RESPONSES TO SLURS

Here are short, powerful responses to the most common antisemitic and anti-Israel slurs. Each one has an approach that is connected to one of three goals:

• For yourself (pride): to stand tall and affirm your position.
• Fact-based: for calm, constructive settings (don't forget to first shake their confidence with questions).
• Exit-line: to calm down hostile conversations with some dignity.

Each comes with a quick note on why it works, based on behavioural psychology.

And each one begins with some questions you could ask to shake the confidence of the other person.

Find out more about the importance of asking questions on the Discussion Tips page.

Slur 1: "Israel is an apartheid state."
Questions to ask:

• Could you help me understand how you define apartheid?

• According to your definition, what states around the world are apartheid states?

• Where did you first hear that Israel is an apartheid state?

For yourself (pride): I'm proud to support the only democracy in the Middle East where all citizens have equal rights under the law.
Why it works: Flips the attack into a values-based pride statement.

Fact-based: Apartheid means legal segregation by race. In Israel, Arabs vote, serve in parliament, and sit on the Supreme Court. That's not apartheid.
Why it works: Frames the term, then dismantles the claim with clear facts (cognitive fluency).

Exit-line: Calling Israel apartheid is propaganda, not truth — I won't debate lies.
Why it works: Draws a clear boundary against bad-faith claims.

Slur 2: "Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians."
Questions to ask:

• What does "genocide" mean to you?

• Who first told you Israel's actions amount to genocide?

• What would make you question whether that's the right word?

For yourself (pride): Israel's fight is against terror, not people — we value life, even when our enemies don't.
Why it works: Moral reframing — puts Israel on the side of life.

Fact-based: Genocide means trying to destroy an entire people. The Palestinian population has grown year after year — this is conflict, not genocide.

Why it works: Controls the definition, then uses one undeniable fact to break the claim.

Exit-line: Throwing around "genocide" cheapens the word and the real history behind it.
Why it works: Shifts moral weight back onto the accuser.

Slur 3: "Zionism is racism."
Questions to ask:

• How do you personally define racism?

• Is every nation's right to self-determination racist, or only the Jewish one?

• Where did you first hear that Zionism equals racism?

For yourself (pride): Zionism is Jewish pride in our home and our history — nothing racist about wanting to live free.
Why it works: Reconnects the term to identity and heritage.

Fact-based: Zionism is simply the Jewish right to self-determination in our ancestral homeland — the same right every people has.
Why it works: Uses universal rights to make rejection harder.

Exit-line: Every people has the right to self-determination. For Jews, that's Zionism — equal rights, not racism.
Why it works: Uses fairness framing to normalise Zionism.

Slur 4: "Jews control the media, banks, and governments."
Questions to ask:

• What makes you believe that's true?

• How can we tell the difference between a fact and a stereotype?

• Does success in an industry mean someone controls it?

For yourself (pride): Jews succeed in many fields because we value learning, hard work, and community — nothing sinister about that.
Why it works: Turns the stereotype into a positive truth.

Fact-based: That's an old conspiracy theory used to fuel antisemitism for centuries — it falls apart when you check the facts.
Why it works: Exposes the pattern — making it seem tired and unoriginal.

Exit-line: Old antisemitic myths don't get true just by repeating them.
Why it works: Humour-edged dismissal breaks tension and ends it.

Slur 5: "The Holocaust is exaggerated or didn't happen."
Questions to ask:

• What sources do you trust on the Holocaust?

• Are you aware of Germany's own records and documentation of the Holocaust?

• Why do you think it's recorded by so many independent sources?

For yourself (pride): My people carry the truth of our history — denial is just another form of antisemitism.
Why it works: Affirms identity as keeper of history.

Fact-based: The Holocaust is one of the most documented events in history — with eyewitnesses, records, and even Nazi confessions.
Why it works: Overwhelming evidence leaves no room for denial.

Exit-line: Denying the Holocaust is pure hate speech — I won't entertain it.
Why it works: Refuses to legitimise denial with debate.

Slur 6: "Jews care more about Israel than the countries they live in."
Questions to ask:

• Can people love more than one place at the same time?

• Would you say the same about other diasporas?

• Why do you think caring about Israel means less loyalty elsewhere?

For yourself (pride): I'm proud of both my Jewish identity and my country — they go hand in hand.
Why it works: Reframes "dual loyalty" as complementary pride.

Fact-based: Loving Israel is like loving your heritage — it doesn't reduce loyalty to your home country.
Why it works: Normalises attachment to Israel through analogy.

Exit-line: Caring about Israel is no different from anyone else caring about their roots.
Why it works: Equality framing removes the sting.

Slur 7: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."
Questions to ask:

• What do you think that slogan means in real life?

• Does your vision include a place for Jews there?

• How do you think Jews hear that phrase?

For yourself (pride): Jews have lived between that river and that sea for over 3,000 years — we're not going anywhere.
Why it works: Anchors the claim in deep history.

Fact-based: That slogan means no Israel at all — erasing Jewish self-determination isn't freedom.
Why it works: Clarifies the meaning and consequence.

Exit-line: That's a call to erase my people — I reject it completely.
Why it works: Frames it as a moral red-line.

Slur 8: "Jews stole Palestinian land / Israel has no right to exist."
Questions to ask:

• What's your understanding of Jewish history in that land?

• Do indigenous rights apply to Jews too?

• Can people "steal" a place they've lived in for thousands of years?

For yourself (pride): Israel is our ancient home — we rebuilt it from our roots.
Why it works: Positions the return as a just restoration.

Fact-based: Jews are indigenous to the Land of Israel. Our history there goes back over 3,000 years. We didn't steal our home, we returned to it.
Why it works: Uses indigenous rights framing for moral authority.

Exit-line: You can't "steal" your own homeland.
Why it works: Short, logical, hard to counter.

Slur 9: "Israel deliberately targets civilians / kills children."
Questions to ask:

• What makes you think it's deliberate?

• Do you know how Hamas operates among civilians?

• What would convince you Israel's aim is to stop terrorists, not civilians?

For yourself (pride): Israel values life — we take risks to protect civilians, even in war.
Why it works: Affirms moral identity.

Fact-based: Israel targets terrorists — Hamas hides among civilians. The tragedy is Hamas' use of human shields.
Why it works: Separates intent from outcome.

Exit-line: That's Hamas' propaganda, not reality.
Why it works: Delegitimises the source in one move.

Slur 10: "Criticism of Israel isn't antisemitic."
Questions to ask:

• Criticism is always accepted. What is your exact criticism?

• How can you tell when criticism crosses into antisemitism?

• Is it fair to hold one country to a different standard than all others?

For yourself (pride): Debate is fine. Erasing my people's right to exist isn't.
Why it works: Combines openness with moral clarity.

Fact-based: True — unless it uses double standards, demonises Israel, or denies our right to exist. Then it is.
Why it works: "Yes-but" agreement builds rapport before drawing the line.

Exit-line: There's a difference between criticism and demonisation — learn it.
Why it works: Forces the accuser to face their framing.