



American Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African Psychological Association

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH AND SUPPORTING ARAB/MENA STUDENTS

The field of professional psychology continues to engage the development of cultural humility, as well as culturally informed practice, training, supervision, research, and pedagogy. However, academia's response to the intensified ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the last month has illuminated the glaring gap in equity and protection of students who identify as- or are perceived as- Arab, Middle Eastern, and/or North African (Arab/MENA). Much of this stems from the limited and biased coverage of Arab/MENA populations in the media and multicultural training of undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students, which impacts the cultural responsiveness of psychologists who practice, research, and train. In line with the American Psychological Association's (APA) Multicultural Guidelines (2019), Psychologists are encouraged to consider structural oppression embedded in institutional practices that produce disparities, disproportionalities, and inequities and to pursue an ongoing self-reflective process of their own social position.

Over the last month, Arab/MENA-identifying students were forced to educate their peers, advisors, and supervisors about the plight of Palestinians. This responsibility left students without the appropriate support and guidance that is typically allotted to other students when navigating different interpersonal, intersectional, and contextual situations that may ultimately impact their training and education. There needs to be better support and stronger training on how to best support Arab/MENA students who are often overlooked or misunderstood. We want to draw attention to the APA Multicultural Guidelines (2019), which underscore that the responsibility for multicultural education should not rest solely on those who identify as minorities. It encourages faculty from varied sociocultural backgrounds to dedicate their time and resources to addressing multicultural issues.

The purpose of this document is to provide educators, supervisors, and research advisors - particularly those involved in psychology training - with guidelines on how to best support Arab/MENA students while the community is actively experiencing grief, despair, fear, anger, and trauma.

AMENA-Psy has received reports of students being discouraged and/or silenced when attempting to speak about the plight of Palestinians. This parallels the increased harassment and discrimination Arab/MENA Americans are experiencing across the United States. As depicted by Dylan Saba, an attorney with Palestine Legal, "We've received hundreds of requests for assistance over the past two weeks, an exponential surge in our caseload. Since

2014, we've handled thousands of such incidents—*suppression of speech supporting Palestinian rights is nothing new—but it's never been this bad.*"

Supporting Arab/MENA students during this time of heightened emotional distress is crucial. Educators, supervisors, and research advisors in higher education programs can play a significant role in fostering a safe and empathetic environment. Below are some guidelines to assist you in working effectively with these students while acknowledging the ongoing dehumanization, silencing, dismissal, and censoring of the community:

Educate Yourself:

- The APA Multicultural Guidelines (2019) encourage psychologists to adopt more expansive global perspectives about events impacting society at large.
- When learning about the history of Palestine and Israel, it is often conveyed that it is “too complex to understand.” This message ultimately deters many from doing the necessary work of educating themselves. We encourage you to not allow this rhetoric to deter you from learning about Israeli apartheid and ongoing oppression in Palestine.
- Seek reputable sources endorsed by Arab/MENA organizations such as AMENA-Psy, The Arab American Institute, Institute for Middle East Understanding and so on. See [AMENA-Psy Palestine Resource Document](#).
- Of note, Arab/MENA Americans are a heterogeneous population that comprises various religions. Arab/MENA identity is often conflated with Muslim identity. Most members of the Arab/MENA community are not Muslim and many Muslim community members are not Arab/MENA. Be aware that because of this erroneous conflation, Arab/MENA people of various religions and backgrounds are regularly impacted by Islamophobia.
- As psychologists, advisors, and supervisors, we urge you to engage in continuing education and reflection to safeguard from acting through implicit or explicit biases, ensuring equity and fairness for all students.

Acknowledge Their Reality and Take Steps to Reduce Harm:

- There is ongoing dehumanization of Arab/MENA people in the media. Ensure you are not further perpetuating this harm by delegitimizing and disregarding student experiences. This includes:
 - Regularly checking in with your students, both in group and individual settings, asking how they are doing and actively listening to their concerns. We have heard reports of supervisors/advisors checking in with students initially in an attempt to validate and inquire about tasks, but not following up with students once they express feelings of distress or suffering. This type of check-in, characterized by a lack of care and consideration, can often cause more harm than benefit.

- Recognizing that Arab/MENA students are likely experiencing grief, despair, and fear. Validate their feelings by verbalizing your awareness of their hurt.
- Proactively acknowledging their pain especially when others' suffering is acknowledged.
- Honor that the complexity of trauma goes beyond direct exposure to a traumatic event, but includes vicarious and intergenerational traumatization, which may be especially amplified for Arab/MENA students. Witnessing violent images of death and harm being perpetuated against one's own communities is traumatic.

Listen and Learn:

- Be open to learning from your students if they disclose information. They can provide valuable insights into the impact of current events on their communities.
- It is also important to recognize that some Arab/MENA people, especially Palestinians, may not have the bandwidth to provide this kind of education - always leave this decision up to the individual without judgment.

Create a Safe Space:

- Facilitate an open and non-judgmental environment in your classes and interactions. Encourage respectful and constructive dialogue while discouraging hate speech or discrimination. This includes challenging tactics that have been used to silence anyone who speaks in support of Palestinian rights. See [Palestine Legal's Resource](#) to familiarize yourself with the tactics, how they have been used, and how to address them.
- It is acceptable and even beneficial to hold support spaces for Arab/MENA students impacted by geopolitical events in the region. Arab/MENA specific spaces are intended to create much needed safety for Arab/MENA students - their purpose is not to exclude other groups. However, please ensure that the person facilitating the group is skilled enough to avoid further harm.
- We encourage clinical supervisors to hold space for and help students process how the current events in Gaza are impacting them professionally. This might include:
 - Discussing ways this impacts the supervisory relationship, in addition to the therapeutic work being carried out by the student.
 - Assisting Arab/MENA students with navigating challenging clinical encounters related to working with clients who hold Islamophobic or anti-Arab/MENA beliefs or sentiments.
 - Acknowledging the challenges that Arab/MENA students experience working with other Arab/MENA clients and simultaneously holding their own, the client's, and the community's grief and trauma in a professional setting.

Use Your Position, Power, and Resources:

- In relation to the professional targeting, intimidation, and ostracism mentioned in our introduction, we have heard reports of licensure-related and other professional concerns regarding protest-related arrests and peaceful activism. See [AMENA-Psy's Open Letter](#) regarding one such example.
- We have also received reports of students being silenced, minimized and encountering microaggressions when sharing personal experiences. Students have conveyed feeling unsafe and unable to speak out in training spaces due to fears of retaliation and/or negative perception - potentially impacting performance evaluations and future professional development. Please be vigilant of such instances and prepared to advocate on their behalf.

Empower Students:

- Encourage students to use their voice for advocacy and social change if they are willing and able. Provide opportunities for them to share their perspectives and experiences.
- It is also important to create safe spaces for them to conduct their advocacy work. As previously mentioned, safe space is crucial for students' mental and emotional well-being - advocacy efforts can often be emotionally taxing.
- Safety allows students to build confidence in their efforts. When students believe their opinions are being valued and respected, they are more likely to proactively advocate for issues that matter to them and their communities.

Flexibility and Accommodations:

- Students may be experiencing the effects of traumatic stress, including: intrusive images of violence; difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, physiological and psychological distress, negative mood, changes in appetite, anxiety, fear, and hypervigilance ([APA Statement](#)). This impacts their ability to fully participate and engage in their academic and clinical responsibilities.
- Expecting students to carry along in their day-to-day tasks is unrealistic and negates this trauma.
- Understand that students may struggle to meet deadlines or perform at their best during times of crisis. Be flexible with assignment due dates and consider making accommodations as needed.
- Give options to reschedule research and supervisory meetings, and to not attend non-mandatory meetings.
- If students are collecting data with the Arab/MENA community, it will likely be halted because the cultural norms of honor and respect would make it ayb (shameful) to continue with data collection when many are mourning deaths related to this conflict.

Provide Resources:

- Offer information about on-campus and off-campus support resources, such as counseling services, cultural affinity groups, or community organizations. This can help students access additional help if needed.
- Seek such resources from organizations that cater to the community (i.e., *AMENA-Psy*, *The Arab American Association of New York*, *the ACLU*, *the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee*, *the Arab American Institute*, *the National Network for Arab American Communities*, *Arabs in Neuroscience*) given that such resources are limited in local settings and often insufficient.
- With the recognition that many Arab/MENA individuals are being targeted for speaking out in support of Palestinians, especially through the practice of doxxing, provide them with resources on how to handle these cases if they are the target of such practices. You may refer them to pro bono services provided by Palestine Legal and/or share this anti-doxxing guide created to support activists around the world:
<https://www.equalitylabs.org/research/publications-resources/>
- Make it clear that discrimination or harassment based on religion, ethnicity, or nationality will not be tolerated in your program or institution. Provide clear reporting mechanisms for students who experience or witness such incidents.

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