

# HOW TO TALK ABOUT REFUGEES WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

**Use this guide to talk to anyone in your life who is not yet part of the Jewish movement in support of refugees.** Consider reaching out to someone who has expressed concern about welcoming refugees to the United States or even someone who has made disparaging remarks.

We can be advocates for refugees not only through our political activism but also in our closest relationships. Take a few minutes to listen to another person's perspective, provide basic facts about the global refugee crisis, address hate speech, and talk about the issue in a Jewish context. We hope that these conversations will prompt some people to take action or simply begin to view refugees differently.

## LISTEN FULLY

חָכָם . . . [אֵינוֹ] נִכְנָס לְתוֹךְ דְּבָרֵי חֵבְרוֹ, וְאֵינוֹ נִבְהָל לְהַשִּׁיב.

**A wise person . . . [does not] interrupt the words of his/her peer and is not impulsive in answering.**

*-Pirkei Avot 5:7*

In addition to generating respect, listening fully will help the person you are speaking with remain more open. You'll also come to understand why they feel the way they do and can follow up accordingly and find the places where they seem most open to change.

## BUILD EMPATHY

וְגַר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יִדְעֶתֶם אֶת־נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

**You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt. -Exodus 23:9**

Challenge yourself to see things from the perspective of the person with whom you're speaking. If they express fear, help them build empathy with refugees by telling the stories of contemporary refugees and the fears they face as they flee violence and persecution. You can find stories of today's refugees on HIAS' blog at [www.hias.org/blog](http://www.hias.org/blog).

## DRAW ON YOUR HISTORY AND VALUES

זְכֹר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שָׁנוֹת דָּר וָדָר.

**Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past.**

*-Deuteronomy 32:7*

Welcoming the stranger is both an American and Jewish value. The United States was founded to provide freedom and safety to the persecuted. Helping refugees sets an example for the nations of the world to follow. Welcoming the stranger is also a core Jewish value. Turn the page for more information about Jewish values and history to use in conversation.

## BRING THE FACTS

חותמו של הקב"ה אמת.

**The seal of the Holy One, Blessed be God, is truth.**

*-Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 55a*

A lot of anti-refugee sentiment is based on lack of, or false, information. You can help correct misunderstandings about refugees with the information on the next page.

# ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS

## WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT THIS AS A JEW?

The Jewish people has been a refugee people since biblical times. In the United States, we know the devastating consequences of turning away refugees. Less than a century ago, refugees fleeing the Holocaust were marked as security threats to the U.S., denied entry, and sent back to Europe to be brutally murdered. Furthermore, the value of welcoming, protecting, and loving the stranger appears in the Torah 36 times according to the Talmud - more than any other value.

## ARE REFUGEES A SECURITY THREAT?

Refugees complete extensive security and medical screenings more rigorous than those for any other entrant to America - involving 5 U.S. government agencies - before they step foot on American soil. No person admitted through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has ever been implicated in a major fatal terrorist attack in the United States.

## WHY DOES THE UNITED STATES NEED TO WELCOME REFUGEES? CAN'T OTHER COUNTRIES DO IT?

When the U.S. welcomes refugees, the rest of the nations of the world follow suit. Other countries are also doing their part. Millions of refugees first flee to and make a life in the countries closest to them. For example, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey have all taken in millions of Syrian refugees.

## AREN'T REFUGEES A DRAIN ON OUR ECONOMY? WHO IS GOING TO PAY FOR HELPING THEM?

Refugees pay taxes, get jobs, and start businesses; they contribute much more to our economy than they take from it. According to one study, in Cleveland, local refugee services agencies spent about \$4.8 million in 2012 to help refugees get established, but the boon to the economy generated by those refugees weighed in at about \$48 million, roughly 10 times the initial resettlement costs.

## BUT AREN'T MANY OF THESE REFUGEES ANTI-SEMITIC?

Many refugees arriving in the United States have never met Jews before. The welcome they receive from Jewish organizations, individuals, and congregations combats anti-Semitism that may exist, breaks down their assumptions, and helps them more quickly become part of the diverse fabric of this country. Additionally, all refugees resettled in the U.S. receive mandatory cultural orientation helping them embrace their new multi-faith, multi-ethnic nation. Finally, we should not be a people who withhold refuge based on religion.

WANT MORE  
INFORMATION?  
WANT TO TAKE  
ACTION?

**For more resources on difficult conversations,**

consider reading *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen.

**For more resources on the global refugee crisis**

(including additional Jewish texts, FAQs, fact sheets, etc.) visit [www.hias.org/resources](http://www.hias.org/resources).

**To learn how to take action and invite others to join you,** go to [www.hias.org/take-action](http://www.hias.org/take-action).