

Cultural Do's and Don'ts: Pakistani Elderly

- Treating Pakistani elders with respect is vital. “Talking time”, regardless of the service outcome, is crucial when working with an elder. In order to establish rapport and promote comfort with the situation, spend “talking time,” practice patience, and refrain from rushing Pakistani elders. It is appropriate to ask direct questions as long as they are not too intrusive (e.g., money issues) and are asked with sensitivity. Take the time to build trust before discussing private or personal matters, and be aware that it may take a few visits before the elder feels comfortable enough to “open up” to you.
- Inquire respectfully whether you should remove your shoes at the doorway when visiting a Pakistani home.
- Greetings are helpful in establishing rapport. When meeting a Pakistani family, greet the eldest male first, unless the eldest is female. Pakistani elders appreciate greetings such as “Aap kasey heay” (How are you?), or “As-salaam alaikum” (Peace be upon you).
- A respectful way of addressing a Pakistani elder is by their last name (e.g. Mr. or Mrs. Khan). Never address an elder by their first name.
- Shaking hands is an appropriate gesture of respect when initially meeting a Pakistani male elder. However, any physical contact with a Pakistani female is considered inappropriate. Slightly bowing your head is the most appropriate gesture when meeting a Pakistani woman.
- Direct eye contact is generally important in Pakistani culture. Avoiding eye contact can be interpreted as disrespectful because it suggests you are not “paying attention”. In the rare case where an elder Pakistani woman may turn her gaze away, avoid direct contact,
- Use a clear, soft, low tone when communicating with an elder.
- Appropriate dress is especially important when meeting with an elder. In Pakistani culture, women are expected to dress modestly and conservatively. The manner in which you are dressed will strongly influence your credibility.
- Keep your hands at your sides or behind the back when speaking with a Pakistani elder. Pointing one’s fingers at an elder is considered extremely impolite.
- Pakistani elders (especially males) may speak English, but using a translator is preferable so that they can communicate in their first language. It would be particularly helpful if a same-sex translator were available, especially for a medical appointment. Also, it would encourage the elder to better express his/her needs if the translator spends a few minutes prior to the appointment encouraging and approving openness with medical personnel.

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- It is extremely difficult for Pakistani elderly women to receive treatment or services from a male provider for religious and cultural reasons. If possible, attempt to find a female provider or worker to provide necessary services.
- Since most elders do not feel comfortable receiving help, it is more effective for service providers to assess an elder's need rather than directly “ask” the elder about their needs. They may at times deny the existence of problems or concerns if directly asked. Elders often answer “yes” to questions to be polite and to not disagree. Ask questions in several different ways and clarify their answers using different phrases. Try to avoid “yes” or “no” questions and use open-ended questions instead.
- Avoid giving “bad news” directly to the Pakistani elder. It is more appropriate to inform adult children first and to have them explain the “news” or situation to the elder.
- Always provide follow-up services when working with Pakistani elders. They will not call with questions or concerns. Many will “fall through the cracks” unless follow-up services are provided.

Traditional Holidays

March 23	Pakistan Day Pakistan Resolution passed in 1923
August 14	Pakistan Independence Day
Date varies by the lunar calendar	Eid-e-Milad-Un-Nabi Holiday commemorating the birth of Prophet Mohammed
December 25	Mohammed Ali Jinnah's Birthday (Father of the Pakistan nation)
Date varies	Ramadan Muslims fast for thirty days, from sunrise to sunset without water or food.
Date varies	Eid-ul-Fitr The end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.
Date varies	Eid-ul-Azha The second Eid, commemorating the symbolic sacrifice of the son of Abraham.
Date varies	Ashoora Holiday celebrated by the Shia Muslim community, commemorating the death of the 10 th Muharram, grandson of the Muhammed.