

# Teacher support materials: Understanding Muslim identity in Aotearoa

## Tips for teachers and schools

This resource is designed to support social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand by teaching about Muslims who call Aotearoa New Zealand home.

These tips are designed for teachers who want to support Muslim students in the classroom to feel safe, included, and that they belong.



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### Learning:

- Consider how you can ensure the learning in your school is inclusive for all students. For example, there are Muslim girls who do not want to wear togs in front of boys when swimming.
- Muslims in Aotearoa New Zealand are very diverse and each family will have different expectations and desires for their children. This may be influenced by the education systems they are familiar with. So it is important not to make assumptions.
- As the teacher, you will know your students well and will identify those who are Muslims. Some students will be very happy to share their experiences and beliefs, while others will prefer not to. It is good practice to check in with Muslim students and their whānau before teaching this resource to find out what they would like to occur during the learning experiences.

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### Food:

- Many Muslims eat halal food, which is food prepared in accordance with Islamic guidelines. Ensure any food provided in the classroom or school has halal options, or offer halal alternatives (for example, vegan, vegetarian, seafood, kosher). This may exclude some food for example, lollies that have non-halal gelatine. Many cities in Aotearoa New Zealand have halal butcheries that could provide halal products (for example, sausages for sausage sizzles), which would also meet the needs of a wide range of ākongā.

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### Prayers:

- Students who request to perform their daily prayers during school time may require a clean, quiet, private place to do so. Parents may appreciate the support for their children to pray when needed (for example, at camps).
- Prayer times vary according to the position of the sun and will change with daylight savings and as daylight hours change throughout the year.
- Friday midday prayer is a special weekly prayer, which is an obligation on Muslim males. Some older students (for example, 12-years-old and above) may want to pray Friday midday prayers at the local mosque. Teachers could have a conversation with whānau if these students miss lessons because of the Friday prayers and provide opportunities for them to catch up on lessons as required.
- Please understand that if prayers or karakia that refer to particular deities are recited at school, Muslim students may prefer not to participate. It is good practice to consider alternatives that are inclusive for all ākongā.

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## Relationships:

- Muslims have high regard towards teachers. Most Muslim families would love to meet with their child's teacher to discuss how best to support their child.
  - Muslims in Aotearoa New Zealand are very diverse and their practices or interpretation of Islamic guidelines may differ based on their backgrounds, cultures, family traditions and personal choices. It is important not to make presumptions.
  - Many Muslims have particular rules for interactions across gender. When meeting whānau of a different gender, please note that some people may choose not to have physical contact such as handshaking. A good practice is to pause and let the whānau member lead. If they prefer not to shake hands, you could smile and greet them with "Assalaamu alaykum" pronounced like "us-sah-lahm ah-lay-kom" (meaning 'peace be upon you') while holding your hand over your heart. Muslims may also avoid direct eye contact as a sign of respect while still listening to what you are saying.
  - Many of your students' families may have a dominant or preferred language other than English. When meeting or communicating with these whānau, considerations should be given to language and whether translations and interpreting support may be needed. Schools can use their ESOL-funding or if relevant, refugee-funding to access paid interpreting services. It is not advisable to rely on their children as interpreters.
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## Religious rituals and events:

- Ramadan is a month on the Islamic calendar, observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community. During Ramadan, many Muslims choose to fast from food and liquids during daylight hours. They may also be very busy after school hours during this month as it is a time of prayer, fellowship, and worship. Students who fast may prefer not to partake in physical activity and may have less energy than usual. Scheduling school events that involve food during the month of Ramadan may exclude some Muslim whānau and ākongā. At the end of Ramadan, Muslim communities will celebrate Eid (a day of celebration to mark the end of Ramadan), and would likely see Muslim students away from school.
  - Some Muslim whānau and ākongā may hesitate to participate in school celebrations or other holidays, such as Christmas, Easter and Halloween.
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## Further support

For an opportunity to read and learn more about Islam:

- [Basics of Islam | Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research](#)

For language and interpretation support:

- [Unlocking Language Barriers | Te Whakamahea Tauārai Reo | Ministry for Ethnic Communities](#)
- [Digi Language Support \(DLS\) Services](#) (Telephone and online interpreting)
- [Interpreting New Zealand](#) (In-person)

Schools can also contact their local (regional) Ministry office and ask for Senior Adviser, Refugee Migrant Support, if you'd like further advice on how to connect with whānau.

- [Refugee and Migrant Support details | Senior Advisors](#)