



An Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices



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About CAIR

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), America's largest Islamic civil liberties and advocacy group, has over 25 offices and chapters nationwide. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding. The demand for our services has grown tremendously. From restrictions placed on Muslims to practice their religion, to profiling and discrimination stemming from a lack of understanding of Islam, the need for CAIR in New Jersey is great. CAIR New Jersey strives to ensure that Muslims in New Jersey enjoy the same protections that all Americans have.

Protecting the rights of New Jersey Muslims is at the core of CAIR New Jersey's mission. We work vigorously to educate on behalf of community members experiencing discrimination and remedy cases through in-person negotiations, from filing charges of discrimination, letter writing, and referrals to our attorney referral network. Cases range from employment, public accommodation and school discrimination, to hate crimes and governmental religious/racial profiling.

CAIR New Jersey actively engages with the media to ensure that a fair and accurate portrayal of Islam and Muslims is presented to the American public. This is accomplished through media appearances, press conferences, opinion editorials, and letters to the editor. In addition, CAIR New Jersey provides training to community members, law enforcement, government agencies, corporations, businesses, employers, media professionals, educators, university students, medical professionals, religious leaders, political leaders, and others. Professionals of all fields are engaged in discussions about working with the Muslim community, with the purpose of helping to create an environment where there is fair, welcoming, and just treatment of Muslims.

Disclaimer: The materials contained herein are not intended to and do not constitute legal advice. Readers should not act on the information provided without seeking professional legal counsel. Neither the transmission nor receipt of these materials creates an attorney-client relationship between the author and the receiver. The information contained in this booklet is designed to inform educators about the sincerely-held and/or religiously mandated practices and beliefs of Muslim students, which at times require educators to provide religious accommodations in compliance with state and federal laws.

Glossary of Islamic Terms

- **Allah:** "God" in Arabic
- **Eid:** Two major religious celebrations, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, commemorating important events in the Muslim year
- **Halal:** Commonly understood to mean "permissible", signals what is acceptable in Islamic practice (i.e. halal food, dress, etc.)
- **Hijab:** "Barrier" or "partition", often used to refer to the headscarf worn by some Muslim women and girls
- **Islam:** Islam is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion centered on the Quran and the teachings of Muhammad. Adherents of Islam, called Muslims, number approximately 1.9 billion globally and are the world's second-largest religious population after Christians
- **Jummah:** Friday prayer, required for those who are able to attend
- **Kufi:** A cap worn by some Muslim men and boys
- **Masjid:** "Mosque" in Arabic, the Muslim house of worship
- **Muslim:** Follower of Islam
- **Prophet:** An individual believed to be chosen by God to deliver two messages 1) God alone should be worshipped and 2) people should strive to live ethically by treating others as they wish to be treated
- **Qur'an:** The Holy Book of Islam, believed to be the word of Allah (God)
- **Ramadan:** The lunar month in which Muslims are required to fast from dawn to dusk, and be especially mindful of other sins
- **Sharia or Shari'ah:** A living system of Islamic legal principles and ethical standards, which extends to one's relationship with one's neighbors, the state, God, and one's conscious
- **Wudu:** Ritual washing required before prayer, requires running water in order to cleanse hands, feet, and face



Five Common Misconceptions About Islam:

All or most Muslims are from the Middle East.

Globally, only one in five Muslims is from the Middle East. The largest Muslim populations are in Africa and Asia. In the U.S., more than 60 percent of American Muslims are immigrants, with 70 percent of this population being U.S. citizens. American Muslims are as ethnically and racially diverse as the American population, with 28 percent of American Muslims identifying as Asian, 20 percent as Black, and 8 percent as Hispanic.

"Allahu Akbar" indicates imminent danger.

"Allahu Akbar" translates to "God is the greatest" and is used as a celebration of life — such as a birth — to indicate gratitude, and to celebrate God's greatness.

"Jihad" refers to violence committed in the name of Islam.

"Jihad means "to struggle" and alludes to the struggle, individual or communal, to become closer to God through overcoming adversity and striving to be one's best self. There are two types of jihad, internal, which is the struggle to become a better person, and external, which is the struggle to make the world a better place.

Muslims are particularly prone to violence and/or to support terrorism.

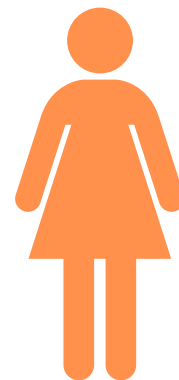
According to a recent poll, 41 percent of Americans believe Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its followers. This belief is unsubstantiated by data, as the vast majority of Muslims around the world are peaceful individuals who suffer from violence and terrorism more than non-Muslims.



Moreover, numerous reports have confirmed that, in the U.S., white, right-wing, non-Muslim terrorists pose a greater danger than radical Islamists, both in number of attacks and deadlines of attacks. Muslim scholars have long defined Islam as a religion of peace and the killing of innocent people or civilians is one of the greatest sins an individual can commit under Islam.

Islam oppresses women.

Most oppression of women that receives attention as being perpetrated by Muslims is not related to their adherence to Islam, but rather tied to local customs and traditions. Muslim women have held high leadership positions in Muslim majority countries including president and prime minister. Islam forbids violence of any kind towards women and promotes care for widows, orphans, and the poor. Finally, the Quran supports the equal status of men and women, by stating that "women have rights over men, similar to those of men over women." - Quran 2:228





Legal Framework

Federal and state laws provide protection for students, including mandating religious accommodations where necessary and protecting students from bullying. Educators should be fully aware of the laws and their implications.

United States Constitution

First Amendment to the Constitution establishes freedom of religious practice and the separation of church and state in order to guarantee this freedom.

Implications:

- State actors, including teachers and school administrators, cannot encourage or promote religious or anti-religious activity such as school sponsored prayer.
- Any teaching about religion must be done objectively and cannot advance or inhibit any religion. Religions should be taught in similar manners with similar resources committed to lesson plans.
- Protects the right to be Muslim and maintain religious practices in school such as clothing choices and prayer.

Federal Laws

Title IV of the Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. §2000 et seq.) (1964): prohibits discrimination based on religion in public primary and secondary schools, as well as in public colleges and universities.

Implications:

- A school must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine the extent of any student-on-student harassment the school knows of or reasonably should know of.

- If harassment occurred, a school must take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the harassment, eliminate any hostile environment and prevent its recurrence.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. § 2000 et seq.): Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

Implications:

- Although religion is not specifically enumerated, this statute applies to anti-Muslim harassment as it is often based on shared ancestry of ethnic characteristics.
- Schools that fail to follow federal anti-discrimination policies are at risk of forfeiting their federal funding.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 6301 et seq.) (1965):

Conditions school districts' funding on written certification that it does not have any policies that prevent or deny participation in constitutionally protected prayer.

Implications:

- Protects the right of students to meet and pray together during the school day and on school grounds.
- Guarantees the right of students of all faiths to have a similar platform for their religious expression.

Examples of actions that may violate federal law:

- A teacher harassing a student because of the student's faith, or a school's deliberate indifference and/or failure to respond, to pervasive faith-based harassment from other students.
- Suppression of students' religious exercise, such as the denial of a group of Muslim students' request for space to perform midday prayers during lunch period.
- Refusal of a student's request to wear hijab (a religious headscarf) at school; or enforcement of a school's uniform policy which requires Muslim students to remove their hijabs.
- Penalizing a student for missing school due to the observance of a religious holiday.

Equal Access Act (20 U.S.C. § 4071 et seq.) (1984): affirms the right of student-initiated religious activities in public schools.

Implications:

- Religious clubs must be allowed and afforded the same access to resources, i.e. space, as other student-run, non-curricular clubs.



New Jersey Law

New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD) N.J.S.A 10:5-4, 5-5: This law provides students a range of protection from discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying without discrimination because of race, creed - including all aspects of religious belief, observance and practice, color, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, affectional or sexual orientation, familial status, disability, liability for service in the Armed Forces of the United States, nationality, sex, gender identity or expression. This is recognized as and declared to be a civil right.

Implications:

- Guarantees all pupils the right to participate fully in the educational process, free from discrimination and harassment.
- Places an obligation on schools to combat bias and provide equal educational opportunity.
- Schools should undertake educational activities to counter discriminatory incidents on school grounds and minimize and eliminate a hostile school environment.
- NJ LAD applies universally to places of public accommodation, a defined term that includes schools regardless of their source of funding.
- NJ LAD does not apply to any educational facility operated or maintained by a bona fide religious or sectarian institution.

Compliance Tip #1:

Recognize **harassment** – look for harassing conduct, motivated by a protected characteristic (including sex, color, race, religion, national origin), that creates a hostile school environment.

To state a hostile school environment claim under the NJ LAD, an aggrieved student must allege (1) “discriminatory conduct that would not have occurred ‘but for’ the student’s protected characteristic,” (2) “that a reasonable student of the same age, maturity level, and protected characteristic would consider sufficiently severe or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive school environment, and” (3) “that the school district failed to reasonably address such conduct.”

Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act N.J.S.A 18A:37-13: School districts must have a public harassment, intimidation or bullying policy that prohibits harassment, intimidation and bullying. “Harassment, intimidation or bullying” means any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it be a single incident or a series of incidents, that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic.

School districts must publicize the policy to students, teachers, administrative staff, and parents. The policy must:

- Extend to all acts related to school activity or attendance occurring within a school, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or, under certain circumstances, off school grounds;
- Include a requirement for school personnel to take immediate steps to intervene if they witness an act of harassment, intimidation or bullying;
- Adopt a process for receiving and investigating complaints;
- Include a timeline to investigate and resolve complaints;
- Contain an appeal process, should complainant disagree with the resolution of a complaint;
- Ensure all complainants remain confidential, as appropriate and are not subjected to retaliation.

Implications:

School Districts policies must contain:

- A statement of how the policy is to be publicized;
- A requirement that a link to the policy be prominently posted on the home page of the school district’s website and distributed annually to parents and guardians who have children enrolled in a school in the school district; and
- Notice of the school district’s policy shall appear in any publication of the school district that sets forth the comprehensive rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools within the school district, and in any student handbook.

Compliance Tip #2:

- The Department of Education, in consultation with the Division on Civil Rights shall develop a guidance document for use by parents or guardians, students, and school districts to assist in resolving complaints concerning student harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors.
- The New Jersey Department of Education has the guidance document and a model policy available at:
<https://www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/behavior/hib/>



Islamic Religious Practices

Schools and educators should be aware of, and responsive to, certain accommodations which Muslim students may require in order to practice their faith.

Daily Prayer:

Islam prescribes that believers perform prayer five times each day: dawn, noon, afternoon, dusk, and nighttime. The noon and afternoon prayers may regularly fall within school hours. Prayer requires a ritual washing, or wudhu, beforehand. During the act of praying, Muslims recite the prayer either aloud or in silence and stand, bow, and touch their foreheads to the ground, while facing the Kabaa in Mecca. During prayer the worshipper is fully engaged and should not be interrupted.

In Islam, congregational worship is on a Friday, with mosques holding midday prayer and sermon called Jum'ah, which lasts approximately an hour.



Wudu

- Before each prayer, Muslims are required to wash their faces, hands and feet with clean water.
- This washing is normally performed in a restroom sink or other facility that has running water, and takes about two minutes.

Prayer

- Allow Muslim students to pray in unused rooms.
- Provide them with privacy and space, as well as a clean place to perform ritual washing.



Ramadan and Fasting:

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, during which most Muslims observe religious fasting. Fasting includes refraining from eating, drinking, smoking, and intimate contact from

dawn to sunset. Ramadan is also a period when Muslims increase their focus on personal restraint, proper conduct, and empathy with the less fortunate through giving to charity and engagement in local projects. Although Muslims are not required to fast until the age of puberty, many choose to participate at a younger age.

Educators should consider celebrating diversity by allowing a student or guest speaker to explain the traditions and practices of Ramadan. This will provide an important learning opportunity and allow Muslim students to feel comfortable in fasting while at school.

Educators can show sensitivity to fasting students by:

- Excusing them from strenuous physical activity.
- Allowing them to spend lunchtime someplace where others are not eating.

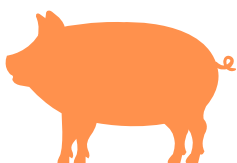
Dietary Requirements:

Muslims refrain from consuming alcohol, pork, and any pork by-products or derivatives. Some Muslims choose to adhere to "Halal" standards for meat and poultry slaughter and preparation.

Schools should indicate, with a clear, age-appropriate marker, if a food item contains any of the following objectional products or ingredients:

- Pork, including: pepperoni, sausage, hot dogs, or bacon
- Animal shortening
- Gelatin, including: jello and gummy bears/worms
- Lard
- Ingredients containing alcohol such as vanilla extract and Dijon mustard

Schools with a high number of Muslim students should consider the demand for halal food and offer it alongside other options such as kosher and vegan.



Pork and Pork By-Products in Lunches

- Mark items with a red dot or a picture of a pig.
- Provide alternate lunch options, such as vegetarian meals and snacks.

Personal Modesty:

Muslims believe that an emphasis on modesty encourages society to value individuals for their wisdom, skills, and contribution to the community, rather than physical attractiveness. Individuals interpret what this means for themselves differently, according to cultural, ethical, regional, and personal interpretations of modesty.

Men and boys may choose to wear clothing that covers from the navel to the knee. Some choose to wear a small head covering, or maintain a beard to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Muslim women

often choose to wear loose-fitting and non-revealing clothing in public. Additionally, some choose to wear a hijab or other head covering and some may wear a face veil, commonly referred to as a niqab. Some individuals may choose to cover their body at all times, even in same-gender locker rooms.

Schools should help students maintain their personal interpretation of modesty by:

- Ensuring that students are not mocked or teased for their clothing choices.
- Allowing alternate clothing for physical education.
- Allowing private dressing and shower areas upon request.
- Being sensitive to the fact that female students who choose to wear the hijab commonly experience issues with other students, with one in three reporting having their hijab tugged, pulled, or otherwise offensively touched, and creating an environment where such conduct is unquestionably unacceptable.



Physical Education

- Discuss clothing requirement with Muslim parents.
- School administrators should consider alternative uniforms for physical education classes.
- A private shower should be made available, or the Muslim student should be permitted to wear some type of covering in the shower, such as a swimsuit.
- Reschedule classes for students preferring same gender exercise environment.
- Provide students with alternate activities if they cannot participate.
- No student should be pressured to participate or penalized for not taking part in such activities.

Gender Relations

- Do not extend hand first for handshakes with members of different genders.
- Avoid touching when comforting students and parents of different genders.
- Respect students' boundaries and allow them to choose whether they wish to hug or hold hands with members of different genders.

Adolescence and Gender Relations:

Puberty is a major life-turning point of all students. Islam seeks to maintain modesty through offering guidance on what is acceptable for members of the opposite sex after puberty. Islamic guidelines suggest that physical contact and being alone together should be discouraged between unmarried males and females. Educators should not be offended if a Muslim student is reluctant to shake hands or avoids eye contact with members of the opposite sex. Further, Muslim students should not be forced to participate in certain coed activities such as physical education or school dances.

Schools should ensure Muslim students can maintain gender relations they are comfortable with by ensuring that students are not penalized or deemed disrespectful for maintaining a distance from members of the opposite sex, including allowing students alternatives to coed activities.



Religious Celebrations:

There are several days in the Muslim calendar with special religious significance, but the major celebrations are the two Eid days. The first Eid day, Eid al-Fitr, is celebrated at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha, is celebrated on the tenth day of the twelfth Islamic month during the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). Typical festivities include congregational prayer, gatherings with family and friends, and

gifts and entertainment, especially for children. Schools with a significant number of Muslim students should consider giving Eid similar recognition as that given to Christmas and Hanukkah.

School should not penalize students for choosing to refrain from participating in school functions or social gatherings that celebrate religious holidays of other faiths.

Schools should accommodate these celebrations by:

- Ensuring students are not penalized for missing school to celebrate these holidays.
- Placing these holidays on school calendars so students and teachers are aware.
- Avoiding scheduling major events on these days.

Pronunciation Guide:

Eid al-Fitr: EED ull-FITTr

Eid al-Adha: EED ull-AHD-ha

Eid Mubarak: EED moo-BAR-ak



Curriculum Issues:

Although availability of accurate and balanced instructional material is increasing, the continued use of outdated material in social studies and world history classes reinforces perceptions of Islam as a foreign creed and Muslims as enemies. Such divisiveness can contribute to incidents of anti-Muslim bullying, harassment, and violence.

- Schools should have their materials reviewed for bias by qualified Muslim educators. Contact our CAIR-NJ office to learn more about our new "Muslim Studies Curriculum" developed in partnership with Teaching While Muslim, LLC.
- Encourage class discussion that embraces diversity, tolerance, and an inclusive classroom environment.

Family Life/Sex Education:

Islam puts great emphasis on modesty, chastity, morality, and there is a specific set of teachings with regard to human development and related issues. New Jersey allows parents or guardians to remove their children from any part of the health, family life, or sex education classes if it conflicts with their beliefs. This is referred to as an "opt-out" policy. (SEICUS)



Family Life/Sex Education Program

- Allow parents reasonable time to review any material pertaining to/with respect to sex education.
- Allow children to opt-out from all or part of the family life program.

Pledge of Allegiance:

While Islam prescribes respect for country and local laws, it also discourages acts of reverence to anyone or anything but God. Some Muslims may choose to opt out of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. This should not be interpreted as a sign of disrespect, or lack of patriotism. Educators should respect the decision of Muslim and other students not to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, in accordance with their First Amendment rights.

Impact of 9/11 and Islamophobia

The catastrophic events of 9/11 had such a massive impact globally that it sparked the phrase, “post 9/11 world.” Following 9/11, Islamophobia exponentially increased, with backlash against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim, including Sikhs. The Patriot Act allowed extensive surveillance of Muslims, and attacks on mosques increased. Directly influenced by U.S. foreign policy, the tragic events of 9/11 unleashed a domino effect of events that marked an aggressive shift in U.S. domestic and foreign policy. These policies sparked the War on Terror and an erosion of the civil liberties of many Americans. The U.S. government defines terrorism as “violence to spread political ideology.” News media often describes Muslims as terrorists, effectively ignoring groups including white supremacists and anti-abortionists who carry out violent acts.

Potential Misconceptions

- All terrorists are Muslims, and all Muslims are terrorists.
- A country’s treatment of others reflects its values.
- Islam advocates for violence.

Palestine

Standing Up for Palestinian and Muslim Students

Students are constantly exposed to the daily atrocities that are egregious in Palestine and may have personal connection via family, history, and shared culture, or a humanitarian connection. They feel helpless and want an avenue to channel their outrage in a productive way to create change in governments, institutions, and media. It is critical to stand up for Palestinian and Muslim students in your classroom and let your classroom know that anti-Arab and anti-Muslim rhetoric will not be allowed. Remember to serve as a safe space for your students. Let them know that you stand with them and that you are there to protect them. If they feel attacked, threatened, or bullied, they should come to you.

Cultural Competence

As educators, it is your role to be aware of the culture and background represented in your classrooms. Some students of Palestinian descent may need trauma-sensitive responses during this time. Students may have family members or friends who are directly impacted by these atrocities. Students may struggle with concentration, memory, cognitive functioning, and social relationships. Educators should emphasize building trust between their students, helping students develop regulatory skills, and promoting academic and emotional health in academic and non-academic settings.

Avoid Language Vilifying Students Who Are Palestinian and/or Muslim

As educators, you must understand how language shapes narratives. You must be aware of the biases you hold and bring to the classroom. Adopting social justice and anti-racist teaching skills means you must take active steps in holding yourself accountable to the language you present to students. Students have experiences and minds of their own, and the language being presented to them directly influences their thinking.

Palestinians are Muslim, Christian, and members of other religions. Muslims themselves come from every race and ethnicity. Referring to Muslims, Palestinians, or Palestinian advocates as terrorists is racist, xenophobic, and inaccurate. As an educator, you are responsible for how you present information and the consequences of that presentation.

Terms to Avoid

- When discussing the Israeli apartheid: “Clashes” and “Conflict”
 - These words assume that Palestine is at war with Israel when in reality, Israel is committing an ethnic cleansing and military occupation against Palestine.
 - Palestinians have no access to electricity, fuel, water, and resources. Palestinians also do not have an army.
- Refrain from using “Extremist” and “Terrorist” in the classroom
 - These terms are often used in reference to Muslim and POC communities.
 - Remember to use fact-based language to describe people, groups, or events.
 - Numerous new outlets refer to Palestinians from Gaza as “Militants” and “Terrorists,” whereas Israelis are referred to as “People” or “Civilians.”
- This bias heavily shapes and impacts narratives that dehumanize the Palestinian population in Gaza. It is important to avoid using language that does not capture the whole perspective of resistance against occupation, mass starvation, and mass destruction.
- Terms like “terrorism” can isolate students of color who may already be dealing with anti-Muslim or anti-Arab racism from peers or other educators.

How to Support?

- Have an open mind. Do not try to diminish their cause or come in with preconceived notions about what they are standing for.
 - Listen to what they are advocating for and respond accordingly.
 - Stand up in support of your student activists who may be facing and resisting instances of bullying or harassment.
- Create a healthy space for discourse.
- Allow students to wear apparel to show their solidarity.
- Guide and Support: Invite students to discuss any potential activism work they wish to enact with you.
- Teach students their First Amendment Rights and how to be safe during any form of protest.

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CAIR-NJ is a chapter of America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Our mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.