

Guidance: Creating and managing effective multi-faith and contemplation space

A number of workplace will have some sort of arrangements for staff who want to pray, meditate or contemplate at work.

It is important to set how these will be managed. We give some practical guidance in this document.

Consultation

It is important to know your staff—what faiths are represented and what needs they might have. A good consultative process will also create a sense of involvement and shared responsibility for the space, as well as build consensus about how the room should be designed and used. It is advisable to start this as soon as possible so that the facility starts off as collaboration and does not become dominated by any one-user group. Some organisations are now building up data about the faith balance of their employees, for example through staff surveys. If undertaken, this needs to be done sensitively, making sure it is clear the information is given voluntarily and that it will be used in the best interests of staff.

Managing multi-faith/contemplation space

Multi faith spaces need on-going management and input to function well. Ideally multi-faith rooms should be managed in an inclusive way such that all the faiths using the room are represented. It is good practice to create a ‘multi-faith room users group’ with representatives from each of the main faith groups involved. This group can work with HR and diversity and buildings managers to make decisions about how the room is set up and publicised, and also to decide on the terms and conditions for its use. Such a group also serves a vital role in ensuring that the space remains inclusive. In practice some faith groups are likely to use the room more frequently than others (often Muslims are frequent attenders because of the obligation to pray five times each day). Unless carefully managed this can create a situation where people of other faiths (or no faith) feel **intimidated** and begin to use the room less, resulting in a space which is no longer truly inclusive. A multi-faith committee, with links to both HR and employee faith networks, will help to remedy this.

Sharing the space

Different faith groups may need the room at different times. For example, Muslims will pray most often at the set prayer times and are likely to want to pray in congregation on Friday lunch times. Christian groups may wish to instigate a weekly prayer meeting, Bible study or Holy Communion. Often the space can be shared quite harmoniously by consulting with all the user groups, agreeing times for congregational prayer, and making sure they are communicated clearly (for example a notice-board outside the room).

It is important to collect regular feedback and review the situation periodically to make sure all the room users are happy with how the space is being allocated. If managed well, this approach can help to build understanding and trust between the different faith groups and

individuals. The consultation process may also explore possibilities for one faith group to extend invitations to others to witness or participate in their prayer practices. Some employers prefer to have a policy of only offering quiet space for individual prayer and reflection. This may make the space less appealing to some faith groups but it does eliminate any difficulties that may arise if more small groups request congregational prayer time than can easily be accommodated.

Etiquette

Different faith groups and cultures may have different expressions of spiritual etiquette, for example removing shoes, limiting conversation in the space, or the necessity for the space to be kept particularly clean. These are all things which the multi-faith management group will need to be aware of and make provision for.

Communication and ethos

Good communication is absolutely essential to managing quiet space well. Decisions about the space need to be made with the involvement of room users or their representatives, and communicated very clearly. For example, display the terms and conditions for use of the room, and to make it explicit how any rules or guidelines were decided upon.

Communication will build relationships between the different faith groups using the space which will make a contribution to faith community cohesion within the organisation and beyond it. It is also important that employees (including new employees) know that the room exists and its location. This can be included as part of new staff induction.

Monitoring and feedback

It is essential that there is some formal procedure for monitoring use of the room and checking it remains inclusive and is treated with respect. Clearly communicated feedback loops are also necessary. All users of the spaces should know how to register any difficulties or issues that come up in regard to use of the room. A comments box or book can be helpful if users want to make comments anonymously. A comments book will give room users a way to communicate with each other (anonymously or otherwise). Contact with the multi-faith management group or diversity manager will give an opportunity to ask questions or raise complaints directly.

Name and language

Calling the room 'quiet space' rather than 'prayer space' can make it more welcoming and accessible for people with no faith who might wish to use the room for quiet reflection as part of a stress management programme. However, it makes sense to decide on a clear policy about what is appropriate. Some employees may decide the room is a good place to take their laptop, prepare for a meeting or even take an afternoon nap. If you decide this is inappropriate, this needs to be clearly stated in the room's guidelines for use or terms and conditions.

Multi-faith and contemplation space design

- Dual-function rooms

If space is in short supply, rooms may need to have a dual-function, e.g. a meeting room or staff restaurant can be made available at certain times of the day. First aid rooms are also utilised by some organisations when not occupied for medical purposes. If the space is likely to be used by Muslim employees, the time the room is needed will vary as the prayer times change throughout the year.

In summer one or two prayers fall during normal working hours, in winter three prayers. All of these will be after midday, so a room can be assigned that is used for other purposes in the morning. The demand for prayer space from Muslim employees will be considerably higher during Ramadan. In some cases, an additional room may need to be provided.

This section explores some of the factors that contribute to the design of good quiet space.

- Location

- It is important to consider accessibility, including disabled access and also likely noise levels.
- Proximity to washrooms is appreciated by faiths who need to wash before praying. Installing a low sink in the toilet near the space can be an effective solution. Take into consideration the number of staff that will require these facilities.
- Clear signposting is essential.

- Orientation and shape

- Some faiths pray facing a particular direction (usually East or South-East). It may be important that the shape of the room fits with that orientation, and that the door is not situated in that direction.
- Muslim men and women usually prefer to pray separately. Moveable screens can be provided, but the shape of the room could also potentially be utilised.

- Neutrality

- It is necessary to avoid any religious imagery rather than attempt to accommodate all faiths.
- Neutral colours, simple abstract designs and effective use of light can all be employed to create a beautiful and welcoming space.
- Muslims and some others avoid imagery of people or animals

- Lighting

- Avoid fluorescent or office-type (overhead) lighting.
- Natural light (with blinds for privacy as appropriate) is good if available.
- A special lighting scheme that allows a variety of moods and effects, controllable by users, is best.

- Some users may appreciate the possibility of allowing candle-light, although such a decision would need to be checked against fire safety regulations.

- Heating and ventilation

- Body temperature drops during meditation so the space needs to be warm enough (or blankets or shawls provided).
- 19 degrees centigrade is comfortable and ambient.
- Conversely, adequate ventilation can be essential depending on the room location, during times of congregational prayer if the room is likely to get very full.

- A sense of the sacred

- Attention to atmosphere is important. Effective interior design paying attention to colour, fabric and light will make a big difference to the atmosphere of the room.

- Seating, furniture and accessories

- Flexibility is important.
- Some faith groups and individuals may prefer to sit on chairs, but others will need floor space and either prayer mats or meditation cushions.
- A small table or altar may be appreciated by Christian groups for Communion services.
- A screen or curtain to separate men and women may be appreciated by Muslim staff.
- Furniture that can be stacked or folded or wheeled away increases the flexibility of the space.
- Shoe racks are helpful.
- Storage cupboards for scriptures, prayer mats and possibly also for chairs, may need to be provided.

- Religious artefacts

- Faith artefacts (such as symbols, holy books, prayer mats) should ideally be stored in a cupboard and put back after use. This allows people from all backgrounds to feel comfortable in the space and not alienated by the presence of other faith objects.
- The artefacts can be donated by individuals or groups in the office as required.