

Ensuring a Culturally Sensitive Response: Key information on Jewish Culture and Holy Days

Key principles of Jewish culture

- **Respect for tradition:** many Jewish practices are rooted in thousands of years of history.
- **Community and family:** holidays often involve gathering with loved ones. Judaism emphasises shared responsibilities and activities within the community, with some practices performed in groups or synagogues.

Rest and Reflection

- **Shabbat observance** - the Sabbath, which starts just before Friday sunset and ends at the completion of nightfall on Saturday, is a central observance where Jews refrain from any activities that relate to work, including any use of electricity, driving, and using technology. The synagogue services are augmented to create a unique atmosphere, all giving spiritual rejuvenation with the day's rest.
- **Prayer and study** - observing religious practices often includes prayer, study of sacred texts like the Torah and Talmud, and attending religious services.

Diversity

- **Orthodox, Conservative, Reform** - Jewish communities encompass a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices, from the strict adherence of Orthodox Judaism to Conservative and Reform movements.
- **Secular Judaism** - there is also a significant and growing population of secular Jewish people who may not follow religious practices but are connected to Jewish culture through shared heritage, history, and identity.

Modesty and gender norms

- In some communities, mixed-gender physical contact may not be appropriate (e.g. handshakes, care tasks). Ask about preferences and accommodate where possible (e.g. offer same-gender staff if requested).

Kashrut (Kosher dietary laws)

- Some Jews follow kosher rules strictly (no mixing meat/dairy, no pork/shellfish, kosher-certified kitchens). Others may follow loosely or not at all. If providing food or refreshments, always ask if they keep kosher and what level. Don't

assume everyone does, let the person guide you. It's also important to clearly label all food.

Community life and structure

Community institutions

- Jewish communities often have strong internal support networks - synagogues, welfare organisations, schools, burial societies. People may prefer to be supported via or in collaboration with these trusted groups. Ask the Jewish Representative Council for appropriate contacts if you do not have them and be open to liaising.

Respect for leadership roles

- Rabbis, community coordinators, or lay leaders often play important roles. Work collaboratively and respectfully with local Jewish leaders but always prioritise the voice of the individual being supported.

Interpersonal connection

- Jewish community culture can be communal, close-knit and family-oriented. Some people may lean on their community as their primary support. Others may want more privacy - always check what they prefer.

Grief, mourning and end-of-life practices

Jewish bereavement ritual begins almost immediately after a loss.

Shiva (mourning period)

- Traditional Jewish mourning lasts seven days. The bereaved may stay home, receive visitors, and refrain from usual activities. Respect if someone wants time off or minimal contact during this time. Avoid unnecessary intrusion.

Chevre Kadisha (burial society)

- Burial is ideally within 24 hours of death. Traditional practices include ritual washing and guarding the body (taharah and shmira).

Kaddish prayer

- Mourners may need to say a daily prayer for 11 months. Some will seek community spaces to do this.

Cultural humility in action

- **Ask, don't assume:** Jewish observance varies widely.
- **Respect diverse expressions of Jewish identity.**
- **Listen more than you speak.**
- **Be flexible:** Respect requests for time off or rescheduling.
- **Use inclusive language:** respectful greetings etc as appropriate.
- **Avoid pressure:** Don't expect participation in activities that conflict with observance.
- **Work in partnership** with trusted Jewish organisations.
- **Honour rituals and practices**, even if you don't fully understand them.
- **Be open to correction and thank people** for educating you.

Further information

[Jewish Manchester – Jewish Representative Council for Manchester & Region](#)

Holy Days – October 2025

Jewish calendar - Check dates of major festivals when planning services or outreach. Avoid requiring attendance during these times.

1. Yom Kippur – *Wed 1 Oct (evening) to Thu 2 Oct*

- **Meaning:** Day of Atonement – the holiest day in Judaism.
- **Practices:** Fasting, prayer, reflection, synagogue attendance.

To note - Avoid scheduling meetings or expecting responses; many will be offline.

2. Sukkot – *Mon 6 Oct (evening) to Mon 13 Oct*

- **Meaning:** Feast of Tabernacles – commemorates the Israelites' journey in the desert.
- **Practices:** Building and eating in a “sukkah” (temporary hut), celebrating harvest.

To note - some people may be unavailable or celebrating outdoors with family.

3. Shemini Atzeret – *Mon 13 Oct (evening) to Tue 14 Oct*

- **Meaning:** “Eighth Day of Assembly” – a solemn day of prayer.
- **Practices:** Special prayers, often for rain and renewal.

To note: this time may be observed quietly; check availability before scheduling any contact.

4. Simchat Torah – *Tue 14 Oct (evening) to Wed 15 Oct*

- **Meaning:** Celebration of completing the annual Torah reading cycle.
- **Practices:** Dancing with Torah scrolls, joyful synagogue services.

To note: some people may take time off.

Weekly Observance: Shabbat

- **When:** Every Friday evening to Saturday evening.
- **Practices:** Rest, family meals, prayer, no work or tech for some.

To note: Avoid non-urgent scheduling during this time. Respect if someone is unavailable due to observance. Always ask if unsure.