

# Islam Awareness

MAC | Muslim Association  
of Canada

# Workshops

**Interrupt & Disrupt Implicit Bias,  
Islamophobia and Microaggressions.**

**Audience:** Educators & Administrators in public schools

This workshop is designed for educators who understand the need to combat all forms of racism, Islamophobia, and microaggressions in the classroom. This workshop works through both interpersonal and systemic Islamophobia which are prevalent in our society. It also asks us to examine and interrupt our own implicit biases and form real allyship with those at the receiving end of discrimination.

## Learning Objectives:

- To examine myths and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims prevalent in media
- To define the meaning of Islamophobia and its consequences
- To differentiate between interpersonal and structural/systemic forms of Islamophobia
- To identify what constitutes a safe learning environment

## Materials:

- Handout: Myths and Misconceptions about Islam and Muslim questions (cue card)
- Handout: Media Representations of Muslims (Homeland poster and questions)
- Handouts: Newspaper articles
- Handout: Unmet friends by Amal Albaz
- Handout: Interpersonal vs. Structural Discrimination worksheet
- Chart paper, cue cards, markers and writing pad or stack of line paper and clipboards



### *Safe Space Disclaimer*

- Recognize your own social position
- Be respectful but honest in your discussions
- Lend a mindful and critical voice
- Don't make assumptions - don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't know



# Part 1: Interrupt & Disrupt Implicit Bias!

## Activity: Myths and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims

### What have you learned about Islam and Muslims lately?

- Everyone will receive a cue card. Write down your answer to the following questions:
  - What are some myths, misconceptions, or stereotypes that you've heard about Muslims?
  - What are some myths, misconceptions, or stereotypes that you've heard about the religion of Islam?
- Some possible answers (but we will not be taking it up):
  - About Muslims:**
    - Difficult to relate to religious, conservatives Muslims as they don't really belong...
    - They are newcomers, they don't speak English well
    - Liberal Muslims are OK but religious, conservative Muslims could become 'fundamentalist' and terrorists
    - Women are oppressed and/or forced to do things (e.g. wear hijaab)
  - About Islam:**
    - It is a violent, barbaric religion
    - Shariah Law oppresses women
    - It is strict and/or old-fashioned and not compliant with the current lifestyle
    - It is an Eastern religion; it doesn't belong in Canada
- Put the card aside for now.

### Discussion: Introducing Terms

- Myths, misconceptions, and stereotypes are all largely false views and opinions about something
- **Where do they come from?** What is the origin of these misconceptions and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims?
  - Two main factors contribute to this narrative about Islam and Muslims
  - 1. **Ignorance**; a lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims
    - Faulty sources of knowledge (e.g. biased mainstream media channels) and lack of reliable sources
    - Lack of interaction with Muslims
    - Being biased against Islam/Muslims
  - 2. **Prejudice, hatred**
    - A malicious intent to perpetuate a harmful narrative about Muslims
    - Negative feelings towards Muslims, influenced by:
      - Friends and/or family
      - Negative portrayals in mainstream media, film, television

## Part 2: What is Islamophobia?

### Self-Assessment

- Do I hold *implicit biases* against a particular group of people?
  - Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. It can be positive or negative.
- Do I hold negative implicit biases against Muslims?

### Activity: Does Islamophobia exist in Canada?

Participants are asked to define Islamophobia without looking it up within their group;

- Interpersonal or private Islamophobia
- Systemic or structural Islamophobia

- This exercise should be done in groups of 2-4 and the definitions and examples should be written on a chart paper. Keep the chart paper aside as we will build on it further as we proceed in this activity.
- Participants will then review a variety of voices and view different examples and analyses in order to create their very own working definition of Islamophobia. Each group should be given the following handouts below at the start of this activity. *Handouts: 1) Spoken Word (Unmet Friends), 2) two news articles, 3) "Homeland" cover poster, 4) Interpersonal vs. systemic Islamophobia graphic organizer*
- Each handout also comes with a set of questions that should be answered by the group. The graphic organizer should be filled in as participants proceed from one example to the next.

#### 1) **Spoken Word:**

[Unmet Friends](#) by Amal Albaz

- Handout spoken word poetry titled "*Unmet Friends*" by Amal Albaz. Participants are invited to reflect for a couple of minutes by themselves and highlight 3-5 lines they found resonated with them or revealed more to them about Islamophobia. Then participants return to their groups to answer the following questions and add more layers to their Islamophobia definition.
- Inform participants to pay particular attention to the differences between interpersonal and structural Islamophobia.
  - How do you think the poet would define Islamophobia?
  - Which lines got your attention?
  - Which statement made you react?
  - What else can you add to your group's definition of Islamophobia?

#### 2) **News articles:**

- Distribute the stapled set of news articles featuring recent incidents of Islamophobia in Canada. Get into groups and discuss the following questions and if need be add more layers to your Islamophobia definition. Inform participants to pay particular attention to the differences between interpersonal/private and structural/systemic Islamophobia.
  - What happened in the story?
  - How is this incident Islamophobic?
  - Who are the victims? How were they affected?
    - Who was *directly* affected by what happened?
    - Who was *indirectly* affected by what happened?

### **Articles:**

Deadly London Attack

<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/12/1005268914/hate-wiped-away-a-muslim-canadian-family-heres-how-friends-want-them-remembered>

Women attacked in Hamilton

<https://nowtoronto.com/news/hamilton-assault-on-hijab-wearing-women-eerily-reminiscent-of-london-rampage-says-muslim-group>

Women attacked in Alberta

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/muslim-women-attacks-edmonton-1.6081152>

Desensitized to violence against Muslims

<https://theconversation.com/london-terror-attack-canadians-have-become-desensitized-to-violence-against-muslims-162392>

### **3) Media:**



Source: [Homeland: Netflix series](#) in its 9th season.

- This is the final activity\*\* in this section of defining Islamophobia. Ask the participants to answer these questions by referring to the Homeland poster used to promote the show
  - Whose face can we see in the photo?
  - Whose faces can't we see in the photo?
  - If you were to name a country where this photo might have been taken, which country would you pick? Why did you pick that country?
  - How would you racially and ethnically identify the person in the red scarf? What about the people wearing black?
  - What does this image tell you about the gender of the person in the red scarf? What words would you use to describe this person?
  - What does this image tell you about the gender of the people wearing black? What words would you use to describe them?
  - What emotions are being communicated in the photo?
  - What does the name of the show refer to?
  - What does this image tell you about Muslims?

\*\*activity adapted from “*What Is Islamophobia? Interpersonal vs. Structural Discrimination: Teaching for Change*” by Alison Kysia

After completing these questions on “Homeland” everyone should remain in their group until the handout titled “[Interpersonal v. Systemic Discrimination](#)” has been completed by each group.

Ask participants to come back as one group to answer the following questions together. Answers can be written on the white/blackboard by the facilitator.

- What is the difference between interpersonal and structural discrimination?
- Why is it important to decipher these terms?
- If you wanted to reduce discrimination, which strategies could you use to reduce interpersonal discrimination?
- Which strategies could you use to reduce structural discrimination?
- How do these strategies overlap?
- How are they different?

### Part 3: Co-construct a definition of Islamophobia

Facilitators may use the prompts below to guide the discussion into formulating a definition of Islamophobia into the two forms we have reviewed in this activity.

#### *Definition:*

- Islamophobia is:
  - a fear,
  - hatred, and
  - hostility toward Islam and Muslims
  - dehumanizing rhetoric
  - degrading representations of Muslims and Islam that result in bias
  - discrimination, violence,
  - marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life.
- Islamophobia can take many covert/implicit forms...
  - Failing to acknowledge their presence
  - Recognizes Muslims only in extremes (the oppressed veiled Muslim woman/ the bearded angry Muslim man or the liberated Muslim woman without a hijab and dating men etc..)
  - Subtle discrimination
    - Microaggressions
    - “Random selection” for additional screening at airports
    - Implying that a certain act of terrorism was committed because Muslims “hate us” or “our way of life” v. “their way of life”
  - Using stereotypes to make a well-intentioned joke or comment to a Muslim
    - Mocking an accent
- Or overt forms...
  - Verbal assault
    - Name-calling

- Raising voice; verbally attacking (with incessant questions or insults)
  - “Go back to your country”
  - “You don’t belong here”
  - “Your people did this...”
  - “As a white Muslim, you’ve betrayed your people...”
- 
- Discrimination: the unjust treatment of a group of people on the grounds of their faith, etc.
  - Physical assault
    - Pushing, punching
    - Pulling hijab off
  - Murder
    - Depicted as self-defense or simple altercation gone wrong

**Definition of Islamophobia\*\*:** Islamophobia, at least partially, refers to a system of advantages and disadvantages based on the othering of Muslims from the dominant culture. At a personal level, prejudice and discrimination represent;

a) the belief that members of different religio-cultural groupings have different characteristics that are understood hierarchically or placed along a binary of inferior/superior;

b) the conditioning and stereotypes internalized and replicated by members of the dominant culture/grouping and

c) actions taken related to these beliefs and conditioning which include the systemic misuse of power by individuals and institutions.

**\*\*Definition taken from MAC’s Anti-Islamophobia course offered online.**

### ***Discussion: The Consequences***

- What are some consequences of Islamophobia?
- On a personal level: How do you think it feels to be subjected to these forms of Islamophobia?
  - Hurt; emotionally impacted
    - Being the target of hate can cause psychological damage
    - Muslims may feel frustrated and confused at being treated this way, especially those who are active, contributing members of society
  - Afraid; paranoid; threatened; unsafe
    - Muslims could fear leaving their homes, interacting with people, sending their children to school, etc.
    - Isolation might be the response to this fear
  - Unwelcome; alienated
    - Many Muslims call Canada their home, but Islamophobic incidents make them feel like they don’t belong.
    - Many young Muslims may experience identity crises; they feel they will never fit it anywhere
  - Ashamed; low self-esteem
    - Muslim youth can be made to feel ashamed of their ethnic and religious backgrounds; they might act differently to ‘fit in’, which causes tension between aspects of their identity
    - Muslims may suffer from mental illness as a result of the rampant Islamophobia

- On a community level: How do you think Muslim communities are affected by Islamophobia?
  - Higher levels of mental illness; not enough resources to specifically meet the psychological needs of Muslims
    - Stress, anxiety, depression, PTSD
  - Trauma
    - Entire communities are affected by incidents of Islamophobic violence in particular, especially if it was fatal
    - Grief and terror
  - Distrust in the non-Muslim community, the authorities (law enforcement or government agents), etc.
    - Reluctance to interact with anyone outside of the Muslim community
  - Houses of worship and homes feel unsafe and under threat
    - Lack of safe spaces
    - Money is needed for drastic security measures

## Part 4: What can you do to create a safe learning environment?

There's always hope! Muslims are resilient, but it helps to have allies.

➔ **Become an ally to Muslims** ←

*How to Become an Ally to Muslims (with suggested action items):*


1. Beware of your implicit bias and your social position (especially as an educator)
  - Think before you speak
    - Is it true?
    - Is it kind?
    - Is it necessary?
  - Work on consciously changing your stereotypes
    - Stereotypes are not set in stone - our opinions and biases about people are changeable, as we are
    - Understand where the bias might be coming from
    - Seek out positive experiences that are counter-stereotypical
  - Don't laugh at racist, Islamophobic, or other stereotypical jokes
2. See the humanity in others
  - Learn about Muslims and their rich, diverse cultures
    - Ask questions - don't make assumptions or judgments
  - Try to understand someone else's perspective
    - How would you feel if this happened to you?
  - Engage in dialogue
    - Focus on commonalities, not differences
    - Make connections with parents, community builders etc...
3. Take Meaningful Action

- Stand up to Islamophobia
  - Do not be a passive bystander or enabler
  - Report hate and support victims
- Educate yourself and others
  - As educators, model appropriate responses
- Participate in the inclusion of Muslims
  - Advocate for the proper accommodation of Muslims at your school or workplace
- Make a commitment to take action against Islamophobia

***Exit Activity: Make a Commitment***

- Revisit the stereotypes that you wrote at the beginning of the workshop.
- If you feel they have been disproved, cross them out.
- On the back of the card, write down one action item you are going to implement - a commitment to stand up to hate, and to fight against Islamophobia
- No action is too small - write down what you think you can realistically achieve
- When you're done, tape the action on the chart paper

*You are the educators of the future generation of leaders!  
You can make a difference! Thank you for your time.*



## Additional Resources:

Islamophobia in Canada

[https://projectsomeone.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ISLAMOPHOBIA\\_Feb2019.pdf](https://projectsomeone.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ISLAMOPHOBIA_Feb2019.pdf)

Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/Islamophobia-AntiMuslim/Civil%20Society%20or%20Individuals/Noor-ICLMG-ISSA.pdf>

Rise of Islamophobia in Canada

[https://globalnews.ca/news/5275557/1-in-4-canadians-acceptable-prejudice-against-muslims/?utm\\_source=Article&utm\\_medium=MostPopular&utm\\_campaign=2014](https://globalnews.ca/news/5275557/1-in-4-canadians-acceptable-prejudice-against-muslims/?utm_source=Article&utm_medium=MostPopular&utm_campaign=2014)

2018 Survey: Islamophobia in Canada, still a grave problem

<https://www.cjpme.org/islamophobia>

How bad is Islamophobia in Canada by Global News

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8\\_R4YE0kmk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8_R4YE0kmk)



