SACRE | Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

RAMADAN (FASTING)

A guide for

Primary & Secondary Schools
ABOUT THE GUIDE

The Guide has been produced in order to provide useful information on the area of Ramadan for schools. It can be used as a reference by teaching staff in order to aid their planning and preparation during the month of Ramadan.

The desired result is to empower staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to improve Muslim students’ readiness for learning.

Any suggestions and ideas are welcome in order to continually improve the information contained herein.

ThankYou.
Discover Islam Team
## TABLE OF CONTENT

1. What is Islam?  
2. Fasting in Islam  
3. Ramadan – The Basics  
4. A Typical Day in Ramadan  
5. Strategies to Improve Learning  
6. Advice for Primary Schools  
7. Advice for Secondary Schools  
8. General Advice and Tips  
9. Ramadan (Fasting) Dates  
10. Eid – The End of Ramadan  
11. Further Islamic References on Fasting  
12. Glossary of Key Terms  
13. Further Readings
WHAT IS ISLAM?

"The word Islam means voluntary submission or surrender to the Will of God. It is derived from the root word ‘Salam’ meaning peace."

Muslims believe in one God, known as ‘Allah’ in the Arabic language. Muslims believe Allah is the Creator of everything and has created people to worship Him in this world by following his commands which will ultimately bring benefit to the individual, the surrounding community and society at large.

Muslims also believe Allah sent special people to this world to teach His message of peace. They are known as Prophets, some of them being:

**Prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Jonah, John the Baptist, Jesus and Muhammad** (peace be upon them all).

Muslims consider Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be the last and final Prophet and believe the Qur’an¹ was revealed to him by the Angel Gabriel as the final book of guidance.

Like the Bible and the Torah (the Holy Books for Christians and Jews respectively), the Qur’an is the Holy Book for Muslims, which they refer to for guidance as to how they should live their lives. Muslims also refer to the practices of Prophet Muhammad (known in Arabic as the sunnah) for detailed understanding of the Quran’s teachings.

In the Qur’an, Allah states that the only purpose for which He created humankind is to worship Him. Islam recognises that humankind has free choice in whether to obey or disobey God, but ultimately we will be held accountable to Him in the hereafter for the choices that are made in this life.

---

1. ‘Qur’an’ can also be spelt in English as ‘Koran’
PRINCIPLE TENETS OF ISLAM

Islamic belief is centred around the ‘5 Pillars’:

1. **S H A H A D A H** —— Testifying to the belief in Allah alone and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)²

2. **S A L A H** ——- Obligatory prayer performed 5 times each day.

3. **Z A K A H** ——- Annual charity of 2.5% of a person’s wealth to be given to the poor.

4. **S A W M** ——- Fasting for 29 or 30 days in the month of Ramadan.

5. **H A J J** ——- Pilgrimage to be made to The Sacred Mosque (Masjid ul Haram) in Makkah at least once in each Muslim’s lifetime, if they have financial means.

++ ADDITIONALLY…

Muslims should also believe in the ‘6 Articles of Faith’ which are:

- **Allah**
- **The Angels**
- **The Revealed Books (Torah, Psalms of David, Gospel and The Qur’an)**
- **The Messengers**
- **The Day of Judgement**
- **Divine decree and predestination**

2. PBUH = Peace be upon him (him being Muhammed), a small prayer Muslims make after a name of a Prophet is mentioned.
Ramadan guide for Primary & Secondary Schools

Muslims are commanded to observe the fast of Ramadan as per the following ayah (verse) of the Holy Quran:

“Oh You who believe! Fasting has been prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those (nations) before you so that you may be mindful of God” ——— Quran | Chapter 2 Verse 183

This verse highlights that the obligatory fasting for the believers in Islam was already a tradition following on from previous nations, such as the people of Abraham, David, Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them all).

Additionally, it highlights that the objective of fasting is to become more God-conscious, i.e. more conscious of the fact that God is watching everything we do and will judge with His complete knowledge and wisdom. Hence the goal of a fasting for Muslims should be to become a more caring person in relation to one’s responsibilities to one’s self, God and all other creation.
Some of the more detailed impacts of Ramadan on a fasting person may be as follows:

- Increased focus on additional acts of worship and God-consciousness leading to a greater mental clarity, focus and inner resolve and promotes an inner calm and enhances spiritual connection.
- Improved characters and improved relations with other people, greater kindness, and be more willing to forgive.
- Avoiding all types of unhelpful comments, bad language and poor behaviour such as backbiting, name calling or bullying.
- Using spare time and any breaks in the day to pray, recite Quran and reflect
- Training one’s self to become more self-aware and increasing one’s self-control.
- Developing empathy with the poor which is often exhibited by actions of generosity including donating to charity and sharing food with others upon breaking of the fast. This often leads to a development of a sense of community amongst Muslims and their neighbours alike.
- A break from ‘routine’ in eating and emotional patterns.
- A detox for the body and opportunity for the major organs to rest due to reduced food intake which contrary to belief, often gives fasting individuals a feeling of lightness and increased energy levels.
**Ramadan - The Basics**

- Fasting in Ramadan is the fourth of the five pillars of Islam.
- Ramadan occurs in the 9th Month of the Islamic lunar calendar.
- Ramadan begins 10 or 11 days earlier each year in the Gregorian calendar. Taking approximately 33 years to move through the seasons from January to December.
- Currently the month of Ramadan in 2019 falls in late spring, between the 4-5th of May 2019 to 3-4th of June 2019.
- Fasting refers to the refraining from the consumption of food, drink, smoking and sexual relations during the hours of daylight, from just before dawn until the sun sets.
- Muslims also aim to abstain from all bad behaviour & bad thoughts, they should increase in their ‘good deeds’ such as reading the Quran, performing extra prayers and giving to charity as the rewards are manifold during Ramadan.
- Fasting is obligatory for all males and females once they attain puberty.
- Exemptions are given to the sick, the traveller, and menstruating woman. Missed fasts need to be refasted at a later date any time during the year but before the next Ramadan, if they cannot be made up due to health reasons one can feed a poor person or donate towards feeding a poor person for each day missed. The amount will vary from country to country based on the price of an average meal, but in the UK £5 is the norm.
- Muslims believe that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the month of Ramadan, so it is a month of spiritual, moral and social significance.
- The last ten nights of Ramadan are viewed as particularly sacred and Muslims often use this time to further increase their acts of worship and disengage from any distractions. Some Muslims spend some time in seclusion (*Itikaf*).
- *Laylaat ul qadr* (‘the night of power’) is the night in which the Qur’an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) by the Angel Gabriel, from Allah. It falls on one of the odd nights in the last 10 days of Ramadan and Muslims believe that worshipping during these nights is greater than worship in a thousand months.
**WHAT INVALIDATES THE FAST?**

- Intentional eating, drinking or sexual intercourse.
- Self-induced vomiting.
- A female starting her menstruation while fasting.
- Injections providing nourishment.
- Smoking

**WHAT DOESN'T INVALIDATES THE FAST?**

- Unintentional eating or drinking.
- Using an inhaler for health purposes e.g. asthma.
- Minor bleeding from a minor accident.
- Giving a small amount of blood for testing.
- Using eye drops or applying kohl to the eyes.
- Tasting food while cooking, out of necessity, so long as it does not go beyond the throat (i.e. not eating, but simply checking for taste).
- Swallowing one’s own saliva.
On the day of fasting, a Muslim would wake up in the morning and have an early breakfast before the sun rises. This pre-dawn meal is known as *Suhoor* in Arabic.

The fast would then commence from dawn until sunset.

The table (next page) outlines a typical timeline that may be expected for Muslims fasting during Ramadan.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Activity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Approximate Duration</strong></th>
<th><strong>Detail &amp; Purpose</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-dawn meal (<em>Suhoor</em>)</td>
<td>15 – 20 minutes</td>
<td>To nourish the body to be able to fast (this meal is optional, not a requirement of observing Ramadan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Prayer (<em>Fajr</em>)</td>
<td>5 – 15 minutes</td>
<td>The first of the five obligatory daily prayers, starts from the breaking of dawn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep until morning</td>
<td>3 – 5 hours</td>
<td>Assuming a wake-up time of 7am: To rest and energise the body for the day ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midday Prayer (<em>Dhur</em>)</td>
<td>5 – 15 minutes</td>
<td>The second daily prayer, midday prayer after Sun passes is highest point, around 1:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon Prayer (<em>Asr</em>)</td>
<td>5-15 minutes</td>
<td>The third daily prayer, around 5:00pm after school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking of the fast at sunset (<em>Iftaar</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>The fast is initially broken with a small meal, usually consisting of dates, water and fruit in keeping with the Prophetic tradition. This time is particularly used to pray for acceptance of fasting and to thank God for the food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Prayer (<em>Maghrib</em>)</td>
<td>5 – 15 minutes</td>
<td>The fourth daily prayer follows shortly after the breaking of the fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night prayer (<em>Isha</em>) followed by the recommended extra <em>Taraweeh</em> prayer at the mosque</td>
<td>5-15 minutes</td>
<td>The Isha prayer is the last prayer. During Ramadan Muslims usually attend extra prayers (known as <em>Taraweeh</em>) at the mosque, especially in the last 10 nights of Ramadan. Over the course of the month, the entire Quran is recited during these prayers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many schools are often understandably concerned about the impact fasting in Ramadan may have on a student’s behaviour and attainment.

The following list provides useful suggestions, incorporating comments from students themselves, on how schools may best accommodate the learning of students during Ramadan.

- Teachers and all other staff who will be in contact with students who are fasting need to know the basic facts about Ramadan, as set out in this Guide, in advance of the month of Ramadan.
- This Guide should be made accessible to all staff and be easily located by staff throughout the time of fasting.
- Muslim students should be assured that all members of school staff have been informed of the basic facts about Ramadan and that they understand that fasting is a duty for both boys and girls once they have reached puberty. School staff also need to be informed that some younger Muslim students may be encouraged by their parents to participate in the Fast to some extent after the age of seven. Teachers should let it be known that they have a basic understanding of Ramadan and the demands it makes upon those who are fasting, and share this information with non-Muslim students so that the whole school community is aware of the fast and its implications for the daily life of the school.
- As far as is possible, schools should do what they can to facilitate Muslim pupils who want to say the midday prayer and also give them access to a room where they can sit during the time when other students are eating their lunch.
- Students should be encouraged to remain focused and work hard during Ramadan. Students’ learning in this period may be linked to an increased self awareness and an extra effort to secure self-improvement.
- Insofar as is practical teachers should see if lesson-plans can be adjusted so that they may be made more relaxed and interactive and engaging in order to keep students active at all times. In this way, the lessons go by quicker and the impact of the fasting is felt less.
- Schools should not insist that fasting students participate in PE or Games lessons, and if they do to remember that they will not be able to take in any fluid (including water) until between 8:30pm and 9:12pm. In addition, students will have been taught that playing games and participating in sport is inappropriate during Ramadan.
- Students may have been advised by their parents that talking of food is likely to be a cause of distraction and potentially stress, while fasting. Teachers should also refrain from discussion or comment about food in the presence of Muslim students during Ramadan.
It may be advisable for teachers to make adjustments to lesson plans where possible in order to reduce any adverse impacts on students. This may include reducing workload and even the postponement of tests during Ramadan to reduce stress on students while fasting.

Lastly, teachers should use their judgement to adjust lessons mindful that in addition to not eating or drinking their students may well have disturbed sleep pattern during Ramadan. However, Ramadan should not be seen as a time to let children ‘get away’ with misbehaving or disruptive behaviour and warnings should be given as appropriate. The key is for teachers and students to forge an understanding and find what works best for the fasting student.

The two subsequent sections of this Guide provide further guidance and information specific to primary and secondary school students respectively.

**ADDITIONALLY...**
ADVICE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

“Fasting is not obligatory for young children, until they reach the age of adolescence, because the Prophet (PBUH) said: "The pens have been lifted from three: from one who has lost his mind until he comes back to his senses, from one who is sleeping until he wakes up, and from a child until he reaches the age of adolescence." (Narrated by Abu Dawood, 4399; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.)

As fasting for primary age children is best undertaken under parental supervision and out of school hours, it is imperative that teachers and staff are made aware of fasting children in order to safeguard them against health risks. Although schools may wish to make suitable arrangements to support students, it is equally important that students realise that Ramadan is not an opportunity to try to gain special individual rights within the school.

It is a common practice for Muslim children to begin fasting before they attain puberty. Although fasting for the entire month does not become obligatory until the age of puberty.

Younger children who are very enthusiastic may be encouraged by their parents to fast only on certain days of the week, especially the weekends.

The younger the children, the more difficult it tends to be for them to fast without their physical stamina and concentration levels being affected. All staff need to be aware of some of the effects of prolonged dawn to dusk fasting which include sleepiness, mood swings and headaches. Such behaviour is particularly prominent in very young children, therefore it is recommended that schools liaise with parents to encourage them to fast half days or to avoid fasting during school days.

Ultimately, whether a student decides to fast or not is a matter to be decided between the parent and child.
Schools should not encourage children to break their fast early unless it is for health and safety reasons. The overriding consideration should be that the children do not feel disadvantaged in school activities because of their religious observance.

On the other hand, if a fasting child exhibits health concerns, the school has an overriding safeguarding duty of taking action to enable the child to have the best outcome. Additionally, new and supply staff may need to be made aware of the importance of Ramadan and the school’s responsibilities.
As this year’s GCSE/A Level examinations will fall during the month of Ramadhan, secondary schools may need to anticipate any actions required in advance in order to prepare students to achieve their best. Fasting is obligatory for Muslim students in secondary school with the only dispensation given to those who are ill or females who may be menstruating. Families will normally make their own decision on such issues affecting their children. Having to take examinations on top of long hours of fasting over the summer period will be a challenge for students.

Since fasting students have plenty of spare time during lunch breaks, schools can support Muslim students by providing a quiet room during break times where they are able to pray, rest or revise between examinations. In addition to this, fasting students can also be advised to utilise the long gap between the end of the school day and Iftar (breaking of the fast) to have a good rest, balanced with revision periods where necessary.
Ramadan is seen as a time for a person to cleanse themselves of any shortcomings and gain closeness to God. As such, each student aiming to fast or not fast is motivated to do his / her utmost in the month of Ramadan to be good, respectful and enthusiastic. Teachers should also take the opportunity in this month to improve a student's behaviour by addressing any issues with them as Ramadan is considered the best time for Muslims to make efforts to improve and make positive changes in their lives. Students should be reminded that good behaviour will also contribute to the acceptance of their fast. As Muslim students would be particularly morally and religiously enthusiastic to do good during Ramadan, this should result in a happier environment for all.
SPORTS DAYS

- Where possible, sports days should be held before Ramadan begins or after it ends.
- Students should be discouraged in taking part in sports day
- Fasting students, who have been given permission by their parents to participate in sports day should ideally be limited to one activity.
- Long distance races such as the 400m and particularly the 800m should be avoided.
- Participating students should be prepared by having a balanced meal at Suhoor.
- Parents should be invited to attend and support a child if sports day takes place.
- If sports day falls on a hot day, sufficient shelter should be provided for fasting students as they will not be able to consume any liquids. Any offers of drink should be avoided.
- Students who have medical conditions that may affect their health are exempt from fasting (see below).

MEDICATION

- Students requiring regular medication would normally be exempted from fasting.
- No oral medication should be taken during fasting hours.
- Medical injections that DO NOT provide nutrition to the body are permissible.
- Inhalers for example to treat asthma are also permissible.
- Routine vaccinations should be scheduled for other times of the year so as to not clash with the days of Ramadan.
- In an emergency situation the wellbeing of the student should come first and medicine should be administered if a medical professional deems it necessary.
GENERAL

- As previously mentioned, exams should be scheduled to take place outside of Ramadan as much as possible in order to help students focus on their studies.
- Given that parents will be typically busier during the month with extra prayer and other religious activities, parents’ evenings and other similar school events may prove difficult to attend, especially where timings overlap with the breaking of the fast.
- Consideration should be given to the scheduling to the timing of detentions and after school activities, so as to avoid any situations where students are unable to break their fasts at home. This is particularly applicable where Ramadan falls during winter months.
- Lessons based on the involvement of food should involve fasting students as much as possible (with the appropriate levels of sensitivity as necessary). For example, food technology teachers may encourage the preparation of more traditional meals during Ramadan in order to engage students and allow them to lead some of the sessions, without focusing on the worry of not being able to eat.

RAMADAN (FASTING) DATES

2019 - 05th May - 04th June

Ramadan 2019 in United Kingdom will begin, for most Muslims, in the evening of Sunday, 5 May and end on the evening of Tuesday, 4 June. However, some Muslims maintain that the new moon has to be seen with the naked eye before Ramadan can be officially announced, and other Muslim communities wait for news of a moon sighting from their country of origin.
Eid ul fitr, the festival of breaking the fast, is the first Eid in the Islamic year (the second being Eid ul Adha) and marks the end of fasting.

It is the first day of the next month in the Islamic calendar after Ramadan (named Shawwal). The month of Ramadan may last for either 29 or 30 days and the date of Eid is subject to the sighting of the new moon and may vary according to each locality.

Zakat ul fitr (not to be confused with Zakaat al Maal) is a charity levied upon each household that must be given prior to the performance of the Eid prayers so that it may reach the poor and in time for Eid celebrations. The purpose of the Zakat ul fitr is to serve as an atonement and purification of any wrong behaviour during Ramadan, as well as to allow food to be given to the less fortunate. In the UK the cost of Zakat ul fitr is approximnatly £5 per person.

On Eid day, a special congregational prayer is held after sunrise in mosques, parks and other open spaces. Muslims are prohibited from fasting on this day and instead celebrate by dressing in new and their finest clothes, exchanging gifts and visiting family and friends. It is common for Muslim students to take up to 3 days off from school in order to commemorate the occasion and spend time celebrating with families. Schools should discuss any such Eid plans with families and their students in advance, in order to avoid any disruption to the child’s learning.
“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous - [Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] – a “ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew.

The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur’an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful.

... And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset...”

Quran | Chapter 2: verses 183-187

NARRATIONS FROM PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)

• Abu-Huraira reproted that the Prophet of Allah said "Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions (during the month of ramadan), Allah is not in need of his leaving food and drink" (i.e. Allah will not accept his fast)

• Abu Hurayrah reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, “Whoever observes fasts during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah’s rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven.”

The Prophet (PBUH) would also fast on a voluntary basis outside the month of Ramadan:

• Twice a week, being Mondays and Thursdays.
• Three days in the middle of each (Islamic) month according to the lunar calendar – 13th, 14th and 15th.
• Two days, being the 9th and 10th of the first month of the Islamic calendar (Muharram).
• Frequently in the month leading up to Ramadan.
• Six days in the month following Ramadan (i.e. Shawwal).
GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Allah: Arabic for the One and Only God worthy of exclusive worship

Asr: Afternoon Prayer

Dhur: Midday Prayer

Eid ul Adha: Festival which marks the end of the annual pilgrimage (Hajj) and falls approximately two months and ten days after Eid ul Fitr

Eid ul Fitr: Festival which marks the end of Ramadan

Fajr: Dawn Prayer

Iftar: Literally meaning to 'break fast', it is the meal eaten after sunset and marking the conclusion of the day's fasting

Isha: Night Prayer

Islam: Submission to the will of Allah and thereby attaining peace

Itikaaf: The act of seclusion (typically within a mosque) during the last ten days of Ramadan for worship, reflection and meditation

Lailatul Qadr: Meaning 'the night of power', it is the night in which the Quran was revealed to mankind. It falls on one of the odd nights in the last 10 days of Ramadan and the rewards during this night is greater than a thousand months

Maghrib: Sunset Prayer

Muslim: One who submits to the will of Allah 

pbuh: Peace be upon him - a term of respect used after the name of the Prophets like Muhammad (pbuh)

Quran: A book believed by Muslims to be the Final revelation from God (Allah) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the Angel Gabriel. Similar to the Torah or Gospel being revealed to Moses (pbuh) and Jesus (pbuh) respectively

Ramadan: 9th Month of the Islamic Calendar in which fasting occurs

Suhoor: Pre dawn meal before fast

Taraweeh: Extra recommended congregational prayers occurring during Ramadan after the night prayer usually within a mosque, with the aim of completing one recital of the Quran in the month

Zakat ul Fitr: Charity given by each household to the poor before Eid ul Fitr prayers
FURTHER READING

The following links may be used to obtain further information about fasting in Ramadan.

https://www.discoverislam.co.uk (for school visits, Mosque Tours & Interfaith Panels)
https://www.youtube.com/user/DiscoverIslamUK

http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthyramadan/Pages/fastingandhealth.aspx
http://www.digitaljournal.com/pr/1260603
www.mcb.org.uk

Jon Ashworth Labour MP for Leicester South and an Opposition Whip “Why I Spent a Day Fasting This Ramadan and What I Learnt” why-i-spent-a-day-fasting_b_1809194.html

Fasting during Ramadan
http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/fasting-during-ramadan/3053.html

Alex & Yusuf discussing Fasting in Islam
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hW3hH9_7pI

Ramadan Fasts and Sports © Saudi Journal of Sports Medicine


Islamicstudies.info ©, Islamic Study Information
http://www.islamicstudies.info/fasting/ fasting.php?id=8

Ramadan health guidance, © Copyright ITV plc 2013