

Which students may be affected?



Whilst you will likely encounter students from all backgrounds who feel affected by the conflict in one way or another, there are certain students who may feel more emotionally connected to the conflict and may bring the conflict into their identity and emotional well-being, and some who feel nothing at all.

Religious students:



Jews, Muslims, and Christians have a great connection to the land that we now know as Palestine and Israel, especially Jerusalem. As you'll see in the preparation video that students and teachers watch before our sessions (accessible when you book an SNS session) all three Abrahamic faiths have connections to this land and would like to access the holy sites there. However, students of Jewish, Muslim, or Christian backgrounds may not feel affected by this conflict simply because of their religion's history, but because of present-day religious matters in the region.

Let us begin by discussing why Jewish students might feel particularly affected by this:

Jewish people trace their origin back to this land, to over 2000 years ago, where various Jewish tribes, settlements, communities, and nations lived and were exiled from. Jerusalem is particularly important in Jewish prayer traditions and is referred to as 'Zion' in the Hebrew Bible - the place of return for the exiled Jewish people. Today, Israel is referred to as a Jewish state; as the modern-day state of Israel was created to be a safe place for Jewish people from all over the world to go and live in and be citizens of, at a time when they were not safe elsewhere. Many Jewish people around the world today support the existence of Israel as a Jewish state and feel some sort of affection and/or support for the country because of this.

Illustration:
the
Western
Wall in
Jerusalem



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A small minority of Jewish people do not agree with the existence of the modern nation-state of Israel on religious, Messianic grounds of belief or from their own political reasoning, and students who hold this perspective may also need some extra support around how they feel about this and any opposition to their opinion from other members of their community.

There are still high and rising levels of **antisemitism** in the UK, and these often flare up when there is conflict between Palestine and Israel. Many British people who are also Jewish experience antisemitism related to Israel-Palestine; they are blamed for the actions of the Israeli military or government, assumed to be loyal to Israel and not to Britain, accused of antisemitic conspiracy theories such as drinking the blood of Christian children, holding the world's political and economic power in their hands, and not caring about the lives of Palestinians, or Muslims. For British teenagers who are also Jewish, the prejudice, discrimination, and racism against them can be extremely difficult to deal with. Added to this, they may be experiencing other pressures from within their communities in relation to Israel and how they should think or feel about it. They are particularly vulnerable to having an emotional reaction to discussing the conflict.



Illustration: the Al Aqsa
Mosque in Jerusalem

Muslim people also have strong historical roots in this land.

Jerusalem is a particularly important place in Islam due to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the history of Islam which has its origins in the Middle East, over 1,300 years ago. Jerusalem was under Muslim rule for centuries - first, under the Arabs for the first half of the 7th century, then under subsequent Muslim empires, the most recent being the Ottoman Empire. Muslims believe that Jerusalem is where their prophet, Mohammad (PBUH), was transported on a winged creature in a night journey. They call the foundation wall 'Al Baraq wall', and it's a very sacred place for Muslims. Jerusalem is also important to Muslims as having been the first direction to face for prayer, before it changed to Mecca.

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In addition, the majority of Palestinians are Muslim, and within the state of Israel there are also Israeli citizens who are Muslim or Christian of Palestinian, Syrian, Druze, and other origins. Because the lands assigned to be a Palestinian state by the United Nations, and under agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, are still under an illegal occupation by Israel (the West Bank and East Jerusalem), or under blockade by Israel and Egypt (Gaza), Palestinians do not have political or physical freedom. Many British students who are Muslim may have feelings of sympathy, sadness, desperation, and anger over the current situation for Palestinians. They may feel helpless regarding the situation and unsure where to turn for support. They may also, like Jewish students, feel pressure from within their own communities to think or feel a particular way towards Palestine and Israel and need emotional support if they hold a different political view from those around them. There is also discrimination and prejudice towards British Muslims regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; for example, the view that because British Muslims may support Palestine it automatically makes them antisemitic or that they support terrorism or are in danger of 'radicalisation', that they support or are somehow part of the political decisions that some Palestinian leaders make, that they want to destroy Israel, or that they are more loyal to Muslim countries than the UK. They, too, are particularly vulnerable to having an emotional reaction when discussing the conflict.



*Illustration:
the Dome of
the Rock in
Jerusalem*

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British students with a Christian background also experience vulnerability when discussing the conflict and should be supported in this process.

Christianity originated in the region, and there are many Christian holy sites. However, there are also many Christians living in Palestine and Israel who experience discrimination and often do not feel safe. As they are such a minority, the same focus is not given to them, and their issues and experiences aren't particularly well known here in the UK. British students in the UK who are Christian may feel sadness, desperation and empathy for the Christians living in Israel and Palestine and may also feel frustrated about the lack of media coverage for their plight. Furthermore, different denominations may show solidarity with either Palestinians or Israelis. For example, Quakers and Catholics tend to support the Palestinians, while Protestants may express solidarity with the Palestinians if they focus more on a theology of human rights, or the Israelis if they focus more on a theology of 'Christian Zionism' or come from Northern Ireland.



*Illustration:
the Church
of the Holy
Sepulchre in
Jerusalem*

British students of other religions and none may also feel sadness, anger, or helplessness at the situation, and many may not feel comfortable discussing it. All in all, for these young people, whilst there is a plethora of information on the conflict online, it really can be a quagmire trying to wade through it whilst also feeling pressures from inside and outside their communities to focus on one particular perspective. Through your guidance, studying the conflict, and support from organisations such as SNS, we can help to give them a solid foundation of knowledge about both sides and prepare them for the challenges and to make up their own minds.

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Refugees:



Another group of students who may be particularly vulnerable to sensitivities related to the conflict are refugees and those of refugee background. The majority of Israelis and Palestinians have heritage rooted in refugee experiences; for Jewish Israelis, most fled or were forced out of their homes in Europe, Russia, North Africa, or the Middle East. Few British students will realise that around 1 million Jews who were expelled from their ancient homelands around the Middle East made their way to British-Mandate Palestine and think only that Jews fled from Europe, especially after the Holocaust. This increased the Jewish population in British-Mandate Palestine, although the total number still remained a minority at this time. For Palestinians, the 1948 Nakba (meaning catastrophe in Arabic) saw the expulsion and flight of around 780,000 Palestinians from their homes as a result of settlements and violent campaigns led by Jewish militias to clear areas of Palestinians. Many Palestinians still have refugee status today and live scattered across Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and other places around the world. There are now around 6 million Palestinians with refugee status, so refugees in the UK may see their own experiences and stories reflected in those of Israelis and Palestinians. Furthermore, many Palestinian refugees who have been displaced in refugee camps in Syria since 1948 have had to flee Syria due to the war there, and some are now residing in the UK. You may have Syrian refugees in your school whose heritage is Palestinian but have never visited there nor spoken much about this.

Politically active students:



The final group of students to highlight here are particularly politically active students. Israel-Palestine is also a political issue here in the UK, with the tendency of left-wing activists and politicians to side with the Palestinians, and right-wing with the Israelis. Please note that this is a generalisation, and there are plenty of activists and politicians who do not simply pick a side but choose to work down the middle and advocate justice and safety for all.

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However, the political divide between pro-Israel and pro-Palestine has become particularly prevalent in the last few years, with groups on the far-left using antisemitic stereotypes about Jews and global wealth/domination in some of their campaigning, and far-right groups sometimes claiming to support Israel out of anti-Muslim sentiment. Brexit has also had an influence on the debate surrounding Israel-Palestine. The Brexit campaigns and subsequent battles for and against it have seen a resurgence of the debates and discussions around Britain's colonialist and imperialist past.

The Balfour Declaration and subsequent events are subject to much contention by Palestinians and those who support them. However, it is also seen as a period of pride and leadership by many who support Israel, some right-wing activists and politicians (who generally feel pride in Britain's history), and Christian Zionists (often found within the evangelical Christian denominations in the US). There is little middle-ground or complexity in these debates or positions. You may have very politically active students who support Israel or Palestine as a proxy to their right- or left-wing activism. These students may not be personally invested emotionally or vulnerable here, but it may still be an important subject for them.



Students listening to Palestinian and Israeli speaker's personal stories during a Solutions Not Sides workshop