

Cultural Etiquette Guide

This is a practical guide to help you when meeting and working with people from different cultures, faiths and ethnic backgrounds, and dealing with situations that are unfamiliar to you. If what you want is not here, or you are at all unsure what to do, the best advice is to ask the person you are visiting.

If you cannot find what you are looking for please email us [HERE](#)

Contents

- 1 Quick facts
- 2 Background to communities in A2 Housing Group area
- 3 Cross Culture Communication - some dos and don'ts
- 4 Visiting places of worship
- 5 Language - what to use and what to avoid
- 6 Different customs and visiting someone in their home
- 7 The name game
- 8 Gypsies and Travellers
- 9 Calendar of significant dates and holidays for other ethnic groups
- 10 Translation services
- 11 Further information and sources of help

Can't find what you are looking for or have any other suggestions with regard to this guide? Please email Ellie Broughton by clicking [HERE](#).

1 Quick facts

Here are some broad facts on the main faiths in the area. Be aware, however, that there are likely to be variations within the faith, practices may differ, and some people may observe them more strictly than others.

Buddhist

Diet	mainly vegetarian, but may eat eggs and fish
Visits in the home	may have small shrine for meditation
Places of worship	dress modestly and remove shoes
Death customs	generally cremated

Christian

(see section 11 for details of churches and groups)

Diet	no special requirements
Visits in the home	a prayer may be said before meals; a simple fish symbol is often used to identify Christians
Place of worship	normally a church or chapel
Names	a 'Christian' name followed by a surname
Death customs	burial or cremation

Hindu

Diet

do not eat beef; many are vegetarian;
usually do not drink alcohol or smoke

Visits in the home

ask about removing shoes;
if in room with shrine remove shoes;
women may feel uncomfortable if alone with a man
who is not a family member

Death customs

family member to handle the body;
white is colour of mourning;
generally cremated

Jew

Diet

pork forbidden, only eat Kosher food, ie prepared
in accordance with Jewish dietary law - see section
11

Visits in the home

Sabbath (holy day) is dusk on Friday to dusk on
Saturday, when all work, including driving, is
forbidden for Orthodox Jews

Synagogues

visits must be pre-arranged; men must cover their
heads; may be separate seating for men and
women; in liberal Judaism
men and women sit together

Funerals

burials to take place within 24 hours if possible. If
death is after sunset, burial should be before sunset
on the next day

Muslim

Diet

no pork. Only Halal meat, ie prepared according to
Islamic dietary rules, is permitted - see
section 11; alcohol is
forbidden; food is eaten with right hand
only

Visits to the home

ask about removing shoes

Mosques

remove shoes; Friday afternoon customary for
prayers; women must cover head, arms and legs

Death customs

cremation is not permitted; burials to take place
within 24 hours if possible

Sikh

Diet

practising Sikhs are vegetarian, and do not
eat eggs or fish;
tobacco and alcohol are forbidden

Visits to the home

ask about removing shoes;

Death customs

in room with Guru Granth (holy book) remove shoes
cremation preferred; white usually worn for
mourning

2 Background to communities in A2 Housing Group

A2 Housing Group currently manages properties in forty one boroughs in the South East, encompassing many diverse and culturally rich communities. The following charts, compiled from the 2001 census figures, show the ethnic and religious breakdown for the top seven boroughs where the majority of the group properties are to be found. Although the categories used for the census are not ideal and over simplify, they do give an indication of the amazing diversity of ethnicities, cultures, sub-cultures, languages, alphabets and religions that exist. In addition, there has been an increase in people from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, coming to live and work in the area, none of whom are reflected in these tables.

Ethnic breakdown

	Spelthorne	Winchester	Oxford	Hounslow	Hillingdon	Slough	Guildford
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
White	94.3	97.8	87.11	64.19	79.06	63.7	95.9
Mixed: white & black Caribbean	0.31	0.1	0.77	0.65	0.59	0.94	0.3
Mixed: white & black African	0.1	0.1	0.28	0.4	0.29	0.19	0.12
Mixed: white & black Asian	0.62	0.3	0.73	1.13	0.82	0.71	0.37
Mixed: other	0.31	0.2	0.64	0.85	0.61	0.5	0.28
Asian or Asian British; Indian	1.95	0.4	1.73	17.34	9.56	14.04	1.12
Asian or Asian British; Pakistani	0.31	0	1.96	4.3	1.57	12.06	0.73
Asian or Asian British; Bangladeshi	0.15	0.2	0.65	0.53	0.6	0.14	0.19
Asian or Asian British; other Asian	0.38	0.1	0.48	2.56	1.87	1.7	0.29

	Spelthorne	Winchester	Oxford	Hounslow	Hillingdon	Slough	Guildford
Black or Black British; Caribbean	0.24	0.1	1.24	1.33	1.35	2.91	0.34
Black or Black British; African	0.25	0.1	1.05	2.7	1.74	1.91	0.31
Black or Black British; other Black	0.09	0	0.22	0.32	0.21	0.24	0.06
Chinese	0.44	0.3	1.83	0.87	0.77	0.29	0.41
Other	0.54	0.3	1.31	2.14	0.97	0.67	0.37

Religious breakdown

	Spelthorne	Winchester	Oxford	Hounslow	Hillingdon	Slough	Guildford
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	75.3	76.2	60.4	52.11	64.1	53.75	73.62
Muslim	0.94	0.4	3.85	9.13	4.63	13.35	0.85
Sikh	0.72	0.1	0.23	8.6	4.55	9.09	0.12
Hindu	1.05	0.2	0.78	7.57	4.61	4.48	0.51
Buddhist	0.25	0.2	0.8	0.69	0.39	0.25	0.35
Jewish	0.24	0.2	0.8	0.32	0.81	0.12	0.22
Other	2.5	0.3	0.49	0.56	0.4	0.3	0.33
None/not stated	19	22.4	32.65	21	21.5	18.66	24

3 Cross Culture Communication - some dos and don'ts

Do.....

Do seek advice where possible from colleagues with different cultural backgrounds about how to communicate effectively.

Do ask the first language of the person with whom you are dealing.

Do take care to be patient and reassuring when accent or language hinder communication. It is essential to use a translator when a person speaks only basic English or no English at all, and understanding is vital, for example when dealing with Social Services, the NHS, taking legal advice and court appearances.

Do be prepared to check out the precise meaning of words for family relationships, such as 'uncle', 'cousin', or 'aunt', as they may have different

meanings. Many cultures have specific words for maternal and paternal relatives, which indicates their particular role in family life.

Do avoid use of racial and ethnic terms such as 'coloured', or half-caste' as they are liable to cause offence.

Do be sensitive to the difficulties that using jargon, acronyms or slang may present.

Do appreciate how cultural differences in body language might contribute to misunderstandings and conflict.

Do be aware that it may not be the custom in some instances to shake hands, especially between men and women.

Do be aware that it may not be the custom in some instances for a man to be in the same room as a woman who is not related.

Don't.....

Don't make generalisations about groups or individuals.

Don't assume someone's language is the same as that of their country of origin. For example nobody speaks Nigerian, Swiss or Belgian.

Don't assume that because someone responds in English, they fully understand it.

Don't assume that a lack of eye contact is bad.

Don't assume that a raised voice or gesticulations are necessarily signs of aggression or loss of control.

Don't underestimate the influence of your own cultural background in the way it might affect your perceptions and behaviour towards others.

Don't assume that everyone from a particular country has identical cultural backgrounds or beliefs.

Don't enter a room unless invited to do so. It may be a prayer room where important customs should be respected.

4 Visiting places of worship

For information about visiting places of worship of Sikhs (gurdwara), Hindus (mandir) and Muslims (masjid or mosque) click [HERE](#)

5 Language - what to use and what to avoid

Be aware that language does change over time and words and phrases that were acceptable can become unacceptable or vice versa. If you are at all unsure of the appropriate term, ask the individual or the group how they wish to be identified. The following is a guide to terms in common usage.

Term	Acceptable?	Any comments
Black	Yes	Most black people prefer this term
Coloured	Avoid	Used to be the preferred term at the beginning of the Black emancipation movement. Can now be considered offensive or patronising
West Indian	Avoid	An historical term, mainly used in a title such as West Indies cricket team
African Caribbean	Yes	
African, Black African	Yes	
Black British	Yes	
Asian	No	Imprecise and confusing
South Asian	Yes, if national origin not known	Or use national origin, eg Indian, or region of origin, eg Bengali, or religion, eg Muslim
Immigrant	No	Only use in strict technical sense, ie for people who have recently arrived in the UK
Half-caste	No	Offensive
Ethnics	No	
Ethnic minorities	Yes	
Mixed race	No	Can have negative connotations. Can use 'mixed parentage' or 'mixed cultural heritage'
Multi-racial	Yes	Use when referring to a multi-racial household, ie several people from different races
People of colour	No	
Refugees	No	Only use in strict technical sense, ie people who have been granted refugee status
Migrants	No	Only use in strict technical sense

Term	Acceptable?	Any comments
Asylum seeker	No	Only use in strict technical sense, ie people who have applied for refugee status
Tinker	No	Highly offensive
Itinerant	No	Highly offensive
Gypo	No	Highly offensive
Traveller, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany	Yes	Use with initial capital letters and only when relevant and accurate
Offensive stereotypes like 'scroungers', 'dole dodgers', 'bogus asylum seeker'	No	Only to be used when they are both accurate and proven descriptions of particular individuals

6 Different customs and visiting someone in their home

- If you are unsure what to do, ask. When visiting people in their own homes you should try and respect cultural and religious customs, but should not put your own health and safety at risk.
- If the person you are visiting takes their shoes off, is wearing slippers or is not wearing shoes, ask if they would like you to remove your shoes. You can carry plastic covers for your shoes to avoid removing them.
- In the cultures of the Middle East and South Asia, males and females do not touch each other in public. Physical affection even between married couples will not take place in public. Men might be seen holding hands or, in the Middle East, kissing each other on the cheeks. A male Orthodox Jew would not expect to shake hands with a woman.
- Therefore it is probably best not to shake hands, especially with a member of the opposite sex, unless the person offers their hand to you.
- In South Asia and the Middle East the left hand is unclean. The left hand is used in the toilet, the right hand is for eating.
- Raised voices are not a sign of anger in every culture, nor are tears amongst men so unusual in others.
- Generational migration and the scattering of families across continents entail different demands. For those who made England their home 50 years ago, going back and forth to their country of origin is not considered excessive. Many people have relatives in their country of origin and in North America or continental Europe and attending a funeral or tending to a sick relative thousands of miles away is not exceptional.
- It is important to be aware of the influence which our cultural background may have on our judgements and perceptions, no matter how open-minded we may consider ourselves to be. It helps our

- understanding to have an awareness of the differing realities of life for all peoples of diverse backgrounds.
- Poland is traditionally a Catholic country so Polish people are likely to be Catholic and to observe Catholic Christian festivals and holidays. Go to www.poland.gov.pl for more about Polish culture and customs.
 - Be aware when in a meeting that people from some cultures and backgrounds may find it difficult to contribute because of a reluctance to engage in public discussion or robust debate. One of the reasons for this is hierarchy. The Important Older Person is always right, the Unimportant Younger Person is always wrong, with many subtle in-between grades. When in this situation, stick to honesty, but take it gently and allow time to build up a relationship and trust.

7 The name game

We are all sensitive about our names and titles or forms of address. If you are unsure how to address a person the best thing is to ask them how they would like to be addressed. Getting it right helps communication and puts people at ease.

When names are required for records it is best to ask what people use as a surname and a personal name, and in what order.

Here is a bit of information about Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Chinese names. This is by no means all there is to know - it is just to get you thinking.

Sikh names

Historically Sikhs have three names: a personal name, a title (Kaur, meaning Prince, is used for females, and Singh, meaning Lion, is for males) and a family or caste name. Sikh personal names are unisex.

It is usual for a Sikh to be called by first name and title. Kaur and Singh are often used as last names. A family name may be used in place of, or in addition to, Kaur or Singh.

Women normally adopt the husband's name on marriage.

Eg Mohinder Singh Sandhu (male) should be addressed as Mohinder Singh
Mohinder Kaur Sondh (female) should be addressed as Mohinder Kaur

Chinese names

Women normally keep their family names upon marriage.

The family name comes first, followed by either a one or two-part personal name.

It is usual to address a Chinese person formally, with the title, ie Mr, Mrs, Miss followed by the family name. Only for the young or for very close friends is the personal name used.

The family name is often confused with the first name by officials unfamiliar with the reversal, and official records may be confused as well. Many Chinese live with the ambiguity among non-Chinese rather than attempt to straighten out the reversal.

Eg Wang Xun Biao (male) should be addressed as Mr Wang
Li Qiu (female) should be addressed as Mrs/Miss Li

Muslim names

A Muslim may have two, three or four names in addition to their personal names and it is quite usual for members of the same family to have completely different names.

Historically, wives and children, especially those of Indian and Pakistani origin, do not adopt the father or husband's name.

Do not use a religious name, such as Mohammed, on its own unless asked to do so.

Begum can be used to confer married or widow status for a woman.

Do not use the personal name of a person of the opposite sex unless invited to do so.

Muslim names work more like western ones, so you can address someone as Mr, Mrs, or Miss, followed by the family name.

Eg Hussein Mohammed Mirza (male) should be addressed as Mr Mirza
Asmat Begum Mohamed (female) should be addressed as Mrs Mohammed

Hindu names

Wives and children take the husband's or father's name and the surname is shared by all members of the family.

Male and female names have three parts: personal name (only for family and close friends), middle name (cannot be used separately) and surname (traditionally indicating occupation and status).

Polite address is with first and middle names - omitting the surname.

Kumar (male), meaning Prince and Kumari (female), meaning Princess, may be added to the personal name.

Eg Sunil Kumar Gupta (male) should be addressed as Sunil Kumar
Harbens Lal Sharma (male) should be addressed as Harbens Lal
Gita Devi Gujral (female) should be addressed as Gita Devi

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, if you are unsure ASK 'What shall I call you?'

8 Gypsies and Travellers

Most people know very little about Gypsies and Travellers. Unfortunately, most people's perceptions are derived from the behaviour they sometimes observe on unauthorised encampments (eg littering, dumping, damage, anti-social behaviour etc) or from the condition that the land may be left in once an encampment has moved on. This type of behaviour, and the associated public perception, sets an inaccurate stereotype for all Gypsies and Travellers.

Most Gypsies and Travellers are law-abiding citizens, living in houses or on official sites. The anti-social and criminal aspects of the local Gypsy and Traveller community relate to a minority. There is no evidence to suggest that Gypsies and Travellers are more likely to commit crime than any other sector of society as the criminal justice agencies do not monitor ethnicity, so there are no statistics available.

If you are working with Gypsies and Travellers the following websites have more detailed information.

The Council for Racial Equality site has up-to-date news, good practice and information about Gypsies and Travellers and the issues affecting them:
http://www.cre.gov.uk/gdpract/g_and_t_facts.html

There is the Gypsy Council website (currently under construction):
<http://www.thegypsycouncil.org/>

The Traveller-Gypsy organisation has a useful contact section on organisations across the UK offering information and support: <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/>

For information on Romany Gypsies see:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/kent/romany_roots/index.shtml

9 Calendar of significant dates and holidays for other ethnic groups

Muslim

Fridays	day of worship
Ramadan	the 9 th month of the Muslim year when Muslims are required to fast for one month, from dawn to dusk
Id or Eid al Fitr	1/2 day celebration at the end of Ramadan

Id or Eid al-Adha 1/2 day celebration after the day of the Hajj (pilgrimage)

The **Islamic or Muslim calendar** is used to date events in many predominantly Muslim countries, and used by Muslims everywhere to determine the proper day on which to celebrate Islamic holy days. It is a lunar calendar having 12 lunar months in a year of about 354 days. Because this lunar year is about 11 days shorter than the solar year, Islamic holy days, although celebrated on fixed dates in their own calendar, usually shift 11 days earlier each successive solar year, such as a year of the Gregorian calendar. (The Gregorian calendar is the most widely used calendar in the world with 365 days, and a leap year every four years.)

Jewish

Sabbath	from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday
Pesach/Passover	usually March/April
Rosh Hashanah	1 st day of the Jewish New Year, and beginning of 8 days of penitence, ending with -
Yom Kippur	25 hours of fasting

Hindu

Diwali	festival of lights, October/November
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Go to www.interfaithcalendar.org for more definitions and for complete calendar pages through to 2017.

10 Translation services

See Translation scenarios for A2 Housing Group staff on intranet.

11 Further information and sources of help

Christian

Christianity is based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who lived as a Jew in the Middle East. Christians date their calendar from his birth. Church is used to describe many of the buildings in which Christians meet, as well as the community of Christians who worship together, primarily on a Sunday. The Church is found in many forms: Anglican (Church of England), Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Methodist, Baptist, United Reform, Salvation Army, Quaker (Society of Friends), as well as churches with a significant ethnic focus, independent churches including chapels, and modern church movements.

Alongside these are a number of religious groups which share some of the beliefs and terminology of the churches, but also have a number of significant differences. These include Scientology, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Mormons, Spiritualists, Unitarians, and Christadelphians.

Kosher food

Jewish dietary laws include rules about which animals and poultry can be eaten, not eating certain parts of animals, not mixing dairy and meat, keeping cooking utensils for meat and dairy separate, strict guidelines for slaughtering, and the removal of all blood from the carcass. See: http://www.unitedsynagogue.org.uk/jewish_living/keeping_kosher/keeping_k

Halal food

Halal means lawful or permitted. For meat to be Halal it has to be ritually slaughtered and fully bled. Certain foods are forbidden, such as pork and its by-products.

See <http://www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk/define.html>

Council for Racial Equality (CRE)
Slough Racial Equality Council
Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council
Hillingdon Racial Equality Council

www.cre.gov.uk
Tel: 01753 691266
Tel: 01865 791891
Tel: 020 8848 1380

www.hillingdonequalities.org.uk

Hounslow Racial Equality Council

Tel: 020 8583 2525

Most hospitals have an Ecumenical and Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Service, which usually has either appointed Chaplains or contacts with religious leaders for all faith groups.

Researched and written by Caroline Kemp for A2 Housing Group, March 2007.
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