their “Jewish lens” on occasions when confronted with Jewish memory such as visiting a museum or taking part in an especially moving ceremony. However, in a time of crisis our Jewish lens is activated. We have no choice as Jews, in the context of the intense media and socio-political environment in which we find ourselves to take notice. **No matter our political orientation, or level of involvement in the organized Jewish community, Jews recognize that Israel is not just another country, and the rise of antisemitism is not something we can ignore.** Both Israel and antisemitism sit on millennia of the Jewish experience from biblical to modern Israel, and persecution as a minority is captured in our sacred texts, holidays, religious rituals, history books, art, theater, language etc. They are part of who we are.

Anxiety and Despair: The result of being forced to activate our Jewish lens by dint of historical circumstance is an intense emotional experience, captured in this research by the negative emotions that Jewish educators are expressing of their own experience as well as the way they see their learners reacting. We propose that the reason that nine months into the war the intensely negative reaction marked first and foremost by “anxiety” and “despair” continues, is that most Jewish educators lack sufficient training. After the initial shock of October 7th, ideally Jewish educators can begin to apply their professional knowledge and skills to treating challenge and conflict as integral to living a rich human and Jewish life and guiding their learners forward to a desire to engage, learn and react in a constructive manner. Most Jewish educators are not ready for the challenge.

From Crisis to Opportunity: The question is how do we react to crisis and challenge? How do we move ourselves and our learners from a place of “anxiety” and “despair” to “curiosity” and a desire for constructive engagement with other Jews, community and the surrounding society, in which Israel is seen as a positive force? **The answer we propose is to recognize the critical need for integrative Jewish education.**

Integrative Jewish Education: Moving Beyond Israel Education Narrowly Defined

In our February 2024 report we noted that many educators focus on specific disciplines (Jewish studies, history, philosophy, etc.) or areas (early childhood, youth groups, campus life, etc.) and do not feel they have the training to grapple with charged issues, such as the experience of living as a minority group, the rise of antisemitism or negative portrayals of Israel in the media in the context of the Israel/Palestinian conflict and beyond. Many commented on the need for better Israel education. For example, one respondent wrote: “*Teachers need to be better trained in Israel education. Too many are not fluent with modern Israeli history and current events.*”

Learning from our previous and current survey points in a different direction. The need is not for Jewish professionals to embrace yet another discipline such as Israel education. Rather, there is a need to recognize that **a core competency of a Jewish professional should be the ability to respond to core issues and challenges of life by facilitating**

⁸ On the idea of “Peoplehood Consciousness” see Kopelowitz (2021), Ravid (2014). Or a similar use but coined, “Jewish Consciousness,” see Horowitz (2008).

both Jewish bonding and complex thinking, what we refer to here as “integrative Jewish education.”⁹ The goal is for each educator to bring knowledge and/or skills associated with their disciplinary or area specialization and, in so doing, empower their people to think from a place of Jewish engagement - action, identification, learning and perspective - about issues that are important to them.

Responding to Challenging Issues

In ordinary times, conversations about challenging issues, in general, are difficult,¹⁰ particularly when Jews need to speak to one another about charged issues involving Israel.¹¹ In this snapshot of time, the difficulty that Jewish professionals experience in facilitating educational conversations about challenging issues is evident. We first saw the difficulty in the survey conducted shortly after October 7th, and nine months later the difficulty persists. Other post-October studies also confirm the negative emotional intensity of the event and the difficulty in responding.¹²

The need for training and support for Jewish professionals in general, and Jewish educators in particular to tackle challenging issues as central to their professional practice is only just gaining traction in the Jewish community. A pioneer in this effort is an organization named *Resetting the Table* founded in 2014 with the goal of promoting communication about contentious issues in the Jewish community. One outcome is a collaboration with *Hillel* to train campus professionals on “conversations across difference,” with a focus on Israel.¹³ Since 2015, *The Jewish Education Project* has trained more than 200 professionals in methodologies that support discussion across difference. In the past decade, organizations such as *GatherDC*, *Tribe 12*, and *The Base Movement* were founded to promote the Jewish community in which a core building block is conversations in which participants can speak with others about personal or macro issues of importance to them. Two years ago, *M²: The Institute for Experiential Education* launched its *Values in Action* initiative to “equip Jewish educators [with the skills] to support their learners in navigating the complex challenges of our time and inspiring them to take positive action.”

The common denominator of these recent developments is the realization that a robust, meaningful experience of the Jewish community is one that includes speaking about challenging personal and/or collective Jewish issues. The following recommendations build on and assume robust work already taking place in the field of Jewish education and community building today. Many educational and communal organizations are actively developing resources and professional development frameworks for Israel in Jewish education, post October 7th and beyond. A list of organizations cited by survey respondents in their written responses appears in Appendix 2.

“We are Not Alone” – A Framework for Support to Respond

In our February 2024 report we offered a framework for thinking about purposeful educational communication about the challenging issues arising for Jewish professionals after the October 7 attack.¹⁴ There we focused on the need to identify a personal professional narrative, which is challenging but crucial. For many, such a process requires support and engaging one’s colleagues in discussion. We used the respondents’ written answers to propose a framework for enabling collegial discussions for the purpose of crafting educational strategies to respond to difficult social issues. **The need is for planful discussions so that Jewish professionals will have each other’s support and input in times such as these.** These include focusing on the big questions that one’s learners or constituents are concerned with, educational considerations and value-informed dilemmas. This need continues.

Here we broaden the frame to focus on the necessary conditions for an educator to feel confident engaging in integrative Jewish education – feeling able to engage learners in both Jewish bonding and complex thinking about challenging issues. Keren Fraiman suggests four key areas that contribute to Jewish educators expressing

⁹ Discussions of integrative Jewish education are found in: Bryfman (2024, February 1), Golden (2024, September), Chazan (2016), Pomson and Chazan (2015), Chazan, Chazan and Jacobs (2013), Kress (2012), Ross, Woocher and Woocher (2007).

¹⁰ Cox et. al. (2020)

¹¹ Cohen and Gitlin (2013)

¹² Manchester (2023), Hassenfeld (2023).

¹³ Weissman (2022)

¹⁴ Kopelowitz et. al. (2023) p. 9.

a lack of confidence for engaging their students in the discussion about the Israel-Palestinian conflict. While the topics covered in this report go beyond the conflict narrowly defined, we find these four categories helpful.

1. **Knowledge:** Knowing enough about the conflict and its context
2. **Pedagogy:** Facilitating challenging conversations more generally
3. **Emotions:** Supporting educators and students' emotions that emerge when learning about and discussing the conflict
4. **Communal pressures and institutional support** (or lack thereof), Understanding the external forces that educators navigate when tackling the conflict.¹⁵

Working Groups to Support and Encourage Integrative Jewish Education

How do we leverage this historical moment to transform the field and move the standard for educational success to an integrative Jewish education?

WORKING GROUPS

These recommendations are calls for action. There is an urgent need to create working groups with representatives of philanthropic entities, educational and communal organizations, researchers and other thought leaders who are already working to develop integrative Jewish education of which Israel is part. There are ready resources and knowledge in the field that should be built upon and further developed in a coordinated fashion.

The goal is to support and encourage deep complex discussions as an integral part of Educators' work to nurture connection and commitment to Israel and the Jewish People.

The following are suggested areas for working groups to focus and refine conceptual frameworks from which practical pathways for delivering curriculum, professional development and peer support are created.

1. Acquiring Knowledge while Deepening Jewish Relationships

The interaction between “knowledge acquisition,” and the development of “interpersonal relationships between learners” enables knowledge learned to take on meaning from the interactions between the learners and/or the learners and their educator. For this purpose, educators need adaptable, easily accessible, high-quality materials that engage learners in thoughtful conversations about Israel, Jewish belonging, and the complexities of our world that at the same time enable Jewish bonding. Areas to consider include:

- ❖ **Emotional Knowledge:** This area emphasizes building emotional connections to Israel and Israelis, fostering empathy while allowing students to critically reflect on their emotional responses. Creating shared spaces for discussing difficult feelings helps students process their attachment to Israel and the Jewish People.
- ❖ **Jewish Peoplehood:** Use of secular and religious rituals, culture and text to underscore Israel's centrality to Jewish life, helping students understand their personal connection to the historical and contemporary Jewish People. Rituals and shared heritage strengthen this bond, while discussions expand students' understanding of Jewish unity and mutual responsibility.
- ❖ **Historical Knowledge:** Teaching Israel's history, including Zionism and antisemitism, roots students in shared Jewish knowledge. By connecting past events to the present, educators foster a deep sense of belonging and help students appreciate the complexities of Israel's formation and its relevance today.
- ❖ **Contextual Knowledge:** Media literacy is used to help students critically assess current events, especially the portrayal of Israel and Jews in global media. Simplifying news for younger students lays a foundation for more complex engagement as they grow, promoting both intellectual engagement and emotional connection.

¹⁵ Fraiman (2024, p. 230)

- ❖ **Political and Moral Knowledge:** Open discussions around political views encourage critical engagement with Israel's role in the world. Ethical discussions deepen students' critical thinking and foster a sense of responsibility towards one another, their community and the Jewish People.

These five areas of knowledge collectively support an integrative approach that blends Jewish bonding with complex thinking.

2. Pedagogy

The sections of this report that document educators' strategies for integrating Jewish bonding and complex thinking point to four general pedagogic strategies. The common denominator are pedagogic practices in which learners are activated to engage with Jewish knowledge in ways that build feelings of bonding, while developing their personal understanding of what is important to them as individuals and in relation to other Jews and Israel.

- ❖ **Development of Informed Opinion through Collective Rituals and Engagement:** Beyond cognitive reflection on their connection to Israel, learners can be encouraged to act on their insights through both personal and communal activities. Learners cannot only engage in group rituals but also design them or reflect on them together. These include religious and secular rituals such as lighting candles, reciting prayers, singing songs or reciting meaningful texts focused on Israel and Jewish peoplehood that enable learners to recognize themselves as part of a larger historical and global Jewish People. Participation in ceremony transforms personal introspection into a collective experience, reinforcing a sense of belonging and purpose. Additionally, actionable engagement, like organizing volunteer projects, engaging in political or civil action with Israel as a focus, can turn introspection into outward expressions of collective identification, bridging the development of informed opinion with Jewish bonding.
- ❖ **Integrating Complex Narratives with Experiential Learning:** To deepen engagement with diverse perspectives on Israel and Israel in Jewish life, educators can facilitate active, experiential learning. For example, role-playing exercises where students advocate for different viewpoints or organizing discussions with guest speakers help students practice engagement with complex issues. This cognitive exploration can be reinforced behaviorally through ceremonies that include diverse voices or events honoring multiple aspects of Jewish history and identity, different Jewish narratives. Singing songs from various Jewish traditions or observing rituals reflecting Israel's multicultural society teaches students to embody and celebrate diversity while considering the implications of that diversity of Jewish life. These actions reinforce a respectful engagement with varied perspectives, transforming understanding into collective experiences involving both Jewish bonding and complex thinking. Engaging with narratives should also take into consideration the desire of many educators to also expose their learners to Palestinian interpretations of the Israel/Palestinian conflict.
- ❖ **Communication Across Differences Integrating Dialogue Skills and Collective Expression:** Educators can teach specific dialogue techniques, like active listening and constructive expression, through small-group discussions on challenging topics, giving students practical experience in navigating differences respectfully. Complementing communication across differences are behavioral exercises, such as participating in group singing or collaborative art projects, demonstrate that individuals with diverse opinions can unite through shared and meaningful Jewish actions. Ceremonies where students join voices in song or rituals highlight that bonding can coexist with diversity, cultivating empathy and mutual respect.
- ❖ **Relationships with Israelis:** Educators can build on inter-personal interactions between their learners and Israeli Jews in an intentional manner to both enable emotional bonding and complex thinking. These include possible interactions with 1) Israeli *shlichim* [emissaries] who work in Jewish educational institutions, 2) Israeli youth in planned *mifgashim* [educational encounters] virtual or in-person when they are visiting abroad or when a diaspora Jewish group visits Israel; or 3) ongoing interactions with family, friends or teachers who live in Israel.
- ❖ **Advocacy-focused activities** can be used both to urge love of and support for Israel, while also enabling complex thinking. Possible educational activities supporting advocacy range from organizing celebrations of Israeli culture and heritage through Independence Day events, music, and symbols, to teaching Israel's historical narrative, including its biblical roots, Zionist development, and statehood. They also emphasize Israel's modern contributions, such as

technological innovations and humanitarian efforts, to instill pride and admiration. In the process educators have the opportunity to facilitate discussions on Israel's current geopolitical challenges, enabling a sophisticated understanding of the Jewish relationship to Israel as integral to Jewish belonging.

3. Emotional Support

Educators are not just instructors; they are guides and mentors, the emotional pillars of their communities, holding space for learners to process trauma, navigate difficult discussions, and find strength in their sense of Jewish belonging. However, many educators are not prepared to address Israel in their work in the context of crisis. They feel emotionally drained and isolated, making it difficult for them to offer the support their learners need. **Investment in emotional support networks for educators can change this.**

- ❖ **Initiatives that promote community-building among educators** - peer support groups, mentoring programs, or retreats can help reduce burnout and foster resilience. These efforts will allow educators to feel seen, supported, and rejuvenated, better equipped to guide their students through uncertain times.
- ❖ **Fostering professional networks that recognize the emotional challenges educators face**, acknowledging ambivalence, grappling with difficult questions without conclusive answers, and highlighting conflicting Jewish values.
- ❖ **Israel professional development travel programs for educators** also provide a compelling platform for emotional renewal, offering a chance to connect with other educators, experience collegiality and deepen their personal connection to Israel. Educators return home with fresh energy and confidence.

4. Navigating Communal Pressure

- ❖ **Value Alignment and Communication Challenges:** Our data shows most Jewish educators finding themselves less than fully aligned with their institutions' values on matters touching on the fallout from October 7th. This includes value conflicts with their supervisors, which can create tension and hinder an educator's ability to navigate discussions on complex issues. This lack of alignment also affects collegial interactions, with only 45% feeling fully able to engage in productive dialogue with colleagues. Many of the written comments also include references to pressure from parents and other stake holders.
- ❖ **Support Structures:** The feelings of isolation within one's own work environment underscores the need for support structures that promote open and respectful conversations, and emotional support that overlap with the above areas, including.
 - **Peer Support Needs:** Many educators express the need for peer support networks where they can share insights and challenges with colleagues. Programs like mentorships, support groups, and Israel immersion trips can provide emotional renewal, especially if done with work colleagues. These peer connections reduce feelings of isolation and help educators feel seen and supported amid challenging circumstances.
 - **Institutional Culture that Views Complex Thinking as Essential:** There is a need to work with the leadership of Jewish organizations to encourage and empower their educators to lead educational and community building processes that strengthen community and support complex thinking. Buy-in and active support of professional and lay leadership is essential for creating a culture in which educators feel valued and respected in their work environments.

Moving Forward: Seizing the Opportunity

The events of October 7th have undoubtedly created a moment of crisis for Jewish educators, but they have also opened new possibilities for education to drive robust Jewish engagement in general, and with Israel in particular that will leave the organized Jewish community strengthened. As we move forward, let's take inspiration from the wisdom of Jewish tradition to guide our educational efforts. The verse from Devarim, often referred to as the concept of "Not in Heaven," feels especially relevant today:

"כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלַיךְ הַדָּבָר מֵאֵד בְּפִיךָ וּבְלִבְבְּךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ"

“Because the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it.”

This verse reminds us that, no matter how overwhelming or complex the challenges may be, the answers are within our reach. As educators, we have the power to help our learners not just understand, but to act, to feel, and to reflect deeply. We can foster connections, nurture belonging, and equip our learners with the tools to engage thoughtfully with Israel and Jewish Peoplehood.

Let this be a call to action: to teach with heart, to inspire complex thought, and to encourage meaningful action. In these difficult times, we can help our learners and communities rise above the complexities, fostering both resilience and a deeper sense of Jewish purpose and belonging. The work we do together—through words, ideas, and actions—can shape the future of Jewish education and community.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEWED FOR RESEARCH

1. Jamie Simon, Chief Program Officer, *Foundation for Jewish Camp*, New York NY
2. Dr. Jonathan Golden, Founder, *HeartStance Education Consulting*, Boston MA
3. Liron Lipsky, Director of Education, *BBYO*, Remote
4. Sharon Tash, Director of Education, *Temple Micah* Washington DC
5. Dr. Joy Getnick, Executive Director, *University of Rochester Hillel*, Rochester NY
6. Rabbi Rick Kellner, Rabbi, *Congregation Beit Tikvah*, Columbus OH
7. Senior Congregational Educator (requested anonymity)
8. Jay Leberman, Head of School, *Mandel Jewish Day School*, Cleveland OH
9. Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein, Executive Director, *Atra: Center for Rabbinical Innovation*, Remote
10. Chaya Silver, Education Director, *Agudas Achim, NFTY – The Reform Jewish Youth Movement*, Alexandria VA

APPENDIX 2: ORGANIZATIONS CITED BY RESPONDENTS AS RESOURCES FOR NAVIGATING THE POST OCTOBER 7TH WORLD

Overview of the approaches

The good news is that many educators cited a number of exemplars organizations that provide supporting materials and training to the approaches above. The following are those mentioned:

ADL (Anti-Defamation League)

Focuses on fighting anti-Semitism and hate, providing educational resources and advocacy programs.

Website: <https://www.adl.org>

"It was helpful when we had the ADL join us for a program called 'Words to Action' to combat the rising antisemitism and antizionism that's been mounting."

Resetting the Table

Specializes in dialogue and facilitation training for open conversations on complex issues, particularly around Israel and Jewish community topics.

Website: <https://www.resettingthetable.org>

"Resetting the table dialogue across difference programming and training"

Hillel International

Provides Jewish life, learning, and leadership programs on college campuses worldwide, supporting Jewish students in identity-building.

Website: <https://www.hillel.org>

"I have been meeting 1:1 with anti-Zionist Jews and trying to better articulate Hillel's perspectives on our boundaries/borders"

Jewish Federation

Supports Jewish communal life with a focus on education, social services, and Israel engagement through a network of regional federations.

Website: <https://www.jewishfederations.org>

"A round table discussion on Israel with a former congregant who made Aliyah, teens who just returned from studying with Muss, congregants who went on a Federation mission trip, and me, who just returned from a trip visiting with peace activists post-October 7."

Birthright Israel

Offers free trips to Israel for young adults of Jewish descent, aiming to strengthen participants' connection to Jewish heritage and peoplehood.

Website: <https://www.birthrightisrael.com>

"JResponse deployment volunteer experience in Israel in partnership with Birthright"

Unpacked for Educators

Fostering meaningful conversations and deepen students' understanding of Jewish identity and Israel through multimedia content and curriculum tools.

Website: <https://unpacked.education>

"Every Monday morning we have a 'sicha', a discussion, which involves updates on Israel, local news bites, and opportunities for students to share & express their feelings. It's a safe space for them to talk. Our school guidance counselor is available to join us if requested. The 'Unpacked' videos are helpful in informing students of content."

Shalom Hartman Institute

A think tank and educational center in Jerusalem focused on Jewish thought and pluralism, offering programs for educators and community leaders.

Website: <https://www.hartman.org.il>

"We had The Hartman Institute come in for learning with our parents. This was extremely helpful. Because this was so helpful and because that age group is actually the one that is open to nuance and difficult conversations, I am focusing on them for future programming like this with parents and starting the ARZA Israel curriculum in our school."

The iCenter for Israel Education

Dedicated to advancing Israel education through resources and training programs that foster Jewish peoplehood and connection to Israel.

Website: <https://www.theicenter.org>

"Reflection, discernment, education and professional development through the iCenter."

The Jewish Education Project

Transforming Jewish education to inspire and empower children, teens, and families through innovative programs and resources that deepen Jewish identity and connection.

Website: <https://www.jewishedproject.org>

"I have worked with other teachers and done research, reading many "articles from Jewish parenting publications and other resources like the Jewish Education Project to familiarize myself with the language, information, and tools to accurately and appropriately answer my student's questions."

M²: The Institute of Experiential Jewish Education

Designs and provides professional development and resources to elevate the impact of Jewish educators through innovative, values-based experiential learning.

Website: <https://www.ieje.org>

"I have utilized a bunch of the M2 resources (e.g. the Yamim Project) and enjoyed their in-service training as a way of fostering dialogue and reflection within our Middle School."

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