



A Simple Guide to Working with Muslim Students During Ramadan

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar that has special significance for Muslims all over the world. It is a time of active religious observance through fasting and spiritual reflection, and an opportunity to strengthen a Muslim's adherence to their faith. During this month, Muslims reconnect with their faith and with their family and community, due to the communal nature of the month's devotions. The last ten days in particular are seen as a time to increase acts of worship, especially Laylatul-Qadr, the Night of Power/ Decree, which many people spend in prayer. Ramadan begins and ends at a different time each year as it follows a lunar calendar. The end of the month is marked by a celebration known as Eid Al Fitr, which lasts for 3 days.

What is fasting?

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is prescribed in the Qur'an and is one of the 5 pillars of Islam. Fasting involves abstaining from acts that break the fast such as food and drink from dawn to sunset. As such, Muslims all around the world fast for different lengths of time, depending on their geographical locations. Muslims customarily eat a light meal before dawn, known as *Suhoor*. The meal at sunset is known as *Iftar*. Fasting does not simply consist of abstaining from food and drink; it facilitates the attainment of spiritual purity. This is through the development of a greater sense of mindfulness regarding one's actions, in particular monitoring behavior and speech. Fasting also enhances our compassion for the less fortunate.

During the summer fasting is more challenging due to longer days. Many Muslims, however, report that their body quickly becomes accustomed to not eating or drinking during daylight hours. In fact, fasting has been shown to have many health benefits. Further, the spiritual focus of Ramadan is not meant to diminish one's attention to other activities such as school or work.

Who needs to fast?

Fasting is required of all Muslims who have reached the age of puberty, and who are physically able to do so. Those with medical conditions whose health may be endangered as a result of fasting are not required to do so, nor are pregnant or breastfeeding mothers or those who are traveling long distances. Young children are not expected to fast but many families will encourage their children to observe shorter fasts as a form of training.

Accommodating Muslim students

During Ramadan, Muslim students may appear to be more tired or inattentive, particularly at the beginning of the month. Schools could grant concessions to fasting students where possible, such as requests for time out, flexible schedules and lighter homework assignments, or less strenuous playground or physical education activities, especially towards the latter half of the day. If Eid Al-Fitr falls on a school day, Muslim children maybe be absent for the day. Some Muslim families, especially new comers, may not know that it is ok to request an absence from school for religious reasons. Students may express an interest in observing one of the daily prayers during school time. A small supervised space would suit that activity well, and prayer should not take more than 5-10 minutes. Your support in facilitating these measures is greatly appreciated.

Ramadan 2018

Ramadan this year will start on May 16th and Eid Al Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan, will be on June 15th. The Manitoba Islamic Association holds an annual Eid Carnival which is open to all! It is scheduled for June 23rd. Visit www.miaonline.org for more information.

Additional information

If you have any questions around dealing with your Muslim students and families, you are welcome to call our office on (204) 256 -1347 or visit our website at <http://www.miaonline.org/contact-us/>.