

A Guide to Parenting in Islam

Addressing Adolescence

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Creating a Muslim Youth Culture

The world is now very small and interdependent. Societies in the East and the West are gradually becoming more pluralistic. Muslims, in the past, co-existed with other communities amicably and in many Western countries they are now living peacefully with others in local communities. Young Muslims need exposure to the wider society. That is the spirit of Islam. They need friends from all sections of the community, but they should be guided in finding close friends whose values of life are similar to their own or at least not antagonistic.

Taking children to mosques and Islamic centres from a young age, when children are able to maintain *adab* of the mosque, opens the door to a wider world with people of different races and languages. Mosques have always been the hub of social and educational activities in Islamic history. Unfortunately, many mosques today are quiet and are even locked outside prayer times. Regeneration of the *ummah* will remain a dream if mosques are used for ritual prayers alone. The mosque of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in Madinah was the hub of society and so our mosques must be today.

In addition to congregational prayers and Qur'an classes, mosques should organise a host of activities, for example, sports, discussion groups and supplementary classes for both men and women. Mosques and community organisations must move away from their traditional reluctance to involve young Muslims and include them in community affairs. Imams, preferably 'home-grown', should be competent in communication skills and should have basic knowledge and understanding of their community and wider society in order to be able to relate to both young and old. Improving standards in mosques, running them professionally and engaging young people should be at the forefront of mosque agendas.

Mosques, weekend schools or community clubs can occasionally arrange for day trips and weekend or holiday camps, for fun and

learning so that children can grow together as Muslims. They create opportunities to make friendships with others, which is very important for their social life. Children easily make and break friends and through this they learn about themselves and the world around them. A peer group of good Muslims friends will encourage each other to do common good and they are often more powerful than academic instructions. On the other hand, parents should be careful that their children avoid the company of other children who can mislead them or encourage them to do wrong things. Young people are generally prone to the fashionable 'youth culture' of the day, in reality a 'culture' created by market forces for their own profit. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has warned:

A person is upon the deen of his friend, so see whom you take as a friend. (Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Ahmad)

If time and finances permit, family holidays should be taken in places of historical and Islamic significance, *Umrah* is obviously the best choice. Bringing the stories of the past to life through these visits will create added motivation and inspiration in children.

The best way to harness the potential of Muslim children is to involve them in regular Islamic circles from an early age, where they can be engaged in a host of activities. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ revived and initiated social welfare work through an association called *Hilf al-Fudul*, in his youth. Parents should encourage their children to join good groups related to mosques or reputable Muslim organisations. There are now many groups that cater for children in their teens, but children need to start their communal responsibilities earlier, even from junior school age. Junior groups can engage young children in challenging activities and create motivation in them to grow within a sound Islamic environment.

Muslim parents need to give their youth effective support so that these young people feel valued in their own communities, mosques and also in the wider society. This is an investment to get something back from them. For this to happen, parents must resist the temptation to over-protect their children.

Useful Tips

Creating a positive home environment is a mammoth task and it can be difficult to know where to begin. These are a few points that will help in this regard:

- Establish prayer on time. When possible, fathers should take their sons to join in congregational prayers. Otherwise, pray together at home.
- Recite the Qur'an every day. It will bring blessing to the home and peace to the reader and the listener.
- Refer to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* when needing advice about any issue. These two central sources contain all the information that human beings need in their everyday lives and should always be the reference points for Muslims.
- Follow Allah's guidance and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ ourselves in our daily activities. This includes much remembrance of Allah, supplication and the *masnoon du'a* (supplications from the *Sunnah*) for any event or incident, as taught by the Prophet ﷺ.
- Exemplify Islam in word and action. This is the essence of being a Muslim and children will learn the spirit of Islam directly from you, their role model, not just as a collection of rituals but as the highest state that a person can reach.
- Maintain a cordial relationship with all our neighbours. This will create social skills in the child and a tendency to help others in

need. This *khidmah* aspect of Islam is in the Prophetic *Sunnah* and a major ingredient of a happy and successful society.

- Arrange regular family sessions. They help bonding among family members and increase knowledge of and conviction in Islam. We should encourage our children in the affairs of the family through engagement in discussion of family issues.
- Avoid passing on the stress of our job or of our lives to the children. There is no doubt that modern life is stressful, but younger children are not in a position to appreciate that. It may lower us in their eyes when we unload our frustrations on our children.
- Keep family arguments away from the children. Parents must show the utmost tolerance and sensitivity among themselves. There may be arguments among adults in the family, but children should not be overburdened with them before they are in a position to understand them.