

Prevailing narratives frame teen mental health as a uniform crisis. This study reveals a complex landscape where sense of self, interpersonal relationships, and broader sociopolitical contexts intersect to shape Jewish teens' unique experiences of well-being. These findings illuminate three key dynamics:

FINDING 1:
Jewish identity centrality emerged as the most significant factor predicting well-being.

This was found using the EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-Being and a novel set of questions about teens' Jewish experiences. Teens who reported that being Jewish is personally important to them scored higher across all five dimensions of well-being: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Other factors, such as the importance of Jewishness in their family and frequency of participation in Jewish teen programs, were less strongly or consistently associated with well-being.

FINDING 2:
Our analyses revealed a complex interplay between Jewish identity and stress patterns.

While survey respondents reported experiencing the greatest stress related to school issues—consistent with broader adolescent populations—they reported nearly equivalent levels of stress arising from antisemitism and the war in Israel and Gaza. Analyses of both survey and open-ended response data suggest that for American Jewish teens, these sources of stress can intersect. Respondents detailed a constellation of interrelated concerns about their personal safety, distressing encounters on social media platforms, and experiences of interpersonal conflict and social isolation. Further analyses revealed that teens reporting greater Jewish identity centrality were more likely to report stress related to these Jewish-specific concerns.

This suggests that being Jewish functions as both a source of resilience and a source of stress for American Jewish teens navigating often hostile political contexts in their schools, communities, and broader society.

FINDING 3:
Respondents highlighted interpersonal relationships, and particularly those with Jewish peers, as sources of support.

Most respondents identified multiple settings—predominantly with Jewish peers, family members, and in Jewish teen programs—where they felt empowered to express their authentic selves and seek guidance. Teens were less likely to turn to Jewish professionals or clergy for such support.

This study sheds light on the tension at the heart of American Jewish teens' well-being, where Jewish identity centrality emerges as both a source of strength and a potential driver of increased stress. This complex portrait presents a challenge for Jewish organizations, communal professionals, and educators who work with teens. While teen engagement strategies have focused on enhancing teens' sense of their Jewish selves, our findings suggest the need for a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the relationship between social stressors, well-being, and teens' expressed sense of Jewish importance. Supporting Jewish teens may require providing opportunities for authentic self-expression, equipping them to engage in challenging discussions, and empowering them to ask difficult questions. While the path forward is neither simple nor straightforward, this report provides empirical grounding from which innovative responses might emerge.