



How Can Conservative Clergy and Educators Help Diverse Families Understand Israel?

By Keren McGinity

USCJ/RA has created this list of 10 tips* to inspire curiosity, conversations, and connection between clergy, educators, and interfaith families. Couples including one Jewish partner may face unique challenges discussing the current conflict in Israel due to a lack of common knowledge, experience, or attachment. The Jewish partner may feel particularly alone when their beloved does not automatically understand their position, and the partner of another faith and/or cultural background may be bewildered by their beloved's ardent support or visceral reactions to any criticism of the Jewish state. Jews by choice and their families of origin will also benefit from engagement by clergy and educators on this topic.

As Dr. Rachel Fish said in a program about [responding to questions about Israel](#), "The vast majority of folks are 'don't knows.'" Meaning, they have not studied the history of the region and do not understand the geopolitics involved. We need to take this point to heart to best engage and support diverse couples and families in our communities.

1. Acknowledge that, like all facets of identity, being connected to Israel is complex and nuanced for Jewish partners. It takes time, patience, and compassion to unpack in ways that strengthen mutual understanding and respect.
2. Encourage the Jewish partner to express how they feel about Israel to their beloved, even if they've never been there. For someone who was raised as a Zionist, loving Israel is an emotionally ingrained part of their Jewish identity, so it may seem strange to have to put into words why Israel's existence and right to defend itself are so important. If the Jewish partner has been to Israel, suggest that they tell their partner and extended family about the trip(s) and their impressions of Israeli people, food, culture, music, etc.
3. Explain to partners of other faith backgrounds that antisemitism is something Jews live with on a regular basis and how the current war exacerbates feeling



unsafe or insecure. Educate them about how many people born or raised Jewish carry [generational trauma about the Holocaust](#) and the loss of whole branches of their family trees. The founding of Israel provided a safe place for all Jews, hence the attack of October 7, including the lapse of Israeli intelligence and defense forces, feels very destabilizing. The current situation is an existential crisis.

4. Reassure Jewish partners that it is not their job to educate everyone in their beloved's family about Israel. Some Jewish partners may not want to champion Israel to their family members of other faith backgrounds and feel guilty about not doing it. Reassure them that it is okay, it is not their job alone, and provide a list of resources they can share instead or in addition.
5. Educate the partners of other faith backgrounds that, for many Jews, Israel is an emotional topic. It has served as a space of pride and security for many Jews of this generation. It may be the only place on earth where their Jewish identity was never questioned or the one place where it was questioned. They may have had a really powerful experience while visiting the Kotel or climbing Masada.
6. Reassure interfaith couples and families that supporting Israel and caring about innocent Palestinian civilians are not mutually exclusive. As Jews, we prioritize our own family, which extends to Jews living in other parts of the world, and we feel the pain of civilians living in Gaza without basic needs and being used as human shields.
7. Be curious about diverse families and what cultural attachments they may have to other countries based on where their parents or grandparents were born; you can use those as examples as a starting point to help them understand why Israel is so important to Jews, even if they weren't born there.



8. Invite interfaith couples and families to share what Israel means to them and why. This communal sharing will help interfaith couples and families feel seen and included; it will also reassure the community that interfaith couples and families stand in solidarity with the principle of Am Yisrael Chai.
9. Teach your community how the Jewish value of “kol Yisrael aravim zeh ba’zeh” (all of Israel is responsible for each other) starts with the Jewish family, and that this idea explains why Jews both inside and outside Israel stand together at this time when Israel needs to defend itself and its citizens. At the same time, Judaism also expresses concern for all human life, including innocent Palestinian civilians.
10. Plan a congregational trip to Israel that would be inclusive of (yet not limited to) interfaith couples and families with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim historical sites on the itinerary.

If you would like more information or guidance about diverse couples and families, check out <https://uscj.org/leadership/interfaith-inclusion>. For a private or group consultation, contact Dr. Keren R. McGinity, USCJ’s Interfaith Specialist (kerenmcginity@uscj.org).

*The idea for this tip list was inspired by 18Doors. To see their original list, click [here](#).