



CENTER FOR ADJUSTMENT, RESILIENCE & RECOVERY

CAB Corner: Faith Based Healing in Action

Key Takeaways

Between April and May 2023, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Culture Consortium Community of Practice welcomed CARRE and prominent Muslim leaders across the U.S. to engage in an informative, introspective conversation on Faith-Based Healing during Ramadan and Eid, the first of its kind for NCTSN. In addition to Leena Zahra, Program Officer with [CARRE](#), we were honored to partner with Risho Sapano Executive Director of [Mother Africa](#), Dr. Jaleel Abdul-Adil Co-Director of [Urban Youth Trauma Center](#), Dr. Mohammad Sediq Hazratzai Director of [SEHAT Initiative](#), Dr. Saida M. Abdi Assistant Professor in the [School of Social Work](#) at University of Minnesota, [Dr. Omar Reda](#) Board Certified Psychiatrist, Baitullah Hameedi Cultural Broker at [Jewish Family Services of Western NY](#) and Adam El-Fawal Cultural Broker at [Jewish Family Services of Western NY](#).

The two-part discussion highlighted the great need for practitioners to understand the cultural and religious significance of [Ramadan and Eid](#) for the Muslim community, a cherished, celebrated time for connection (with ourselves and one another), reflection, empathy and collective healing. Ramadan can be seen as a resource to engage in a heightened sense of purpose, awareness (Taqwah) and gratitude. Not only refraining from eating and drinking "...fasting is not just of the stomach, but also of the tongue, mind, and heart" ([Harvard University](#)). Muslims are seeking a relationship with God (Allah), reconciling with past events, gaining clarity while strengthening faith, and relinquishing of attachment to worldly matters in desire of an inspired afterlife due to accumulated good deeds. Thus, faith can be significant in understanding culturally appropriate healing practices. Despite circumstances faced, families who have been forcibly displaced may use faith as a source of resilience, strength, comfort and hope.

However, Ramadan and Eid can also be challenging for marginalized Muslim communities in the U.S. This can especially be the case for youth and families who have experienced forced displacement and historical trauma, are separated from loved ones, and/or witness ongoing violence and atrocities taking place back home. Simultaneously, families are attempting to navigate and integrate into their new communities during assimilation, which can be extremely distressing with the fear around identity loss and disruption of accessing faith outlets during survival mode.

Families may be concerned and grieving the ability to practice essential faith-based routines and traditions which are often so intricately linked to preserving identity and having a sense of self and belonging. This can lead to concern and anxiety around how to embrace and take up space with the plurality of identities the Muslim community often holds, while maintaining familial and cultural expectations around faith. The perceived threat of religious identity, custom, and ritual loss can be particularly concerning. Severe mental health impacts of guilt, shame, anxiety, depression and PTSD among others are common. For some, the relationship with faith may have changed or has been tested drastically due to uncertainty and great mourning surrounding attachment and accessibility to the "homeland," family, community and other layers intersecting with identity.

Faith Based Healing: Tangible Actions You Can Take Today

In your commitment to show solidarity and support for the Muslim community during and beyond Ramadan and Eid, we ask you to reflect on faith-based healing with continued engagement and action with culturally appropriate healing and coping mechanisms. Here are our recommendations to move this important work forward:

1. As **identity and a sense of pride** are so crucial and closely linked with faith and lifestyle, ensure families are seen, encouraged and supported to embrace identity and intersectionality. Do this by promoting safe, celebrated spaces and paths towards dignity, stability, prosperity and peace. Do not normalize tragedy as part of individual and collective identities, assist with shifting the narrative and center community perspectives rooted in humanization. Lastly, apply a **strengths-based** vs deficit approach.
2. **Do not generalize and assume.** Be aware of cultural norms and understanding of collectivistic cultural groups, but do not generalize. There are differences within and among communities, and providers may unintentionally assume trauma is the same among various ethnic and religious minorities. It is recommended to use empathic listening and open questions to gauge if and how faith serves as an important risk or protective factor for the individual, and to frame your understanding of their practice based on a collaborative back and forth conversation. This applies if you yourself identify as Muslim or otherwise.
3. **Do not undermine nor exaggerate the role of faith.** It is important not to presuppose a standard, universal observation of faith. Islam may be practiced and perceived differently amongst same racial and minority groups, let alone amongst the vast demographics who call themselves Muslim today. While there are many shared practices faith, and the role it plays, may differ with the individual due to various factors including experiences within the migration journey, or change in family roles during assimilation. Faith can serve multiple roles as both a unifying and divisive force especially within forced displacement. It can be a source of great comfort but also a reminder and exacerbation of grievances and separation. Coming with an open mind to the complex dynamics of faith when maintaining a sense of identity is essential in understanding healing.
4. **Listen and ask.** Ask families open-ended questions on what they would identify as culturally appropriate healing and coping mechanisms. Have you asked recently, “What does “thriving” look like to you? What do you perceive as “traumatic” events? Do you have any routines and traditions you like to practice, or individuals and places you consult with, during times of distress and what are they? Is faith an important aspect of your wellbeing and coping and if so, how?” Further explore what already exists within their “cultural healing toolbox.” Co-partner and embed cultural knowledge and traditions into your practice by asking about the client’s understanding of their traditional and religious stories, and where can they draw from for inspiration or guidance.
5. Acknowledge **cultural humility** and the possible biases and privileges you may enter the conversation with. Always be curious, respectful and mindful of how we approach the conversation and possible power dynamics between practitioner and client. Continue to partner in conversations around cultural norms and perceptions around Mental Health, and its connection to faith-based healing. Meet individuals where they are.
6. **Retain and gather community.** Partner with your local schools and religious institutions to better connect and bridge the community members to your services. Partner with a local mosque and Imam religious leader, organize a training for non-Muslim providers, support a



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network of Muslim Mental Health providers, and/or hold workshops at the mosque on religiously significant days like Fridays. Talk to your schools on how they can provide safe spaces and linguistic support for students so they can observe practices such as daily prayers or during Ramadan, spaces for children who are not participating in lunch due to fasting. Having open lines of communication and using cultural brokers to have students and families navigate supportive spaces is highly encouraged and appreciated.

Recommended Resources

- USA for UNHCR; UNHCR provides a brief [overview](#) of Ramadan, and the importance for families who have been forcibly displaced
- CARRE; The CARRE resource library has various suggested resources working with families who have been forcibly displaced, including resources on Racial, Ethnic and Religious Trauma that can be found [here](#)
- Switchboard; Switchboard has released a guide for refugee service providers in the U.S. related to Faith-based Healing among Afghan Muslims, which can be found [here](#)
- Dr. Omar Reda; Be sure to engage with the work of Dr. Reda, including his published work such as the [Wounded Healer](#) and [Project Untangled](#)
- Dr. Saida Abdi; Dr. Saida Abdi has recently published [Mental Health Practice With Immigrant and Refugee Youth: A Socioecological Framework](#), guiding mental health providers who work with refugees and immigrants