

Ramadan and the Duty to Accommodate

Tuesday, March 22, 2023 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 29 or 30 consecutive days.

The following offers information about Ramadan, and some 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 March 22nd or 23rd will signal the beginning of Ramadan.** Due to the diversity within the Muslim community, some individuals may begin marking Ramadan, including fasting, a day before or after their peers.

Eid al-Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan and is one of the most significant Islamic holidays. **In 2023, Muslims who mark Eid will celebrate on either April 20th or 21st.** As such, it is important to not schedule, major assessments, field trips, and important staff meetings on either day.

Laylat Ul Qadr, or the "Night of Power", commemorates the day where the first verses of the Quran, which is the Islamic scripture, were revealed. Laylat Ul Qadr may fall on April 17th or 18th. Many Muslims spend the night praying on this day.

How do I greet someone observing Ramadan?

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

What does it mean to fast?

Fasting means 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 supporting people experiencing financial or other hardships by sharing support, food and wealth.

How will Ramadan impact my teaching and what should I consider when supporting Muslim students 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 relevant and responsive pedagogy into classrooms you share with students 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 students who are observing Ramadan through fasting to let you know if they need any support or accommodations.

Whether learning virtually or in-person, 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. Caregivers who may have typically supported students through their online learning may now be focused on the additional work of preparing for evening meals and prayers.

Some students will choose to observe their [Dhuhr](#) (midday) prayer in the afternoon and so a space and time should be provided to accommodate them.

How will Ramadan impact my Muslim coworkers/staff and how can I be an ally?

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.

Consider that late-in-the-day meetings may not be ideal for your Muslim coworkers as people who are fasting tend to have more energy in the early morning. Participation in evening activities may conflict with preparations for breaking the fast. Be mindful of this

when organizing meetings or activities during this month. Avoid scheduling team meetings with food or drinks during Ramadan

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 their right to be accommodated and invite them to share their needs with you if they wish to do so.

Avoid making assumptions about needs - make sure you speak to individuals and include them in the planning.

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 as humanrightsoffice@tdsb.on.ca.

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](#)

TDSB Equity resources on [Honouring the Multiplicities of Muslim Identities](#)
Accommodating Muslim Students During Ramadan Poster by Huda Fahmy:
www.hudafahmy.com

[Yes, I'm Hot in This](#)

