



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# JEWISH HIGH HOLY DAYS IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

# WHAT ARE THE HIGH HOLY DAYS?

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are known as “High Holy Days” in the Jewish faith, and are celebrated with family and loved ones.

Rosh Hashanah, meaning “head of the year” or “first of the year,” is the Jewish New Year, and commemorates the creation of the world and marks the beginning of the Days of Awe.

This year, Rosh Hashanah begins at sunset on September 29, 2019 and ends at sunset on October 1, 2019. The exact date of Rosh Hashanah varies every year, since it is based on the Hebrew Calendar, where it begins on the first day of the seventh month. Rosh Hashanah occurs in September or October. A common greeting to mark this occasion of Rosh Hashanah is “Shanah Tovah”, which means “Good Year.”

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement and is considered the holiest day in the Jewish faith. This year, Yom Kippur begins at sunset on October 8, 2019 and ends at sunset on October 9, 2019. It marks the culmination of the 10 Days of Awe, a period of introspection and repentance. The holiday is observed by fasting from sunset to sunset and a religious service at the synagogue.

These are very general guidelines, and practices of the faith differ by community and affiliated congregation. Every effort should be made to accommodate these requests for religious observances.

# HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

- 1 Get Educated.** Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Jewish colleagues are aware of the High Holy days and how they can be supportive.
- 2 Intentional Planning.** Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events on the High Holy Days.
- 3 Be flexible.** Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, they may want to swap shifts to observe the High Holy Days, look for solutions that suit all parties.
- 4 Be thoughtful.** On Yom Kippur, Jewish colleagues refrain from food or water for a 25-hour period. If colleagues work on this day, and are fasting, please be considerate about this.
- 5 Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Jewish colleagues may take the time off or fast, but they may still observe in various ways.

*\* Use the High Holy Days as a platform for greater understanding and creating an environment where all staff feel they are supported and belong.*