

Understanding Islam - Raising Awareness

These questions and answers are aimed to help teachers and other professionals in school to explain some of the misunderstandings children or parents might have about



Q 1 - We hear a lot about Islam on the TV. What is Islam and who are Muslims?

The word Islam comes from the Arabic language, it means peace and submission. In the religious context, Islam means surrendering to God and submitting to His will, by doing what God orders and avoiding what He prohibits. While in other religions the names derive from names of people or places; leg. Christianity from Jesus Christ, Buddhism from Buddha and Jews from the tribe of Juda, Islam's name is from the message it carries. A Muslim is one who has accepted Islam as a religion and follows its principles and practices.

Q 2 - What do you have to do to be a Muslim?

A Muslim is required to follow 5 tenets. The first point is central to the Islamic faith. Points 4 to 5 vary depending on how strongly a person is at practising the religion.

1. Declaring faith by believing that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger. In Arabic (la ilaha illallah muhammadur rasulullah).
2. Praying 5 times a day.
3. Observing Ramadan by fasting during the daylight.
4. Paying Zakat, which is a mandatory donation amounting to 2.5% of a person's excess money.
5. Hajj, which is the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Q 3- Do Muslims worship Mohammad?

No, Muslims do not worship Muhammad or any other person. Muslims only worship Allah (god), who created everything and sent messengers, including Muhammad, to show people the right way.

Q 4- Most major religions have a holy book. Do Muslims have a holy book?

The sacred book of Islam, the Qur'an, was written in Arabic within 30 years of Muhammad's death. Muslims believe it contains the literal word of god. Also important is the tradition of the sayings and actions of Muhammad and his companions, collected in the Hadith.

Resources:

Islamophobia Education Pack – Show Racism the Red Card
Islamophobia content for PSHE lessons – Produced by 'Muslim Engagement and Development' group - MEND (Power point is available and the lessons will be ready for November 2017 – DfE will be circulating it to schools)

References:

<http://www.religionfacts.com/islam>,
<http://muslimxplore.me/blog>,
<http://islamicsupremecouncil.org/>
<http://www.dhra.mil/perserec/osg/terrorism/jihadist-terrorist-threat.htm>,
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion>

Training:

Raising Awareness of Islamophobia in the Primary School: Keeping Safe – delivered by the Ethnic Diversity Service
(email: eds.admin@stocport.gov.uk)

Q 8- I've heard Muslims are unkind to women and treat them as a second-class citizens. Does Islam discriminate against women?

No. Islam does not oppress women. On the contrary, it has elevated the status of women. Before Islam, women had no rights at all and were treated as objects rather than human beings.

When Islam came, it gave women numerous rights, like the right to a secure and safe life, the right to inherit and have financial independence, the right to agree or refuse marriage and the right to divorce. Children being dutiful to their mothers were prioritised to being dutiful to their fathers.

Q. 9 – Many Muslim women cover their head and some cover themselves from head to foot. Is this necessary?

A hijab is veil traditionally worn by Muslim women in the presence of adult males outside their immediate family, which covers the head and chest. This is worn as a symbol of modesty and privacy. The covering of women varies depending on how strict you are at following the religion. In some parts of the world for example Saudi Arabia and Iran, it is part of the local culture and is enforced by the state. In other parts women choose to wear it or not depending on their belief and commitment to the religion.

In Europe and America, the racist individuals and groups target women wearing hijab, and many have been verbally and physically abused. After an Islamic extremist attack such as the one in Manchester, the Muslim women became a target and hate crime increased by five folds.

Q 10 - Does Islam promote violence and terrorism?

A 10 - No, Islam does not promote violence or terrorism. The word Islam is derived from the word "salam", which in Arabic means "peace", thus, Islam is a religion of peace, and it condemns terrorism. Allah in His Holy Book says: "Because of that, we decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely" (5, 32). In addition to Qur'an, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad about warfare clearly state that killing innocent civilians is prohibited. He ordered Islamic warriors to abstain from killing women, children, non-combatants, livestock and animal and to avoid burning or uprooting trees and destructing wells.

Q 5- Who is Mohammed?

Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. He was born in Mecca, and raised by his uncle as his father died before his birth. His mother died when he was six. He has always been known for being truthful, just and righteous. He never approved the rituals of his society, instead, he opted to meditate in an attempt to find the truth about God and religion.

When he was 40 years old, he became the prophet as he received his first revelation from Allah through the Angel Gabriel. These revelations have continued for 23 years and became known as the Qur'an.

Q 6 – What is halal and haram? Why can't Muslims eat pork?

For a Muslim, certain foods are not allowed to be eaten and pig meat is one of them.

Halal is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted. In reference to food, it is the dietary standard, as prescribed in the Qur'an (the Muslim scripture). The opposite of halal is haram, which means unlawful or prohibited. Halal and haram are universal terms that apply to all facets of life. These terms are commonly used in relation to food products, meat products, cosmetics, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, food ingredients, and food contact materials.
(<http://www.icv.org.au/about/about-islam-overview/what-is-halal-a-guid>)

Q 7– What is Jihad and a Jihadist?

The word "jihad" is widely used, though often inaccurately, by Western politicians and media. In Arabic, the word means "effort" or "struggle". In Islam, it could be an individual's internal struggle against baser instincts, the struggle to build a good Muslim society, or a war for the faith against unbelievers.

Jihad is not a violent concept. It is not a declaration of war against other religions. The Qur'an specifically refers to Jews and Christians as 'people of the book' who should be protected and respected. All three faiths worship the same God. Military action in the name of Islam has not been common in the history of Islam.

A jihadist is any Muslim who has been involved in Jihad (holy war). Militant Islamic jihadism is a political ideology comparable to communism or fascism. This militant ideology is communicated using the rhetoric of religion, but an overwhelming majority of Muslims throughout the world do not see militant jihadism as a part of their faith.