

Ramadan Guidance

This is for colleagues who work with individuals who are Muslim and will be fasting during the month of Ramadan. It is intended to provide advice and guidance on issues that may arise and on how to support colleagues and students who are fasting.

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What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the Muslim month of fasting and is undertaken as a sign of respect for Allah. It takes place during the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic Lunar calendar. It is a month full of blessings as it is when the Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) was revealed.

The precise date for the start of Ramadan depends on the sighting of the moon, and therefore the starting date will vary from year to year. There is often confusion and disagreement over the start of Ramadan. This is because, although Muslims live all over the world, Islam started in what is now known as Saudi Arabia and Muslims must consider which country's first moon sighting marks the start of the month. The majority believe it is sufficient to begin fasting once Saudi Arabia representatives have sighted the moon; however others feel it should be sighted in the country one resides in and therefore if no one in your country sights the moon on the first day you should fast on the second regardless. Inevitably it is up to the individual to decide which route they follow.

Adults fast during the hours of daylight. Muslims are encouraged not to use Ramadan as an opportunity to avoid aspects of normal life but rather to cope with normal life under a different set of guidelines. Muslims fasting will get up before dawn to have their breakfast. This interrupts their sleep pattern. By the same token when Ramadan falls during the summer months they will need to stay up later than usual.

When is Ramadan

This year Ramadan starts on 10th / 11th August 2010 (these dates are approximate as commencement of Ramadan and Eid, a festival marking the end of Ramadan, are determined by the Lunar Calendar). Ramadan will last for 29 or 30 days, depending on the sighting of the new moon. It ends on or around 9th / 10th September 2010.

What do Muslims do?

The physical dimension of fasting involves completely abstaining from all forms of nourishment, food, liquids (including water) and smoking as well as not engaging in sexual activity from dawn to sunset for the whole month. The spiritual and moral dimension of fasting is considered to be of far greater importance than the physical one. The fast is an act of worship in which Muslims seek a raised level of closeness to God. Fasting is intended to direct the heart away from worldly activities and cleanse the inner soul, enabling Muslims to practice self-discipline, sacrifice and sympathy for those who are less fortunate. Children, adults with illnesses, those travelling and pregnant and nursing women do not have to fast. If fasting days are not completed, then they would have to be made up at a later date or in some circumstances compensated for as prescribed by Islam e.g. feeding the poor.

During Ramadan, Muslims wake before dawn for a meal called Suhur, and then fast throughout the day, abstaining from both food and drink. When daylight hours are over the fast is broken, usually with dates or water. This is followed by a meal called Iftar - 'the breaking of the fast' - an opportunity to gather with family, friends and the community and give thanks for their sustenance.

I work with colleagues and students who are fasting. What do I need to know?

- Allowing some flexibility around when working hours are undertaken may help Muslim staff, for example:
 - By enabling colleagues to temporarily change working patterns to leave work slightly earlier to end the fast with their families and prepare for their evening meal. This year and for the coming few years Ramadan will be occurring over the summer months which means fasting longer hours and therefore there may be a contrasting trend of colleagues wanting to alter their working time so they start and finish later.
 - Colleagues and students may follow observance of prayer times more strictly during Ramadan and wish to offer prayers during the day. This would typically be 2 or 3 times a day for 10-15 minutes at a time, and would take place in a quiet, private area.
 - If colleagues request to take shorter lunch breaks please be aware of the requirements of the Working Time Regulations which provide that there must be a break of at least 20 minutes after 6 hours of work.
- Bear in mind that fasting combined with disturbances in normal sleep patterns can leave individuals feeling a little more tired than normal, or light-headed, particularly towards the end of the day.
- Be sensitive to the fact that some people may be fasting when arranging meetings or events where refreshments are being served.

What happens when Ramadan ends?

The end of Ramadan is marked by the festival of Eid ul-Fitr, a three day festival. It is likely that Muslim colleagues and students will want to take leave from work or study to celebrate Eid. For colleagues, this will need to be taken from their annual leave allowance. The actual day that Eid falls on will depend on when the new moon is sighted. For this reason it may not be possible for colleagues and students to be specific about the day they would like to take leave until very near the event. This year, Eid ul-Fitr is anticipated to fall 9th/ 10th September 2010.

Eid ul-Adha takes place two months and 10 days after Eid ul-Fitr and is also a three day festival. It is the festival that marks the end of the Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah) which is one of the 'five pillars of Islam'. It is a festival of sacrifice (the meat is distributed to the poor, and some shared with relatives and friends) commemorating Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. Similarly to Eid ul-Fitr, it is likely that Muslim colleagues and students will want to take leave from work or study to celebrate this festival.

Where can I learn more?

For further information:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/>

For Ramadan specific information:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/ramadan_1.shtml