



# Strength & Spirit

JEWISH COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

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GREATER WASHINGTON

## PASSOVER 5776: Putting Windows in our Walls

*By Rabbi Uri Topolosky*



The Exodus from Egypt reached its climactic moment in the crossing of the Red Sea. Our Rabbinic tradition in the Midrash, the ancient commentary on the Hebrew scriptures, offers a twist in this tale, suggesting that it was not a single canal that opened to birth forth our people, but instead, “Chomot v’Chomot” – “walls and walls.”

The Rabbis suggest that there were enough walls to create 12 distinct passages – one for each of the Tribes. This teaching is a thoughtful metaphor for our sense of Peoplehood – a reminder that we were born as a diverse people and must always recognize the unique paths of our individual members.

*“And the waters became like walls, to the right and to the left.” – Exodus 14:22*

However, our Midrash continues and offers another inspirational detail to our story.

Within each of those walls were embedded, “Chalonot v’Chalonot” – “windows and windows.” Windows in the walls offered the tribes glimpses of each other, so that even as one group moved along its own path, it would be cognizant of the greater family. The windows strengthen our metaphor and suggest that Jewish Peoplehood is not simply defined as a diverse community. Rather, each member must feel invested in the other and sensitized to the varied journeys of our people.

Among those journeys, are some very difficult ones, including the paths walked by those suffering from domestic abuse. In our community, like in every other, men and women struggle behind closed doors, victims to their oppressors, hoping for a window out of their pain.

As each of our individual communities plod along our own paths, we must be collectively responsible to open windows in our walls, and see the whole of our Jewish family. There will be many reasons to celebrate as we peer through those windows, but we must also be willing to see into the shadows.

The *Shulchan Aruch*, our code of Jewish law, records a requirement for all synagogues to have windows and specifically writes, “It is recommended for a synagogue to have twelve windows” (*Orach Chayim 90:4*). It would seem that this design obligation is born out of our Midrash, and underscores the value of being conscious of the needs and struggles of our larger family as part of our Divine worship. In the case of domestic abuse, which so often lurks in those shadows of our community, we have an even greater responsibility to place windows in our walls. Our awareness that abuse exists, and then our dutiful acknowledgment of it, can be the window of opportunity a silent someone might need to reach on through for help.

*Rabbi Uri Topolosky is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Joshua of Aspen Hill and the Rav HaKehillah of the Berman Hebrew Academy.*

## FROM THE CLINICAL DESK: Witnessing Domestic Abuse - Exposure in Childhood

By Rahel Schwartz, PhD, LCSW-C, JCADA Clinical Director

For as long as Anna\* could remember, staying focused in school had been a challenge. She often woke up in the middle of the night with a pounding headache and knots in her stomach. Pretending not to hear the fighting was exhausting. The mornings after, the pain behind her eye would block out the teacher's words. She wished she could talk to someone, but it was hard to explain. Everyone liked her mom and dad, and they were friends with all of her friends' parents. Things didn't always feel good at home, but other times, things seemed normal and her parents seemed to get along.

What happens to children who witness domestic violence? Are there adverse effects even when the abuse is not directed at them?

Exposure to domestic violence (DV) causes long-lasting emotional and neurological effects in children. Children who witness DV are at a significantly increased risk of developing health problems.

The Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACE), one of the largest studies ever conducted on this topic, found associations between events during childhood and health/well-being later in life. This highly respected study asked people about their childhood experience of abuse, neglect and family dysfunction during a comprehensive physical exam. Children who witnessed a parent being abused were more likely to experience learning issues, engage in risky health-related behaviors and suffer from disease and early death.

Living in a chronically stressful situation impacts children on multiple levels. The ACE study also found that individuals who experienced repeated or unpredictable traumas, especially ones that occurred in childhood and were caused by a known caregiver, were more negatively affected than individuals who experienced trauma attributed to a single event or natural stressor.

During a traumatic event, which is any deeply distressing or disturbing experience, stress hormones flood the body. As the body prepares for fight, flight or freeze, other nonessential systems shut down. Executive functioning is impacted, as is the part of the brain responsible for organizing memories. This is a helpful response for survival in the short-term. However, in the long-term, elevated levels of cortisol can result in impaired memory and a suppressed immune system.



SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Witnessing DV can negatively affect social functioning and academic performance. Additionally, experiencing trauma can change a child's world view. Children who witness abuse often start to believe that bad things will continue to happen and no one can be trusted.

Many of the clients seen at JCADA have witnessed abuse in their past. More than 50 percent of our clients have children who may be exposed to conflicts at home. JCADA clinicians work with clients in individual and group counseling to identify protective factors and foster resilience. Together, we look for strengths and supports that may counter adverse experiences and empower clients to obtain safe living environments for themselves and their children. ■

\*Name has been changed to protect the identity of client.  
Full citations for this article can be found online at [jcada.org/blog](http://jcada.org/blog).

## CHECK US OUT!



For the second year in a row, JCADA was selected for the Slingshot Guide's Women & Girls Supplement as one of the Jewish organizations most impacting the lives of women and girls in North America. Learn how our work is making a difference for women in the Greater DC area and beyond at [jcada.org/Slingshot](http://jcada.org/Slingshot). ■

# AWARE® Partners with Hillel International and BBYO DC Council for New Trainings

By Leah Siskin Moz, MSW, JCADA Assistant Director

Educators and youth professionals - such as youth group advisors, camp staff, guidance counselors and teachers— play a unique role in dating abuse prevention efforts. Every year the AWARE® initiative brings workshops focused on building healthy relationships to hundreds of youth in middle school, high school and college. Even after the AWARE® facilitators have left the building, youth who are struggling with relationship or friendship issues still have these trusted adults as a resource. In the past, we have run workshops on warning signs of unhealthy relationships for youth professionals upon request. However, the requests were increasing and we saw that there was a real need in the community.

Over the past two years, we invested in developing a series of workshops for youth professionals, which empower them with tools to support young people as they navigate relationship and friendship issues. We surveyed and met with professionals from across the region to learn more about the common issues they saw youth struggle with. We took this information and combined it with our best practices developed from working with thousands of youth.

We piloted the foundational workshops in this series through partnerships with BBYO DC Council and Hillel International. The AWARE® Training offerings now include workshops on recognizing warning signs of unhealthy relationships; facilitating conversations about sensitive topics with youth; and responding to and supporting youth in crisis. After bringing AWARE® Training to 100 Hillel staff, which focused on strategies for responding to students in crisis while on immersive programs, a participant in the training, Sharon Silverman, shared:

*This webinar afforded me the opportunity to think critically about how I respond during times of crisis and what I can do as staff to promote an environment of emotional and physical safety. I certainly feel more comfortable and prepared to handle these issues, not only during immersive experiences, but also in my everyday interactions with students.*

AWARE® Training is part of JCADA's prevention initiative, the goal of which is to empower young people (ages 12-25) with the skills and knowledge they need to cultivate healthy relationships and, ultimately, healthy lives. Providing training to professionals who interact and support young people on a daily basis is critical to

## AWARE TRAININGS 2015-2016

# 41

Total number of schools that participated in AWARE training for Hillel staff

### Participating Hillel Chapters



Thank you to Hillel and BBYO for piloting our newest AWARE Training Modules!

# 11

BBYO Advisors who participated in "Navigating Tough Conversations" Training

100% of advisors said they were "very likely" to use the new strategies learned in this training when discussing issues with their teens

achieving this goal. The development of these modules was made possible with funding from the Tikkun Olam Women's Foundation. We are excited to begin offering these workshops to the community in the 2016-2017 school year.

If you are interested in bringing a training to your organization, please contact Leah Siskin Moz at [aware@awarenow.org](mailto:aware@awarenow.org) for more information. ■

## RALES CHALLENGE GRANT: We Did It

JCADA rose to the challenge presented by The Norman and Ruth Rales Foundation to independently fundraise \$50,000 in new or increased gifts. In fact, we raised over \$80,000!

The Rales Foundation awarded JCADA a \$150,000 grant in October to be disbursed over three years. After an initial \$50,000 installment, the grant was structured as a challenge to others concerned for the plight of those experiencing domestic abuse. Given a year to complete this challenge, JCADA raised the funds in 6 months, activating the remaining \$100,000. Thank you to our new supporters, our committed donors and the Rales Foundation for this opportunity that will allow us to continue to provide life-saving services for those in need free of charge. ■

# 5K Ways to Show You Care

-  Be a sponsor
-  Be a team captain
-  Be a fundraiser
-  Be a runner or walker
-  Be aware



Choose your 5K way and tell us at [event@jcada.org](mailto:event@jcada.org) or [#JCADA5K](https://twitter.com/JCADA5K).



The Jewish Federation  
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JEWISH COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

Strength & Spirit



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