

# Befriending Muslims

## Guide to being a good neighbor.



### Where to Meet Muslims: Anywhere!

Have you noticed people speaking Arabic in your neighborhood? Women wearing hijabs taking their kids for a walk or at the store?

Visit restaurants and grocery stores that cater to Muslim halal diet. Take your family to parks where Muslim families play. Become a regular—a consistent presence—and you can make friends.

**“May I ask, where are you from?”** If there is time, engage in a short conversation. **“If you don’t mind my asking, what’s your ethnic background?”**

Don’t assume that an Arabic speaker or Middle Eastern person is Muslim. Or that someone wasn’t born here. Let it come up, and ask respectfully.

### Ways You Can Serve Immigrant Friends

*Tutoring kids/helping with homework.*

*English practice.*

*Helping fill out forms.*

*Teaching someone to drive.*

*Invite their family over for a meal.*

*Ask if you can come visit them.*

*Volunteer with Firm Foundation, Oasis International, IRWP, the International Institute, New Dimensions Soccer, etc.*

*Devin can help you find a great fit.*

### Hospitality and Friendship

These are the keys to making your immigrant acquaintances and friends feel at home in our culture.

**Invite them to do what you and your friends already do.** For example, if you are going to the grocery store, invite your friend along. There are so many things that differ from country to country that it can make a recent immigrant’s head spin.

Invite them to your home. *You would be shocked at the number of immigrants who have never been in a local person’s home.*

Invite them to fun church or community activities. *Muslim friends may or may not feel comfortable participating in Christian holiday celebrations, but it’s always friendly to invite. Don’t forget about Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, and other holidays that don’t have a central religious focus.*

Invite them to use you as a cultural resource when they don’t know or understand something. Be a safe place for questions. They may need help with things like using the post office, paying a bill (and identifying junk mail or scams!), our banking system or credit cards. Do you know trustworthy accountants, real estate agents, lawyers, etc., that can help them?

Hospitality is very important to Muslim cultures. If you receive their hospitality you are giving dignity to them. Visit their home, say yes to coffee, tea, and food.

Try to befriend several people until a friendship clicks. **Don’t give up!** Be helpful and loving and let it happen naturally. *Making friends always takes time, no matter where you’re from. Sometimes it doesn’t click.*

*Being a good neighbor on mission is about presence, prayer, and being prepared to give an answer for the hope you have in Christ.*

## Talking with English Language Learners

Ask open ended questions. For example, ask "What did you do today?" instead of "How was your day?"

Get comfortable with long silences after you ask a question, as they're probably translating in their head.

Don't finish their sentences, but ask if they'd like help with language.

Be encouraging!

## Conversation Starters

Ask about their family and share about yours.

If you are interested, ask them to teach you some words from their language.

Invite them to share about their home, customs, food, family members, schooling, holidays, etc.

- "What is the most important holiday in your country?" "Why is it so important?", "What kind of traditions do you have in that holiday?", "What's your favorite thing to do during that holiday season?"

Ask if you can go to one of their cultural/religious celebrations.

## Being Polite in a New Culture

Don't ask them about **politics**. Wait for them to initiate that discussion. Even then, tread lightly.

**Men and women in Islam:** Unrelated men and women do not touch each other, not even to shake hands. Married couples do not display affection in public. A woman will not feel comfortable having a man visit her home without a male relative present.

**Modesty:** Muslim people don't expect non-Muslims to abide by their standards of dress, but it is a sign of respect and even a positive witness to consider these guidelines when visiting a Muslim friend. Men, if you wear shorts, make sure they aren't shorter than the knee. For women, pants are best. Women should not show their shoulders or midriff either. If you're not Muslim, you don't need to cover your hair.

**Visiting a Home:** When visiting a Muslim home, remove your shoes. It is also offensive to show the bottoms of your feet to someone (eg., if you cross your legs while sitting). If you're offered food or drink, take some. When it's time to leave, plan on saying, "I need to get going," three times before you actually leave.

**Food:** Muslims eat *halal*, which means "permissible." This is a set of rules concerning how an animal is treated and slaughtered. If you serve meat, do not serve any pork products. Many Muslims will accept meat a Christian has prepared, as we are "people of the Book." But consider visiting a *halal* grocery store to buy some meat. It's an opportunity to make more friends in the community! *Halal* restrictions only apply to meat. As one friend put it, "Sweets are always permissible!"

**As you can see,** many cultural norms are driven by religion. The similarities and differences in how our faiths view respect, modesty, hospitality, and family are great opportunities for spiritual conversations! Remember, identifying yourself as a Christian whose faith impacts their everyday life is an important witness.

## Important Words to Know

**Assalaam u alaykum.** "Peace be with you." This is a common greeting all over the Muslim world. It's the same as the Hebrew phrase "Shalom aleichem". Jesus used this greeting in the New Testament (Luke 10:5, Luke 24:36, John 20:19). You answer with "**Wa alaykum assalaam**" ("And with you peace.")

**Inshallah.** "If God wills..." This word is used liberally, whenever we would say "hopefully." Some very religious people will add this phrase almost any time they speak in future tense. Arab Christians use this phrase too.

**Subhanallah** and **Mashallah.** "Glory to God" and "God has willed it."

**Alhamdu lillah.** "Thanks be to God." If you ask, "How are you doing?" this is the common response, no matter how things are going.

**Allah.** "God." Arab Christians use the same word, because it's simply the Arabic word for God, just as we use a Germanic word in English. It is related to Hebrew and Aramaic words for God. Muslims are very devoted to monotheism and the unity of God. They refer to God as the God of Abraham, and believe Christians added two other gods alongside him.

**Hijab.** The headscarf Muslim women wear, covering their hair. While there are more conservative forms of dress, like niqab and burqa, the hijab is what you'll see most often here.

**Quran.** The Muslim sacred text. It means "recitation." It is only sacred in Classical Arabic. There is special significance to it being recited or sung out loud, not just read silently.

**Injil** and **Taurat.** "Gospel" and "Torah," respectively, these are the Arabic words for the New Testament and Old Testament. It is an interesting conversation starter to ask a Muslim friend if she has read the *Injil*.

**Halal** and **Haram.** "Permissible" and "forbidden," respectively. This refers to food, dress, behavior, or relationships.

## Spiritual Conversations with Muslims

*Faith is part of their life and culture. Just like with Christianity, there is tremendous variation from community to community and person to person.*

Don't tell them what you know or make assumptions about what they believe. Just ask questions until they ask you what you know. *Islam is diverse and there are multiple traditions, similar to the different sects and denominations of Christianity.*

When you've made a friend, ask if you can share your beliefs. *Share about who you think Jesus is and how you came to believe that.*

### Islam do's and don'ts:

**Do** ask what Islam is about.

**Don't** assume you know what they believe.

**Do** ask what they know/think about Christianity. There are a lot of misconceptions.

**Don't** get into an argument with a new friend. You both know you disagree with each other. "We disagree but we still care for each other" is powerful.

**Do** ask what they think about Jesus. You might be surprised!

**Do** read the Quran and ask if they've read the New Testament.

You'll find you have a lot in common, even as you differ on the most vital truth about Jesus. Many Muslims believe your friendship is contingent on their interest in Christianity. Commit to building a friendship with someone even if they say they are not interested in becoming a Christian.

### **Being a Good Neighbor on Mission is**

- Presence—be consistently in their life.
- Prayer—offer to pray for them and do it.
- Being prepared to give an answer...