# Resources and support for trainee teachers in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict

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## UoM response and approach - focus on our common humanity

UoM Initial Teacher Education promotes a humanitarian stance as an educational response to conflict. As educators of children and young people, we feel so much for the children and young people of Israel and Gaza, lacking influence over what is happening, many of them in desperate circumstances, and having witnessed awful things. This humanitarian crisis involves us all (Howes, 2023).

In these pages, we explore what it means to focus on our common humanity as teachers in the UK, with a particular focus on trainee teachers.

1. **What is required of us in the classroom?**

We may be working with children and young people who are directly or indirectly affected by this crisis? How do we respond to the concerns of our children and young people, to their questions, and to what they have to say?

* Our classrooms should be safe for everyone, and we as teachers have a key role in maintaining that.
* Follow the principles of safeguarding that you have already learnt.
* Pay attention to individuals, to changes in their behaviour, alerting other staff to any concerns you have.

1. **What we as educators can usefully offer to young people who are worried, angry, concerned about the situation.**
* We can help to create a safe and calm space, by making time to acknowledge those emotions, listening, being empathetic.
* We cannot resolve the feelings, but it helps a lot to know that a teacher is listening.
* Use the resources signposted above if you think that they are useful or helpful

1. **What will not be useful.**
* Any sense of taking sides in the classroom in the context of this crisis is very likely to be unhelpful, and should be avoided.
* The classroom is a space for empathy and for exploring ideas, not for insisting on them.
* We have a lot of influence as teachers, and it is important to resist any temptation to use that influence without great care.
* In all of this, be guided by the policy and practice in your school or college.

 (main points from letter from Andy Howes Head of ITE UoM– full letter in appendix below)

* Take a humanitarian educators’ perspective and using empathy as a critical pedagogy is important as a teacher.
* Put the principle of humanity, rules of war at the forefront of discussions and focus on those civilians impacted by the violence on both sides
* Remember the individuals being impacted by the violence to avoid ‘othering’ either side and also to avoid the ‘single narratives’ (i.e. all Palestinian’s/all Israelis are responsible or are in support of…etc).

(main points from message from Dr Amanda Corcoran – see full message in appendix below)

# Resources

## Responding to pupils’ questions

Some pupils may ask you questions which you don’t know how to answer. Let them know that you will try to find out for them and get back to them Some pupils may ask what a terrorist is? Or what extremism is. Here are some legal definitions:

## Definitions

legal definition of 'extremism' as part of the Prevent Duty:

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/what-is-extremism/>

legal definition of 'terrorism':

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism>

## The Equality Act for schools

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e3237ed915d74e33f0ac9/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf>

Schools should be a safe place for all children where they feel able to express their views and where racism, antisemitism/Islamophobia or incitement to hatred or violence will not be tolerated. Follow the school curriculum and policies in the teaching of RE/PSHE/RSHE and seek help from staff with questions that you are not sure how to answer and let the pupils that you will get back to them.

The Equality Act includes a public sector duty for organisations to 'advance equality' and to 'foster good relations' between people of different faiths and beliefs part of Fundamental British Values(FBV) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guidance-on-promoting-british-values-in-schools-published>. This extends to what constitutes a racist incident/hate crime: 'anything that is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person'. Pupils may express views which you think are racist or anti-Semitic. If so follow your school’s policy on approaching this. Ask your mentor or senior leaders in the school for help with this. Sometimes we can come up against "that's racist/not racist..." arguments in such sessions. The law and school culture is there to protect staff and students.  There's also the Ofsted focus for schools and colleges to 'prepare students for life in modern Britain' and trainees to prepare lessons to meet these requirements. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d39d3e1e5274a400af8142a/Education_inspection_framework_-_equality__diversity_and_inclusion_statement.pdf>

## Critical thinking in schools

Finally, fostering neutral critical thinking skills is likely to be useful eg:

What do you already know about the conflict?

How has it made you feel?

What are you hoping for?

Where are you finding information?

Could you look for other points of view?

How is this affecting the wellbeing of students in school?

**Thanks to Bob Hindle, Secondary PGCE for suggestions and links above**

## History of the Israel-Gaza war and Palestine

Israel Gaza war: History of the conflict explained <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-44124396>

United Nations – the history of Palestine <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>

Organisations like MSF (medecins sans frontiers – Doctors without borders), the Red Cross will give a good of the humanitarian crisis.

* [2023 Israel – Hamas conflict | MSF UK](https://msf.org.uk/issues/2023-israel-hamas-conflict)
* [ReliefWeb - Informing humanitarians worldwide](https://reliefweb.int/) – A news website for humanitarians and sponsored by OCHA

## How to talk to children about, war, conflict and hard things

Dr Amanda McCorkindale, UoM, Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute recommends these for how to talk to young people and children

* [How to talk to children and young people about conflict](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/how-to-talk-about-conflict-impartially) from the *British Red Cross,* *Our guide will give you confidence to discuss conflict with school aged children, using an impartial and neutral humanitarian approach.*
* [How to talk to kids about hard things | Save The Children UK](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-hard-things)
* [How to talk to children about war | Save the Children UK](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2022/how-to-talk-to-children-about-war)

## Teaching controversial issues

[Teaching Controversial Issues: A guide for teachers - Oxfam Policy & Practice](https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/teaching-controversial-issues-a-guide-for-teachers-620473/)

## Wider conflict resources:

* The British Red Cross also have a few specific teaching resources on specific conflicts, like Sudan and the Ukraine, [Conflict in Sudan teaching resource | British Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/newsthink-conflict-in-sudan), [Ukraine teaching resource | British Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/newsthink-ukraine). While this doesn’t address the immediate surge in violence in Gaza, it will help student teachers see how the BRC has approached other conflicts and what resources they’ve used to help consider how to approach. It can also help to broaden the discussion to understand how conflicts and humanitarian crises affect people.
* Another teaching resource on the Rules of War, [British Red Cross teaching resources : Rules of war](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/rules-of-war), which can be used as a framework for discussing the current conflict.

## Kindness and wellbeing

* The British Red Cross also have a number of resources on Kindness and Wellbeing with some of those focused on building resiliency for students (and educators). [Kindness and welbeing teaching resources (redcross.org.uk)](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/kindness-resource-list)

Thanks to Dr Amanda McCorkindale for the links above

# Appendices

**The Israel-Hamas conflict and humanitarian crisis – Dr Andy Howes**

This is a message to all staff and trainees in our PGCE programmes, regarding the crisis which has developed in Israel and Palestine. This is, above all, a time to recall and focus on our common humanity, in all of our interactions. As educators of children and young people, we feel so much for the children and young people of Israel and Gaza, lacking influence over what is happening, many of them in desperate circumstances, and having witnessed awful things. This humanitarian crisis involves us all, and it directly affects many people in Manchester and within our PGCE partnerships. We extend our thoughts and care to all trainees and partners who are affected personally and in our communities. Please let us know – get in touch and talk in the knowledge that we will make time to listen.

The situation raises particular questions for us as educators, which we need to think about. What is required of us in the classroom, where we may be working with children and young people who are directly or indirectly affected by this crisis? How do we respond to the concerns of our children and young people, to their questions, and to what they have to say?

Firstly, follow the principles of safeguarding that you have already learnt: paying attention to individuals, to changes in their behaviour, alerting other staff to any concerns you have. Our classrooms should be safe for everyone, and we as teachers have a key role in maintaining that.

Secondly, think about what we as educators can usefully offer to young people who are worried, angry, concerned about the situation. We can help to create a safe and calm space, by making time to acknowledge those emotions, listening, being empathetic. We cannot resolve the feelings, but it helps a lot to know that a teacher is listening.

Thirdly, think about what will not be useful. Any sense of taking sides in the classroom in the context of this crisis is very likely to be unhelpful, and should be avoided. The classroom is a space for exploring ideas, not for insisting on them. We have a lot of influence as teachers, and it is important to resist any temptation to use that influence without great care. In all of this, be guided by the policy and practice in your school or college.

For many of you, this is a challenging time to be finding and developing your identity as a teacher, and your approach as a teacher to difficult and complex issues. We know that you will more than rise to this challenge, and we are here to support you with this as much as possible, sharing useful resources and listening to your concerns.

Andy Howes

Head of ITE

**Please also see message below from Dr Amanda McCorkindale UoM Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute in response to request for support and advice from UoM PGCE.**

Whilst understanding the complicated nature of the current conflict is important, I argue that this is where taking a ‘humanitarian educators’ perspective and using empathy as a critical pedagogy is important as a teacher. In this way, we are putting the principle of humanity, rules of war and focus on those civilians impacted by the violence on both sides at the forefront of discussions. I would consistently emphasise that we need to remember the individuals being impacted by the violence to avoid ‘othering’ either side and also to avoid the ‘single narratives’ (i.e. all Palestinian’s/all Israelis are responsible or are in support of…etc).

Dr Amanda McCorkindale