

A manual for a conflict resilient community

Lessons from Haifa's Response
to October 7th



Objective of This Document

The purpose of this document is to serve as a **practical guide for academic institutions seeking to develop a conflict-resilient community among their students**. This model has been praised by senior figures in the Israeli legal community. Dr. Faina Milman-Sivan and Adv. & MSW Dana Finerich-Gila, The leaders of the team were even invited to lecture at several colleges in the United States. But Most importantly, the students of the Faculty of Law benefited directly from the tools that were developed **together with them**.

If there is one key message to be taken from the outcomes of our project, it is that **academia must take responsibility for its community and its diverse groups, and do so by involving them in the process**. In this guide, you will find examples developed for the Faculty of Law at the University of Haifa, along with the insights and guiding principles we learned along the way.

About the Team



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Our team was deliberately diverse, bringing together two Jewish students, a Muslim Arab student, and a Druze student. This composition inevitably surfaced **tensions related to personal identity, collective memory, and the significant historical and social differences between us**. At times these differences created real challenges in communication, expectations, and perspectives. **Yet the same diversity also became a source of intellectual richness and mutual growth**. It fostered meaningful conversations, encouraged empathy, and ultimately strengthened our collaboration. Moreover, it enabled us to engage more effectively with varied audiences, as each member contributed cultural insight and sensitivity that broadened the project's reach and relevance.

Background

The team emerged following the events of October 7, which profoundly affected campus life and intensified social and political tensions among law students. In response, the faculty promoted the aChord “traffic-lights” model as a framework for maintaining constructive discourse, distinguishing between unacceptable harmful speech, emotionally charged but legitimate expression, and respectful disagreement.

Two years afterward, the death of our classmate Shada Khatib further heightened sensitivities within the students community, **and tensions increasingly surfaced in interpersonal exchanges, particularly in WhatsApp groups.** Against this backdrop, the group was formed to support second-year law students by creating structured spaces for dialogue and tools for navigating conflict. The first instinct was to form a consensus building team of Shada's friends and classmates, in order to create a much-needed creative project that will help maintain and strengthen the sense of safety within the faculty community in various ways.



Dr. Faina Milman-Sivan presents the principles of the 23' Charter at the beginning of the 2024 academic year

Dialogue Charter and The Traffic Model

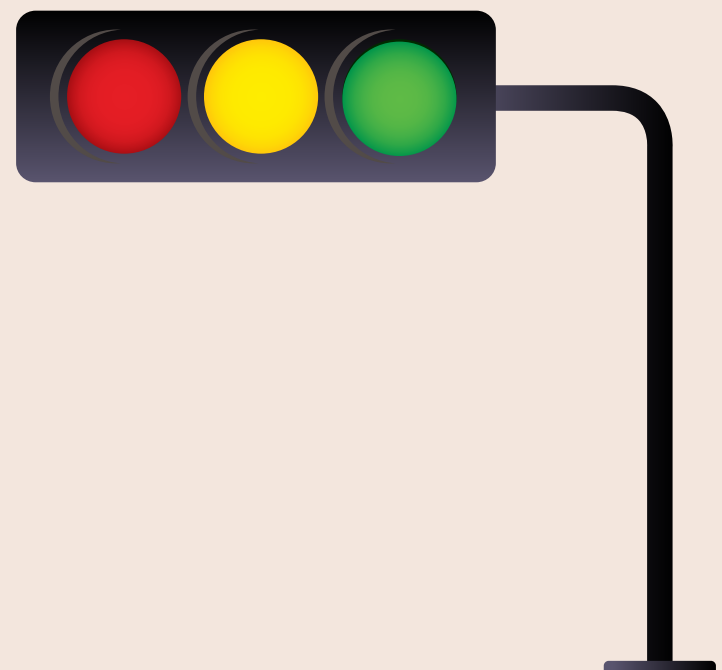
Alongside the practical workshops, an important conceptual anchor for our work was the faculty's Guidelines for Free and Safe Discourse, a collaboratively drafted charter developed in the aftermath of October 7th. The document reflects a collective attempt by students and faculty to preserve academic freedom while maintaining a respectful and emotionally safe shared environment during a period of acute social tension. Rather than relying solely on disciplinary enforcement, the charter frames respectful dialogue as a shared responsibility - something cultivated collectively through everyday interaction

At the heart of the charter stands the aChord center "traffic-lights" model, which offered a clear and accessible vocabulary for navigating disagreement:

Red zone – speech involving incitement, racism, dehumanization, or threats of violence. These expressions require immediate intervention to protect the basic conditions for dialogue.

Orange zone – legitimate opinions expressed in ways that may be hurtful, dismissive, or inflammatory. The goal here is not silencing but reframing tone and delivery, often through mediation or guided conversation.

Green zone – open disagreement expressed respectfully, with empathy toward others' experiences and awareness of the diverse identities present in the academic community



Dialogue Charter and The Traffic Model

Several broader principles from the charter significantly shaped our work:

- Commitment to freedom of expression alongside mutual respect, even in discussions about war, politics, and identity.
- Recognition that online spaces amplify conflict, requiring extra care in tone and interpretation.
- Encouragement of direct dialogue and mediation before formal complaints, to prevent escalation cycles.
- Emphasis on collective responsibility for maintaining a respectful academic environment.

What made this framework particularly useful was its refusal to equate safety with silence. **The aim was not consensus or emotional comfort at all costs, but the ability to remain engaged despite disagreement.** This perspective strongly influenced our workshops, where we framed conflict resilience as a skill that can be developed over time. The traffic-lights model helped students separate the existence of disagreement from the way it is expressed, creating space for difficult conversations without immediate escalation.



The Shared Life team met with students at the beginning of the war to develop the Respectful Dialogue Charter.



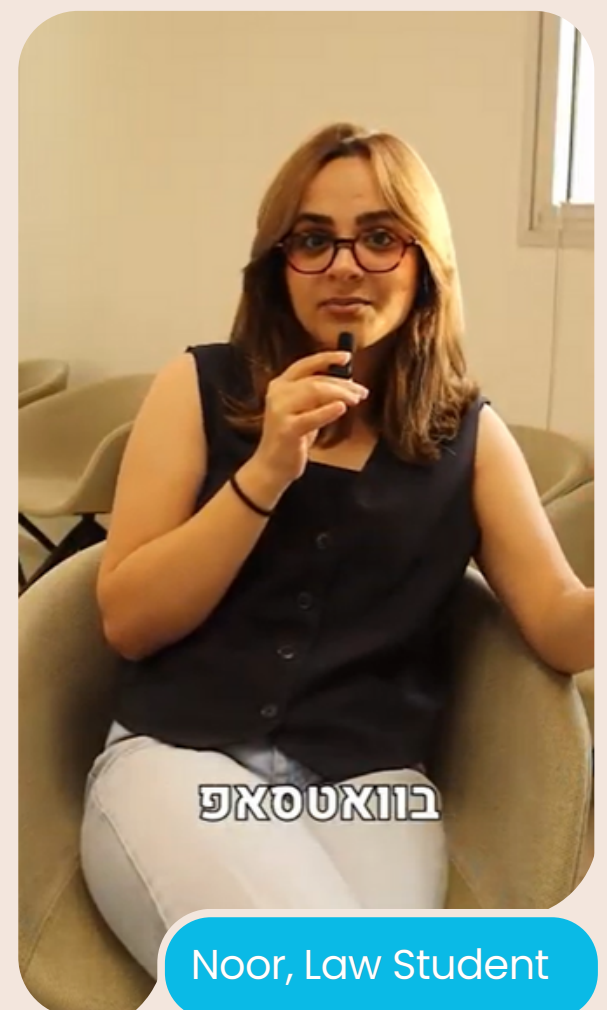
A Respectful Dialogue Charter is displayed in the faculty hallways in Hebrew, English, and Arabic.

Social Media Content

As part of translating these ideas into accessible practice, we produced a series of short videos offering **concrete tips for managing difficult conversations**.

The videos were filmed with participants from diverse backgrounds and were later distributed through the **university's social media platforms**, allowing them to reach a broad student audience in a format that felt **immediate and approachable**.

The production process itself was both complex and meaningful, exposing us to new voices and perspectives while reinforcing the relevance of the issue across different communities. Just as in the process of developing a respectful-dialogue charter, we found that involving students in offering tips creates a sense within the community **that they are seen and acknowledged**. The tips do not need to be perfect or "by the book." In addition, the professionals who participate in the videos - such as litigators or mediators - **are key figures in the lives of law students**.

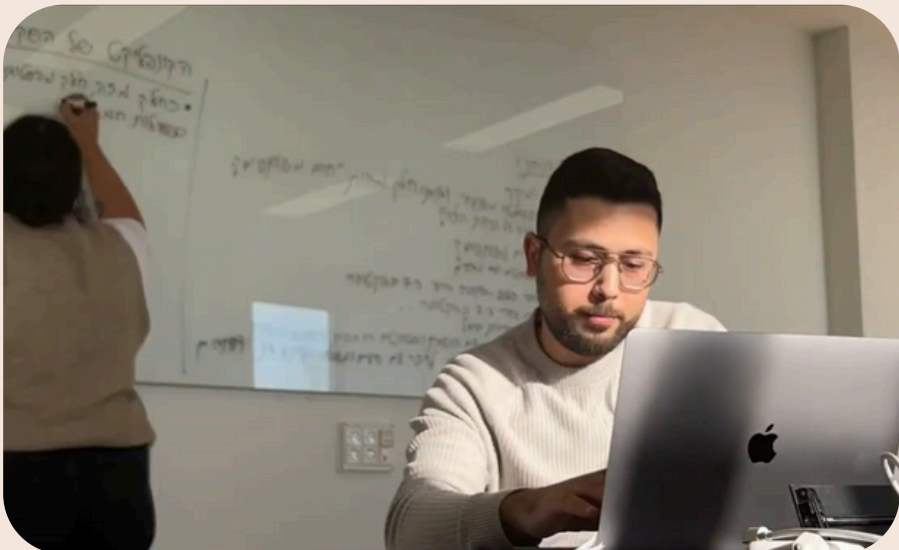


Leader Workshop

The workshop became the central practical component of the project, designed to translate abstract ideas about dialogue into concrete skills students could actually use. We chose tools drawn from mediation, conflict-resolution practice, and reflective listening because they focus less on persuading others and more on managing oneself within emotionally charged interactions. A key idea we emphasized was that conflict resilience functions much like a muscle: it can be trained, strengthened, and refined over time. The workshop therefore provided **practical methods for developing this capacity, including:**

- emotional awareness;
- strategic questioning;
- techniques for staying present in difficult conversations.

Many students reported that these tools gave them language and confidence to navigate interactions that previously felt overwhelming.



The students are responsible for selecting the learning materials, developing the lesson plan, and delivering it to their fellow classmates.

Leader Workshop



At the same time, the process exposed the depth of the tensions we were addressing. In one session, when we introduced a political example and asked participants to position themselves according to whether they supported or opposed a controversial faculty letter, about the sudden expelling of arab students on the grounds of posting terror-supporting content to social media - to which a few faculty members have responded by claiming those students deserve due process;

The room divided almost entirely along ethnic lines, with Arab students on one side and Jewish students on the other. The moment was visibly stressful and underscored how persistent these divisions remain, even two years after the initial crisis.

This experience reinforced both the relevance of the workshop and the limits of any short-term intervention: the goal was never to resolve political disagreement, but to create conditions in which difficult conversations could occur without immediate escalation. As reflected in the workshop structure, which emphasizes emotional awareness, questioning techniques, and holding tension rather than eliminating it, the focus remained on strengthening students' capacity to live with ongoing disagreement rather than expecting quick consensus.

In Conclusion

Taken together, the project **demonstrated both the difficulty and the necessity of sustaining dialogue in a deeply polarized environment.**

While no single intervention can resolve underlying political or social tensions, the combination of shared frameworks, practical tools, and peer-led initiatives helped create moments of recognition, reflection, and more mindful communication. The experience reinforced the idea that constructive engagement in conflict is not a one-time achievement but an ongoing practice, requiring patience, self-awareness, and continued investment. Even modest interventions can contribute meaningfully when they focus on building the everyday skills that allow disagreement to coexist with mutual respect.

