



## Teaching During Times of Global Tensions: Violence in Gaza and Israel

Students may bring their thoughts and feelings as well as their trauma related to the violence and humanitarian crisis of the Israel-Gaza conflict into your course, even if your course material is not related to current events (see [AC64 Academic Freedom in Instructional Roles](#)).

We offer this resource as a tool for planning your interactions with students—and check-in with yourself—as members of the Penn State community grieve and cope amidst this tragedy. Per [President Bendapudi's Message](#), this is just a first step of an ongoing commitment to advancing an inclusive society.

### Begin with the Facts

Knowing the historical background and context can help instructors and students better understand the ongoing turmoil. Penn State [offers access to the news for students, and faculty members](#). The following articles are useful primers for understanding what is happening and why:

- [A Historical Timeline of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#) (nytimes.com)
- [Israel Gaza War: History of the conflict explained](#) (bbc.com)
- [What Is Hamas and Why Did It Attack Israel?](#) (wsj.com)

### Check-in with Our Students (and Ourselves)

Your students (and you) might be experiencing trauma or increased levels of stress. Checking-in can be vital for alleviating despair, isolation, and/or confusion. First steps might include:

- Proactively provide resources to students, such as [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) and other wellness resources, on your Canvas course page.
- Find your own support with counselors in the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP).
- Accept your and students' feelings as a natural emotional reaction to world events.
- Engage in conversations with friends or family and be open to accepting their assistance, to alleviate isolation and alienation during times of global tensions ([Almoshmash, 2016](#)).
- Consider giving students an ungraded opportunity to freewrite about what they are experiencing or feeling—as an anonymous and private way to decompress before engaging in class. This can also be used to defuse/pause during challenging discussions; per ([AC64 Academic Freedom in Instructional Roles](#)) notes that discussions should be related to the field or course content).
- Direct students to the [PSU Manage Stress Workbook](#).
- Use [Penn State Red Folder](#) for guidance on how to connect students with available campus resources.

## Signs of Trauma

Given the unimaginable violence and escalating tension towards cultural and spiritual communities around the world related to the Israel-Gaza conflict, it is possible that students in your classroom are experiencing trauma as a result even though they might be geographically removed from the immediate conflict. "Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" ([SAMHSA 2022](#), March). In experiencing extraordinary events, emotional and/or psychological trauma could emerge as a result, making one feel helpless in the situation. When a student is experiencing trauma, you may see some signs indicating trauma:

- Withdrawal and disengagement
- Difficulty with maintaining focus
- Trouble retaining and recalling information
- Irritability or difficulty regulating emotions
- Struggle with attending class and completing assignments regularly and on time
- Difficulty taking risks (e.g., answer questions, start new tasks, or consider alternative viewpoints)
- Misinterpreting nonverbal cues (e.g., tone, facial expression, posture, etc.) in a negative way

### How can instructors respond to indications of trauma in the classroom or our students' comments?

- If you suspect the student is in danger or need of immediate assistance, [report](#) your concern.
- Inform students about the resources at [CAPS](#), but also introduce them to the [Student Care & Advocacy](#) office at Penn State; instructors sometimes walk beside students as they go to CAPS.
- Consider watching "[Trauma-informed Pedagogy](#)," recorded in 2020 (and [2021](#)), from the Commonwealth Campus Faculty Development, Penn State Keep Teaching initiative.

### Trauma-informed Teaching Practices

[Trauma-informed pedagogy](#) recognizes that past and present experiences can negatively affect students' learning and works on understanding students' personal and social situations by showing care and empathy ([Mayers et al., 2019](#)). Trauma-informed teaching includes:

- Understanding that trauma may impact learners' social and learning behaviors.
- Being mindful of students' and your own emotions.
- Connecting with Resources on Trauma-informed
- Validating others' feelings and thoughts, and subsequently providing support opportunities.

### References

- [Avoiding/Confronting Antisemitism and Islamophobia](#) , Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2023.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2019). [Shifting teacher practice in trauma-affected classrooms: Practice pedagogy strategies within a trauma-informed positive education model](#). *School Mental Health*, 11(3), 600-614.
- "[Coping With Traumatic Events in the News: Israel-Palestine Conflict](#)" Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, October 18, 2023.
- "[Keeping Up With . . . Trauma-Informed Pedagogy](#)" American Library Association, June 18, 2021.
- [http://www.schreyerinstitution.psu.edu/feature/\"Navigating Disruptions](http://www.schreyerinstitution.psu.edu/feature/\)" Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2023.
- [Taking ACTION on Disruptions or Microaggressions](#), Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2023.