

Supporting Jewish employees

A guide to supporting Jewish employees in the workplace

The Jewish Public Servants' Network (JPSN) aims to help educate all members of the public service, including managers and executives, on the fundamentals of Judaism with the goal of helping Jewish employees feel welcome and included.

This guide is meant as a compliment to collective agreements and anti-racism and anti-discrimination initiatives prepared by the various Government of Canada workplaces and organizations.

Judaism: The Basics

- ◊ Judaism is both a religion and a culture/ethnicity comprising many races and nationalities.
- ◊ Jewish identity is not necessarily tied to religious observance.
- ◊ Jews trace their origins to Ancient Israel, but have become dispersed around the world.
- ◊ Jews can be subdivided into religious denominations including: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and unaffiliated.
- ◊ Individual Jews have many different approaches to their religion and culture, and may request different accommodations.

Inclusivity in the Workplace

- ◊ Canadian Jews make up one percent of the Canadian population yet are frequently the most targeted religious group for hate crimes.¹
- ◊ There are different, often subtle, manifestations of antisemitism in the workplace which can harm team morale and damage relationships (i.e., joking about Jewish people and money, Jews in the media, etc.).
- ◊ Given the increasing antisemitism in Canada, Jews left out of departmental anti-racism initiatives, can feel ostracized. Workplace anti-racism and inclusion initiatives should explicitly address antisemitism and issues facing Jewish employees.
- ◊ Jewish employees can also be affected emotionally by national or international events where Jews are harassed or attacked.
- ◊ Jewish employees appreciate and look forward to having safe spaces to connect with colleagues.

- ◊ Jewish employees may not feel comfortable discussing their personal political position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and should not feel pressured to speak on behalf of the State of Israel (or be put on the spot to do so).

Respectful Interactions

- ◊ Some Jewish people of a particular level of religious observance may abide by certain rules pertaining to modesty with respect to interactions with a different sex, as well as clothing in public settings.

Dietary Differences

- ◊ Jewish employees may have special dietary requirements (i.e., that they keep Kosher), perhaps making specific accommodations necessary.

Religious Accommodations, Jewish Holidays and the Sabbath

- ◊ Friday afternoons/evenings is when Jewish employees may need to prepare for the Sabbath.
- ◊ Many collective agreements provide for accommodation for religious observances.
- ◊ During a recruitment process, it should be explicitly conveyed that candidates are entitled to religious accommodations
- ◊ During the workday, some Jewish employees may need to fulfill prayer obligations and may require a designated physical space to do so.
- ◊ Absences due to religious holidays and the Sabbath may occur, requiring scheduling flexibility on the part of employee and manager. Alternative working arrangement should be spoken about by the employee and manager in case special arrangements/accommodations are needed.
- ◊ A Jewish employee may prefer an alternative greeting during the winter holidays; Jewish employees oftentimes appreciate the traditional greeting of "Merry Christmas" in conjunction with "Happy Chanukah", or simply "Happy Holidays".

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220317/dq220317a-eng.htm>