



Visit My Mosque Media Pack

Date of Visit My Mosque event: [date and details on website]

This short guide provides advice on engaging with the media for your mosque open day.

Contacting local media

Local journalists are always looking for new stories to write or broadcast about. Ideally, Mosques should look to establish a long-term relationship with local journalists and occasionally send them a 'good news' story about local Muslims or the Mosque. For VMM, a press release will be an essential way of reaching out to them; remember to include a poster with event details.

Use the templates available online here:

- Sample press release
- Sample poster

Preparing for Media

TECHNIQUE for answering questions:

- Be respectful, stay calm and remember who you're talking to i.e. BBC will be looking for different things versus a local broadcaster, or versus a Muslim-focussed TV channel.
- Always relate your answers back to the open day itself and its overall aim of IMPROVING LOCAL COMMUNITY COHESION. Keep it positive.
- Smile and don't forget to thank them (before and afterwards) for the opportunity and taking interest.

The following list of questions contains common queries from the media on open mosque days. It has been compiled based on experience from previous open days. It contains generic guidelines only, so please consider your specific local mosque context when answering questions.

1. What is Visit My Mosque Day?

#VisitMyMosque day is a national initiative facilitated by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), where mosques across the UK organise open days, inviting in their neighbours and people from the wider community for tea, biscuits, cakes and an insight into the day-to-day goings on of a busy Muslim centre of worship called a Mosque.

2. Why are you taking part in a Visit My Mosque Day?

Firstly, open days are nothing new - Mosques across Britain have actually been holding open days for years, if not decades, welcoming in their neighbours and building strong relationships with their local communities. Many even do it 3 or 4 times a year if not more. [Insert any info on your previous open days].

What is new, is that over 200 mosques across the UK are coordinating their open days on one day of the year ' –Visit My Mosque 'day – to amplify the effect and show that Muslim communities in the UK are full of people who are open, tolerant and just normal citizens like you and me.

3. What benefits do you hope your initiative will achieve?

- To allow the British public to see what actually goes on in a mosque and to understand its role in Muslim life.
- To encourage deeper cultural and religious understanding between people of different faiths and none, and tackle the misunderstanding of Islam due to negative media coverage.
- Overall, to promote community cohesion.

4. Why is your mosque only open on 'one 'day of the year?

Actually our mosque has an open door policy and anyone can walk in at any time of their year, there is no restriction! We regularly organise events where people of other faiths and none are welcome to attend. Visit My Mosque day is just an initiative over 200 mosques in the UK have timed their open days on the same day to maximise national impact.

5. Why don't Muslims visits Churches, Temples, Synagogues/other places of worship?

Muslim communities are already very active in interfaith work, regularly making visits to their local churches, forming relationships with their congregations and maintaining those relationships throughout the year through regular events. Islam – like other great faiths of the world - places great emphasis on improving cultural and religious understanding between people of different backgrounds and traditions. [Insert info about your mosque's recent interfaith activities]

6. Why do women visitors need to be covered (legs/heads) / Why is there a dress code?

- In similarity to many churches in historic areas of Italy, France or other European countries, many places of worship wish to maintain the sacredness of the building by asking their guests to dress modestly upon entry.
- This includes for example, asking men to wear trousers that cover their knees, and women to wear long skirts and/or a shawl to cover their shoulders and legs.
- Many synagogues also often ask guests to wear a kippah or skull cap when visiting too.

7. Why do mosques have segregated areas for women?

- In most mosques, men and women may pray in the same large room with a curtain in between or in two adjacent rooms. This is because of the physical nature of the prayers, where worshippers are required to line up with shoulders touching and to bow down and prostrate themselves, so women line up in separate rows for greater concentration and spiritual benefit.
- Some mosques also have a gallery level reserved solely for women too.

Additional questions that you may be asked?

1. Why are there mosques that don't allow women?
2. Are Muslim women oppressed?
3. Are there any women on your mosque management committee?
4. If Islam preaches equality, why are women not allowed to lead prayers?
5. Why do Muslim women cover up?
6. Why is having a beard important for men?
7. Are mosques breeding grounds for extremism?
8. Does your mosque preach hate?
9. Does your mosque have a safeguarding policy to ensure children are protected?
10. Why are young Muslims in Western countries being driven to bombs/commit acts of terrorism in cities like Paris or London?
11. Why are Muslims in the world involved in wars and killing each other?
12. Why do you fast?
13. What local projects does your mosques get involved in?
14. Why are there no pictures of people in your mosque?
15. Why are your prayers all in Arabic?
16. What is the purpose of Call to prayer (Adhan) if you do not have speakers outside the mosque?
17. Are you Sunni or Shia, what's the difference?
18. Can anyone lead prayers?

Please note this is not an exhaustive list and the above answers are only suggestions based on feedback from previous years.

If you are unable to provide an answer, you can refer the interviewer to the MCB at media@mcb.org.uk or 0845 26 26 786 who will be able to help.

Technique for answering questions:

- Be respectful and always stay calm
- Always assume the microphone is live
- Plan your message, prepare how to deliver it, then practice doing it!
- Before you start, ask the person interviewing you the three key questions:

o Who is this for? i.e. BBC will be looking for different things versus a local broadcaster or versus a Muslim-focussed TV channel.

o Is it live or recorded?

o What's your first question? (Will help you understand what they're looking for)

- Always relate your answers back to the mosque open day itself and its overall aim of IMPROVING LOCAL COMMUNITY COHESION.
- Keep it positive.
- Don't lecture the interviewer. Be conversational, as if you were in a café.
- Be passionate, be humane, be yourself!
- Smile and don't forget to thank them (before and afterwards) for the opportunity and taking interest

For further queries, contact the #VisitMyMosque team on mosques.queries@mcb.org.uk