



A GUIDE TO COUNSELLING MUSLIM CLIENTS

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Purpose of this Booklet

According to the 2011 Census, there were approximately 2.7 million Muslims in the UK, however, more recent statistics suggest that this figure has now doubled.

Despite the increasing number of Muslims in the UK, research has shown that ethnic minorities, including African-Caribbean, East and South Asian, tend to engage less with counselling and mental health support services. This may be impacted by several factors which include: (a) lack of understanding, (b) lack of trust or negative attitude towards services (c) resolving matters within the family and (d) poor service or mistreatment.

In a clinical setting being unable to acknowledge wider situational and contextual implications, counsellors may misread or misunderstand their client's distress and issues. Therefore, it is significantly important for counsellors to have a basic understanding of Islam and the wider cultural issues which Muslims face. Where this knowledge is missing, this could result in Muslims receiving a lesser standard of service. Indeed, evidence has shown that clients of an Asian background leave counselling with a positive experience but were dissatisfied as they felt they were not understood. From this writer's own perspective as well as empirical evidence carried out, it is clear that non-Muslim counsellors often have difficulty counselling Muslim clients due to the lack of understanding of Islam and wider culture.

The purpose of this booklet is to give a brief guide to counsellors in how to deal with Muslims clients. The booklet includes information both from an Islamic perspective and a cultural perspective about some of the key areas Islam and the lives of Muslims. References to culture in this context is referring to the Indo-Pakistani (Indian-Pakistani) culture. The booklet also provides a short guide on how to deal with Muslim clients in a clinical setting.

One of the main limitations to this guide is the lack of research in relation to the various areas of Islam and its culture. Currently, there is little research papers produced which focus on the cultural aspect as well as empirical evidence on views within the Islamic community. Therefore, the writer has used its own understanding of the cultural aspects as well as informal discussions with members of the community. In the future, the writer hopes to produce empirical evidence to back up such claims.

Background to Islam

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ

'There is no god except Allah and Muhammad ﷺ is his servant and messenger'

The word Islam derives from the Arabic word *silim* which translates to 'submission', 'obedience', and 'peace'. At a basic level, Islam is the religion of Muslims and fundamentally Muslims believe that there is only one god, Allah, and that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was his servant and messenger. Islam teaches that Allah is alone, he has no children, parents, or partners, and that there is no one equal or superior to Allah.

In Islam, there are five pillars which Muslims live by which are set out as follows:

1. **Shahadah:** sincerely reciting the Muslim profession of faith.
2. **Salat:** performing ritual prayers in the proper way five times each day.
3. **Zakat:** paying charity to benefit the poor and the needy.
4. **Sawm:** fasting during the month of Ramadan.
5. **Hajj:** pilgrimage to Mecca.

Such principles and practice are contained within the Holy Quran and Ahadith which comprise to form Shari'ah law. Muslims abide by Shari'ah law in order to be granted a place in heaven in the afterlife. It is set out in the Holy Quran that there is a heaven and hell which is determined by how people act in this life. Whilst Muslims believe in destiny and that their fate has already been written, Muslims have free-choice in this world and these decisions will determine whether they enter heaven or hell; for those who lived their life in accordance with Shari'ah law, they will be granted a place in heaven, but for those who act against Shari'ah law, they will be sent to hell to be punished for their misdeeds.

In the Holy Quran, there are some sins which are more punishable than others. These includes: (1) shirk – associating partners with Allah (2) committing murder (3) practising magic (4) leaving daily prayers intentionally (5) neglecting fasting without a valid excuse (6) fornication and adultery (7) dealing with interest (8) gambling and (9) consuming alcohol and drugs. However, it is also contained in the Holy Quran that every person can be forgiven if they sincerely repent to Allah and avoid committing this sin again.

When dealing with Muslim clients, it is also important to understand that not all Muslims follow the same beliefs. Most notably, there is a difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims which are the two main sub-groups in Islam. The difference between the two groups is a political distinction and not from spiritual beliefs.

- Sunni Muslims believe that Muhammed ﷺ had a number of companions at the time of his death and that the new leader following the prophet's death should be among those capable of the job. Therefore, Sunni Muslims believe that the rightful leader following the death of Muhammed ﷺ was his close friend and adviser, Abu Bakr.
- Shia Muslims believe that the new leader following the prophet's death should have passed directly to his cousin and son-in law, Ali bin Abu Talib. Therefore, since the death of Muhammed ﷺ, Shias do not recognise the authority of Muslim leaders.

1. Marriage

1.1 Marriage in Islam

'Whoever Allah provides with a righteous wife, Allah has assisted him in half of his religion.' (At-Tirmidhi Hadith 3096)

Marriage plays a significant role in the life of a Muslim as Islamically, a male or female is considered to have completed half of their faith when they get married. Therefore, Muslims ought to consider careful who they choose to be their spouse and generally will select those who have good character and spirituality, two key traits for any Muslim.

One of the issues which arises in getting married is the process in which Muslims get married. Firstly, Muslims are not supposed to free mix with the opposite gender and it is against Islamic principles for Muslims to have boyfriends or girlfriends. Secondly, as free mixing is forbidden in Islam, marriages tend to be arranged through the parents. Thirdly, marriages in Islam take place through a proceeding known as a Nikah which is a simple ceremony usually consisting of readings from the Quran and exchanging of vows in front of witnesses for both partners.

1.2 Marriage in Culture

In culture, marriage is equally an important concept and one which is taken very seriously. Many parents often coerce their children into marriage including who their child is to marry. This is perhaps less common in western countries but still does occur.

More commonly, parents will have a large say in who their child is to marry and there can often be differences between what the child wants and what the parents want. These differences are varied but some differences include: (1) issues of cast (2) acceptance of love marriages (3) moving in with in-laws, as it is tradition for the new bride to move into the household of her husband and (4) the role of a wife, as it is common for parents to wish for their daughter-in-law to stay at home and be a housewife, although this is becoming less common particularly in western countries.

1.3 Polygamous Marriages

One of the most common questions which arises in practice is regarding polygamous marriages. A polygamous marriage is essentially a state of marriage to many spouses. In Islam, it is stated in the Quran that a man is entitled to marry up to four wives so long as he treats each of them fairly (Surah Nisa 4:3). Culturally, polygamy is also accepted, and it is not uncommon for a man to have multiple wives, including wives in the UK and elsewhere.

However, whilst polygamy is accepted in Islam and by culture, it is unlawful in the UK. Particularly, a second marriage will not be recognised in the UK as this would be treated as bigamy. This does not prevent unregistered nikahs of second (or more) marriages taking place and due to the laws in the UK, this could mean that on Islamic divorce, the second (or greater) wife would have no legal rights.

Therefore, when dealing with marriage with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- Marriage is significant in both Islam and culture.
- Islamically, free mixing is forbidden, and parents will often have a large involvement in the process of marriage.
- Differences can arise between what the child wants and what the parents want.
- A male may have more than one wife and although this is unlawful and not recognised in the UK, the client may still consider this a valid marriage.

2. Divorce

2.1 Divorce in Islam

Muhammad ﷺ said: “off all things which have been permitted, divorce is the most hated by Allah” (Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah)

As a starting point, divorce is permitted in Islam. However, divorce is considered to be a last resort and should only be done after all attempts have been made for reconciliation between the two spouses. The most common form of divorce in Islam is known as Talaq which is translated as repudiation. In Islam, it refers to the husband’s right to divorce his wife by simply announcing to her that he repudiates her.

There is a distinction between the method of divorce between the Sunni Muslims and the Shia Muslims. The Sunnis do not require any witnesses and so a divorce will be valid once the husband has expressed his desire for a divorce on three separate occasions within a period of three months. For Shia’s, two witnesses are required followed by a waiting period before a marriage can be ended.

Although in Islam, men are granted strong rights in divorce, there are circumstances in which a woman can initiate a divorce, and this is known as Khul. There is no restriction on the grounds for such a divorce. Importantly, however, Kuhl is translated to mutual divorce and requires the consent of the husband. Where this consent is not granted, Islamic law permits qadis (lay judge in the community) or imams to dissolve the marriage under Faskh (judicial dissolution).

Following the divorce, a husband or wife is entitled to re-marry.

2.2 Divorce in Culture

In culture, there is a stigma about divorce and many Muslims stay in marriages because of the fear of being judged in the community, particularly for Muslim woman. Divorce can not only bring shame to the individual Muslim, but also to the wider family. Therefore, couples may stay together although they are unhappy in the marriage, even where there is physical or emotional abuse and violence.

As there is such a stigma which exists in the community, Muslims often find it difficult to talk about such matters to their family or friends due to fear of shame. This can lead to spouses, particularly woman, feeling lonely and isolated from the community.

Following divorce, a divorcee can often feel judged and struggle to remarry. In the community, families are often judgemental and have a stigma towards divorced woman and so difficulty arises in finding another spouse, despite it being valid to remarry under Islamic law.

Therefore, when dealing with divorce with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- Islamically, divorce is seen as a last resort and it is a much simpler process compared to conventional divorce proceedings.
- There is a stigma which exists in culture towards getting a divorce and there is a stigma in the community about divorcees which may make it difficult for them to remarry.
- Due to such stigmas, divorced couples or couples considering divorce may feel isolated and lonely with no one to talk to.

3. Mental Health

3.1 Mental Health and Disability in Islam

“Allah has sent down both the disease and the cure, and He has appointed a cure for every disease, so treat yourselves medically, but use nothing unlawful.” (Abu Dawud, Tibb 11, (3874))

A person in Islam comprises of a combination of four interacting parts: (1) Mind (Aqal) (2) Body (Jism) (3) Self (Nafs) and (4) Soul/Spirit (Ruh).

In Islam, Muslims are told to take care of both their body and mind. This includes eating healthy food, eating appropriate amounts of food, and exercise to look after your body. In relation to the mind, a person who acts in accordance with Islam and worships Allah, he is considered to have spirituality which is one of the reasons in Islam why drugs and alcohol are prohibited, as these are substances which can hinder the mind. The Quran can often be used as a guide for those who suffer from emotional distress as it leads people to spirituality and a meaningful quality of life.

Islamically, it is accepted that Muslims can have mental health issues as frequently in the Quran there is reference to ‘insane’ people or those who have a mental illness. Particularly, it is noted that there is a difference in the requirements of worship for those who are mentally ill and for those who are mentally well, particularly there are exceptions for mentally ill Muslims when following the five pillars of Islam.

The Quran also believes that every disease which has been sent down on earth, there is a cure for and so Muslims are entitled to seek treatment for these illnesses. This can commonly relate to drugs and medication, but treatment can be wider and include things such as counselling or rehabilitation. These diseases can be seen as a test from Allah.

It is also important to note that in Islam, Quranic writing and Ahadith have confirmed that suicide is forbidden, and a person will not enter heaven if they take their own life.

3.2 Mental Health and Disability in Culture

Culturally, mental health is a taboo subject as discussing it can often lead to embarrassment and fear for the mentally ill Muslim. This causes feeling of loneliness and isolation. This is particularly difficult as whilst the individual may need professional help, their fear of speaking about such matters could result in them being unable to ask for help.

Additionally, misconceptions exist within the community regarding mental health. Firstly, the Muslim community may consider that the individual who suffers from mental health may be “non-religious” or “not religious enough.” Secondly, the Muslim community may consider this a form of Nazr - which is essentially jealous intentions from others; they believe that others may make jealous remarks which have caused these illnesses. Finally, they may consider this illness to occur due to influence from jinns. A jinn is a separate race in Islam which cannot be seen by humans and they can appear in different forms and cause harm to humans through human possession. Whilst jinns and nazr is accepted in Islam, these are unlikely to be the cause of the mental illness suffered by Muslims.

Therefore, when dealing with mental health with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- Muslims believe that today's mental health issues are tests from God and therefore may not seek any help. Due to the taboo nature of mental health in the Muslim community, again Muslims may be reluctant to seek help.



- For Muslims who have completed suicide, there is not only a stigma which exists against them, but this can also bring shame to the family who have been bereaved by suicide. They may face social isolation and disgrace, and therefore, they are likely to require extra empathy, and support.
- Muslims are more likely to seek help from trusted sources such as the Imam of the mosque or family, if they are comfortable doing so.
- Muslims may be reluctant to engage with the mental health profession. Mental health is often linked to spirituality and so misconceptions may arise that mental health professionals are going to impose their beliefs on the Muslim client and undermine their Islamic beliefs. This is of course not the case as professionally, there are ethical obligations on all mental health professionals to respect religious values and beliefs of their clients.

4. Sexuality

4.1 Sexuality in Islam

"...For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds..." (Quran, Al-Araf 80-81)

The Islamic position on homosexuality is clear from the writings in the Quran and Haadith. It is not only a sin, but also a crime under Islamic law. Putting the above quote in context, in Islam it is believed that there were previous nations to ours and Allah had destroyed one nation as they ignored Allah's warnings and continued to commit homosexual practices. Therefore, homosexuality in Islam is expressly prohibited and it is a crime.

4.2 Sexuality in Culture

Given that homosexuality is seen as a crime in Islam, this is reflected in countries which follow Islamic law including Saudi Arabia. This can be punishable in multiple ways.

However, in western countries, gay marriages are becoming more common due to many countries legalising them. Despite this, many Muslims still feel reluctant to talk about such matters due to fears of being judged. Although legalised, in Islam homosexuality is still a sin and a crime which is why Muslims feel judged to talk about such matters and may be ostracised from the community.

Additionally, it is common practice for those who express homosexuality to be pressurised into getting married and they can often be forced into entering a heterosexual marriage for the sake of family' reputation within the community.

Therefore, when dealing with homosexuality with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- Homosexuality is forbidden in Islam and considered a crime.
- Despite homosexuality being legalised in many western countries, it is still forbidden in Islam and so Muslims are reluctant to speak about their sexuality.
- Muslims may be pressured into heterosexual marriages.

5. Domestic Abuse

5.1 Domestic Abuse in Islam

“What do you say (command) about our wives? Muhammad ﷺ replied: Give them food what you have for yourself, and clothe them by which you clothe yourself, and do not beat them, and do not revile them.” (Abu Dawud, 2139)

Contrary to popular belief and what media suggests, women have a very important role in Islamic society. Men and women are recognised as different in Islam and have different roles in society. Nonetheless, women are held in high esteem and should be shown the upmost respect and kindness; it is noted that the best among Muslims is those who are the best towards his wife (Tirmidhi).

Equally, it is narrated on several occasions that men should not abuse women or show them injustice. Particularly, Muslims are to follow the way of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and it has been noted that: *“The Messenger of Allah never struck a servant of his with his hand, nor did he ever hit a woman. He never hit anything with his hand.”*

However, ambiguity arises in Islam with regards to the following verse from the Quran:

...good women are obedient, (and) guard (the property and honor of their husbands) in (their) absence with the protection given by Allah. As for women of whom you fear rebellion, convince them, and leave them apart in beds, and strike them. Then, if they obey you, do not seek a way against them. (Quran, An-Nisa 4:34).

The misconceptions which often arise is that: (1) women must be obedient to their husbands and (2) if she does not obey, then her husband can beat her. However, this is not the case and scholars disagree as to the exact meaning of this verse.

5.2 Domestic Abuse in Culture

The issue which exists in culture regarding domestic abuse is that it is not widely condemned in the community. Particularly, Muslims may rely on the above verse from the Quran to suggest that hitting their wife (or their husband) is permitted. However, as mentioned, there is disagreement as to whether this is the case. Firstly, any form of hitting is seen as a last resort and there are two options to be used before this; these include warning them and also not sharing a bed with them. Secondly, there is a disagreement over what strike means as some consider it to mean “strike them out”, meaning that you remove them from the house. Despite the different forms of interpretations and ambiguity, as well as the way of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who never beat his wife, some Muslims rely on these verses to justify domestic abuse.

Additionally, there is also a stigma in the Muslim community against divorced women and so, reluctantly, women often stay in the marriage even where domestic abuse occurs. Islam allows women to divorce as noted above and men should seek to use any form of hitting as a last resort, yet despite this many women stay in an abusive relationship due to fears about what the community might say.

Therefore, when dealing with domestic abuse with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- Islamically, severe physical abuse is not accepted although there is disagreement as to whether any form of hitting is permitted; in any case it is a last resort.
- Muslims may stay in an abusive relationship to avoid the stigma which exists and therefore may be reluctant to talk about such matters.

6. Family Life and Children

6.1 Family Life and Children in Islam

Muhammed ﷺ said: “He is not one of us who has no compassion for our little ones and does not honour our old ones.” (Tirmidhi)

Family life in Islam is of paramount importance and at the heart of every Muslim community; every Muslim is considered to be brothers and sisters in Islam. This follows the ways of the Muhammed ﷺ who was married and raised a family. Family includes parents, children, grandparents, and elderly relatives.

Importantly, children have a significant role in Islam and therefore abortion in most cases is forbidden (A good book to note and study would be *‘Birth control and abortion in Islam* by Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari). It is noted in the Quran: “Do not take a life which Allah has made sacred, except for just cause” (Quran 17:33). Therefore, abortion is only permitted in certain circumstances such as in order to save the life of the mother.

As for family life, as mentioned men and woman have differing roles in Islamic society. Traditionally, men are regarded as the protectors and providers of woman and family, and woman are expected to have children and to fulfil the important role of wife and mother. Whilst this is the case, the way of Muhammed ﷺ is significant and Muslims are also required to follow his ways; in several writings it is noted that Muhammed ﷺ would often help his wife with the cooking and cleaning of the house.

6.2 Family Life and Children in Culture

Family life is equally important in culture and traditional Indian and Pakistani families tend to be large. The traditional Muslim family is extended, often spanning 3 or more generations.

With regards to abortion, this is an area which is frowned upon in culture. Historically, in Arabian times, unwanted baby girls would often be buried alive. Although times have now moved away from this, it can be argued that boys are still treated favourably in Muslim families compared to girls. In relation to abortion itself, this is still frowned upon culturally, even in circumstances in which it is valid under Islamic law. Therefore, those who consider abortion often feel guilty and avoid discussing such a topic.

Culturally, certain Muslim families tend to strictly adopt the notion that the men are the providers of the family and woman are to look after the children and house; this includes during marriage when the wife moves into the in-law’s house following the wedding. Additionally, the way of Muhammed ﷺ can often be neglected, particularly Muslim men helping around the house with the cooking and cleaning.

Therefore, when dealing with family life with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- Family is an integral part of the life of a Muslim.
- There is a difference between the roles of males and females but culturally, certain families adopt these roles strictly and limit the ability and freedom of daughters and daughters-in-law in particular.
- Abortion in Islam is forbidden and is only permissible in limited circumstances such as when the mother will die. Culturally, this is still perceived as a negative act and is frowned upon in the community.

7. Death

7.1 Death in Islam

“Every soul shall taste death.” (Qur’an, Surah Al-'Ankabut 29:57)

In Islam, death is inevitable. As mentioned earlier in this guide, Muslims believe that there is a heaven and hell, and where they will be placed in the afterlife will be determined by how they act in this life. For those who have been good and followed the commands of Allah and the way of Muhammed ﷺ then they will enter heaven, but for those who have been bad and failed to follow the commands without repenting, they will be sent to hell. This is recorded in a book of deeds which is recorded by angels throughout a person’s life.

How Muslim act in this life also impacts on their treatment at the time of death. When a person dies, the soul leaves the body, in which the physical appearance of the body may not reflect the situation of the soul. A believer who followed the commands of Allah will have a quick and peaceful exit of the soul whereas for disbelievers and those who failed to follow the commands of Allah, they will have a slow and painful exit.

The burial in Islam is also very sacred and a special procedure is followed, known as a Janazah. This is to respect the dignity of the deceased and consist of: (a) a special prayer (b) a special burial and (c) a short time between the death and the burial. Importantly, still-born babies are not given a burial (Janazah prayer).

Following the death of the deceased, in Islam a person is entitled to three days to grieve. This is subject to interpretation but it was mentioned that Muhammed (pbuh) had tears coming from his eyes after three days of the death of his son; it was noted that a person is entitled to grieve for longer than three days but a person should not whale in grief following three days.

7.2 Death in Culture

Perhaps the most contentious area in the community regarding death is over the mourning period. Losing a family member or close friend is a difficult period for anyone. However, in the community, a Muslim who grieves for longer than three days is looked at negatively.

It is important to understand that there are two exceptions to this general rule. Firstly, a widow is entitled to mourn for a period of 4 months and 10 days. Secondly, there is a distinction between grief and continual mourning; a Muslim is expected to continue with his daily affairs after three days, but they are still entitled to grieve and have feelings of sadness.

Therefore, when dealing with death with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- There is a special funeral and burial for Muslims known as a Janazah.
- Still born babies are not entitled to burials and this can often lead to Muslims not getting closure and continuing grievance.
- A Muslim is entitled to be entitled to grieve for as long as they need but after three days, they are expected to continue their daily life.

8. Drugs and Alcohol

8.1 Drugs and Alcohol in Islam

'O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks) ... are an abomination of the devil's handywork. So, avoid that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.'

(Quran Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:90-91)

Islam is clear on alcohol and drugs, they are both forbidden due to the effects they can have on people. The Quranic text focuses on the effects which these substances can have on Muslims, particularly that they may neglect their duties towards Allah or be insincere in their prayers. Therefore, all forms of alcohol and drugs are forbidden.

One of the arguments which is raised in Islam is the use of such substances for health purposes. Generally, it is accepted that even under such circumstances, drugs and alcohol are forbidden. This is in line with the Hadith referred to in the mental health section in that Allah has made a cure for every ailment, so seek cure but seek not a cure by unlawful things (Abu Dawud). As such, Muslims should stay away from these substances.

Importantly, in this regard, drugs refer to those which can significantly impair on the mind such as marijuana, cocaine, or heroine. It also includes other forbidden sources such as pigs skin which can be commonly used in skin grafts; in Islam such treatment is not preferred and alternatives should be considered, however if it is needed in order to save the life of the Muslim then it is permissible.

8.2 Drugs and Alcohol in Culture

The position in Islam is clear regarding alcohol and drugs consumption. However, given that such substances are common in western countries, it is not uncommon for Muslims to drink alcohol and take drugs. However, there is a stigma which exists in the community against such people and tend to be shunned from the community. Whilst Islam allows Muslims to repent for their sins, the community tends to disregard this, and judge Muslims based on their wrongful actions. Therefore, those who have committed such deeds are made to feel ashamed for their actions and find difficulty in speaking about such matters.

As a result of the commonality of such substances, parents can be stricter with children when going out and where they go out. This may leave children feeling excluded from their peers and could in itself create feelings of isolation or loneliness.

Therefore, when dealing with drugs and alcohol with Muslim clients, it is important to note:

- Both substances are forbidden in Islam.
- Medication is permitted in Islam but drugs which significantly impair the mind such as heroine or marijuana are forbidden.
- These may be more commonly used by Muslims in western countries as it is more common in such countries than other Islamic countries.
- Muslims who use such substances may then feel isolated from the community.
- As a counsellor, it is advisable not to ask Muslim clients specific questions such as what they drink and how much they drink, or what drugs they use, as this could lead to feelings of being judged.

9. Practical Tips for Working with Muslim Clients

Potential problems which may arise:

1. Muslims may not wish to be counselled by the opposite gender due to the rules on Islam and free mixing.

2. Muslims may not wish to shake hands or be too close to counsellors if they are of the opposite gender.

3. Muslims may have mistrust towards counsellors as they may think they are trying to change their values or beliefs.

4. Muslims may have trust issues or issues of confidentiality as they will want their matters to be kept privately, potentially due to fear of what the community might say.

5. During sessions, Muslims may bring religious text such as the Quran or Ahadith text into the room with them.

6. Muslims families tend not to have pets such as dogs and Islam does not permit dogs living in a Muslim household.

Potential solutions:

Requests can be put in before the sessions start and this can be managed depending on staff availability.

The counsellor should respect the views of the client but still attempt to create a welcoming environment to maintain a connection with the client.

Counsellors are regulated and there is guidance set out stating that counsellors are to respect the religion and beliefs of all their clients. If the client expresses concern regarding this, this guidance which counsellor must follow can be communicated to them.

Counsellors are also bound by confidentiality and there will usually be information whether in the organisation or externally regarding this. This can be communicated to the client to re-assure them that their issues are not discussed with others out with the sessions.

In Islam, a person must be pure before touching religious text such as the Quran and books containing Ahadith; this includes washing in a particular way. Therefore, as a sign of respect, counsellors should refrain from touching any religious texts if they are brought into the room.

Counsellors should be cautious when making reference to animals such as dogs during creative activities as Muslims may find it hard to relate to such references.

10. The Use of Pluralism

Pluralistic therapy is about creating a framework to allow the counsellor and clients to work together to find the best way to work with the client's issues; this is done by using counselling methods and ideas as well as the client's life experience. The key for the counsellor is to be open-minded and accept that there may be alternative ways. Particularly, McLeod notes in his book on Pluralistic Therapy (McLeod, 2018):

- 1) There are many different ways of dealing with various emotions and problems, and there are a lot of methods and ideas that can help.
- 2) People who enter therapy are already actively attempting to solve their problems and they have knowledge, insight, and preferences as to what they think will help.
- 3) Counselling is likely to be more effective when it takes into account the client's knowledge, insight and preferences.
- 4) Counselling is likely to be more effective when there is a relationship of collaboration and trust between the counsellor and the client.

When dealing with Muslim clients, pluralism becomes particularly important. This is because the client will have different knowledge, experiences and beliefs to you as the counsellor. Pluralism requires respect for the client which includes the religion and spirituality they practice. Counsellors may be mindful of their own views, stereotypes, and beliefs towards Islam and Muslims. The more that counsellors are able to display knowledge of Islam and ask about the religion, it is likely that the client will have more trust in the counsellor as previously they may see the counsellor representing the views of a biased society and media. Therefore, asking questions is of particular importance both to understand the client's preferences and beliefs but also to help clarify any points which the counsellor may be unclear on.

Additionally, it is likely that the client will have a better understand of what they think will help which means that the session should be client-led. This does not, however, mean that the counsellor should not engage. One way of engaging would be to understand the client's frame of reference potentially by asking questions such as *what does religion mean to them?* Other techniques that counsellors may choose to use include: (1) timelines (2) preference forms and (3) goals – tasks and methods. These can help engage the client and centre the sessions around the client's knowledge, insight, and preference which should help them become more engaged and follow on from what they feel might help.

Throughout the sessions, the counsellor when attempting various methods and ideas should always integrate meta-communication. This is particularly important for setting clear goals as generally non-Muslim counsellors may find it difficult to create goals with those who they do not share the same faith as. Moreover, Muslim clients may not engage well with standard methods and so asking them if they would like to do things differently can help them engage more and also build a relationship of collaboration and trust. An example could be where counsellors attempt to use certain animals during creative activities; Muslims tend to dislike dogs or avoid dogs and so by simply asking the client if they would like things done differently would help to identify these issues and alter them for the client's needs.

This guide is designed to give counsellors a basic understand of some key areas in Islam, but it is not exhaustive. Therefore, whenever unsure about particular points, it is important to always ask questions, and this could be seen as a way of building trust as the counsellor is asking to be educated by the client regarding their views, values, and religion.

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<u>Word:</u>	<u>Meaning:</u>
Allah	Arabic word for 'God'.
Faskh	Dissolution of a marriage by an Islamic Court (in Muslim country) or a Shariah Council (in the UK).
Hadith, Ahadith (plural)	Traditions of the holy Prophet of Islam describing his utterances, actions, instructions and actions of others (Companions) tacitly approved by him.
Halal	Arabic word for 'Permissible'.
Hajj	Pilgrimage to Mecca.
Haraam	Arabic word for 'Forbidden'.
Imam	Literally translation means leader but in Islam refers to the person who leads the prayer in a mosque.
Janazah	A Muslim funeral prayer, part of the Islamic funeral ritual.
Khul/Khula	Procedure through which a woman can divorce her husband in Islam, by returning the dower (mahr) or something else that she received from her husband, as agreed by the spouses or Qadi's (court) decree.
Muhammed ﷺ	Muhammed was the last prophet in Islam and Muslims believe the Quran was revealed to Muhammed through god. ﷺ means peace and blessings be on the prophet, something said by Muslims after mentioning Prophet Muhammed's ﷺ name.
Nazr	Translates to jealousy or evil eye; the idea that one can place evil intentions on another.
Nikkah	Nikkah is a marriage contract between two people under Shariah law.
Qadis	Magistrate or judge of a Shariah court who exercises extra-judicial functions such as mediation, guardianship and at times divorce.
Salat/Namaz	Performing ritual prayers in the proper way five times each day.
Sawm	Fasting during the month of Ramadan.
Shahadah	Sincerely reciting the Muslim profession of faith
Shariah	Divine guidance as given by the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad; embodies all aspects of the Islamic faith, including beliefs and practice.
Talaq	Divorce effected by the husband's enunciation of the word 'talaq' on three occasions within a month, this constituting a formal repudiation of his wife.
Zakat	Paying charity to benefit the poor and the needy.
Holy Quran	Literally translates to 'recitation' but it is the religious text of Islam revealed by Allah to Muhammed ﷺ through the angel Jibril.

Guide to Counselling Muslim Clients – Feedback Form:-

Please complete the following survey (link below) to evaluate the guide and consider what topics could be added in future editions:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HNJMKNN>

