

PREVENTION



Series On:
 **TRAUMA**
 PARENTING IN A POST-OCTOBER 7 WORLD.

ISSUE **1**

Presented by
 Operation Survival,
 in partnership with
 Mayanei Hayeshua



Our family has witnessed protests in New York City where the crowd chanted, "Globalize the Intifada." **MY KIDS ARE SCARED.** How can I explain what is happening without causing too much fear, especially since we parents are also scared?

Parents ask, professionals answer.

**BASED ON AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. BELLA SCHANZER
 SENIOR PSYCHIATRIST, MAYANEI HAYESHUA'S MENTAL HEALTH CENTER**

It sounds like mom and dad are very, very anxious, which makes it hard for them to create a sense of safety for their children because they themselves do not feel safe. The rapid growth and expression of anti-Semitism in America is very scary for many people. Not that it is surprising, but more that it's been so vocal and so blatant, especially in the wake of what we as Jews have experienced as one of the worst attacks on Jews since the Holocaust.

This is a piece of the cognitive confusion where we're thinking "This doesn't make sense to me. Why am I being attacked if I was the one who was attacked? People should be supporting me. Why are people hating me?" Our brain tries to make sense of this, and in that space of not being able to make sense of it, our brain starts getting worried that something wrong must be happening since we can't make sense of this.

As parents, it's important to figure out how to deal with your own fear so that you can create a sense of safety for your children. From a very technical perspective, more likely than not, at least in the near future, even though there are protests and there are a lot of very loud, scary voices, there is a low risk of physical danger associated with these protests.

The first thing to do is to say to yourselves and to your children, "I know this seems really scary. It's very loud, it's very hateful, and it's very hurtful, but we're not actually in danger." It's important to be able to say that to yourselves so that you can say it to your children. If you are struggling to believe that and you are unable to shake these persistent worries and fears, it's important to reach out for help.



How do you know when you can manage on your own or when you should speak to a therapist? You need to determine how much your fear is impacting your functioning - such as you're not sleeping, you're not eating, you're having trouble paying attention to what's going on with your kids, you're becoming more irritable, you're short-tempered because of it, it's consuming your thoughts, or anything else along that spectrum. Those are all signs that you should be speaking to somebody.

This doesn't mean you have a diagnosis. It means you're struggling with something that you're very fearful and worried about, something that you're having an anxiety response to and it's starting to have negative ramifications for your life. Why is it important for you to speak to somebody? Because you can't create a safe environment for your children, which is what they need if you yourselves are so worried. That's number one.

Now, how do you create a safe environment for your children? Children need to feel love. They need to feel that things are going to be okay, and they need to feel that their parents are going to take care of them. To provide that sort of safe space and support for your children, you need to talk to them. This is a little bit of a lost art. Unfortunately, a lot of parents these days don't really take the time to sit down with their kids and talk to them.

If I could just push Judaism for a second, we as Jews are given the gift of Shabbos. Every week we have an opportunity to at least have two, if not three, meals with our children where we all sit without phones, and without distractions, and we can actually talk to them. It's a gift that Hashem has given our community. Take advantage of it; talk to your children. Don't assume you know what is going on inside their heads; whatever you assume is probably not exactly on point. Certainly, try not to

project your feelings onto them. That's only going to make you more worried because they may or may not reflect back to you what you're feeling.

Talk to them. And listen deeply. Ask them how they're feeling. Delve into the specifics of what is going on with them, understand what they are seeing and how they are interpreting that all. Inquire about what their peers are saying to them. For parents, this is the most important intervention you can make. Not

only does this provide insight into what's actually going on inside your children's heads and inside their lives, but your children will know they can talk to you and come to you if they do start feeling worried.

With that knowledge, you can help them. If your children start to show you that they're experiencing functional impairment in their own lives because of the worry—they're not sleeping, they're having nightmares, they're having trouble at school, they're becoming more socially isolated, etc.—take them to talk to somebody.

Often, it's just a few sessions, and it'll give your children a feeling of agency because they will then be able to speak about it and they'll learn tools to help manage how they're feeling. All in all, if you can get yourself to have real conversations with your children and then respond to what your children are saying, you will not only help them in this moment with this extremely difficult situation, you will also give them the strength, resilience, and support to have very functional lives as adults. ♥

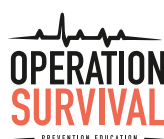
Bella Schanzer, MD, is a board-certified general adult psychiatrist with over two decades of experience providing evidence-based, holistic care to individuals grappling with mental health challenges.

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Mayanei Hayeshua opened the world's first full Mental Health Center within the orthodox Jewish community in Israel, offering a range of treatments that cover every aspect of human functioning, respecting the dignity and individuality of every patient, all in a colorful, clean, and cheerful environment.



The National Committee for Furtherance of Jewish Education established Operation Survival in 1988 to provide prevention services in schools in the Crown Heights area such as rap groups, family intervention, and classes for the parents of these students. The program networks with other agencies and provides information to educators, social service and medical professionals, clergy, and community agencies.