

Preventing discrimination

All employers should take steps to try to make sure religion or belief discrimination does not happen at work.

As an employer, you should:

- aim for a culture where everyone knows that religion or belief discrimination is not acceptable
- recognise and promote the benefits of a diverse and inclusive organisation
- make sure no one feels excluded because of their religion or belief

[Find out more about improving equality, diversity and inclusion](#)

Steps for preventing religion or belief discrimination

Many ways to prevent discrimination apply equally to all 'protected characteristics'. You can find out more in our advice on [preventing discrimination](#).

To help prevent religion or belief discrimination consider how you can manage:

- time off for religious reasons
- other needs relating to religion or belief
- how to promote an understanding of religion and culture
- how people express beliefs at work

If you're a small organisation with limited resources, you might not be able to take all measures. But you have a duty to prevent discrimination, and there's still a lot you can do. Making your organisation more inclusive does not have to be costly or complicated.

If you're a public sector employer, you also have responsibilities under the [public sector equality duty](#).

Time off for religious reasons

People might want time away from work for various reasons related to religion or belief. This could be for:

- prayer or reflection
- religious festivals and services

There is no legal requirement for employers to allow time or facilities for religious reasons. But where possible you should try to accommodate any requests. It could be discrimination if you unreasonably refuse.

Time and place for prayer

People might want to pray several times a day or at particular times of the day or week. Other people will value having quiet time to pray or reflect.

You should try to accommodate requests in a way that fits in with business needs.

If someone requests time for prayer during the day, consider how you can be flexible. You could ask them to:

- start work earlier or finish later
- have a shorter lunch break to allow for another break or breaks in the day

It can cause resentment if other employees think that someone they work with is having extra breaks.

You should make it clear that time for prayer is not 'time off'. Everyone is working the same total hours.

You do not need to provide a dedicated prayer room. But you should consider providing a suitable space for people to use. If you provide facilities you must not favour one religion or belief over another.

Time off for religious festivals and services

You should try to allow people time off for festivals and services which are important to them. But this must not take priority over other reasons for wanting time off. This could discriminate against people with no religion or belief.

To help manage requests for time off fairly, you could:

- ask employees to book time off well in advance
- agree how to handle it if too many people want to be off at the same time

You should treat unexpected events such as funerals with sensitivity. In some religions burial or cremation takes place very soon after death. Employees might not be able to give much notice.

Some people who work in retail might be able to opt out of working on a Sunday.

Find out more about:

- [Sunday working rules on GOV.UK](#)
- [religious festival dates on the Inter Faith Network](#)

Other needs relating to religion or belief at work

Some aspects of working life can affect people because of their religion or beliefs. Accommodating someone's needs can help them work more effectively.

Rules on dress code and appearance

To show their religion, people might want to wear:

- particular types of clothing
- their hair, beard or make-up in a certain way
- religious symbols or jewellery

These can be very important to people. Being too restrictive could be discriminatory.

If you have a policy on dress or appearance, you should make sure it's flexible enough to accommodate religious needs.

If you decide to introduce a policy, speak to your employees to find out about their needs and preferences.

Any restrictions must have a 'legitimate aim' and must not discriminate more than is necessary. This might be for:

- health and safety – for example, not wearing loose clothing when using machinery
- hygiene – for example, covering hair when preparing food
- business image – for example, a company uniform

For example, a manufacturing company bans employees from wearing loose jewellery at work for safety reasons. Some employees complain this will stop them wearing religious symbols. The employer decides the ban is essential for people using machinery. But they allow people to wear jewellery in the office, as it's not a safety risk.

Food and fasting

If you provide food, either in a work canteen or for events, you should consider dietary needs connected to religion or belief.

Some religions require periods of fasting which might affect people at work. You should consider how you could accommodate any requests related to fasting.

For example, you might make temporary changes to someone's duties or working hours to support them at work. Any changes should not disadvantage employees who do not follow the religion.

Job duties

An employee might ask to opt out of certain duties because of their religion or belief. For example, handling meat, alcohol or contraceptives.

To accommodate any requests, you could consider if:

- the duties are a core part of the job
- other employees can do the duties without having to do extra work
- it would cause problems for the business or its customers

When recruiting, you should clearly state what the job involves.

Example of accommodating changes to duties at work

Robin works in a small supermarket. Robin becomes a vegan and asks not to handle meat products. Their employer considers the rota and how tasks are shared out. They find they can arrange shelf filling so that other employees handle most of the meat products. The employer agrees with Robin that they'll only have to handle meat products when on the till or stacking tins.

How to promote an understanding of religion and culture

A lack of understanding of other people's beliefs and way of life can cause disputes at work.

It's important to have some understanding of the beliefs and cultures in your organisation. This can help prevent problems or make them easier to resolve.

To promote understanding, you could:

- include articles about religion and beliefs in a company newsletter – for example, a story about what a particular religious festival means to one of your employees
- provide information about religions and beliefs in diversity training
- raise awareness of behaviours that might feel uncomfortable within some religions or beliefs – for example, shaking hands or having a photo taken

Multi-faith networks

You could consider setting up a multi-faith network. This is a group where people of all beliefs can:

- share experiences
- promote understanding
- support each other
- raise issues that need addressing

A multi-faith network group might need some 'ground rules' so that people understand they should:

- respect the beliefs of others
- not try to convert others to their beliefs

[Find out more about promoting religious understanding from the Interfaith Network](#)

How people express beliefs at work

Most organisations will have employees with different or opposing beliefs. People have the right to hold beliefs which other people disagree with or find offensive. But problems can happen when people express their beliefs.

You have a responsibility to make sure employees do not discriminate against each other. This includes when an employee expresses their own beliefs in a way that discriminates against others.

It's reasonable for you to require employees to:

- be thoughtful and respectful in expressing beliefs at work, to avoid the risk of offence or distress to others
- not to act in a way that discriminates against others

If you think that someone has expressed their beliefs in a way that is inappropriate, you should consider whether to deal with it informally or formally.

You must make sure that your action does not discriminate against them because of their belief.

This is particularly important if you take formal disciplinary action. It is a sensitive area of law. You should [get legal advice](#).

Example of religious belief causing discrimination

Pat is gay and works for an insurance company. Pat's manager Jamie has a religious objection to gay people and gets Pat moved to another team. This is likely to be discrimination against Pat on the grounds of sexual orientation. Jamie has the right to hold these beliefs but does not have the right to discriminate because of them.

Expressing beliefs outside of work

Employees might express their religious or philosophical beliefs outside work, for example on personal social media channels.

You should respect people's right to express themselves. But you might be able to take action if the comments they make:

- would damage your reputation as an employer
- are disrespectful about the people they work with

You should have guidelines, such as a social media policy, so that employees know what is acceptable.

World events

Sometimes events in the wider world can cause tension at work between people with different beliefs.

You could consider:

- briefing line managers so they can be alert to issues arising between employees
- asking managers not to take sides or express views that could make things worse
- reminding employees to treat each other with respect even if they have different views

Get more advice and support

If you need help to deal with any challenges in your organisation, you can:

- [contact the Acas helpline](#)
- [get tailored support for your organisation](#)