

An SLTs guide to navigating Ramadan

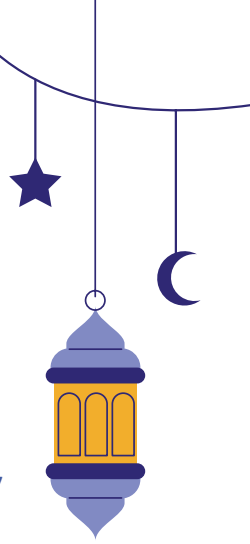
This guide gives an overview of fasting in Ramadan and how speech and language therapists (SLTs), assistant SLTs and student SLTs may support their patients and families during this month. It also includes tips for universities, employers, and colleagues to help them support Muslim student SLTs and colleagues.

We acknowledge that this guide cannot fully cover every aspect of Ramadan. We have endeavoured to emphasise the fundamental elements of Ramadan while recognising the significance of individual differences and practices. Cultivating cultural curiosity is a lifelong journey, and engaging in conversations with families, colleagues and conducting personal research will enhance our understanding of Ramadan and other religious/cultural practices important to our colleagues and patients.

With thanks to authors Meriem Amer-El-Khedoud, Fatimah Bint-Hanif and Amena Umer-Kidia.

01

Overview of Ramadan



Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and lasts either 29 or 30 days, depending upon the sighting of the moon. Throughout this sacred month, Muslims worldwide observe a fast from dawn until sunset, abstaining entirely from food and drink while carrying on with their day-to-day responsibilities, for example, work and childcare.

The pre-dawn meal, known as Suhoor or Sehri, is crucial for Muslims to fortify themselves with nutrition and hydration before embarking on a day of fasting. At sunset, the fast is broken with the traditional combination of dates and water, followed by a meal, this is called Iftar.

While fasting is a familiar practice within Islam, it also finds resonance in numerous other philosophies, cultures, and religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, and Taoism.

Significance and importance of Ramadan

Ramadan holds immense significance for Muslims, as it marks the revelation of the Holy Book, the Qur'an. Fasting during this sacred month is ordained for all who are physically and/or mentally capable, as stated in the Qur'an.

Throughout Ramadan, Muslims intensify their spiritual devotion, dedicating time to family, engaging in charitable endeavours, increasing their Qur'anic recitation, and performing additional prayers. This period serves as an opportunity for Muslims to deepen their connection with Allah and enhance their spiritual growth. During this period Muslims greet each other with Ramadan Mubarak or Ramadan Kareem which translates to "[have a] blessed Ramadan" or "[have a] generous Ramadan".

Ramadan encourages Muslims to have a sense of gratitude, self-discipline, and self-improvement. This is encouraged at both an individual and community level.



01

Overview of Ramadan

Who fasts?

Fasting is obligatory for all physically capable adult Muslims upon reaching puberty. Those exempt from fasting include individuals who are physically or mentally unwell, menstruating women, pregnant or lactating women and travellers. Despite falling into these categories, some individuals may opt to continue fasting due to the profound significance and spiritual blessings associated with this period.

It is important that Muslims can choose to fast for Ramadan and those who wish to are supported. It may be necessary to work within the multi-disciplinary team to understand whether an individual has capacity to make this decision, individuals who lack capacity are exempt from fasting.

As with other family traditions, practices and celebrations, children may want to participate in Ramadan so they may choose to fast as well. At their parents' discretion and where appropriate, children can join in with Ramadan by fasting for the entire day or for shorter periods, for example, fasts for 2-3 hours or fasting until midday, if they wish to do so. This is an important way of supporting them to connect with their religion and culture.

Changes in routine

Throughout Ramadan, the individual experiences of Muslims vary widely, reflecting diverse levels of participation in fasting, prayer, and communal engagement. A notable adjustment for many is the shift in sleep patterns to accommodate pre-dawn meals.

Additionally, Taraweeh prayers which are exclusive to Ramadan, are observed by numerous Muslims either at home or in congregational settings at the mosque. These take place after the fifth prayer 'Isha', (during the first half of the night). The duration of these special prayers is variable, influenced by personal preference and the mosque they attend, typically averaging around 60 minutes.

During the last 10 days of Ramadan some might also choose to perform extra prayers before dawn and the first prayer of the day (Fajr), these are known as 'Qiyum ul-Layl'.

As prayer times and fasting are determined by the duration of daylight, the length of the fast varies based on the timing of Ramadan throughout the year. In London, during the winter months, the fast can be as short as 10 hours (from 06:00 to 16:00), while in the summer months, it can extend beyond 18 hours (from 02:45 to 21:25).



01

Overview of Ramadan

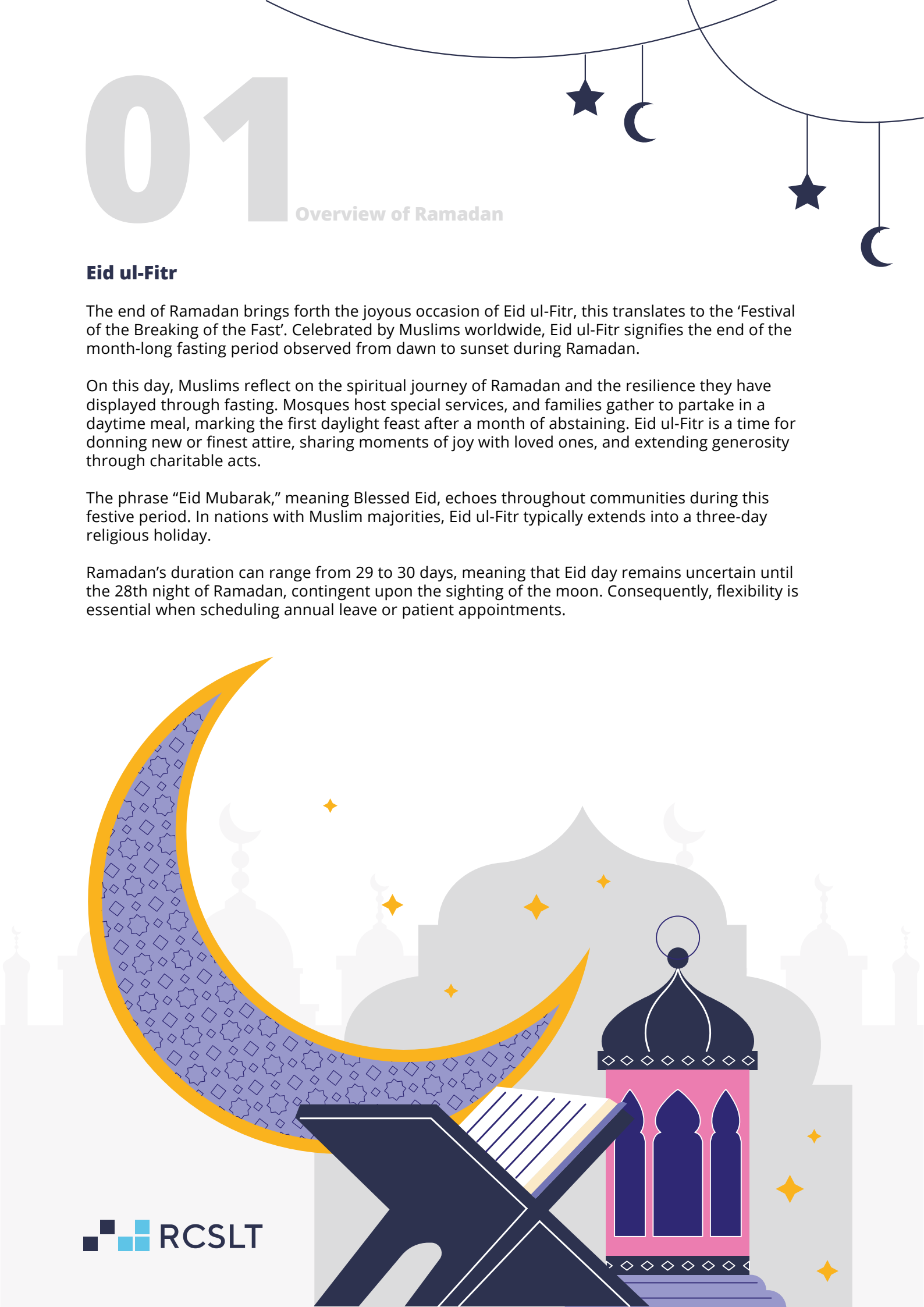
Eid ul-Fitr

The end of Ramadan brings forth the joyous occasion of Eid ul-Fitr, this translates to the 'Festival of the Breaking of the Fast'. Celebrated by Muslims worldwide, Eid ul-Fitr signifies the end of the month-long fasting period observed from dawn to sunset during Ramadan.

On this day, Muslims reflect on the spiritual journey of Ramadan and the resilience they have displayed through fasting. Mosques host special services, and families gather to partake in a daytime meal, marking the first daylight feast after a month of abstaining. Eid ul-Fitr is a time for donning new or finest attire, sharing moments of joy with loved ones, and extending generosity through charitable acts.

The phrase "Eid Mubarak," meaning Blessed Eid, echoes throughout communities during this festive period. In nations with Muslim majorities, Eid ul-Fitr typically extends into a three-day religious holiday.

Ramadan's duration can range from 29 to 30 days, meaning that Eid day remains uncertain until the 28th night of Ramadan, contingent upon the sighting of the moon. Consequently, flexibility is essential when scheduling annual leave or patient appointments.



02 Working with patients and families during Ramadan

The Health and Care Professions Council have signified the importance of practitioners recognising “the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice” and practising “in a non-discriminatory and inclusive manner”. The Equality Act 2010 also describes religion as a “protected characteristic”.

During Ramadan Muslims orient their daily routines around their faith and worship to maximise its spiritual benefits. This section includes some suggestions for effectively supporting patients and their families during Ramadan.

Research and have open conversations

Taking the initiative to research Ramadan will increase your understanding and allow you to better support your patients. This could be by staying informed on the [annual start date of Ramadan](#) which moves back by around 10 days each year.

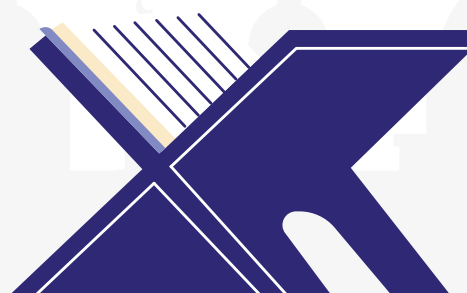
Engage in open conversations with your patients and their families, asking about the personal significance of Ramadan, potential changes in their daily routine, and their preferences for support during this month. Inquire whether they would find it helpful to make any adjustments to therapy or assessment sessions, or if they prefer to continue with the usual routine.

Recognise that Ramadan experiences vary, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Initiating this dialogue provides them with the opportunity to express thoughts or concerns, as they may not be aware that adjustments could be made to better accommodate their needs.

Be mindful of prayer times

When scheduling an appointment be mindful of Iftar and prayer times. Muslims engage in five daily prayers, with these rituals gaining heightened importance during the month of Ramadan. This significance is particularly emphasised during Friday Jumah (congregation) prayers, which are obligatory for boys (who have reached puberty) and men throughout the year.

The last 10 days of Ramadan hold special sanctity, prompting Muslims to intensify their worship efforts and prioritise these spiritual practices over their regular daily activities.



02

Working with patients and families during Ramadan



Understand the personal challenges Ramadan may bring

While Ramadan is a festive occasion, it can present its own set of challenges. Each individual will have different challenges associated with Ramadan. It is essential to demonstrate empathy and awareness of the emotional and physical demands associated with fasting.

Particularly in the initial days of Ramadan, the body adjusts to dietary changes, possibly causing symptoms such as dizziness, low mood, and fatigue. The shifts in daily routines, including disrupted sleep patterns and reduced sleep, can further impact individuals. Consider how your assessment and therapy sessions can be adjusted to accommodate these factors.

Supporting those with Learning Disabilities and/or Neurodivergence

In preparation for Ramadan, it could be useful for practitioners to talk about this in advance as Ramadan can involve a change of routine. The use of visual aids can be beneficial. Social stories and Talking Mats can be used to support understanding about Ramadan and can cover a wide range of topics, reflecting the diversity of experiences and traditions associated with this holy month in Islam. Working with the multi-disciplinary team and families to ascertain the support required is crucial.

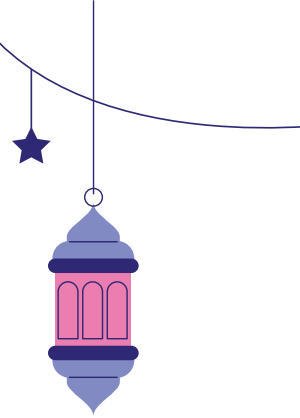
Eating disorders during Ramadan

Ramadan may be particularly challenging for those with eating disorders. Fasting may mask and may also trigger eating disorders. Muslims with eating disorders may find the idea of communal and celebratory eating throughout Ramadan and Eid extremely difficult. It is important for SLTs to be aware of this so they can work within the multi-disciplinary team to support Muslim patients during Ramadan. The Association of UK Dieticians have a [blog post](#) with more information and useful tips for clinicians working with this client group.



02

Working with patients and families during Ramadan



Swallowing assessments during Ramadan

Muslims have the option to break their fasts for medical reasons, a choice often made after personal deliberation, sometimes in consultation with an Imam. It is crucial to avoid making assumptions about who is fasting, as certain medical needs may not be apparent. Respecting the decision to observe the fast is equally important.

The inability to fast, especially for an extended period during Ramadan, can be emotionally challenging for Muslims. Initiating an open and honest dialogue with patients regarding a swallowing assessment allows them to prepare and express their thoughts. In winter months, scheduling swallowing assessments after the fast is broken could be considered.

Some instrumental assessments require the ingestion of diet and fluids, such as a Videofluoroscopy (VF) and a Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES). It would be beneficial to check with patients whether they are fasting before booking these assessments. It is important to have an open conversation with patients to discuss how comfortable they feel going ahead with the assessment and if there is scope, offer the assessment outside the fasting period (depending on clinical need). It may be useful to consult with an Imam or Chaplaincy team on how best to support your patients and the families you work with.

Note: Mouth care is also permitted throughout Ramadan. Mouth care is something that should be encouraged as Muslims can continue practising this without swallowing.

Medication

It is important for SLTs to have open discussions about medications with a prescriber. This is because during Ramadan the timing of the medication may need to be changed. A GP may need to review any changes to make sure they are safe.



02

Working with patients and families during Ramadan

Setting realistic therapy goals during fasting

Ramadan is a busy month, with Muslims prioritising faith-related activities throughout the month. The combination of this focus and increased fatigue from fasting can pose challenges in completing therapy tasks. However, it is worth noting that maintaining physical well-being and personal improvement is considered an act of worship.

Engage in discussions with your patients and their families to determine the most effective way to set realistic and attainable therapy goals. This may involve integrating therapy objectives into their daily routine, such as practicing speech sounds for a few minutes after prayer times or engaging in conversational exercises with family during iftar. Additionally, this may also include being mindful of balancing what is realistically possible, for example, when educating patients on vocal hygiene and hydration.

When supporting patients with eating, drinking, and swallowing difficulties, it's important to consider the significance of celebratory meals during Ramadan and Eid. Considering how to plan goals that accommodate these events.

Supporting those who are exempt from fasting

Some Muslims may be exempt from fasting for a range of reasons. This could be for certain parts of the month or throughout all of Ramadan. It is important to understand that these reasons may be considered sensitive and personal therefore you should be mindful about how you approach possible conversations with those who may be observing Ramadan.

Those who are exempt from fasting may find it emotionally challenging with feelings such as guilt and shame. However, Ramadan can be observed by everyone as Ramadan is more than abstaining from food and drink.

It is important Ramadan is observed in a way that is most meaningful and accessible to those who are exempt from fasting. Discussing what is important to them is crucial as this can allow you to support them better. Working with the multi-disciplinary team could be beneficial.



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Ramadan related activities

Below are some Ramadan-themed activities you may choose to include in therapy to acknowledge the holy month and promote inclusivity. These activities can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their religious background.

Making Ramadan or Eid cards

This fun activity can be done with individuals of all ages and abilities when working on sequencing skills (e.g. "First, cut the moon. Next, stick the moon...etc.") following instructions and developing vocabulary (e.g. cutting, sticking, folding, writing).

Lotto/Bingo games with Ramadan/Eid related pictures or playing 'Snap!'

These can be used when supporting the development of phonological awareness, for speech sound therapy and when supporting the client to develop a vocabulary of words that are functional for them and their family.

Ramadan related colouring sheets

These can be used for listening games, an activity to do during auditory bombardment tasks or as an end of therapy reward.

Cooking or baking Ramadan/Eid treats

This practical activity can be used to support the development of attention, listening and sequencing skills through following instructions and identifying the next steps in the process. This activity can help develop social skills, like turn-taking and sharing, by working in pairs or small groups. Reading skills can also be targeted by encouraging and supporting children to read instructions. The use of different textures of food can support sensory needs. Tasks can be tailored to include individuals with modified diets and International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) recommendations.

Reading Ramadan themed books

- Lailah's Lunchbox by Reem Farqui. The book centres around Lailah, a young girl incredibly far from her home country, struggling with what her classmates will think about her fasting.
- It's Ramadan, Curious George by Hina Khan & H.A. Rey. In this book George celebrates his first Ramadan with his friend Kareem.
- Ramadan Around the World by Ndaa Hassan. Join the moon on a journey around the world highlighting how Muslim children from various cultures and disabilities celebrate and observe the month of Ramadan.



04

Supporting SLTs, assistant SLTs and student SLTs

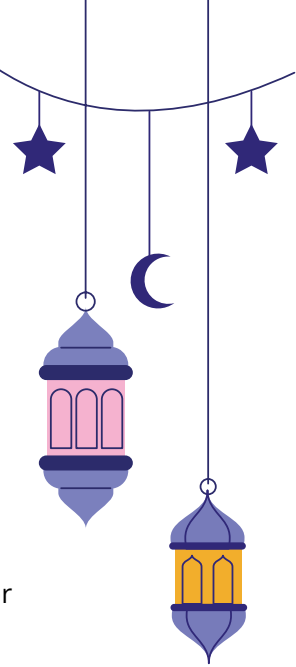
Below are some practical tips for practice educators, universities, employers, and colleagues on how they can be more inclusive and support Muslim students and colleagues during Ramadan. It is important not to make assumptions. One person's fasting preference may be different to another. Instead, ask individuals about any adjustments they may require during the month.

- Acknowledge the coming of Ramadan in the workplace. University staff, employers and line managers are encouraged to have a conversation with Muslim students/employees before the start of Ramadan about any needs they may have. Some universities allow for student SLTs to apply for extensions/mitigation to support them during periods of religious practice. It is beneficial for universities to communicate with student SLTs about what support they can offer if needed.
- Universities are encouraged to be mindful, where possible, of religious practices and holidays when planning for assessments and placements. This could be achieved by using an Interfaith Calendar or communicating with student SLTs in their cohort.
- Practice educators are also encouraged to explore the topic of Ramadan with their students. Universities can help facilitate discussions with students to discuss Ramadan with their placement educator. This will help support students while on placement.
- Practice educators/employers are advised to allow for flexible working and adjusting working hours (e.g. an earlier start, working through lunch and having an earlier finish) during this period of fasting, if requested by students/employees.
- Back-to-back appointments and/or training sessions where lots of talking is required may be difficult for a fasting student/employee as they will not be drinking water during the working day. Employers and line managers are advised to consider adjustments to a student/employee's timetable, if requested.

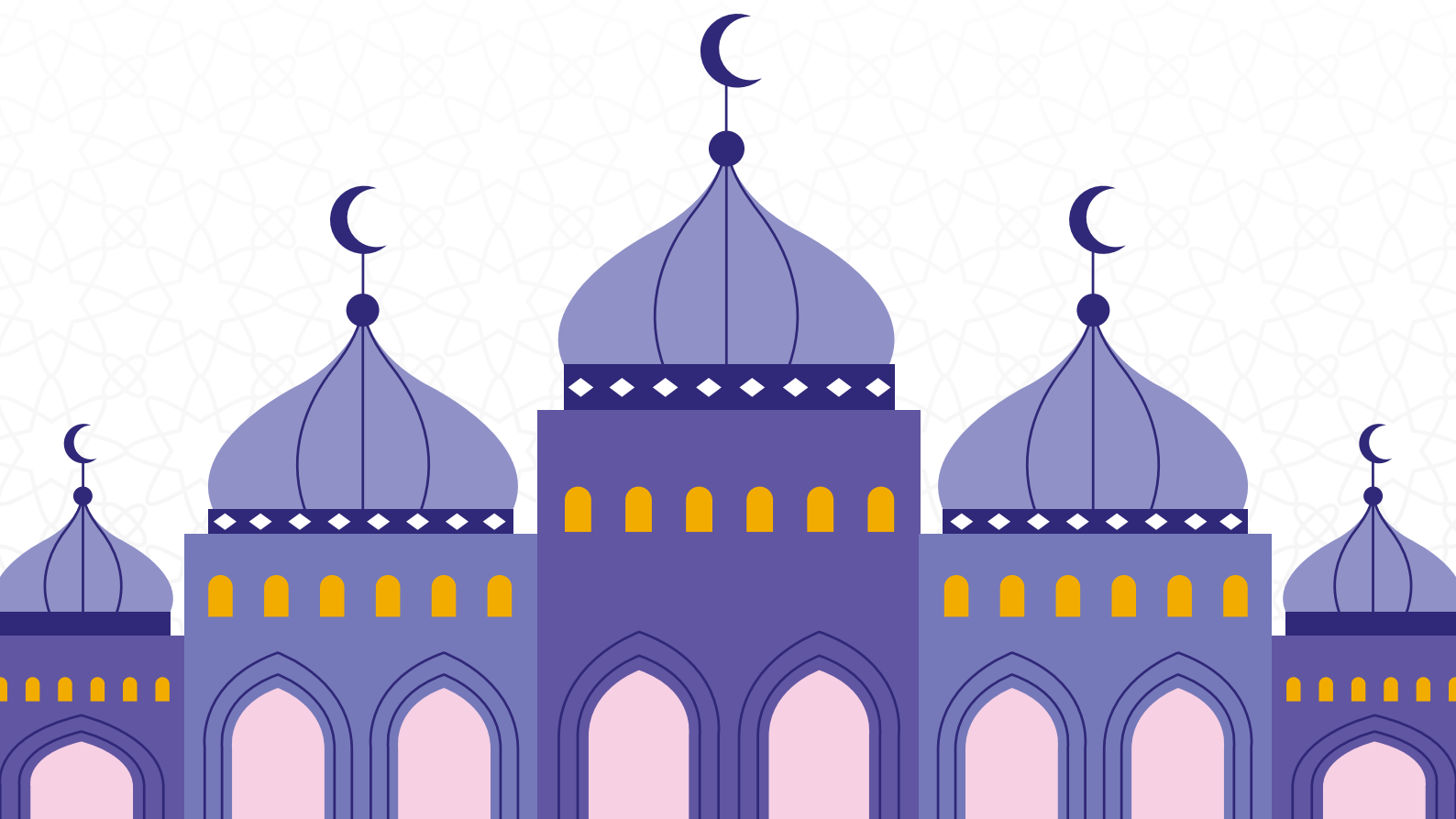


04

Supporting SLTs, assistant SLTs and student SLTs



- For Muslims, Ramadan is as much a month of spiritual discipline as it is physical (fasting). During this month, many Muslims would be grateful for the time and space to pray and meditate at certain times during their workday. If your workplace does not have a committed space already, consider opening a wellness room, office, or any quiet room for colleagues to use for these purposes.
- Where appropriate, ask your Muslim students, employees, and colleagues when they prefer to have meetings as productivity and concentration may be impacted by fasting as the day goes on.
- Avoid scheduling team lunches and after-work social events during Ramadan which may be difficult for Muslim peers and colleagues to attend due to fasting and the time of Iftar (meal to break the fast).
- While it is important to have empathy, acknowledge and suggest reasonable adjustments for those who observe fasting during Ramadan, making judgmental statements, or expressing pity, could be perceived as offensive.
- Be aware that some of your Muslim student SLTs/colleagues may be exempt from fasting for certain parts of the month or throughout all of Ramadan. It is important to understand that these reasons may be considered sensitive and personal therefore you should be mindful about how you approach possible conversations with those who may be observing Ramadan.



05

Common language used in Ramadan

The below lists some of the common phrases or words you may hear during Ramadan.

Allah: A term used for God by Muslims.

Charity: Muslims have a year-long dedication to charitable giving—it is one of the pillars of the religion. However, during Ramadan, Muslims increase the charity they give.

Dates: Sweet, dried fruit which Muslims typically eat to break their fast.

Dawn: This is when Muslims begin their fast.

Devotion: During Ramadan, Muslims devote themselves to God.

Eid Mubarak: This translates to [have a] blessed Eid.

Iftar: This is the name of the meal eaten by Muslims at sunset to break their fast, during Ramadan.

Imam: Imams are religious leaders in the religion of Islam.

Jummah: This can simply mean Friday in Arabic. Friday holds special significance as it is the day of congregational prayer known as Jumu'ah prayer.

Lunar Calendar: Islam follows the cycle of the moon which is the Lunar Calendar.

Madina: A Holy Place for Muslims in Saudi Arabia.

Mecca: A Holy Place for Muslims in Saudi Arabia.

Ninth Month: Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar.

Pillar of Islam: There are five key practices that Muslims are obligated to fulfil, fasting is one of these. The others are Shahadah (declaration of faith), Salah (prayer), Zakat (Charity) and Hajj (Pilgrimage).

Qiyum ul-layl: In the most literal sense, means to 'stand during the night'. It is a voluntary prayer which is completed between the time of Isha prayer and the Fajr prayer (before dawn).

Qur'an: This is the Holy Book for Muslims.

Ramadan Mubarak: This translates to [have a] blessed/generous Ramadan.

Salah (also called 'namaz'): The name given to the five daily prayers observed by Muslims.

Sawm: This is the Arabic word for fast. Fasting means abstinence from food, drink and sexual activities from dawn till sunset.

Self-Discipline: During Ramadan, Muslims have an increased level of self-discipline.

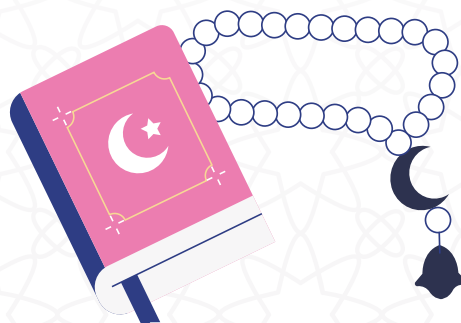
Spiritual: Ramadan is a spiritual month for Muslims.

Suhoor/Sehri: This is the morning meal eaten by Muslims before dawn.

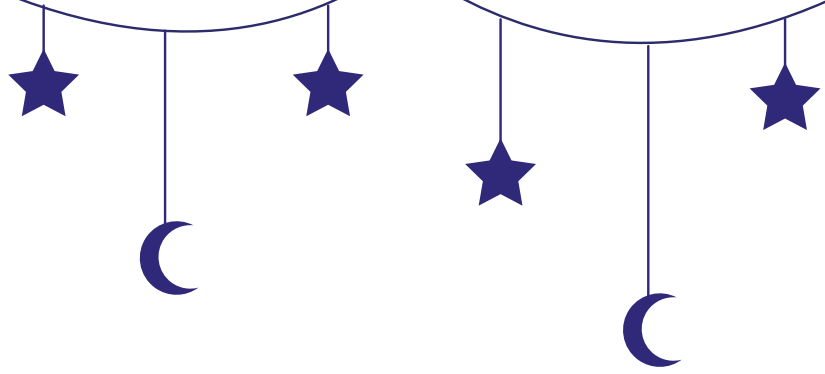
Sunset: This is when Muslims break their fast.

Taraweeh: A night prayer that is performed in Ramadan.

Zakat ul-Fitr: Charity of Breaking the Fast, a charitable donation given before the Eid prayer.



06 Resources



[British Dietetic Association \(BDA\)](#)

- A blog post on Ramadan and eating disorders. The blog post also includes some advice and suggestions.

[British Islamic Medical Association \(BIMA\)](#)

- BIMA has produced a wealth of information for Muslims and the medical community to provide expert advice and guidance on issues relating to Ramadan.

[Care Quality Commission](#)

- Guidance on spiritual and religious practices which can support culturally appropriate care.

[Chaplaincy Team](#)

- Chaplaincy Teams (for example NHS Trusts, universities, and other independent organisations) can offer support and guidance on Ramadan. Some Chaplaincy Teams have Imams. Chaplaincy Teams may also have established networks with Mosques in the local community.

[Fasting On Clinical Placements A guide for all Health Care Professionals](#)

- A resource is to support employers, educators and colleagues in supporting their Muslim colleagues and students during the month of Ramadan.

[Muslim Council of Britain \(MCB\)](#)

- The MCB have a range of resources about Ramadan to increase awareness and provide education for Muslims and Non-Muslims.

[NHS Muslim Network](#)

- The NHS Muslim Network is a national staff network, which supports our Muslim colleagues, allies, and friends in the NHS.

[Open Iftar Events](#)

- Across the United Kingdom, there are many organisations that host Open Iftars. These events invite everyone within the community to join in with breaking the fast together. The aim to increase a sense of togetherness and community.

[Youth Custody Services, Supporting Muslim Children - Effective Practice Briefing](#)

- This guide can offer support and guidance for clinicians working with Muslims in the Youth Justice Service.

