

# BREAKING BOUNDARIES

RELIGION, FAITH, CULTURAL GUIDE  
AND FESTIVAL CALENDAR



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Promoting ethnic diversity in sport & physical activity



## RELIGION, FAITH AND CULTURAL GUIDE

Religious and faith commitments heavily influence the everyday lives of many people. There may also be cultural differences, depending on the country a person has originated from, which also plays a part in how people approach and understand things.

In order to support you with your planning of Breaking Boundaries Events, the following has been written to provide you with a greater awareness and understanding of the different religions, faiths and their cultures.

The guide includes a festival calendar on significant dates for religious observance together with an overview on the six main religions in the UK.

It is not intended that you avoid these dates, but consult with your local communities as the most relevant dates to consider and if appropriate, support celebrations by incorporating into your delivery.

### **Cultural and religious issues concerning physical activity and people from BME and faith communities**

Research has suggested that there are general considerations when including faith groups in physical activity and exercise. It is important to recognise the complexities and differences within faiths and cultures, and that culture and faith are intrinsically linked.

For Black Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) communities with a strong religious allegiance, participation in sport and activity may be problematic because of the requirements of their faith, particularly with regard to single-sex provision and the appropriateness of clothing.

There are many reasons why people from different faiths find it challenging to access sport and physical activity. Some of these may be:

- Feeling uncomfortable with some of the activities or approaches used
- Lack of understanding about which activities would suit their needs
- Lack of support from family, who may not place value on physical activity
- Lack of confidence to carry out activity in unfamiliar settings
- Inability to understand the purpose of what they are asked to do
- Feeling uncomfortable about what they are asked to wear
- Insufficient financial resources to take part

There are often simple ways to respond positively and overcome what can appear to be barriers, with some forward planning and consultation with local service providers.

Cultural factors	Religious factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family not approving of being active, or lack of support from the family, peers and friends to be active.</li> <li>• Belief that old age is a period of rest.</li> <li>• Exercise just not considered to be a priority in daily lives.</li> <li>• Dietary practices, particularly within the South Asian community, are heavily influenced by religious practices (e.g. fasts, festivals, food restrictions and laws).</li> <li>• It is not considered 'ladylike' for women to be physically active.</li> <li>• Different perceptions of what is 'old' – some communities see this as younger than other communities.</li> <li>• Confusion over health diets and the frequency and level of recommended exercise.</li> <li>• Lack of familiarity with health service systems, and places that offer physical activity.</li> <li>• Lack of education about the benefits of exercise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise should not take precedence over, or interfere with, a person's religious obligations.</li> <li>• Women-only sessions are preferable to many religious groups, and there may be a need for female coaches or instructors.</li> <li>• Issues respecting modesty should be considered to allow the head to be covered and participants to wear outfits that they feel comfortable with.</li> <li>• Segregation is often important when carrying out activities, changing and showering.</li> <li>• Fasting is practised by most religions in different ways (this may result in dehydration and low sugar levels).</li> <li>• The need for prayers at certain times of the day should be respected, and a room made available.</li> <li>• Health and safety issues should be considered with regard to clothing and religious symbols.</li> <li>• Where possible, activities should not be planned around major festivals, fasting periods and religious days.</li> </ul>

It's also important to understand the comparison between Ethnicity and Religion. The table below provides some simple guidance.

	Ethnicity	Religion
Description	The term ethnicity is usually used to define a group of persons sharing a common cultural heritage.	Religion is an important component of any cultural heritage.
Groups Share	Language Physical Features Customs Traditions	Common belief systems, but they are not necessarily a single ethnic group.
Collection	Ethnicity is the collection of cultural behaviours celebrated throughout regions around the world.	Religion is a collection of beliefs, morals, ethics, and lifestyles.

The following information provides an overview of the six main religions and their cultures in the UK.

## BUDDHISM

Buddhism is over 2,500 years old and is the story of one man's journey to Enlightenment. In Buddhism, the Buddha is not a god but a founder of a philosophy of life and death.

Buddha' means 'enlightened one'. Buddha believed in the attainment of enlightenment by meditation and spiritual and physical discipline. Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha) was born about 580 BCE in what is now Nepal.

### Places of worship

- Buddhists can worship both at home and at a temple.

### Sacred texts

- Buddhist sacred texts are thought of as guides on the path to truth, not as truth itself.
- There are many sacred texts in Buddhism, but not all texts are accepted by all schools.
- The main texts include the Tripitaka, the Pali Canon and the Mahayana Sutras.

### Diet and fasting

The Buddhist diet is primarily vegetarian, in order to keep with the general Buddhist precept of refraining from killing sentient beings. However, meat can be eaten by one who does not see, hear of, or have any doubts that the animal was killed purposely for him to eat, but instead can be certain that it either died naturally or that its flesh was abandoned by birds of prey.

Some Buddhists may practise fasting, when meals are not taken after noon but small amounts of liquid are allowed. Others may reduce the amount of food they eat.

Alternative food (vegetarian or vegan) should be available if necessary.

### Major festivals

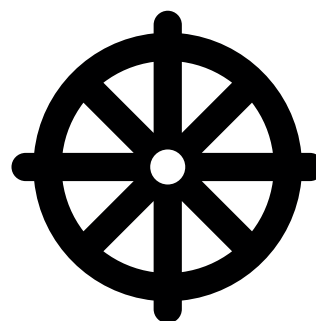
- Most Buddhists use the lunar festivals calendar.
- The dates of Buddhist festivals, and the way they are celebrated, vary from country to country, and between Buddhist traditions.
- The main festivals are Dharma Day, Kathina, Losar, Parinirvana Sangha Day and Wesak.

### Faith requirements and worship

- Buddhism is not a single monolithic religion.
- It teaches that all life is interconnected, so compassion is natural and important.
- At the heart of the Buddha's teaching lie the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which leads the Buddhist towards the path of enlightenment.
- There is no belief in a personal God.
- One of the five precepts of Buddhism for lay people is not to cause harm by physical actions.
- This may cause difficulty in participation in some sports, such as boxing, where the aim is to disable your opponent so he cannot continue. This would be in conflict with Buddhist philosophy. Where other skills are used that do not harm or endanger life, such as martial arts, these are usually deemed appropriate.

### Dress code

- Most Buddhists wear whatever clothes are fashionable in their own country.
- Buddhist monks wear a simple robe, belts, felt hats, boots, aprons and jewellery or metal adornments.
- For the most part, the robes of the monks depend on the dye that is available in the region and also help distinguish which sect/tradition/school of Buddhism the monk follows.



## CHRISTIANITY

Christianity shares its origins and early history with Judaism. It began in first-century Galilee with a man called Jesus. Christianity is a monotheistic religion, its followers believing that there is only one God, whom they call Father and that there are three parts to this God – the Holy Trinity, where God is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They also recognise Jesus as the Son of God.

There are many sub-divisions or groups that base their beliefs on the teachings of Jesus. The most common are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Methodist, Orthodox and Jehovah's Witnesses.

### Places of worship

- Churches, chapels and cathedrals.

### Sacred texts

- The most important Christian texts are the two volumes of the Bible, called the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- The Old Testament is the original Hebrew Bible. The New Testament contains the story of Jesus and the early Church.

### Major festivals

There are many holy days throughout the year and, depending upon the specific group, their importance can vary.

The main events are:

- Good Friday and Easter Sunday
- Christmas
- All Saints Day
- Advent
- Palm Sunday
- Pentecost
- Lent
- The Annunciation
- Ascension Day
- The Assumption
- Corpus Christi
- The Epiphany
- The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Activities should be planned with the religious calendar in mind. This should take account of festivals and periods of fasting.

### Faith requirements and worship

- Sunday is usually the main day for Christian worship, when most Christians will attend church service. However, some Christians may also get together on a Friday or Saturday.
- In many Christian traditions, regular public worship is complemented by other forms of worship, such as individual meditation, prayer and study, small-group prayer (often linked with Bible study), and formal ceremonies on special occasions, including weddings, funerals, baptisms and events of church or state.

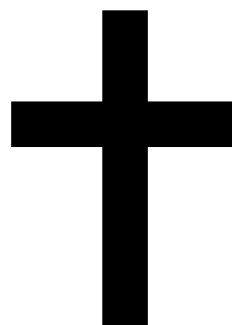
### Diet and fasting

There are no strict dietary restrictions. However, some Catholics (especially older people) may abstain from meat on Friday. Although some people may observe fasts on certain religious festivals, including Good Friday and also the period of Lent (40 days leading up to Easter), most people will abstain from certain foodstuffs, while a small minority will abstain from all food.

Some Christian groups are required to abstain from alcohol.

### Dress code

Some Christian groups who prefer to be modestly dressed have dress codes to do with covering the head or allowing participants to wear long sleeves and trousers if they wish.



## HINDUISM

Hinduism, from the Persian Hindu (Sanskrit sindhu) means literally 'river'. Founded in India approximately 1500 BC, Hinduism means 'of the Indus Valley' or simply 'Indian'. Hindus call their religion sanatama dharma, 'eternal religion' or 'eternal truth'.

Although the Hindu sects are primarily monotheistic, they recognise that 'God is one, but also many', and that man/woman is also divine in nature. Hindus believe that after death individuals are reincarnated according to their behaviour in life – but those who observe the prescribed moral and religious code can attain liberation from the cycle of life and death.

### Places of worship

- Temple (mandir) or home shrine.

### Faith requirements and worship

- Hindu worship, or Puja, involves images (murtis) and prayers (mantras). Central to Hindu worship is the image, or icon, which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple.
- All worship starts with prayers/mantra in praise of Ganesh, who is revered as the key saint in Hindu worship.
- The majority of Hindu homes have a shrine where prayers are said and offerings are made. A shrine can be a room, a small altar or simply pictures or statues of the deity. Family members often worship together. Rituals should be performed three times a day.

### Diet and fasting

- Dietary restrictions are governed by the concept of ahimsa, or avoiding harm, suffering and violence.
- Many Hindus avoid red foods, such as onions, garlic and tomatoes, as these foods are believed to 'excite the body'.
- Some foods are regarded as unclean. These are duck, crab and pork.
- Beef is strictly forbidden, but eggs, milk and (vegetarian) cheese may be acceptable, except on religious festival days.
- Fasting is also practised by some Hindus. It can be done in many ways, including abstaining from certain foods, and is linked to some festivals.
- Alternative food (vegetarian or vegan) should be available if necessary.

### Sacred texts

- Vedas – contains hymns and incantations and is the oldest text written in an Indo-European language.
- Upanishads – the doctrine of karma sets out how a soul can be united with the universal truth.
- Sutras – a collection of aphorisms or sayings.
- Bhagavad Gita – part of the Mahabharata, a sacred text in epic poem form.

### Major festivals

The main Hindu festivals are:

Mahashivarati Holi, Ramnavami, Dusserah, Diwali, Navratri.

Dates of these festivals and many other Hindu festivals follow a lunar calendar and vary from year to year. Activities should be planned with the religious calendar in mind, taking into account festivals and periods of fasting.

### Dress code

- The traditional dress for Hindu women is the sari or salwar (trousers) and kameez (tunic).
- Men usually wear a dhoti, kurta (tunic) and chaddar (shawl).
- Married women may wear a bindi (red dot) on the forehead.

Issues respecting modesty should be considered, which will allow the head to be covered or for participants to wear long sleeves and trousers, should they wish to do so.

Other modesty issues also include the need for single-sex provision for both men and women, which allows people to participate without the need to associate with people of the opposite gender.



## ISLAM

Islam is monotheistic: its followers believe there is only one god (Allah) who revealed the Qur'an to his final prophet, Muhammad. Muhammad is seen not as the founder of a new religion, but as the prophet who restored the original faith of Moses, Jesus and other prophets.

The central tenets of Islam are the Five Pillars: Shahadah (profession of faith), Salat (prayer), Zakat (alms-giving), Sawm (fasting), Hajj (pilgrimage).

### Places of worship

- The Masjid (Mosque) is the usual place for prayer. However, Muslims can pray anywhere that is clean and private.

### Sacred texts

- The sacred text for Muslims is the Qur'an, which was revealed to the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him). Muslims also believe in the Bible and the Torah and in previous prophets such as Jesus, Moses and Abraham.

### Diet and fasting

- Pork, gelatin and alcohol are forbidden in Islam. Meat can only be eaten when it is slaughtered in the Islamic way (halal). Halal meat is usually available from most Asian supermarkets.
- During the month of Ramadan, Muslims refrain from both food and drink from dawn to sunset. The fasting period lasts for 30 days and the dates move forward each year.

When carrying out activity, be mindful of dehydration and ensure that regular breaks are taken, to maintain energy levels.

### Major festivals

- Ramadan (month of fasting from dawn to dusk).
- Eid al Adha, Eid al Fitr and Ashura.
- Islam follows a lunar calendar and celebrations vary from year to year.

### Faith requirements and worship

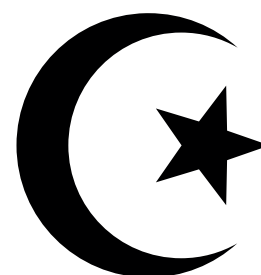
- Prayers take place five times a day. As prayers fall at different times during the day, Muslims need a clean, private area for worship. They also need facilities for cleansing themselves prior to prayer.
- The Friday Prayer is called Jum'ah. There is a need for Muslims to be able to take time during Friday (12–3pm) to attend the Jum'ah congregational prayer.
- Every able-bodied Muslim who can afford to go is required to perform the Hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in their lives.

### Dress code

- Most women wear a Hijab (head scarf) in the presence of men.
- Some women wear a Jibab (longer outer garment), which covers the whole of the body.

Flexibility is required about dress when carrying out activities. Older people may not wish to wear Western attire.

Modesty is not just an issue for women, but for men as well. In all cases, privacy is necessary when changing and showering. Some people may request single-sex provision, particularly when carrying out sports activities such as swimming.



## JUDAISM

Founded in the Middle East about 3,500 years ago, the history of Judaism is inseparable from the history of Jews themselves. The early part of the story is told in the first books of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). It is believed to have been founded by Moses, although Jews trace their history back to Abraham.

Judaism is monotheistic: Jews believe that there is a single God who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship. Sport and physical activity are seen by many Jews as helping to build and retain a vibrant Jewish and civil community – as well as healthier Jews. A number of Jewish community leaders started in community life by participating in the Maccabi movement (an international Jewish sports organisation spanning five continents and more than 50 countries, with some 400,000 members) as athletes, coaches, volunteers, donors and community supporters.

### Places of worship

- The synagogue is the Jewish place of worship, but is also used as a place to study, and is often used as a community centre as well.

### Sacred texts

- The Talmud is a comprehensive written version of the Jewish oral texts (Halakhah) and the subsequent commentaries on it.
- The Torah is the first part of the Jewish bible.

### Faith requirements and worship

- Jews are expected to recite three prayers daily and more on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. While solitary prayer is valid, attending synagogue to pray with a minyan (quorum of ten adult males) is considered ideal.

### Major festival

The Jewish calendar is a combined lunar and solar calendar. The result is that Jewish festivals move about the Western calendar from year to year. The Jewish calendar also starts each day in the evening.

The major festivals include:

- The Sabbath
- Passover
- Hanukah
- Rosh Hashanah
- Yom Kippur.

### Diet and fasting

All Jewish food has to be kosher (prepared according to Jewish law). Kosher foods include:

- all domestic birds and their eggs
- animals with split hooves that chew the cud, and their milk
- all fish with scales and fins
- all plants, including fruit and vegetables.

Kosher foods have to be eaten separately.

- Meat and milk cannot be cooked, eaten or used together.
- Meat has to be treated in a very specific way.
- Shellfish and pork are not allowed to be eaten at all.

Jews fast on special days linked to festivals or prayer, when both food and drink are prohibited. This should be considered when planning any activity, as it may result in dehydration or may impact on sugar levels.



## Dress code

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When a Jew goes to the synagogue, they will wear:

- a Tallit – a prayer shawl
- Kippur or Yarmulke – a small skull cap
- Phylacteries or Tefillin – small leather boxes that have long straps attached that are worn on the left forearm and on the forehead.
- Orthodox women dress modestly, keeping most of their skin covered, and many married women cover their hair, usually with a hat or bandana, or shave their head and wear a wig.
- Orthodox men traditionally wear a skullcap or Kippur.
- Orthodox Jewish men often distinguish themselves by growing beards and sporting long sideburns, wearing black hats and dressing in formal attire. The style of hat will vary from sect to sect.

Issues respecting modesty should be considered, which will allow the head to be covered or participants to wear long sleeves and trousers, should they wish to do so.

Segregation is also important, to give both men and women privacy.



## SIKHISM

Sikhism was founded in India about 1500 CE and is based on the teachings of Guru Nanak. Sikhism is a community-based religion with no priesthood.

The centre of the Sikh community is the Gurdwara, where Sikhs meet for prayer, study and other communal activities.

### Places of worship

- Sikhs worship in the Gurdwara, where verses of the Guru Granth Sahib are read and sung to music.
- The langar, a free community kitchen, is also part of the Gurdwara.

### Sacred texts

- Adi Granth (Sri Guru Granth Sahib) and the Dasam Granth.

### Diet and fasting

The Sikh langar is a common refectory operated by the Gurdwara to provide free food to all who attend. Many Sikhs are vegetarian, and meat is only permitted if it is jhatka (the animal is killed with a single stroke). Sikhs do not eat halal meat. Forbidden items include alcohol, tobacco and narcotics.

### Major festival

The main festivals include:

- Hola Mohalla
- Vaisakhi
- Diwali
- Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur
- birthdays of the Ten Gurus.

Sikhism follows a lunar calendar and the Nanakshahi calendar, so dates of religious celebrations vary from year to year.

### Faith requirements and worship

- Sikhism is a monotheistic religion and believes in equality and rejecting the caste system. Adherents aspire to develop from self-centredness (Manmukh) to God-centredness (Gurmukhi). God (Waheguru) is formless, omnipresent and infinite.
- There are a number of different orders; Sikhs do not believe that one sect has the right to dismiss another. Nihang, or Akali Sikhs, are a military order. Sanatan Singh Sabha is viewed as classical Sikhism.

Sikhs are required to carry the 'five Ks' on their person at all times. These are:

- Kesh – hair; Sikhs are not allowed to cut their hair; Sikh men, and occasionally women, wear a turban
- Kangha – a comb worn in the hair that symbolises orderly spirituality
- Kara – an iron or steel bangle
- Kachhera – knee-length trousers that symbolise modesty and agility
- Kirpan – a curved sword symbolising dignity and self-respect.

## Dress code

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### Women

- Sikh woman may choose to wear a turban. The 'five Ks' (see above) will be worn on the person and some will be visible.
- The normal dress for women is shalwar kameez.

Modesty issues relating to both men and women should be considered, particularly for older people, by allowing participants to wear either long trousers or long shorts during sport.

Other modesty issues should also include the need for single-sex provision for both men and women, which allows people to participate without needing to associate with people of the opposite gender.

### Men

- Sikh men are religiously required to wear turbans to cover their uncut hair. Young Sikh boys will wear their long hair tied in a topknot. The 'five Ks' (see above) will be worn on the person and some will be visible.
- Hair may be covered by wearing a Patka (a simple cloth head-covering) to replace a turban.
- United Sikhs (<http://unitedsikhs.org>), an international non-profit organisation, has engaged an expert who is designing padding to fit over the sheath of the kirpan to make it safe to wear during sports for the wearer and others who may come into contact with the kirpan.

