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CARING FOR MUSLIM MINORS: GUIDELINES FOR NON-MUSLIM FAMILIES

QUESTION AND ANSWER FACT SHEET

The Holy Qur'an
Chapter XCIII, 93, 6-8

Did He not find thee
An orphan and give thee
Shelter (and care)?

And He found thee
Wandering, and He gave
Thee guidance.

And He found thee
In need, and made
Thee independent.

The Holy Bible
Deuteronomy 24:17-18

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an
orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's
garment in pledge.

Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and
the Lord your God redeemed you from there;
therefore I command you to do this.

PLEASE NOTE:

The following are general guidelines, drafted to assist non-Muslim families fostering Muslim youth. These guidelines may also be helpful to social service staff working with Muslim youth. There is a great deal of diversity among Muslim populations, which includes cultural overlays and individual interpretation of one's religion. These guidelines are provided as a means to answer initial questions based upon those most frequently asked by non-Muslim foster parents. However, nothing can replace working with each minor on an individual basis to clarify his/her beliefs and the strength of commitment to practicing Islam.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Refugee minors have three significant non-material needs: **identity**, **language**, and **religion**. Muslim refugee minors can still be primarily "American." Similar to all refugee minors, those who are Muslim must learn to balance issues of cultural preservation vs. religious preservation (e.g. music, food, community, behavior such as removing shoes at the door). Expect on-going negotiation of identity and what seems to be lack of clarity or uncertainty at times.

There is much in Islam and particularly in the life of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh)¹ to provide comfort to Muslim refugee children, especially children who are outside of the care of their biological parents. Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) was an orphan. His Father died before he was born and his Mother died when he was six. He was raised by his grandfather and then by his uncle.

In order to be comforting to others we must be aware of own misconceptions and biases. Keep communication open and keep asking for the child's opinion. Assess the minor's level of commitment to Islam, knowing that the commitment to and involvement with his/her faith may increase or decrease through the adjustment process and as the minor grows and develops. Religion remains an individual choice that needs support. Do not be surprised if a minor wants to change or try other mosques.

As the foster parent, you may want to identify a youth group at a local mosque or classes on Islam or Qur'anic Arabic. If the minor is not fluent in reading Arabic or English and would be more comfortable with a Qur'an in his/her first language, it is possible to obtain a copy of the Qur'an in other languages.

We wish you well in caring for these children. It is through your kind heart that these children are given a new life opportunity.

For more information about this memo, or about the refugee foster care programs of the U.S. Refugee Program, please contact:

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¹ "Peace be upon him" (pbuh) is usually said after the mention of Prophet Mohammad's name as a sign of respect.

For easy reference, the following is a list of questions that are addressed in these guidelines.

1. From where are Muslim refugee minors coming?
2. What is the difference between Islam and Muslim?
3. What are the basic tenets of Islam?
4. What are the religious holydays in Islam?
5. May a Muslim child celebrate Christmas?
6. Are there dietary restrictions for a Muslim child?
7. What does Islam say about women?
8. Does every Muslim girl cover her head?
9. Is circumcision required for Muslim females?
10. Are there restrictions on the type of jobs that a Muslim child may accept?
11. Can a Muslim child attend sex education classes, or must I choose the opt-out alternative?
12. If there are dogs in the house and the Muslim child is uncomfortable about this for religious reasons, what can be done to address his/her concern and still keep the dog(s)?
13. Islam is often presented as a violent religion. Is this true?
14. What is meant by Islamic fundamentalism?
15. I have heard the word *jihad* many times in reference to Islam. What does it mean?
16. What do you recommend if the refugee minor encounters discrimination at school?
17. Where do I go if I have questions?

1. From where are Muslim refugee minors coming?

Muslim refugee minors come from three continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe. They represent many countries and ethnic groups. They speak diverse languages. This diversity is representative of the Muslim population throughout the world.

There are more than 1.2 billion Muslims throughout the world. The following chart provides the distribution of Muslim populations throughout the world.

COUNTRY OR REGION	ESTIMATED POPULATION	PERCENTAGE
South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh)	275 million	23%
Africa	200 million	16.7%
Arab Countries	180 million	15%
Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore...)	170 million	14.2%
Central Asia	50 million	4.2%
China	50 million	4.2%
Iran	50 million	4.2%
Turkey	50 million	4.2%
Europe	20 million	1.7%
Afghanistan	15 million	1.3%
North America	6 million	0.5%
South America	3 million	0.25%
Australia	1 million	0.08%
TOTAL	1,200,000,000	100%

Source: Council on Islamic Education. *Teaching About Islam and Muslims in the Public School Classroom*. Fountain Valley, CA. 1995. Page 3.

2. What is the difference between Islam and Muslim?

Islam is the religion. A Muslim is a follower of or a believer in Islam. It is similar to the difference between Christianity and Christian. The terms Mohammedanism and Mohammedan are incorrect in referring to Islam and should not be used.

3. What are the basic tenets of Islam?

Islam is a monotheistic religion based on the tradition of Abraham, as are Judaism and Christianity. The *Qur'an* is the holy book of Islam and is believed to be a divinely revealed scripture to Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) through the Archangel Gabriel. The *Qur'an* forms the basis of belief for Muslims. Traditions of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) provide additional guidance.

In addition to the One God, Muslims also believe in angels, prophets (with Mohammad (pbuh) as the final prophet—see list below), divine scriptures (with the *Qur'an* as the final scripture), and the Day of Judgment.

It is common to refer to the five pillars of Islam:

- A. **Shehada** (the Profession of Faith)—the belief in the oneness of God and in Mohammad (pbuh) as His messenger as expressed by, “There is no God but God and Mohammad (pbuh) is the Messenger [Prophet] of God.”
- B. **Salat or Prayer** five times a day—at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and night.

- C. **Almsgiving**—Muslims are required to give a certain percentage of their wealth to the community, especially to help the poor
- D. **Fasting** during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Between dawn and sunset, Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual activity. Those who are sick or traveling are exempt from fasting, but the days should be made up at a later time. Ramadan is a time of prayer, contemplation, and reflection on what is important in life, individual behavior, relationships with others, and why the believer is here on earth.
- E. **Hajj** (Pilgrimage to Makkah, also spelled Mecca)—each Muslim should try to make this pilgrimage at least once in his/her life, health and finances permitting

While there may be some differences, the Bible and the Qur'an share such stories in common as: the creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, the covenant with Abraham, Moses and the exodus from Egypt, the birth of Jesus, and more.

In the Qur'an, eighteen individuals from the Old Testament are recognized as prophets. These include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, and Job. Mention of three New Testament figures include Zachariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. The Qur'an includes four prophets who are not in the Bible. In Islam, the five most important prophets are considered to be (in chronological order): Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad (pbuh).

4. What are the religious holidays in Islam?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. The Month of Ramadan is also the time it is believed the Holy Qur'an "was sent down from heaven, a guidance unto men, a declaration of direction, and a means of Salvation."

Ramadan is a time when Muslims concentrate on their faith and their relationship with Allah and with people around them. It is special time to worship Allah and it is also a time to remember needy people and share what Allah gave us with them. So Ramadan is a month for sharing and caring.

Ramadan is a month to review the past eleven months and to get ready for the coming eleven months before the next Ramadan. It is also a month to socialize with all people regardless of their faiths or beliefs, to learn more about other religions.

Muslims welcome this month. It is a time of education when they learn more about themselves, their relationship w/God, and their relationships with others. It is a time when their entire being should be dedicated to and thoughtful of God. It is more than fasting. Ramadan is lived through more than that. It involves the whole self and whole body - for example, good thoughts with ones mind, good deeds with ones hands, kind speech with ones mouth, right steps with ones feet, good actions with ones heart and whole self. Everything can be a prayer. It is an all-encompassing time individually with God and collectively with all brothers and sisters in the world, Muslim and non-Muslim, since all are the children of God.

All food and drink, including water, are prohibited during the daily time of the fasting. Usually minors start to fast around the age of puberty, twelve to fourteen. Some may want to do it earlier. For refugee children who have suffered malnutrition, they should not fast if doing so compromises the state of their health. If a minor is fasting, it may be helpful to ask the homeroom teacher to give him/her a pass for lunchtime to the library instead of having the minor sit in the cafeteria.

The Islamic calendar is lunar and consists of 354 days. The starting dates of Ramadan are usually ten days earlier than the year before. If the weather is warm during Ramadan and the minor is fasting and taking physical education classes toward the end of the day, the foster parent may want to talk to the child's teacher and advise him/her that the child may not be able to perform at optimum capability.

An older child may want to attend Friday prayers during Ramadan. Prayers would be around one p.m. If such a request is received, it needs to be discussed within the context of class schedule, feasibility of transportation, and so on. Minors have been known to make this request. Every night during Ramadan, one-thirtieth of the Qur'an is read in the evening. A minor may ask to attend this at the mosque in the evenings or at least on weekends.

There are two holydays during the year observed by all Muslims, Eid ul-Fitr, which comes at the end of Ramadan and Eid ul-Adha, which is celebrated at the end of the Hajj. The latter commemorates the obedience of Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael. (In Christianity, it is thought that Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac.)

Eid ul-Adha marks the beginning of the new Islamic year. For refugee children, the migration experience of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) and the early Muslims is significant and can be used to give comfort. The New Year does not start with the date of Prophet Mohammad's (pbuh) birth, nor with the revelation of the Qur'an, but with the commemoration of the Prophet's flight to Madinah from Makkah. Those who left with the Prophet were known as "Muhajirum," the "emigrants." Those in Madinah who took the Prophet and his followers into their homes and assisted them were known as "Ansars" or "helpers."

Friday is the preferred day for communal prayer.

While Islam is considered by Muslims to be one religion and all profess the same "Shehada," there are a variety of sects, e.g. Sunni, Shi'a, Ismaeili, and Amadis. Some may consider the others to be misguided or heretical. It is not possible to predict from which sect a minor may come. It is important to ask the minor about what other holydays may be observed that are significant to him/her in the practice of Islam and to assist him/her to identify the mosque that is most consistent with his/her ethnic and religious traditions.

5. May a Muslim child celebrate Christmas?

From the description provided above, it is clear that Muslims have great respect for Jesus and regard him as a prophet. Reference to Jesus, or *Isa* (in Arabic), is found in ninety-three verses spread throughout fifteen chapters (*Suras*) of the Qur'an. It is fine to acknowledge Christ's birth, but this day is not a major holyday for Muslims the way it is for Christians.

6. Are there dietary restrictions for a Muslim child?

Foods in Islam are considered to be "*halal*" (allowed) or "*haram*" (forbidden). There are special meat markets (Halal markets, as they are called), which sell meat that has been slaughtered in a manner that is consistent with Islamic law.

It is not permitted to consume pork and alcohol. Some Muslims take this to include alcohol in flavor extracts (e.g. vanilla extract), wine sauces, and medicines (e.g. cough syrups), and pork-based gelatin in capsules.

If the family cooks pork or drinks wine, it would be preferable to designate a set of plates and utensils for the Muslim child.

7. What does Islam say about women?

In the teachings of Islam, all are equal in the eyes of God—men and women. Each is responsible for his/her own actions and each is to be knowledgeable of the faith. Islam gives women the right to decide on marriage, divorce, and inheritance. She may maintain her own personal property and wealth even if she is married.

Muslim women can be found in any number of professions—business, engineering, government, homemaking, law, law enforcement, medicine, and many more. Mohammad (pbuh) preached to all as a group—men, women, and children. No one was excluded.

Some of the first converts to Islam were women. Prophet Mohammad's (pbuh) first wife, Khadija, was a merchant who had her own business. The Prophet was one of her employees for some time. Fatima, Prophet Mohammad's (pbuh) daughter had a very active role in the early days of Islam. Zaynab, one of the Prophet's wives, knitted and sold clothing, giving the money to those in need. Shafaa Abdullah was the first policewoman during Khalifa Omar's time. She worked among the female merchants in the market to ensure fairness and peace.

If the minor is a girl, the foster parents may want to subscribe to *Azizah* magazine. It is said to be for the "contemporary Muslim woman." Examples of topics from 2001 include discussions of female Muslim scholars in North America, home buying without interest, domestic violence, art, health care disparities, depression, and genetically engineered foods.

8. Does every Muslim girl cover her head?

The injunction to dress modestly is incumbent on men and women. Among Muslims worldwide, there is great variety as to the requirements of covering and the style of covering that is acceptable.

The wearing of "hijab" is not universally observed among Muslim women. It is suggested that foster parents support the choice of a young girl and understand that she may change her mind through the years. Some girls start to cover as they approach adolescence or as they develop a deeper understanding of Islam. If the foster parents are uncertain in how to advise a young girl on this issue, they should feel free to seek out a Muslim woman in the community to help discuss this with the minor. (The mosque or resettlement agency may be able to help in this regard.)

The issue of modesty may also extend to gym class. If a Muslim girl feels uncomfortable in gym uniforms with short sleeves and short pants, ask if she may wear a long sleeve t-shirt and long sweatpants instead of or under the required uniform. The teacher can designate the color to be worn.

Every effort should be made to identify a female physician for a Muslim girl. (Similarly, a Muslim boy will be more comfortable with a male provider.)

9. Is circumcision required for Muslim females?

Known by several terms - female genital cutting (preferred term), female circumcision (FC), female genital mutilation (FGM), and female genital surgery (FGS)—this procedure is practiced by Christian and Muslim women in Africa, Middle East, South Asia, numbering more than 32 countries. It was practiced in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1940's as a treatment for insanity and hysteria. It predates Islam by many centuries and represents a cultural practice rather than a religious one. In any of its various forms, Islam does not require it.

10. Are there restrictions on the type of jobs that a Muslim child may accept?

A Muslim child may feel uncomfortable in having to serve or touch pork products if they work in food service. Because of age, they will not be eligible to work where alcohol is served. The presence of a bar in the restaurant may be uncomfortable for the minor.

If the minor is a girl and she covers, she can make modifications (e.g. tuck in loose ends so that they are not caught in machinery) as needed in the interest of safety and uniform policies, but she does not have to abandon her head covering.

11. Can a Muslim child attend sex education classes, or must I choose the opt-out alternative?

The legal guardian for the child sets this policy and rarely is the decision to opt-out chosen.

12. If there are dogs in the house and the Muslim child is uncomfortable about this for religious reasons, what can be done to address his/her concern and still keep the dog(s)?

Muslims do have and like dogs, but may consider them to be unclean. If the saliva from a dog touches the clothing of a Muslim, it becomes unclean for prayer. Muslim minors often enjoy being around dogs, as do any other children. For a minor who is uncomfortable because he/she believes that dogs are unclean, a compromise could be suggested whereby the dogs are not permitted in the minor's bedroom and area of prayer.

For families who let their dogs lick off of plates, it would be advisable for the family to set aside a set of plates for the Muslim minor.

13. Islam is often presented as a violent religion. Is this true?

The Qur'an teaches non-violence. However, we find that throughout history, individuals and groups of various religions have falsely claimed religion as justification for their actions.

14. What is meant by Islamic fundamentalism?

From *100 Questions and Answers About Arab-Americans*, Detroit Free Press, Question 93, www.freep.com/jobspage/arabs.htm—"This is a complex question. The term fundamentalism, whether applied to Muslims or Christians, is a largely American construct that implies political conservatism and, sometimes, extremism. Some groups make no distinction between their cause and their interpretation of the religion. Careful reporting does not assume that religion is the sole basis for political actions. The term 'Islamic Fundamentalist' has been used to refer to people who cite Islam to justify political actions. Fairness and accuracy mean attributing political actions to the group, government, or party responsible, and not just to the religion, which may have millions of followers with different beliefs. Avoid constructions like 'Muslim bomb.'"

15. I have heard the word *jihad* many times in reference to Islam. What does it mean?

Jihad means to struggle. The main reference is in relation to the inner struggle of the individual to strive to be good and to follow the "straight path." It can also mean to fight on the side of what is right, but it does not allow for being the aggressor. Other religions also make reference to a "justified" or "holy" war as we witnessed recently with various Christian religions coming out in support of bombing as a weapon in the "war on terrorism."

Any of the following actions cannot be justified as part of a true jihad: killing noncombatants, prisoners of war, or diplomatic personnel; use of poisonous weapons or inhumane ways of killing; mutilation of people or animals; careless destruction of natural resources; and sexual abuse of captives.

16. What do you recommend if the refugee minor encounters discrimination at school?

Even non-Muslim refugee minors have been known to experience prejudice and difficulties at school. This is based on the fact that they are foreign-born and/or refugees. For Muslim refugee minors, the negative public stereotype about Muslims is quite pervasive. It can be manifested as "humor" or hostility. Muslim refugee minors who experience prejudice after arrival may feel inferior and ashamed or perhaps become angry and defensive. Research indicates that the more positive a student's self-concept; the higher is his/her level of achievement.

It is important to speak to the minor about such incidents when they arise. Acknowledge the hurt, but strive to make the minor feel worthwhile and important. There are various techniques that have been used in schools and communities to address this issue. The approach needs to include not only the refugee minor, but also non-refugee and non-Muslim students. The caseworker at your refugee foster care agency can be of assistance in suggesting approaches.

17. Where do I go if I have questions?

If you need assistance or have questions and concerns, you can always call the caseworker at your refugee foster care agency. Resources on the web are listed at the end of these Guidelines.

On Islam

Center for Christian-Muslim Understanding
<http://www.cmcu.net/>

Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy
<http://www.islam-democracy.org/>

Council on Islamic Education
<http://www.cie.org/>

Islamic Society of North America
<http://www.isna.net/>

Muslim Public Affairs Council
<http://www.mpac.org/>

About Islam
<http://www.islam.about.com/>

Lutheran Magazine
<http://www.elca.org/dgm/resource/islam.html>

On Arab Americans

American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
<http://www.adc.org/>

Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services
<http://www.accesscommunity.org/>

Detroit Free Press (*See 100 Questions and Answers about Arab Americans*)
<http://www.freep.com/jobspage/arabs.htm>

On Arabs and the Middle East

Center for Contemporary Arab Studies
<http://www.ccasonline.org/>

Middle East Institute
<http://www.mideasti.org/>

Middle East Studies Association
<http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/>

Middle East/North Africa Internet Resource Guide
<http://www.cc.utah.edu/~jw9311/MENA.html>

Other Resources:

Astrolabe Islamic Media–The Islamic Media Source
<http://www.islamicmedia.com/>

Azizah Magazine
<http://www.azizahmagazine.com/>