

Ramadan and the Duty to Accommodate

The week of April 12 marks the first week of Ramadan - one of the holiest months in the Islamic Calendar. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims around the world abstain from food and water from sunrise to sunset for 30 consecutive days.

The following offers some information about Ramadan and tips and considerations for meeting your duty to accommodate under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* and TDSB's Human Rights Policy (P031) .

When does Ramadan start and end?

Muslims follow the lunar calendar and, as a result, the timing of Ramadan (9th lunar month) shifts a little bit each year. This year, the evening of April 12 will signal the beginning of Ramadan. Due to the diversity within the Muslim community, some individuals may begin and end fasting a day before or after their peers.

What does it mean to fast?

Muslims will refrain from eating and drinking from dawn (i.e. the first appearance of light on the horizon) to sunset. Families will have a pre-dawn meal and then an evening meal to break the fast.

Not all Muslims fast. Some may choose not to fast for personal reasons. Others may not fast if they are menstruating, pregnant, breastfeeding, or have health issues. If someone tells you they are not fasting, respect their privacy and do not ask them why.

Along with fasting, many Muslims use Ramadan as an opportunity to focus on spiritual growth. Muslims are encouraged to focus on improving qualities of good character and try to assist those less fortunate through acts of charity.

How will Ramadan impact my teaching? What should I consider in supporting my Muslim students or who may be fasting?

Days and months of significance are great opportunities to celebrate the diversity that exists within our school communities. Consider how you are bringing culturally responsive pedagogy into your classrooms during Ramadan and beyond.

For many Muslim students, observing Ramadan through fasting brings a great sense of fulfillment and community. However, for some, a long day of fasting while trying to keep

up with day to day responsibilities can come with its challenges. Invite your students who are observing Ramadan through fasting to let you know if they need any support or accommodations.

Whether learning virtually or in bricks and mortar, students who are fasting tend to have more energy in the early morning. Consider planning the day in a way that offers students less strenuous work in the later part of the day.

For virtual school, consider how you can offer instructions and learning material which require minimal adult support. Parents who may have typically supported students through their online learning may now be tied up with the additional work of preparing for evening meals and prayers.

How will Ramadan impact my Muslim coworkers/staff? How can I be an ally to any Muslims that I work with who are fasting?

Fasting while working can be challenging. Some Muslims stay up later for nightly prayers and wake up before sunrise for a meal before their fast (suhur); therefore they may become fatigued towards the later part of the working day. If you are a supervisor, offer your staff flexibility in their work schedule where possible.

For many, Ramadan is a time to reconnect with their community. However, because of COVID-19 restrictions, this will be the second year in a row that Muslims will not be able to break the fast with friends and family, or attend nightly worship at the mosque. Physical distancing during a month which is usually filled with communal gatherings may take an added toll on the mental health of Muslim staff. Consider checking in on your colleagues and approaching them with kindness.

In addition, consider that late-in-the-day meetings may not be ideal for your Muslim coworkers. Participation in evening activities may conflict with preparations for breaking the fast. Be mindful of this when organizing meetings or activities during this month.

What responsibilities do I have under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* to accommodate someone who is observing Ramadan ?

The Ontario *Human Rights Code* provides equal rights, opportunities, and freedoms from discrimination for every person in Ontario. As a service provider and employer, the TDSB has a legal duty to accommodate the *Code*-related needs of students and staff. In the context of Ramadan, this means that the TDSB has an obligation to adjust rules, policies or practices so that Muslim staff and students are not disadvantaged. This is called the **duty to accommodate**.

Staff or students may request accommodation or indicate that they cannot meet an expectation because of their religious observance. Even if a request has not been made, if you are in a position of authority or leadership and you have reason to believe someone may need an accommodation, there is a duty to let them know about the duty to accommodate and invite them to share their needs with you if they wish to do so.

The TDSB Human Rights office is here to offer support or answer any questions that may arise as you work to ensure that the human rights of all members of the TDSB community are upheld, including responding to accommodation requests. Please do not hesitate to contact us at humanrightsoffice@tdsb.on.ca.

How do I greet someone observing Ramadan?

You can say the following to greet someone observing Ramadan: “Ramadan Mubarak,” “Ramadan Kareem,” or “Happy Ramadan.”

Ramadan Mubarak to all of those celebrating!

References and Further Reading

[Ontario Human Rights Commission: The Duty to Accommodate](#)

[Ontario Human Rights Commission: Fact Sheet on Religious Rights](#)

Information on the [TDSBs Islamic Heritage Month](#) and the [TDSB Islamic Heritage Month Resource Guidebook for Educators](#).

Tarsin, A. (2015). *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide*. California: Sandala Inc.