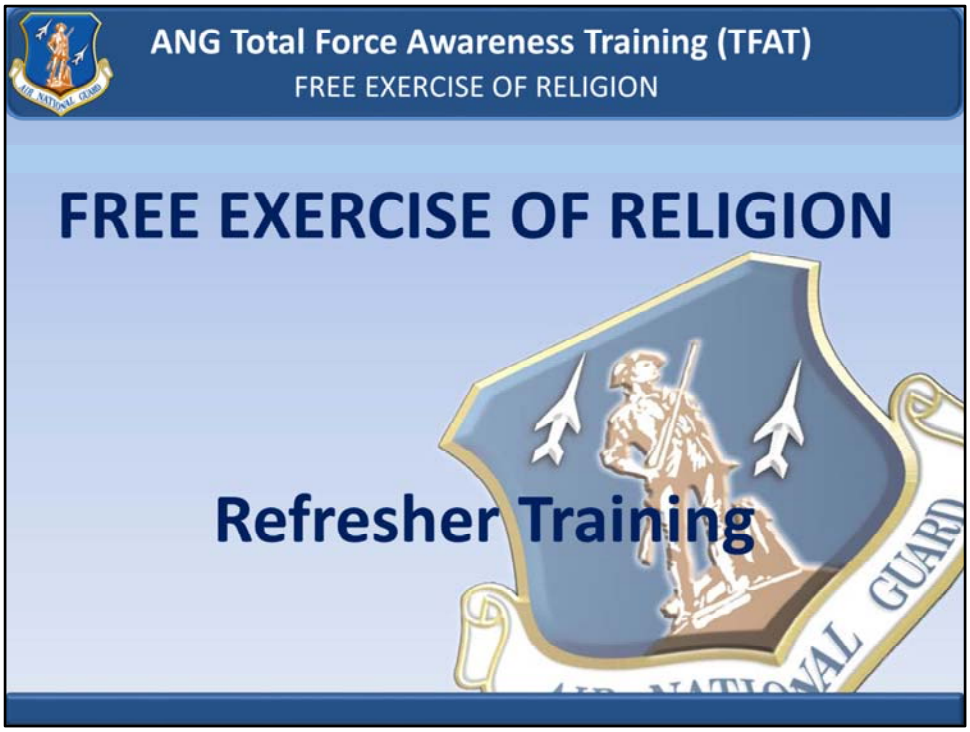
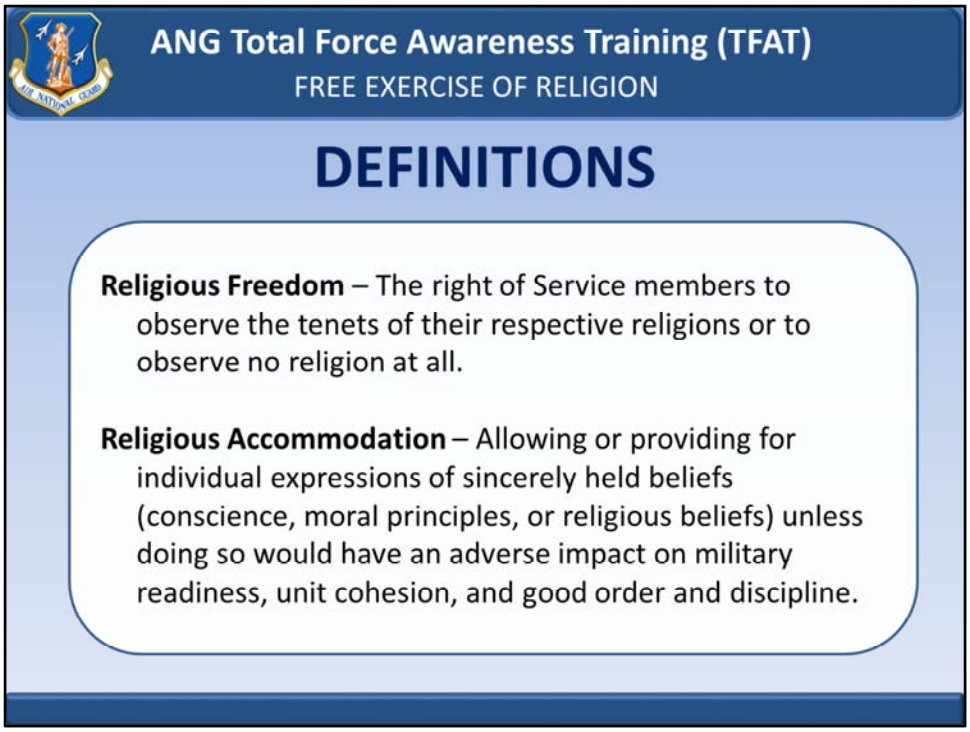


Facilitator:

Read: The Air Force practices the free exercise of religion by placing a high value on the rights of members. Religion is defines as "a personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, moral or ethical beliefs and practices held with the strength of traditional religious views…" This includes groups that affirm and groups that do not affirm the existence of a supreme being.

Facilitator:

Read: Today we will review and discuss:
•Two important terms, Religious Freedom and Religious Accommodation
•The Constitutional Foundation and federal law supporting Service members' freedom of religion
•Various Department of Defense, Air Force, and Air National Guard Instructions
•The role of the Chaplain Corps in religious freedom for members and supporting supervisors and commanders with accommodation
•Religious Accommodation

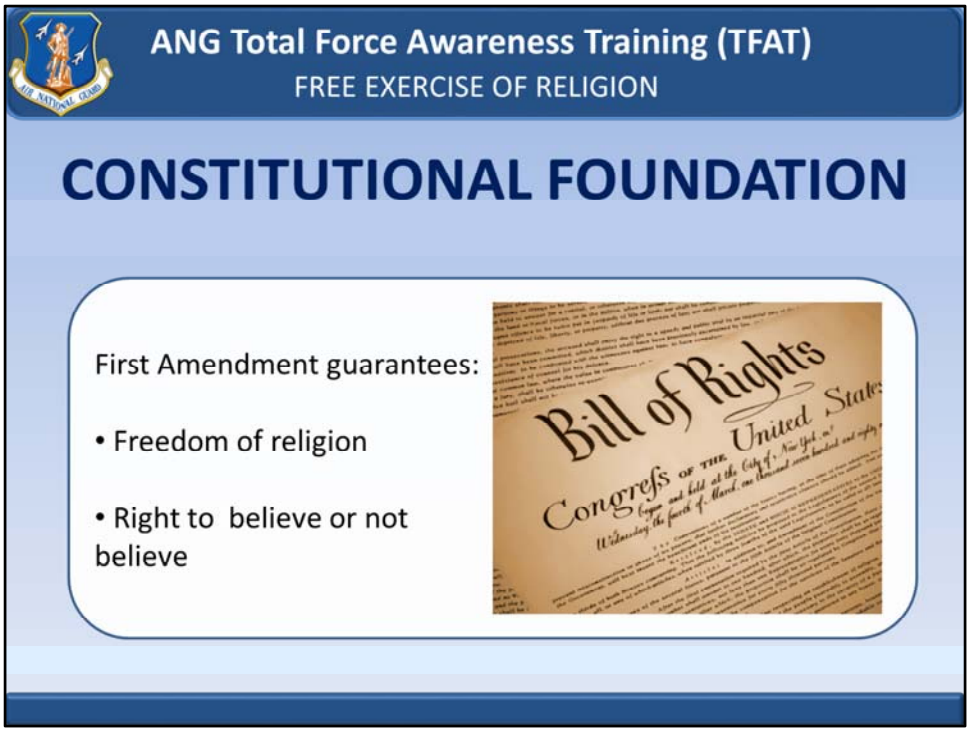


Facilitator:

Read: Throughout this training we will refer to these terms: Religious Freedom and Religious Accommodation.

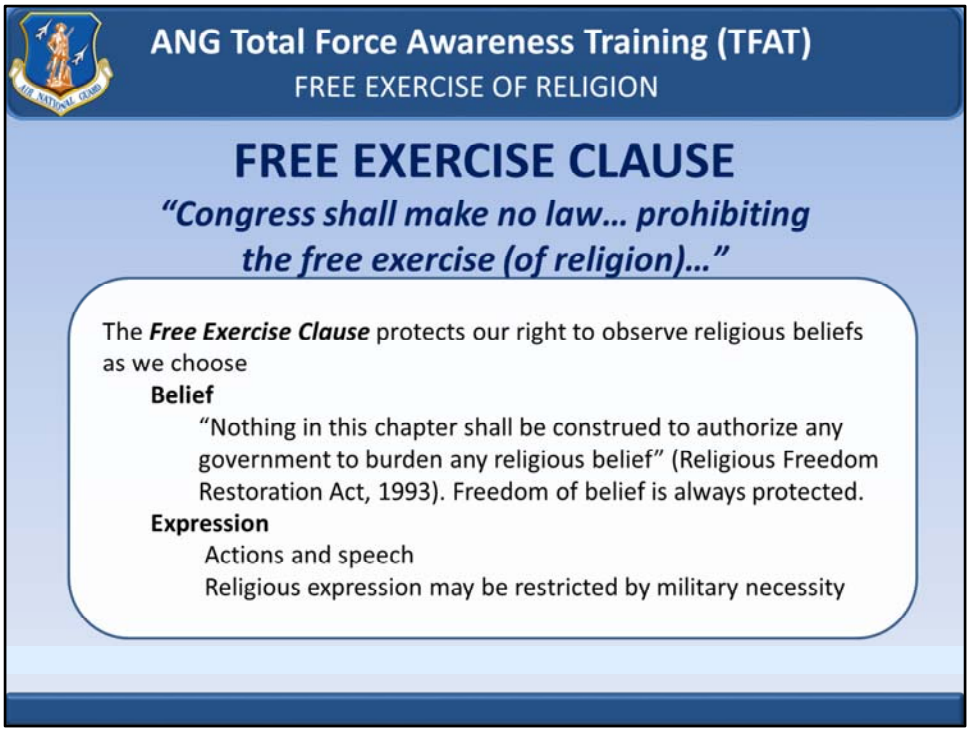
First, religious freedom is the right of Service members to observe the tenets of their respective religions or to observe no religion at all.

Second, religious accommodation allows for individual expressions of sincerely held beliefs (conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs) unless it would have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, or good order and discipline.



Facilitator:

Read: The First Amendment to the Bill of Rights, guarantees freedom of religion. The First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." The establishment clause prohibits the government from establishing a state religion, promoting one religion or faith group over another, or endorsing a religious based way of life. The free exercise clause protects our right to hold and exercise our religious beliefs as well as our right to hold no religious beliefs.



Facilitator:

Read: The Free Exercise Clause protects the right to observe religious beliefs as we choose and implies the right to hold no religious beliefs. However, in the military, religious expression may be restricted due to military necessity. It may be helpful to look at religion as inward belief and outward expression.

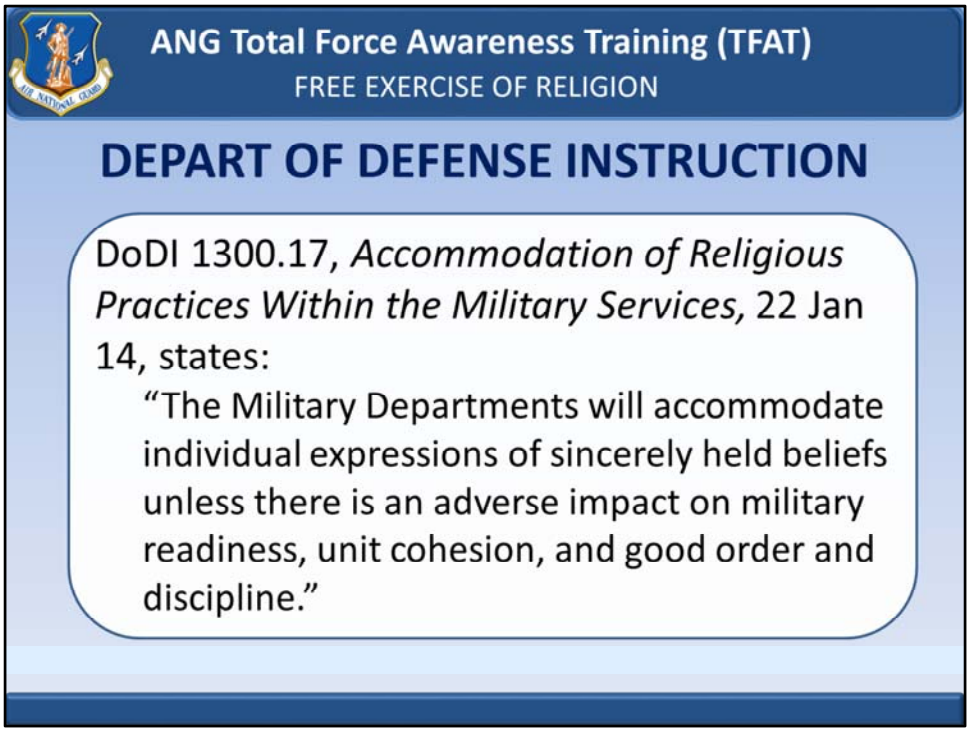
First, let's look at belief. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 states: "Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to authorize any government to burden any religious belief" (42 U.S.C. § 2000bb-3(c) (1993)).

Second, religious expression can be identified as action and speech based on sincerely held religious beliefs. Religious expression is acceptable unless those expressions would have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, good order, discipline, health and safety, or mission accomplishment.

In some circumstances, the government can restrict the expression of religion but to do so, it has to show: A) a compelling interest; B) That it used the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

Reference for the restriction of expression: The Religious Freedom Restoration Act

(1993) (42 U.S.C. §2000bb-1)

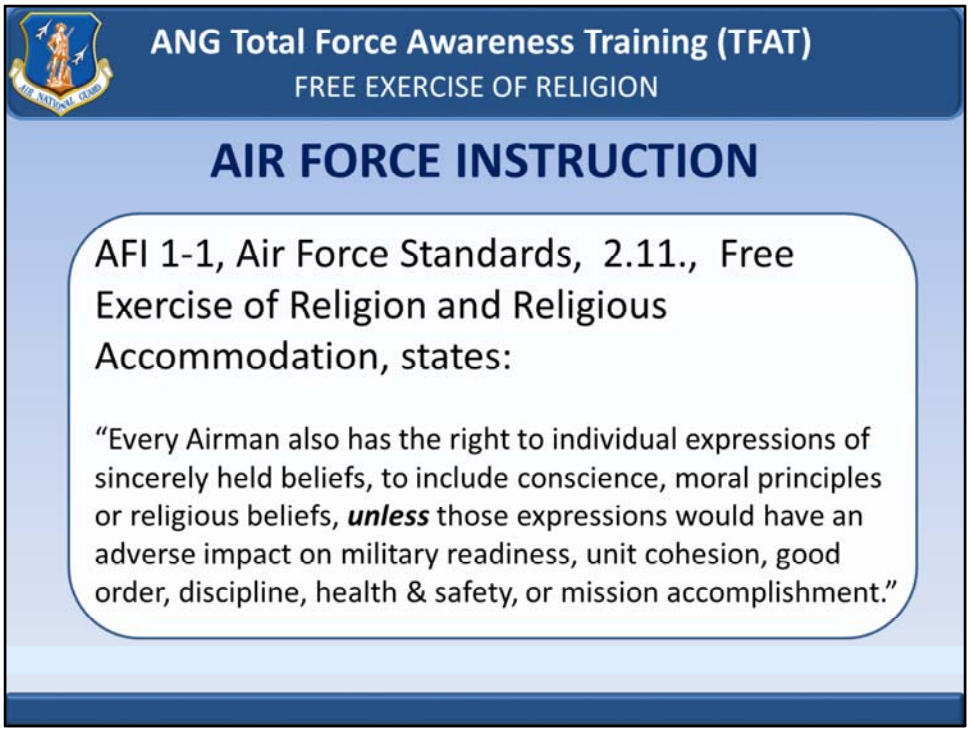


Facilitator:

Read: In 2014, DoDI 1300.17 was updated in accordance with Federal Law, Section 532 and states, "Unless it could have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, and good order and discipline, the Military Departments will accommodate individual expressions of sincerely held beliefs (conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs) of Service members in accordance with the policies and procedures in this instruction."

DoD has a compelling government interest in mission accomplishment. Issues such as military readiness, unit cohesion, good order, discipline, health, and safety of personnel are of compelling interest to the military. For example, an essential part of unit cohesion is establishing and maintaining uniform military grooming and appearance standards.

In accordance with DoDI 1000.29 (Reference (c)), DoD places a high value on the rights of members of the Military Services to observe the tenets of their respective religions or to observe no religion at all. It protects the civil liberties of its personnel and the public to the greatest extent possible, consistent with its military requirements.



Facilitator:

Read: AFI 1-1 (7 August 2012) addresses the Free Exercise of Religion and Religious Accommodation.

It states, "Every Airman is free to practice the religion of their choice or subscribe to no religious belief at all. You should confidently practice your own beliefs while respecting others whose viewpoints differ from your own. Every Airman also has the right to individual expressions of sincerely held beliefs, to include conscience, moral principles or religious beliefs, unless those expressions would have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, good order, discipline, health and safety, or mission accomplishment" (2.11).

The Air Force balances the free exercise of religion with the requirements necessary for mission accomplishment. The goal is to be "Airmen Centered" and to provide a religious accommodation whenever possible. And for all Airmen to respect the differences of others.

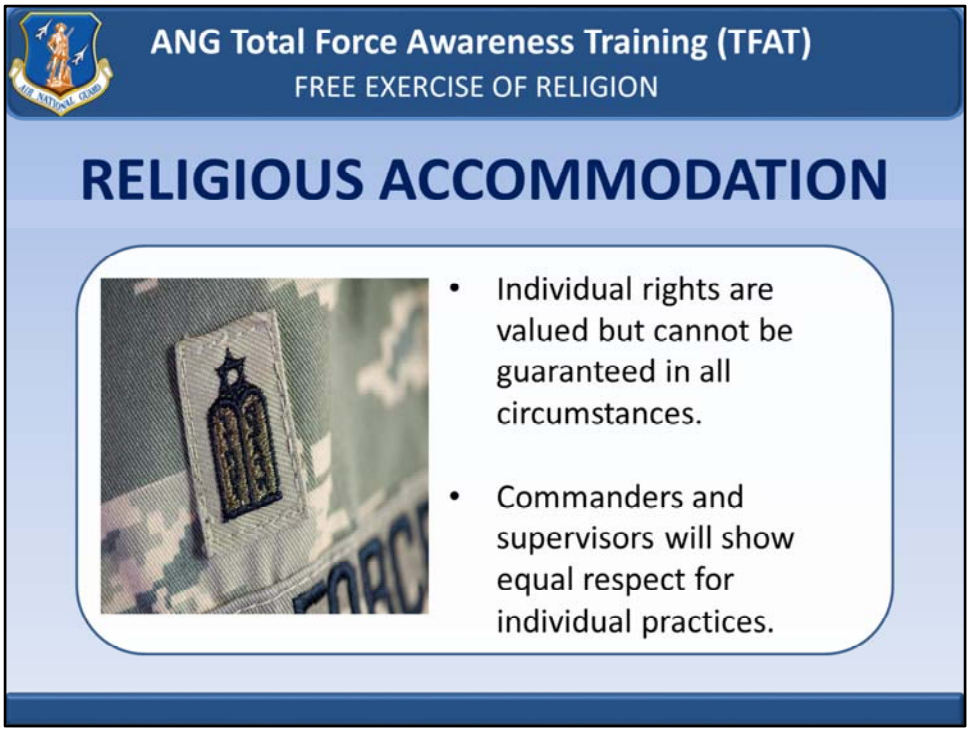
Facilitator:

Read: Chaplain Corps programs are the responsibility of commanders. Chaplains function as staff officers and impartially advise commanders in regard to free exercise of religion. The Chaplain Service also addresses accommodation issues at the group or squadron level. They assist in ensuring the right of individuals to practice their faith in accordance with their conscience, suggesting alternate ways of meeting their religious need when military necessity restricts.

Chaplains directly provide ministry to those of their own faith. They also ensure that ministry is provided to those of other faiths. And they provide care for all service members, regardless of their backgrounds. In these various roles, they respect the rights of others and the individual beliefs of others, including the right to hold no beliefs.

A communication made to a chaplain by an individual in trust and as a formal act of religion or as a matter of conscience is a privileged and protected communication. There are no circumstances in which a chaplain can disclose privileged communication revealed in the

practices of his or her ministry without the member's informed permission.

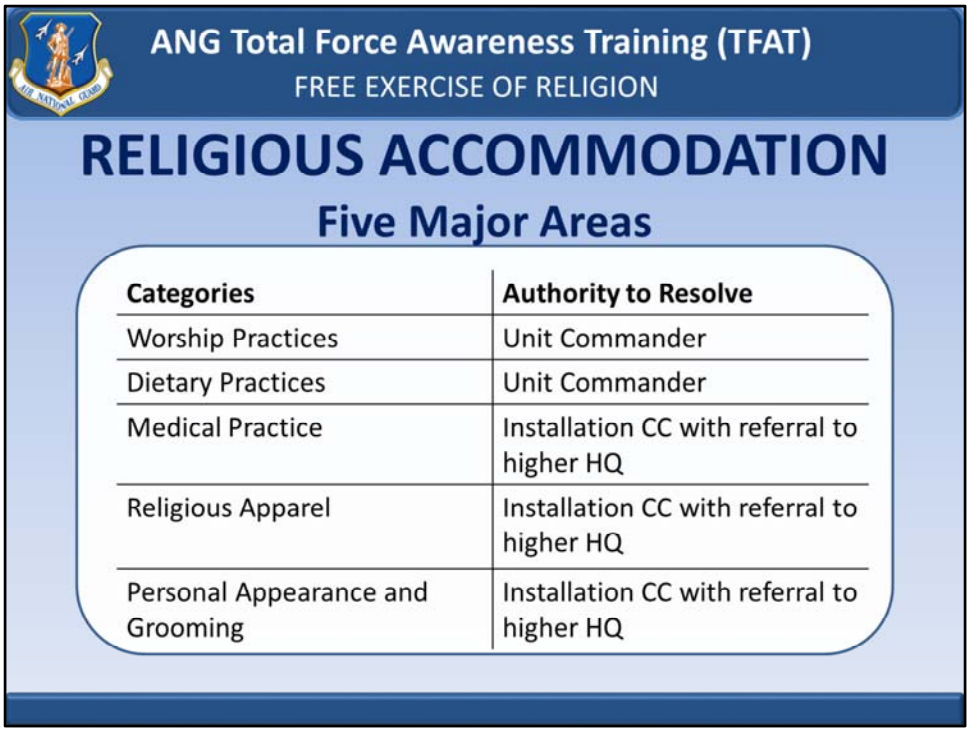


Facilitator:

Read: It is the policy of the Department of Defense that individual rights will be valued but DoD cannot guarantee that these rights will be guaranteed in all circumstances. DoD, the Air Force, and the Air National Guard expect that Service members will respect the religious beliefs and practices of all members in a manner that is consistent with DoD policy.

Commanders and supervisors are expected to respect the religious beliefs and practices of all members in a manner that is consistent and fair to all.

In keeping with Department of Defense policy, requests for religious accommodation should be approved by commanders when the accommodation will not have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, standards, or discipline.



Categories	Authority to Resolve
Worship Practices	Unit Commander
Dietary Practices	Unit Commander
Medical Practice	Installation CC with referral to higher HQ
Religious Apparel	Installation CC with referral to higher HQ
Personal Appearance and Grooming	Installation CC with referral to higher HQ

Facilitator:

Read: Requests for religious accommodation usually fall into five major areas:

1. Worship Practices
2. Dietary Practices
3. Medical Practices
4. Religious Apparel
5. Personal Appearance and Grooming

Approved requests do not apply for the entire career and Services may require a new request upon transfer to another duty station.

NOTE TO FACILITATOR (It may not be necessary to share all of the following information yet, you should be familiar with this content):

Some religious groups may have worship requirements that conflict with an Airman's normal duty hours. Supervisors will make every effort to accommodate an Airman's request to attend religious worship services. Airmen should check for other worship opportunities during non-duty hours if possible and realize there are times when the

mission will require them to be on duty.

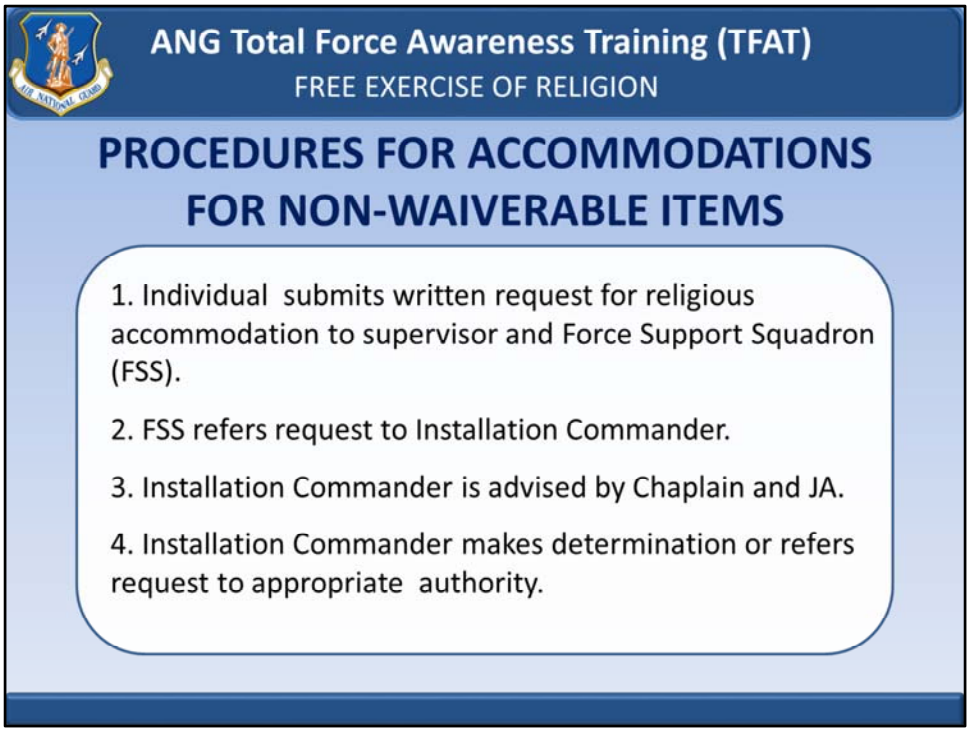
Additionally, some faith groups require special **Dietary Practices** or prohibit the eating of specific foods, or require food to be prepared in a certain way. Airmen with a conflict between food provided by the Air Force and that required by their religion may request an exception to policy. Religious requirements may be grounds for granting such an exception. In field conditions, as practicable, special Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) that meet certain religious requirements should be made available. The Airman may also request permission to take personal supplemental rations when in a field or combat environment.

Further, some religious practices conflict with normal Air Force **Medical Practices**. Immunization requirements for Airmen are described in AFI 48-110. Airmen whose religious practices conflict with the requirements of AFI 48-110 may request temporary waivers of immunization requirements through command channels. AFI 48-110 grants MAJCOM, DRU or FOA commanders' general authority to waive immunization requirements in cases of religious objections to immunizations under certain circumstances.

With regards to **Religious Apparel**, Airmen may request a waiver to permit wear of neat and conservative (defined as, discreet, tidy, and not dissonant or showy in style, size, design, brightness, or color) religious apparel. Items may not temporarily or permanently be affixed or appended to any authorized article of the uniform.

Finally, **Personal Appearance and Grooming Standards** are key to Air Force uniformity. Some religious beliefs require members to maintain particular grooming standards, religious tattoos/body art, and/or personal appearance modifications that conflict with Air Force dress and personal appearance standards. **AF/A1** is the authority to receive requests that impact grooming standards and/or personal appearance (e.g., hair length and style, tattoos, "body art").

Talk with your chaplain or JA if you have a question concerning a request for religious accommodation.



Facilitator: These are the basic procedures for requesting a religious accommodation:

Read:

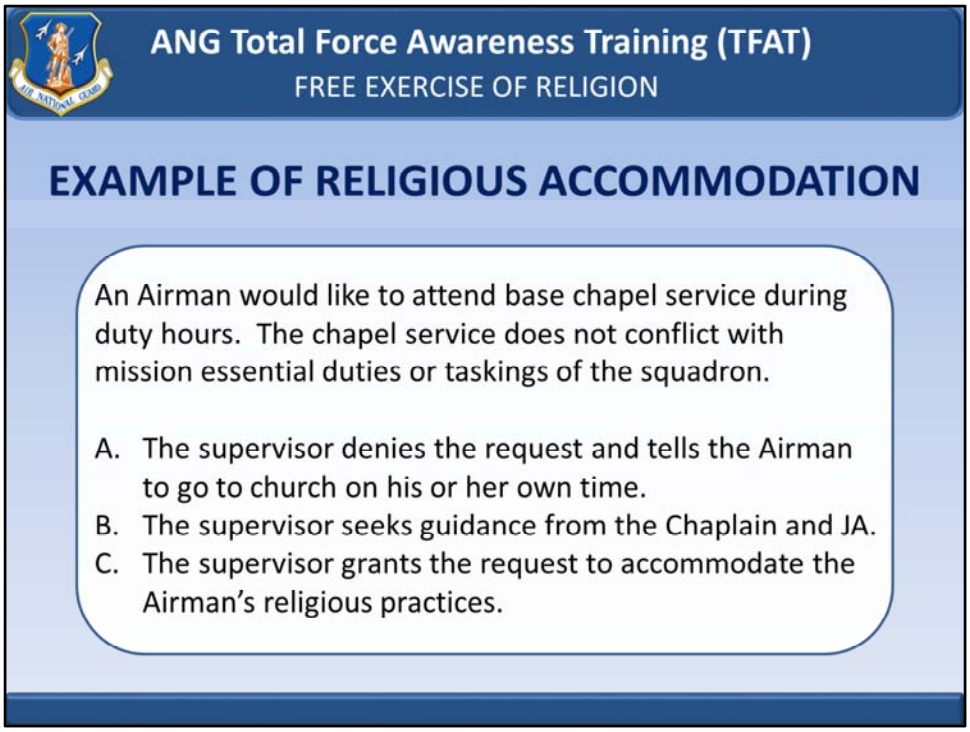
1. Individual submits a written request for religious accommodation to supervisor and Force Support Squadron (FSS).

2. FSS refers request to Installation Commander.

3. Installation Commander is advised by Chaplain and JA, and others as required or

appropriate.

4. Installation Commander makes determination or refers request to appropriate authority.



Facilitator:

Read:

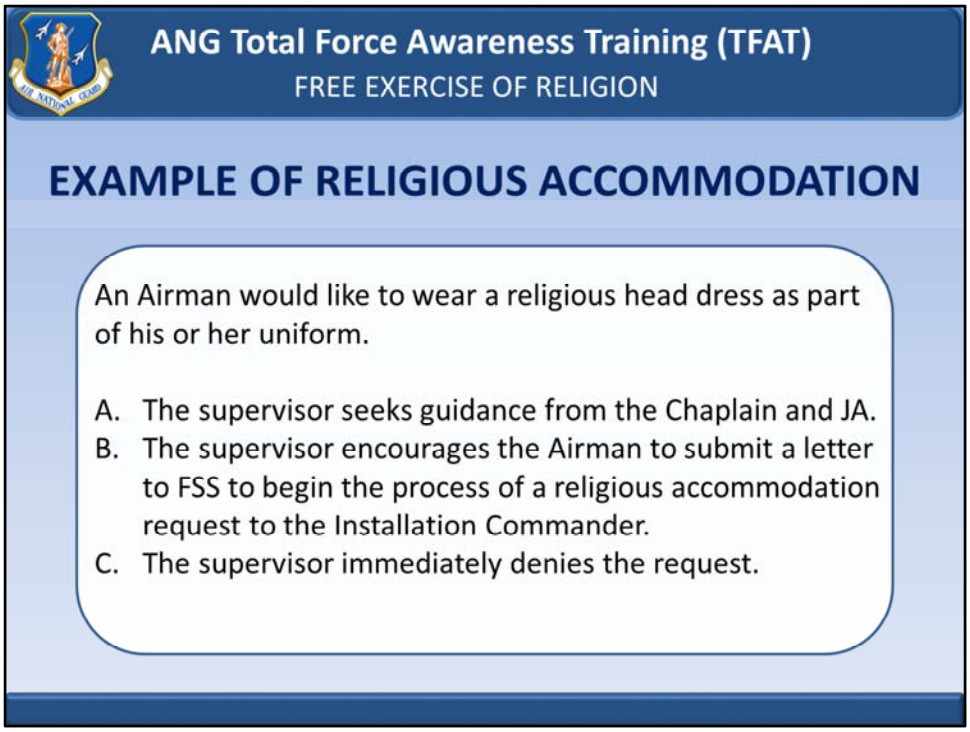
A. **The Airman's supervisor denies the request and tells the person to go to church on her own time.** This answer could violate the Airman's Religious Freedom Rights. If there is not a compelling governmental interest or an essential mission requirement that prevents the Airman from attending worship services, the supervisor could

be violating the Airman's religious freedoms.

B. **The supervisor seeks guidance from the chaplain and JA.** Always a great answer in situations like this.

C. **The supervisor grants the request to accommodate the Airman's religious practices.** This would be an appropriate response to the Airman's request.

B and C are appropriate answers to this scenario.



Facilitator:

Read:

A. **The supervisor seeks guidance from the Chaplain and JA**. Always a good choice in these circumstances.

B. **The supervisor encourages the Airman to submit a letter to FSS to begin the process of a religious accommodation request to the Installation Commander.** This would

be an appropriate guidance to give the Airman.

C. **The supervisor immediately denies the request.** The supervisor may have violated the Airman's Freedom of Religion rights.

A and B are the best responses to this scenario.

Facilitator:

Read: Respect for all Airmen and commitment to a climate in which individuals of diverse beliefs form an effective team is essential to achieving excellence.