

Psychologists for Peace Interest Group of the Australian Psychological Society Statement on the Israel-Hamas War

In response to the Israel-Hamas War, Psychologists for Peace calls for non-violent actions to be taken to cease the violence and to find and develop paths towards a lasting peace in the region.

The present situation can bring up many emotional responses including anger, anxiety, fear, trauma (personal or secondary), profound sadness, vengefulness, empathy or even guilt or shame. Many people living in Australia have connections with people in Israel, Gaza or the broader region; even if we do not, we may see ourselves as global citizens who are affected by world events. Whether as psychologists, family members, caregivers or members of the community, it is important at this time to provide support and understanding for those around us, and to assist in working through the emotions experienced. It is also important to resist the tendency to overgeneralise – avoiding labelling and stereotyping broad groups of people (based on ethnicity or religion) as ‘bad’, but rather focussing on the relevant specific actions of specific actors, and considering how we could address those constructively.

Psychological research shows that, when trying to grapple with distressing events such as those we are witnessing currently, humans are prone to oversimplifying the situation, resulting in vilifying one side or the other and focusing on blaming one side, rather than constructively addressing issues. Clearly actions that are against international laws and conventions need to be addressed by the international community. At the same time processes are needed, including diplomatic efforts and clear analyses of the multiple proximal and root causes of the conflict, viewed from local, regional and international community perspectives over time. Ultimately the deeper needs and interests of all sides need to be thoroughly considered and addressed - preferably through discussion, negotiation and mediation.

An important way to address emotional responses and feelings of helplessness is to take action, such as:

- Educating oneself about the situation using media sources that are fact-based and balanced and avoiding those which are partisan or one-sided.
- Ensuring self-care (engaging in exercise, spending time with nature, meditating, and ensuring supportive sleep and eating patterns) and sharing concerns with compassionate and empathetic others (which may include a psychologist).
- Writing to or visiting relevant politicians to urge proactive diplomatic steps that reduce violence, avoid escalating the conflict, prevent harm to civilians, support peaceful inter-group initiatives (such as those currently taking place between peace-promoting Palestinians and Israelis), and provide humanitarian corridors so aid to victims is provided.
- Making contact with, or learning about, people in your community who have connections with the “other” side to find out how they are feeling and offer compassion and support.

- Supporting children and young people, through finding out what they have heard and how they feel, and discussing issues in a caring, age-appropriate and non-stigmatising manner.
- Donating to humanitarian assistance initiatives. Many established humanitarian aid organisations are active in the area and in other global contexts in which aid is needed.

Examples of organisations to donate to, providing support for victims of war:

- For suggestions about general, Israeli and Palestinian aid organisations and cautions about choosing organisations to donate to:
 - <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/13/1205235922/help-israel-gaza-humanitarian-organizations>
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) - <https://www.icrc.org/en/support-us>
- UNICEF children-focused support – <https://www.unicef.org.au/appeals>
- For donating towards other humanitarian emergencies: UNHCR Australia (The UN Refugee Agency Australia for UNHCR) - <https://www.unrefugees.org.au/>
- For donating to other UN agencies and organisations: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/how-to-donate-to-the-un-system>

Ideas for talking with children and young people about the war:

- UNICEF tips: <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/how-talk-your-children-about-conflict-and-war>
- Posted by Australian Psychological Society: [https://psychology.org.au/about-us/news-and-media/aps-in-the-media/2023/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-amas-israel-\(1\)](https://psychology.org.au/about-us/news-and-media/aps-in-the-media/2023/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-amas-israel-(1))