

Dear Members of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Community,

Last weekend, 4 members of Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas were held hostage during Shabbat services. They included the synagogue's rabbi, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, as well as three other adult members of the synagogue whose names have not been released. Congregants of the synagogue witnessed the hostage situation as the service was live streamed, further traumatizing the community. Fortunately, all members of Beth Israel survived the terrorist attack, which involved three of the individuals being held hostage for nearly twelve hours. The FBI indicated that it is treating this situation as a terrorist act and hate crime.

Unfortunately, it has become all too common for members of the Jewish community to be targets of bigotry, hatred, and violence. Synagogues, which are sacred spaces of worship, have become targets for violent attacks that have made congregants worry for their safety. As recently stated in the New York Times by Deborah Lipstadt, the Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University, ["for Jews, going to services is an act of courage."](#) As a result, sadly, many synagogues have had to invest in security measures to help detect and respond to violent acts. Following his release, Rabbi Cytron-Walker attributed his and the other hostages' survival to many years of training in security and de-escalation.

In 2022, it no longer feels safe to be a Jewish person. Experiencing hatred as a Jew is frequent, transmitted through conspiracy theories and age-old stereotypes about Jews as a people. The hostage-taker in Texas specifically spoke about Jews "holding power" as a reason for his targeting the community to meet his demands. These tropes are now increasingly being met with threats of violence, which are no longer abstract, but a reality Jews must confront daily throughout the world. According to a study by the American Jewish Committee, nearly one in four Jews have been the target of antisemitism during 2020-2021 in the United States. Seventeen percent of respondents had experienced antisemitic remarks in person, whereas approximately twelve percent of respondents had experienced hate online through social media or other forums. Three percent of Jews had experienced a physical attack.

Further, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) recorded 1,879 antisemitic incidents in the US in 2018, the third highest year on record since the ADL began tracking such data in the 1970s. The number of incidents in 2018 was a 99% increase versus 2015. Similarly, there has been a marked increase in antisemitism globally. According to the Kantor Center at Tel Aviv University, more Jews were killed in antisemitic violence around the world in 2018 than during any other year in decades. This has resulted in a sense of emergency among Jews in many countries, including in the US.

Hate crimes can impact our identities at our essence as human beings; sending messages of being unwelcome. Members of our community who are victims of violent hate crimes can experience psychological sequelae in the form of anxiety, depression, anger, post-traumatic stress, lower self-esteem, and distress. The American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association encourage all who

experience hate as a result of religion, race, ethnicity, sexual identification, gender, disability, culture of origin etc. to reach out to emotionally supportive friends, family, relevant community agencies, and anti-violence support services. You may also want to consider filing an appropriate report. Limiting media exposure to prevent further distress is also recommended. If needed, additional help can be obtained by people impacted by these hate crimes from mental health professionals and local Jewish and Interfaith communities.

The members of the department's Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice Committee (DISC) reject antisemitism and hate in all forms and support actions that unify our community in kindness, acceptance, and compassion. We denounce all acts that result in members of our community feeling threatened or unsafe. It is our goal to strengthen our own community to ensure that our departmental community embodies the values of empathy, unity, and support of all its individual members. We encourage a climate in which differences are appreciated and individuals are respected. We unequivocally condemn all acts of hate and violence. At Emory and within our department, any action that reflects hatred or violence is unacceptable. We echo the sentiments expressed by Rabbi Cytron-Walker, "We all desperately, desperately need that sense of peace."

With Compassion and in Solidarity Against Antisemitism and All Hate Crimes,  
DISC Members

