



Processing the Crisis in the Middle East

Witnessing trauma from news headlines and social media can lead to feelings of social isolation for our students. They may be reluctant to process their emotions out loud for fear of what they may perceive as being “wrong.” We have compiled a list of talking points, look-fors, and activities to help your students who are absorbing trauma related to the war in the Middle East confront their own feelings of social isolation.

Key Crisis Guidelines for Teachers

Following a crisis, be prepared for additional trauma, trigger responses, and questions coming into your classrooms the following morning and the coming weeks or even months. It is not unusual for students to:

- Act out
- Draw inward
- Display displaced emotion in reaction to the news headlines
- Say hateful remarks to students of certain communities, without a deeper understanding behind it.

See below for a **guided drawing activity (page 4)** that can be used in your classrooms or advisory sessions to:

- a) Help students process their emotions in a safe, independent way
- b) Help facilitate conversations about feelings that **may not yet have words**
- c) Remind youth of their power and agency to push back against hate



Careful Considerations/Reminders:

1. Take a moment to first reflect on how you are doing. Remind yourself that it is okay not to know all the answers, but remember the opportunity you have to make students feel safe in your classroom.
2. Keep in mind that not everyone may know what is happening; while for others, this crisis is central to their lives at home and in their communities.
 - a. Be careful not to shame those who do not know and to be cognizant of those who may be deeply engaged.
 - b. A simple explanation of events that gives an appropriate amount of context without sparking unrest will enable safety:

“We know that violence and war can feel unsettling and even scary. I want you to know in our classroom, you are always safe. The other adults at school and I are all working to make sure you feel connected and able to express any feelings you may be having.”
3. Avoid getting into ideological debates. Remind students that the space held is for processing feelings and being respectful:

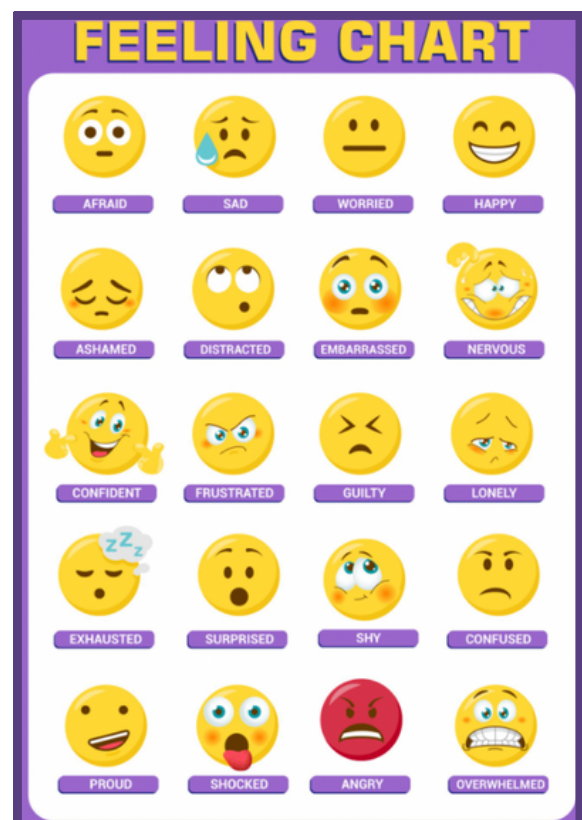
“We know it can be incredibly hard to see adults in your life display emotions of sadness or anger, to witness things on the news, or be worried about your safety in public. Here, we want to give you space and time to process your feelings.”
4. Center and validate students’ feelings and model that all feelings are OK.

Check-in activity suggestion #1:

Help students name two emotions and give them language to articulate their feelings.

Consider providing a color or emoji check-in like the one below to remind students that their mix of emotions are completely valid.

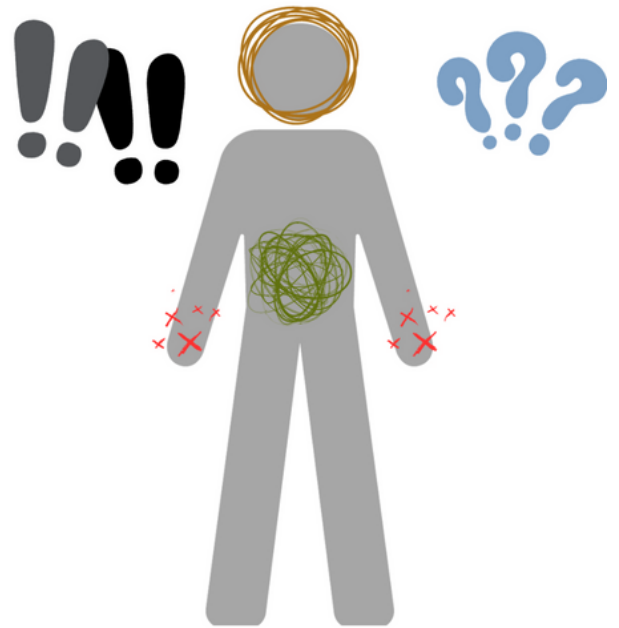
Example: They may feel sad from the news, but also happy that they won their soccer game the other evening.



Check-in Activity #2:

Students may benefit from learning to recognize how their emotions show up in their bodies with a drawing exercise. The colors, symbols and images each student uses will be unique to their experience of their feelings.

The example to the right shows red Xs for sweaty hands, a green scribble for an upset stomach, brown scribbles for a confused brain, and exclamation marks and question marks outside the person to show what messaging they are noticing.



5. Give students multiple ways to connect with you throughout this period (i.e. hold a set of office hours during one lunch period in the week, do an art project, etc.)



Guided Art Activity

Use the drawing prompts to help students process their emotions, and ask them to draw symbols of hope, change, or actions they feel are important during times like these. Also, they can use this time to also process their fears and insecurities.

Materials Needed

- A blank piece of paper
- Writing utensils (markers/colored pencils/crayons)

Facilitation tips

- Ask permission to walk around the room as you read the prompts.
- Specific praise goes further than “Good job” when speaking to students: “I like the words you are using to describe your feelings” or “Your ideas for how to foster hope are so inspiring.”
- If you see something particularly compelling, ask permission to share it with the group.

Guided Drawing Prompts

These prompts can help young people process what has happened in a way that lends to a calm, relaxed state of mind. It can be used with students in multiple languages and those who have disabilities and/or are neurodivergent.

- In the right-hand corner of your paper - Draw something that reflects where you learned about the violence (i.e. could it be a TV in your living room, or a cup on the kitchen table). As educators, this can help you get insight into recognizing what spaces or triggers a student may have.
- Put that image in a box, write words around the box, or draw something that reflects how you feel. Use as many words or images to describe your feelings as possible.
- In the left-hand corner of your paper - Reflect independently on what you wish to say to (the victims' families, lawmakers, teachers, or the people in the communities where violence has occurred). This doesn't have to be recorded or written down, but do then ask them to write one emotion to describe how they feel after writing a sentiment. Box a box around it.
- In the center of the page - Draw or write something that reflects hope to the communities where violence has occurred (i.e. I hope the violence stops).
- Draw lines radiating out from your circle like the rays of a sun.
- Reflect on ideas of how you can create belonging in your community. Write these ideas on the lines radiating out from the sun. Give examples if students struggle:
 - “I will not make comments that hurt people from Jewish or Muslim backgrounds.”
 - “I will recognize that members of my community may be upset, and I will be supportive.”

