

## Guidance for staff during Ramadan

Ramadan begins on Sunday 10th March and concludes on 10th April. In short, it is considered to be a month where Muslims dedicate themselves to God. It is a time when many Muslims will be fasting, from sunrise to sunset every day, which could be around 17 hours every day for 30 days.

In the homelessness sector, it is extremely important to be aware of the personal and religious sensitivities of Muslim staff during this period. By understanding their experience and accommodating their particular needs, you can help ensure people to perform to the best of their abilities through empathy – boosting morale, productivity and staff retention.

Whether your team consists of majority staff who are Muslim, or none at all it is best practice to read through and familiarise yourself to ensure you are being actively inclusive. However, this guidance is general, and you may need to adapt your approach depending on who you are supporting – as not every Muslim is the same as some may be more devout and the interpretations and practices of the faiths of numerous.

### What is Ramadan?

The word Ramadan simply refers to the name of a month, specifically the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is considered to be the holiest month of the 12 as it was this time when Prophet Muhammed initially received divine revelation. The exact dates change every year because Islam uses a calendar based on the cycles of the moon. One of the reasons that signifies the importance of Ramadan is that the Qur'an (the Islamic book of prayer) was first revealed during this month.

During this time, Muslim's will not eat or drink during daylight hours, this is called fasting or 'sawm'.

To note, children are not expected to fast until they reach puberty and pregnant women, elderly people and those who are ill or travelling do not have to fast.

At present, in the UK, Ramadan takes place in Springtime which means the days are slightly longer.

### How is Ramadan celebrated?

Most Muslims fast between dawn and sunset. This means no food, water, smoking, chewing gum and so on. Beyond physical things that break fast, there are other actions that are considered impermissible including: lying, slander and greed.

Fasting allows Muslims to devote themselves to their faith. It is thought to teach self-discipline and remind them of the suffering of the poor. Most importantly it is to strengthen their connection and trust in their creator (Lord) which is one of the five pillars of Islam and an essential element of their faith. The fast is broken at sunset with a meal called iftar, and most Muslims will break their fast with water and dates. After sunset they can drink and eat without limitation. It is also common to have another meal just before dawn, called suhoor.

During Ramadan, Muslim try to give up any bad habits and focus on time for prayer and good deeds, as well as spending time with their loved ones and help people in need. Some Muslims will attempt to read the whole of the Qur'an at least once during Ramadan and will attend special services at their Mosque, called taraweeh, where the Qur'an is read.

### Eid ul-Fitr

Please see this [link](#) how to pronounce Eid Ul-Fitr, for those that may be unsure. You can skip to the timestamp 0:22 to hear it straightaway.

The end of Ramadan is marked by a big celebration called Eid ul-Fitr, meaning the 'Festival of Breaking the Fast.' This celebration does not just signify the end of fasting, but also to thank Allah for the strength given to Muslims during the month. Mosques hold special services and a special meal is eating during the daytime, as it is the first daytime meal for a month. This is then followed by a 2-3 day holiday in which families and friends visit each other, exchange gifts and socialise.

During Eid ul-Fitr, Muslims dress in their finest clothes, give gifts to children, spend time with their loved ones and give money to charity.

### Steps you can take to support Muslim colleagues

- Check-in

It is not offensive to ask a Muslim about Ramadan, instead it shows your proactive approach to making sure preparations are in place so that they feel particularly supported during this month.

Homeless Link 2024. All rights reserved.

Homeless Link is a charity no. 1089173 and a company no. 04313826

Similarly, for those that may be unsure as to who is Muslim in your team – it is okay to ask, as long as it is done meaningfully and respectfully. Similar to asking someone their age or relationship status, if it comes up naturally and asked respectfully it is perfectly fine. Especially if it is coming from the perspective of someone asking in order to ensure they are fully supporting a Muslim colleague.

- How to wish someone well during Ramadan: Ramadan Kareem
- How to wish someone well during Eid: Eid Mubarak

- Flexibility

See if there is any way those that are fasting have the opportunity to change shifts or their working hours in a way that suits all parties.

For example, consider flexible start and finish times. Due to sleep patterns, people will feel a little more tired than usual so they may need to work at different times. Therefore, some organisations are happy for Muslim staff to start as early as 4.30 or 5am.

Also, break allowance for Muslims working long hours is encouraged. This is to ensure they are able to break their fast with ample time, so that they can pray and eat properly.

- Wind-downs

Asking a Muslim colleague to attend a lunch meeting or a Friday social (even if it is online) can demand a lot from them. In some cases, Muslim colleagues will politely agree but it is best to be understanding of those that may not feel comfortable sitting and watching people eat and drink during their fast.

Instead, why not throw a virtual or in-person Iftar one evening, during their dedicated time to eat and pray, and allow people to share a part of their lives with colleagues.

- Meetings

If high concentration levels are needed from people, it is best to not expect this as much from Muslim colleagues who are fasting during the afternoon. It is better, when possible, to use the morning for more productive meetings and tasks.

All large meetings and all events should be avoided on 10th April to avoid excluding Muslim colleagues when they are celebrating Eid Ul-Fitr.

- Annual leave

Be prepared for people to take leave (roughly 1-5 days) at the start and end of Ramadan. This has the equivalent emotional significance to events such as Christmas and is the one time of the year whole families and neighbourhoods usually get together to share presents and food.

To note: dates for Ramadan change every year because Islam uses a calendar based on the cycle of the moon. Therefore, the dates mentioned in this guidance are only applicable to 2024.