

Cultural Awareness for working with Muslim communities

Islam is the name of the religion and Muslims are the followers of this religion.

Funerals

The body is buried as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours, to free the soul from the body. Death is considered as one of the most important stages in a person's journey to God therefore the process of burial is hastened for this important meeting.

Preparing the body before Burial

The body is bathed and covered in white cotton. Women are prepared by women for funeral and men prepared by men. Muslim funerals generally do not have a viewing but after the body is prepared, close family members say their good byes and recite the Quran before it is taken for burial. The body is turned to face towards Mecca, the holy centre of Islam.

What happens during funeral Service

A Muslim funeral generally takes place in a mosque or a family member's home, People sitting next to the body read from the Qu'ran. An Imam (an Islamic leader) presides over the service. The body only stays in the house after the prep for a few minutes for families to say their good byes and it is done by close family members only. The body is then carried to the graveyard by men. A procession of friends and relatives follow. In the Islamic tradition, only men are allowed to attend the burial, although some Muslim communities also allow women to be present.

What happens at the graveyard

Following the completion of the funeral prayers, the congregation will line up in rows and pass the coffin from shoulder to shoulder towards the gravesite for burial. Non-Muslim mourners should keep at a respectful distance to allow the coffin to be carried. No discussion takes place at the time of burial, but all guests pray for the soul of the departed. (Please note: how the body is carried to the burial ground is different in different cultures, not everyone uses a coffin)

What happens after a Muslim funeral?

After the body is buried, all guests go to the house of the family of the deceased. During this time, the family members congregate to pray for the deceased and console family members. Usually the community provides food for the bereaved for the first three days after the funeral. Under Islamic funeral customs, the mourning period for a relative is typically 3 days. In some cultures the mourning occurs for 40 days but can often vary depending on the family.

Muslim funeral etiquette for non-Muslims

Both men and women are expected to dress modestly. Also be aware that shoes must be removed to enter the prayer hall of a mosque. Therefore you may want to wear presentable socks, tights or stockings. If arriving late, guests should simply join in. Guests should not take photos or use recording devices unless permission is given by family members. White is the Islamic colour of mourning but this is not a strict requirement. Guests of the same sex should greet each other with a handshake and hug.

Dealing with Muslim Community affected during a crisis

Welcoming back a child or young person into the school community

Try and use the greeting in the language of the person where possible. As-salāmu ‘alaykum is a greeting in [Arabic](#) that means "Peace be upon you" or use Salaam which is commonly used by all. You will treat the child or young person like any other child affected by this kind of trauma. Give them space and time to talk about it at their own time. They might feel more comfortable talking about it with someone from their own community where possible. It is also important that families are consulted before any discussion takes place.

What to do about the possessions a young person may have at school – and how to return these to the bereaved family

Any possessions that belongs to the deceased child can be put aside in a box and returned to the family member but wait at least for a week to let the family grieve. It may be a good idea for one of the senior management to contact a member of the family and visit them to return the items. However, it would have more sentimental value if possible for the possession to be taken by a teacher or staff member that the child was close with and even if possible a friend of the child.

How we can deal with the “place” a student used to sit – in a sensitive way

If possible, talk to the classmates of the deceased student and decide together how you would deal with this. This would be quite a sensitive subject for the students to deal with. It would be a good idea to get the school counsellor to get involved in this. This is an opportunity for the students to give voice to their grief.