

# The Olive Branch Award

Information Pack for  
teachers and schools



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# What is The Olive Branch Award?



The Olive Branch Award supports schools to become safe and empowered spaces to talk and learn about tough issues through focusing on four key skills; **active listening, empathy, critical thinking, and social and emotional learning**. Schools can join and collect leaves for their Olive Branch by participating in SNS sessions and exclusive new programmes for teachers and students. It is a holistic approach for the school to embed a culture of learning, listening, and reflection on Israel - Palestine over a three year period, achieving full SNS accreditation at the end.

## *Why should I sign my school up?*

The Olive Branch Award is a unique way to include key life skills within the school curriculum and school culture. In addition, it supports teachers and the SLT in having challenging conversations, increasing quality teaching and learning across the board, and creating safe and informed spaces. Palestine - Israel is the vehicle through which these skills are taught and through which school culture is strengthened.



Fig 1: Students speaking to a Palestinian speaker during a Solutions Not Sides workshop



# Charter of Values



- 1.To promote Social and Emotional Learning within the school
- 2.To promote active listening and critical thinking
- 3.To tackle antisemitism and Islamophobia
- 4.To support non-violent forms of activism
- 5.To take a whole-school approach to Israel-Palestine education
- 6.To empower students to have a voice
- 7.A rejection of conspiracy theories and a blame culture
- 8.A commitment to seek win-win outcomes for conflict
- 9.A commitment to practise empathy and respectful disagreement
- 10.A commitment to equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging

We ask all schools joining The Olive Branch Award to sign up to a charter of values. This charter is a pledge of intentions for the school to become a school that is a safe and compassionate place on Israel - Palestine.

Schools may choose to hang the charter up somewhere, display it on their website and/or social media, and use it as a discussion point with students.



# Frequently Asked Questions



## 1. Why does this initiative exist?

The model and impact of the Solutions Not Sides Youth Education Programme has evolved significantly in the last twelve years. SNS is no longer a single intervention programme, but today provides multiple interventions to the target audience of British youth, and has also started working more closely with the teachers themselves. Following an upsurge in violence in Israel and Palestine in May 2021 and the subsequent fallout in schools here in the UK, we responded to a request of additional support for schools & teachers. Taking on feedback from hundreds of schools, we understood that the unit of change is not just the individual student, but the wider school community and school culture. In response to this feedback from schools and our deepened understanding, SNS has designed and implemented additional components including resources and teacher training. The Olive Branch Award formalises these components for schools, providing schools with a systematic method of strengthening the school's culture against racism related to Palestine and Israel.



Fig 2: Students listening to a speaker's personal story during a Solutions Not Sides workshop





# Frequently Asked Questions



## 2. *Why do schools sign up for three years?*

We ask participating schools to commit to the Award for three years because we have observed from focus groups and focus schools that real cultural and organisational shifts, which have an impact within an institutional setting, require at least three years of active work. The implementation of new policies, training, and skills amongst the teaching staff, and changes to PHSE curriculums take time to settle. In addition, SNS is offering multiple programmes that are best implemented step by step over consecutive years.

## 3. *Which schools can participate?*

The Award is open to any secondary school or sixth form college, or higher education college. You may be interested in the initiative because of the focus on life skills and the way in which it enriches geography, history, religious studies, and politics curriculums, or it may be because you want to take a more proactive approach to antisemitism and Islamophobia within the school, or it may be because your students, the teachers, and the general school community see Israel - Palestine as a vital international issue. If your students are interested in or passionate about Palestine - Israel, this will give them multiple opportunities to learn, listen, and express themselves. It also provides teachers with additional training, peer-to-peer learning, and a community of teachers across the country. The Olive Branch Award is neither simply for teachers or simply for students, but a wrap around Award for the school itself.



# Frequently Asked Questions



## 4. How much is it?

There is no sign up cost and schools make a contribution for different programmes of the Award that they choose to participate in with an annual cap that differs based on need. Many programmes have no cost attached at all e.g. creating a display.

## 5. How much work is it?

We ask for schools to commit to at least 3 leaves in a school year. Beyond this, the initiative is designed to be as low or high commitment as schools see fit within their needs and within their timetables. Several of the programmes can take place within normal school lessons and are programmes that schools are already doing, and others are self-run student projects, or once a year events. You can also receive DIY leaves.



Fig 3: Students listening as a speaker's answers questions during Q&A in a Solutions Not Sides workshop



# Frequently Asked Questions



## 6. How does it work?

Once a school has applied to The Olive Branch Award, alongside this welcome pack, which has all the information you need to get started, you'll receive some printed materials to help you get a display underway. You will then discuss the programmes that you want to be involved in during the academic year with Programme Manager, and send in evidence of completing programmes in order to receive the next leaf on your branch. SNS will send you new graphics and certificates for each branch. You'll receive a framework to self-monitor progress, and the Programme Manager will support you with an evaluation process. There are many different programmes to choose from and full accreditation is reached once you have done 10 of these programmes over three years and you can choose whichever ones you like.

## 7. How many teachers should be involved?

Schools should nominate one teacher to be the lead teacher on The Olive Branch Award, but multiple teachers are welcome to run the programmes and attend events.



Fig 4: Teachers during a teacher training event with Solutions Not Sides





# Olive Branch Award Leaves



You'll sign up for certain programmes throughout the academic year, and send in evidence of completing programmes in order to receive the next leaf on your branch. SNS will send you new graphics and certificates for each branch. There are currently 15 different programmes to choose from and full accreditation is reached once you have done 10 of these programmes over three years and you can choose whichever ones you like:

- 1 SNS session per year
- Staff training on Antisemitism & Islamophobia
- Networking meeting - once per term - virtual
- Student-led research projects
- Cambridge networking and training event for teachers
- School-led reflection process
- Priority places for students at Annual Student Leadership Programmes
- A charter of values
- DIY leaves
- Cultural exchange
- Become a Hub School
- A mural or school display
- Exclusive Zoom calls with our Palestinian and Israeli speakers for your students
- 'Rage, Revenge and Repair'
- Referring another school
- Bespoke advice
- Mentoring another school
- Student committee
- Staff mediation



# The Olive Branch

## Award Journey

These are just some of the ways that Olive Branch Award schools can collect their leaves over the first three years. More leaves will be released each year.

solutions  
not sides

Become Hub  
School

12

11

A Charter of Values

Cultural  
Exchange

10

A Mural or School Display

9

8

DIY leaves

7

Priority Places at Annual  
Student Leadership  
Programmes

School Led  
Reflection Process

6

Cambridge Networking  
& Training Event

5

Student-led Research Projects

4

3

Networking Meeting

Staff Training

2

1 SNS Session Per Year

1

## Additional Leaves!

- Exclusive Zoom calls with our Palestinian and Israeli speakers for students
- Bonus SNS session 'Rage, Revenge and Repair'
- Referring another school
- Bespoke advice
- Mentoring another school
- Student committee
- Staff Mediation

# Conflict Resolution and Emotional Thinking Life Skills



These are the life skills that the Olive Branch Award focuses on. These are designed for students, but teachers and parents alike can also benefit from better understanding and engaging in training of these skills. Whilst there are many other practical skills that the Olive Branch Award programmes provide such as public speaking, debating, researching, and knowledge on Israel - Palestine, these are the 'soft' skills that are important for life.

## Social and Emotional Learning

The Education Policy Institute defines Social and Emotional Learning as being “concerned with fostering children’s social and emotional skills within educational settings, alongside their academic skills. This can include developing young people’s relationships, communication, decision-making, self-esteem and behaviour”. It focuses on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. [The Education Endowment Fund](#) carried out research and interviews with teachers across the UK who noted that they would like to integrate SEL into the curriculum and schools, but there were specific barriers in the way:

**Table 8: C8. What do you think are the main barriers to promoting pupils’ social and emotional development in your school?**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of time available to prepare for teaching lessons	172	47%
Lack of time in class available to teach lessons on SEL	259	71%
Lack of confidence amongst staff in teaching SEL	131	30%
Lack of specialist knowledge amongst staff in teaching SEL	170	38%
Lack of finances available to purchase SEL curriculum	145	33%
We are not aware of a curriculum that addresses our needs	35	8%
General scepticism regarding need for teaching of SEL	40	9%
Lack of senior belief or support for SEL	11	3%
Negative experiences with teaching SEL in the past	6	2%
The pressure to focus on other priorities unrelated to SEL	249	68%
Difficulties in staff recruitment and turnover	52	14%
Other	37	10%
Total	365	



# Conflict Resolution and Emotional Thinking Life Skills



The Olive Branch Award seeks to address these issues by integrating these skills within the programmes which can be done throughout the school year and which also address other curriculum needs. These curriculum needs are particularly relevant within Geography, History, RS, PHSE, and Politics.

## Active Listening

Active Listening is the skill of concentrating and working to understand what is being said by those who are speaking or communicating. It is about:

- Listening to the words being said
- Being aware of your body language
- Giving the speaker your full and undivided attention
- Listening without judgement
- Trying to decipher the meanings, intentions, and perspectives behind the words
- Understanding the body language of others
- Pausing before responding

It connects to emotional learning in better understanding the emotions of others. It can help with developing empathy and helps to respect and celebrate diversity and difference with comfort. The National Literacy Trust lists Active Listening as a vital skill in their Oracy and Talk For Learning [guide](#). Being able to fully listen to what is being said and understand the nuances of communication is a vital skill for all sorts of [work and careers](#) that students may go on to do later in life.



# Conflict Resolution and Emotional Thinking Life Skills



Many things distract us in modern life, and active listening is a skill that many adults do not yet practice [including educators](#). After reading this, why not try to engage in active listening in the next conversation you have and see what difference it makes to that interaction?

The Olive Branch Award includes the fostering of this skill for teachers and for students through the various programmes on offer including the Part 2 school session, the Student Leadership Programme, the teacher community, and the annual teacher conference.

## *Critical Thinking*

Being able to take the time to pause and think critically about what is being said is vital to learning and to life. Understanding that not everything that is said is necessarily true, and to understand the bias behind certain sources, medias, social media, and those communicating messages. Whilst we all have access to diverse narratives, different media sources, and opposing viewpoints to the ones we hold ourselves, we rarely actually look to engage with multiple perspectives and we rarely go outside of our own comfort zone. We all have 'confirmation bias' - seeking out information that confirms our already firmly held beliefs or perspectives. The skill of critical thinking gives us the chance to take a step back and look at what we are understanding and what we are thinking. It gives us the skills to assess the sources of our information and analyse the interests and bias behind them, as well as pushing us towards looking at different perspectives. Critical thinking also gives space to a number of other skills in [other areas](#) including maths and science, and ties into the other life skills here. The Olive Branch Award has several programmes that promote critical thinking including the student led learning resources and part 2 of our two part programme.



# Conflict Resolution and Emotional Thinking Life Skills



## Empathy

The ability to have and use empathy is another life skill to be developed. Empathy involves stepping into the shoes of someone else, and understanding their perspectives and emotions. It does not require you to become that person or take on their feelings as your own, but simply to understand and accept those feelings and perspectives. A good way to look at empathy is to think about stepping into someone else's shoes whilst keeping your own socks on. SNS was founded on the value of empathy and being able to understand how those who are different from you, or even those who have very different viewpoints to you, feel and approach situations. The premise of empathy is that every human is good and to understand their needs and emotions better helps us to understand where they are coming from. All of SNS' programmes include approaching and teaching empathy. [Radical Empathy](#) goes one step further, to look at our own internalised biases and discriminations and how the dismantling of them can lead to a fairer society.



# The Whole School Approach



## The Whole School Approach and Mental Health in the curriculum

Solutions Not Sides' work fits in with the 'Whole School Approach' to mental health. The Whole School Approach to mental health states that a mentally healthy school is one that takes an approach to mental health that involves "all parts of the school working together and being committed" to creating a mentally healthy environment. As well as practical skills, our Olive Branch Awards programme equips students with 'soft skills', developing skills around conflict resolution and emotional thinking. This development of students' emotional learning through Solutions Not Sides' work supports the wider Whole School Approach, equipping students with conflict resolution, active listening, critical thinking and empathy skills.

Equipping students with conflict resolution and emotional thinking 'soft skills' is even more important when the introduction of RHSE (Relationship, Health and Sex Education) to the curriculum in 2020 is taken into account. Solutions Not Sides' work fits in well with the curriculum requirements of RHSE in secondary schools in a number of areas. Our work to encourage critical thinking skills directly contributes to the curriculum requirement to teach about internet safety, with our sessions encouraging students to think more critically and evaluate information they see online. SNS' work also fits in with the curriculum requirement to teach about "respecting others, even if they come from different backgrounds".

# The Whole School Approach



## Pupil Voice

A Whole School Approach to mental health involves listening to the voices of all within the school community, including teachers, parents, other school staff, and pupils. The Whole School Approach to mental health outlines the need for children and young people to be provided with meaningful opportunities to share their “views, hopes and experiences”, with this leading to positive outcomes for the wider school community. Solutions Not Sides’ work aims to promote opportunities for students to get their voices heard, empowering them to ask questions and interact with our speakers, as well as share their own views when taking part in our sessions.

## Ofsted

Commitment to promoting the mental health wellbeing of pupils is routinely assessed by Ofsted in schools. As part of this, approaches used within the school to promote the personal development of students are considered. Solutions Not Sides’ Olive Branch Awards not only provide students with real-world skills such as debating, public speaking and research skills, but also soft skills such as the ability to actively listen, and critically think. How effectively a school manages risks, such as bullying, prejudice and discrimination are also assessed. Taking part in programmes such as Solutions Not Sides’ Olive Branch Awards, where pupils are empowered to deploy empathy, and learn non-violent conflict resolution and communication skills demonstrate schools actively engaging in methods of managing these risks.

# The Olive Branch Community



Schools joining the Olive Branch Award will also join the Olive Branch Award Community of other schools and teachers in the community. We advise that schools nominate one teacher to lead on the Olive Branch but we welcome multiple teachers to our events including:

- Termly community get-togethers on Zoom which consist of guest speakers, training, sharing best practice, and scenario discussions
- Our annual Olive Branch Award conference in Cambridge, in July, with teachers also joining from partner organisations in Israel and Palestine
- The half-termly Olive Branch newsletters will provide you with useful information about opportunities, events, and hopefully inspire you to take up more leaves for your olive branch!



Fig 5: Teachers during a teacher training event with Solutions Not Sides

# Thank You!



**Solutions Not Sides is a registered charity in England and Wales (1183651)**

**[www.solutionsnotsides.co.uk](http://www.solutionsnotsides.co.uk)**