

Ramadan: “Tips for Educators”

(This article was shared by Dr. Mike Lucas to all staff on April 5, 2021)

Ramadan is a month in the Islamic calendar when Muslims observe fasting from sunrise to sunset. And it can be a difficult month for many to get through, especially students who have to go through a normal school day without eating or drinking.

This year (2021), Ramadan will begin on MONDAY, APRIL 12th.

For schools, it’s important to provide an environment for students where they feel safe to practice their religion, but maybe more importantly, one that ensures their well-being during the school day.

Who fasts and why

Not everyone is expected to fast. Fasting is not obligatory for children, until they reach “of age.” There is scholarly debate on what that age might be, though most scholars do recommend that fasting start when one reaches adolescence, anywhere from 13 and up. There are some Muslims who start earlier, or later.

Often, Muslims are also exempt from fasting if they’re ill or have certain medical conditions, or traveling. Pregnant and breastfeeding moms are also exempt, as well as elderly folks.

Ramadan is considered one of the holy months in the Islamic calendar. Kindness, forgiveness and charity are recommended and often pursued as good practice in faith. It is also a time to be more compassionate and show empathy to those who are in need.

While fasting, Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual activities. Ramadan is a time for Muslims to make an extra effort to abstain from lying, gossiping and other sinful acts. Many Muslims use Ramadan as a time to reset and start anew, creating new goals and improving old ones to improve oneself and rejuvenate the spirit and the soul.

Fasting often provides a spiritual perspective for Muslims that allows them to understand the suffering of those who are less fortunate, in poverty, and those in need. It also reminds us to not be wasteful of God’s blessings.

Ramadan concludes with Eid al-Fitr, a festival or meal in which family and friends often congregate to share a festive meal(s).

How schools can be supportive

During this holy month, one of the hardest things that we often hear Muslim students complain about is the lack of space and lack of understanding.

Here are several ways to support your students during the month of Ramadan:

- **Understanding:** One of the vital pillars in creating a safe environment for Muslim students in Ramadan is to educate oneself about the month. Many teachers and classmates do not understand why Muslims fast. It's important to try to form your own understanding about the month, and to not rely on Muslim students to educate the class.
- **Space:** Lunchtime is probably one of the most difficult periods to endure while fasting. Many students will tell you that they don't care if you eat in front of them, and chances are that might be true. However, hunger often worsens when you're in a room full of people eating. It might help to have a comfortable space for Muslim students to go to instead of the designated lunchroom during lunchtime. The room can have some iPads, books, magazines and other things to keep students busy. Of course, it's then up to the student whether they choose to go there or not, but having that as an option, even for students who are not fasting, is usually beneficial.
- **Physical Education:** Across the nation, we have heard that some teachers are not very tolerant of Muslim students practicing Ramadan, and therefore are not very understanding when students cannot participate in phys ed classes. Some students have grades deducted due to their lack of participation during Ramadan. This is not okay. It is within students' right to practice their religion, while having the necessary conditions for them to succeed and achieve their best potential. Teachers can make accommodations for practicing students, such as assigning a different task/project for students to complete that does not require them to do any strenuous work while they're fasting.
- **Empathy:** This sounds a bit easy, but having empathy requires one to truly understand the other person's situation and feelings. When planning school activities and events, think about how it'll impact practicing Muslim students. Will they feel left out? Will they need to break their fast during that time if it's during Iftar (i.e. sunset)?

If students have the right accommodations and support from teachers and their peers, it can turn a challenging month into the most rewarding. If you're still unsure about how to help practicing Muslim students in your school, don't hesitate to ask them privately what they need, and how you can support them.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/column-teachers-can-support-students-ramadan>