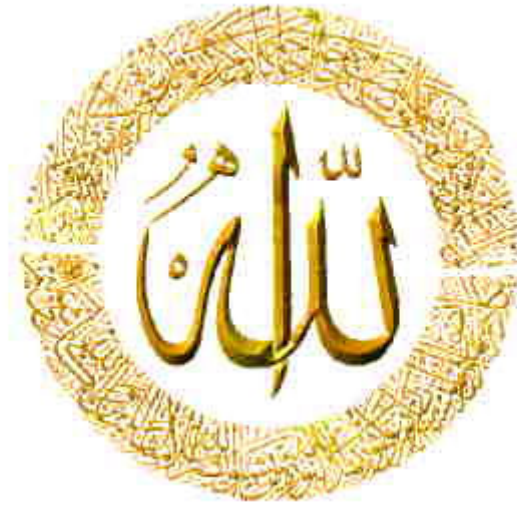


An Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices



The information contained in this guide is designed to assist employers in formulating and implementing policies that will help create a culturally-sensitive workplace environment. It will also serve as a guide to religiously-mandated practices of Muslim employees.

Daily Prayer

Islam urges "God consciousness" in an individual's life. To that end, Islam prescribes those believers perform prayer five times each day.

1. Morning prayer may be offered from break-of-dawn until just before sunrise.
2. Noon prayer may be offered from just after midday until afternoon.
3. Afternoon prayer may be offered from late afternoon until just before sunset.
4. Sunset prayer may be offered from sunset until darkness.
5. Night prayer may be offered throughout the night hours.

Washing Before Prayer

Muslims are required to wash their face, hands and feet with clean water. This washing is normally performed in a restroom sink or other facility that has running water.

Prayer Space

During the act of worship, Muslims stand, bow and touch the forehead to the ground. Worship may be performed in any quiet, dry, clean place. During the prayers, the worshiper will face toward Mecca. Total privacy is not required. However, other workers should not talk in front or interrupt the worshiper during the prayer. During prayer time, the

Muslim is fully engaged. He or she may not respond to a ringing telephone or conversation. Fellow employees should not take offence if the worshipper does not answer their call during the prayer. However, in case of emergency, the Muslim will respond to an announcement by stopping the prayer immediately.

Time and Scheduling Consideration

The time it takes to perform the washing and the prayer is usually about 15 minutes. This enables the Muslim employee to pray during break times or at lunch/dinner breaks. Employees working regular day hours may schedule their breaks to fit noon and afternoon prayer, depending on location between noon and 5 p.m. Depending on employees working times, some of them may need to perform their prayers in their workplace.

Friday Congregational Prayer

Friday is the day for congregational worship, called Jum'ah. The prayer lasts a total of 45 to 90 minutes. It takes place at a mosque during the noontime prayer and includes an address or sermon. A Muslim employee should be able to complete Friday prayers during a slightly extended lunch break. Any work missed may be made up by either, or through whatever arrangements are mutually satisfactory.

Fasting

Islamic holy days and festivals follow the lunar calendar. Like the solar calendar, the lunar calendar has twelve months. However, a lunar month, which is marked by appearance of a new crescent in the horizon, may last only 29 days. A lunar year is about eleven days shorter than the solar year. This means that Islamic festivals occur about eleven days earlier each year.

The month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is the period in which Muslims are required to fast. Observing Ramadan means refraining from eating, drinking and smoking from break-of-dawn to sunset. Ramadan is a period of personal restraint and renewed focus on moral conduct. It is also a time to empathize with those who are less fortunate and to appreciate what one has. Fasting does not mean that Muslims cease to work. An employee observing the fast will not be able to eat during typical lunch times, but will need to eat after sunset. Mutually convenient adjustments should be made. For example, a work shift should be shortened by the length of the lunch break, if the lunch break is not taken.

Travel

Islam provides relief for many of the burdens of travelers. A traveler is exempt from fasting during the month of Ramadan, and a traveler's prayers may be shortened and combined during the trip.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage plays a significant role in many faiths. In Islam, it is one of the five "pillars", or basic obligations, of the religion. Muslim adults are required to go on pilgrimage to the city of Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Pilgrimage lasts for about a week in the beginning of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. Muslim employees may choose to make pilgrimage using vacation days.

Muslim Holidays

There are several days on the Islamic calendar with special religious significance. Muslims celebrate *Eid* (festival) twice a year. The first *Eid* is celebrated on the days after the end of the month of Ramadan. The second *Eid* is celebrated beginning on the tenth day of the twelfth Islamic month. The festivals include congregational prayers, family visitations and exchange of gifts. Celebrating *Eid* requires that Muslims take one day off twice every year. There should be no undue penalty for this religious obligation.

Dietary Requirements

The Qur'an, Islam's revealed text, prohibits the consumption of alcohol, pork and pork by-products. Practicing Muslims are careful about the food they consume and about how it is prepared. Many practicing Muslims follow certain standards- called Halal (permissible) - of slaughter and preparation of meat and poultry. Airline companies and other parties that serve food to Muslims may order these special items (mainly meats) from certified Halal food providers. If this is not possible, employees should be given choices that meet Muslim dietary requirements (such as vegetables, egg, milk and fish).

Clothing

Islam prescribes that both men and women behave and dress modestly. Muslims believe men and women should be valued and judged by their intelligence, skills and contributions to the community, not by their physical attributes. There are a number of ways in which Muslim men and women express such teachings.

Men's Caps

Men are always to be covered from the navel to the knee. Also, some Muslim men wear a small head covering, called a Kufi.

Beards

Many devout Muslim men wear beards. Cleanliness and proper appearance are required by Islamic teachings. Should there be safety and health considerations, employers may require employees with beards to use proper covering such as hair nets or masks.

Women's Dress

When in public, Muslim women wear loose-fitting, non-revealing cloth known as *Hijab*, or *khimar*. This religiously mandatory attire, which may vary in style, usually includes covering the hair, neck and body, except for the face and hands. Companies may ask that clothing be clean and neat. Businesses with designated uniforms may request that the Muslim worker's attire adhere to certain requirements of fabric, color and style that are consistent with corporate image. Employers may wish to modify dress code policies so that religiously-mandated attire is addressed as a diversity issue. For example, many corporations have a policy forbidding the wearing of "hats." This rule may be amended to exempt items such as head scarves and caps.

Other Consideration

Shaking Hands

Some Muslims will be reluctant to shake the hand of an unrelated person of the opposite sex. This should not be taken as an insult, but as a sign of personal modesty.

Eye Contact:

The Qur'an teaches Muslims men and women to "lower their gaze" when communicating with unrelated persons of the opposite sex. Observing this teaching, many Muslims avoid sustained eye contact. This should not be taken as an indication of unwillingness to communicate.

Social Work

Many Muslims are reluctant to take part in social gatherings celebrating religious holidays of other faiths or where alcohol is served. These employees should not be penalized for not attending such functions and such event should not be mixed with business. A Muslim employee should not be asked to serve or sell alcoholic beverages.

Legal Action

CAIR (www.cair-net.org) Provides legal services for Muslims who feel that they have been discriminated against either because of their faith or ethnicity.