

# Running Holiday Activities in Ramadan

**Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims. Most Muslims fast during Ramadan; although young children are not expected to fast. In 2022, Ramadan coincides with most of April and includes the school Easter holidays. This guidance has been prepared by Children’s Quarter with help from CQ members. It is intended to assist anyone organising Easter holiday activities as part of the Fit for All programme which provides inclusive sessions including for disabled and vulnerable children and, more widely Children’s Quarter members.**

These notes are based on the views and experience of CQ member groups and are published by Children’s Quarter in good faith. You should not rely upon them as your sole source of guidance in respect of the subject identified above and you should base any decisions you take on advice and guidance you have independently verified.

## Ramadan

Ramadan is a holy month of fasting, worship, and prayer which celebrates the revelation of the Quran, the holy book of Islam. For most Muslims fasting during daylight hours is a part of how they mark Ramadan. Fasting means not eating or drinking between sunrise and sunset. Young children are not expected to fast but there is no set age at which children are expected to start fasting – it depends on the family. Some children who are not expected to fast will, nonetheless, want to observe all, or some, of the rules of fasting. They may, for example, drink water but avoid eating. Older children who are Muslim are likely to want to fast.

In 2022, Ramadan coincides with most of the month of April, which includes Easter school holidays. In Birmingham, Easter school holidays for most children start on Friday 8 April and end on Friday 22 April. Sunrise and sunset times in Birmingham, England during Ramadan (British Summertime) are:

	Sunrise	sunset
Saturday 2 April	06:40	19:43
Sunday 1 May	05:37	20:34

The words, in Arabic, for the meals before the fast begins and after it ends, each day, are: suhoor and iftar. Children who are fasting may call them by other names depending on what languages they use at home

The exact dates of Ramadan change every year because it is worked out using the lunar calendar (like Passover and Easter and many Chinese festivals and holidays). Ramadan begins 10 or 11 days earlier each year on the European (Gregorian) calendar.

## **Factors to consider in managing activity during Ramadan**

Our children are each individuals with their own needs, talents, preferences and views. Fit for All partners are used to providing customised approaches in order to provide for children who are individuals. Running sessions during Ramadan means adding some further factors into managing because some of the children who come to our sessions will be fasting. The factors to look at, however, include things you would normally consider when running sessions.

They include:

- varying activity levels – and considering quiet alternatives
- weather – if it's hot, children who are not drinking water are at risk of dehydration; consider provision of shade outside and ventilation indoors
- time of day – without lunch or snacks, blood sugar levels decline during the day
- when in the month – in Birmingham, daylight hours grow nearly two hours longer during the month which means the fast is longer the later in April your sessions take place
- pre-existing health factors affecting children – consider the effect of dehydration in particular, whilst fasting
- family nutrition – feeding a family is never easy and children with SEND often have particular issues around food and eating; during Ramadan, this can be even more of a challenge.

## **Dehydration**

There is no evidence of long-term harm from fasting for most people and some evidence of some benefits. When people who are fasting experience ill effects, the most common are: mild dehydration and constipation or other stomach problems. Mild dehydration is the most common. The symptoms of mild dehydration include:

- feeling thirsty
- feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- feeling tired
- a dry mouth, lips and eyes

- peeing little, and fewer than 4 times a day
- dark yellow and strong-smelling pee.

Staff and volunteers who are dehydrated may experience headaches, tiredness and lack of concentration. These symptoms may affect children who are dehydrated. We can be dehydrated whether or not we are fasting.

## **Dehydration as a medical issue**

If dehydration symptoms become severe – there is dizziness, increased mental confusion or, for example, someone is unable to stand up, when they normally would be able to – then it is a medical issue that needs to be treated by taking liquids/rehydration powders. This involves breaking the fast. If someone who is fasting becomes severely dehydrated it may be because: they have some underlying medical issue; or they are not eating well or hydrating sufficiently the night before.

## **Caffeine**

Although unlikely to affect children who are fasting, staff and volunteers may suffer caffeine withdrawal symptoms during the daytime. Caffeine is present in tea and some soft drinks as well as coffee. Some of the symptoms of caffeine withdrawal look like the symptoms of mild dehydration including: headache; tiredness; and difficulty concentrating. Other symptoms of caffeine withdrawal are: feeling anxious or depressed; irritability; having low energy; and tremors (involuntary and rhythmic shaking movements in one or more parts of the body caused by muscle contractions).

## **Factors affecting feelings**

Dehydration, low blood sugar and missing caffeine may all affect how people who are fasting feel during the day. The effects are likely to be more pronounced as the day draws on. Given a choice, people who are working as well as fasting during Ramadan may choose early shifts. Those times that would normally be meal times may be hard to manage. It is good to provide alternative spaces and activities for children who are fasting as other children eat their meal.

## **Healthy eating during Ramadan**

Healthy eating and drinking is particularly important during Ramadan. People who are fasting during the day should drink plenty of water and take fluids, including things like smoothies and soups. They are recommended to avoid oily and fatty food including fat meat or pastries. Dates are a nutritious foodstuff that is traditional for iftar. Other foods

that are widely recommended are watermelon and fruits of all kinds, yoghurt , lean meat and fish, pulses and grains, sources of unsaturated fats (like olives, salmon, avocados and nuts) and salads. Some of these foods are expensive, however, whilst cheaper nutritious food can take longer to prepare. There is a temptation, when breaking a fast, to stock up on sweet or fatty food that can be made quickly.

### **What doesn't break a fast?**

People can worry that everyday medical and health incidents invalidate the fast. Most don't. For example, it isn't breaking a fast to: use an inhaler for asthma; have a nosebleed; have a blood test or receive an injection; use eye drops or nasal sprays or drops; use mouthwash, oral spray, or gargle; or use plasters, ointment, skin cream or patches containing substances that are absorbed into the skin. Taking oral medication probably does invalidate a fast, but families should check with their mosque: if someone needs to take medication every few hours, they are probably exempt from fasting anyway.

### **The bottom line**

How children observe the fast is a matter for parents and children. How we manage things during the time that children spend at Fit for All sessions is up to us.; but many of us have been managing provision during Ramadan for years and even those that are less familiar are used to customising things to suit the individual children we provide for. Ask parents about whether, and how, their child is observing the fast; assume everyone is different. Don't encourage a child to break their fast unless it is for safeguarding/health and safety reasons. This is the only basis on which you should over-ride what parents say. Our aim is that no child should feel disadvantaged in activities because of their religion, or how they keep it.