



Mental Health Tips for Jewish Students during the Middle East Crisis

Dr Grant Blashki GP,
A/Professor at the
University of Melbourne.



01

Cut yourself some slack

It's totally appropriate to be feeling a range of emotions such as grief, anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, or disappointment. These are very hard and confronting times so give yourself time and a chance to get your head around these confronting events.

02

Remember it's not all on you

In our civil Australian society, there are rules and expectations of the community, and the public institutions are required to protect everyone from intimidation, feeling unsafe and hate speech. Report to the appropriate authorities in your organisations if you are feeling unsafe or experiencing antisemitic incidents.

Know your red flags

If you find that worry about the Middle East crisis is affecting your sleep, is causing you endless rumination, that you are unable to talk about anything else, or feel a sense of hopelessness or despair, these are signs that you need to get on the front foot and look after your mental health more proactively.

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04

Be Safe

Safety is first and don't put yourself in harm's way, avoid direct confrontations and report any incidents to the university authorities. Keep a screenshot and a record of any online hate speech or intimidation. Pick your battles, it's not your job to take on every person with a differing opinion, especially not those who have no interest in changing their mind.

05

Stay Realistic

During this stressful time and out of control social media it's easy to get caught up in the whirlpool of common thinking traps. Catastrophising is a very common one, and especially with our history of intergenerational trauma it's easy for Jewish people to feel like we are on the cusp of another Holocaust.

The reality is that Australia is still one of the safest countries on earth for Jewish people. Other thinking traps are Mind Reading or what we call Black and White thinking, for example assuming that every person who expresses pro-Palestinian views is antisemitic which is also not true. In reality, there are many shades of grey between people with genuine humanitarian concerns through to nasty antisemitic views, and everything in between, so be careful of jumping to conclusions.



06**Take Control of your Media**

With social media there's only two options, either you're in control or it's in control. During a crisis like this it's very easy to go down the addictive swirl of doom scrolling. Set some boundaries, turn off notifications, consider taking the social media apps off your phone and just look at them at a time limited session on your computer. For example, put in your diary that 8am to 9am is going to be your social media hour or maybe after work just 7 pm till 8 pm. Stop following people that are stressing you out. We also know from this crisis that social media is an incredibly unreliable source of credible news so put some time aside to look at the mainstream news which at least attempts to apply some editorial filtering. Avoid any graphic images or videos, which can be very upsetting and not helpful to be watching.

07**Connect with Community**

It's easy to feel isolated and alone during a crisis such as this and it's a good time to schedule regular catch ups with family and friends and people you love. Be assertive with friends or family who are over-communicating with you with too many posts on social media or WhatsApp and tell them you don't want to receive so many communications. Consider joining like-minded groups who you trust and make you feel supported. Consider helping as a volunteer with local Jewish community organisations who are always looking for more assistance.

08**Actions are a Great Stress Reliever**

Put your energy into practical actions, so commit to take one practical action a day. During this crisis it's very common for people to feel overwhelmed, so remember you only need to contribute your small piece of the puzzle without having to address everything. Reflect on your skills for your resources and how you can best put those into action. Are you a letter writer, are you an organiser, a fundraiser, a volunteer, or are you part of an industry or professional organisation? Even dropping a supportive note to a friend or family is very much appreciated at this time.

09**This too will pass**

Keep a cool head during this time and remember this is a marathon not a sprint. Make sure that you are prioritising your mental health, you can't fill from an empty cup. Keep up the mental health basics like regular exercise, eating well and getting enough sleep, consider learning meditation to give your mind a rest. Quarantine time out to do fun things when you don't think about the Middle East conflict. Remember our Jewish people are extraordinarily resilient so tap into that sense of being part of the community if you find that helpful.

10**Help is out there**

In Australia we have well established counselling and mental health support services. Phone support is free and available from organisations such as:

Kidshelpline **1800 55 1800**

Beyond Blue **1300 22 46 36**

Lifeline **13 1114**

All GPs in Australia can undertake what's called a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan and link you in with mental health professionals.

Jewish health organisations such as Hatzolah are also offering mental health support.

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