

A Guide to Parenting in Islam

Cherishing Childhood

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positive sense of achievement that the day has been productively spent.

Around the age of eight, children will enter into junior school and will have a greater sense of responsibility and self-discipline. It is worth inviting the input of children of this age into the family timetable and asking them how they would like to spend their quality time with their parents. Time is the most precious yet limited gift that Allah has given us. Teaching children the value of time and how to get the most out of it is one of the best skills that parents can teach to their children.

It goes without saying that parents also need to communicate with each other and discuss family issues as they arise, with or without the children present.

ISLAMIC UPBRINGING AT HOME

The manner in which children are brought up determines how they will cope in later life. In a caring, value-rich environment, where there is a sense of freedom within the broader ethos of Islam, children are less likely to be conflicted and rebellious, particularly in the challenging teenage years. On the other hand, parents who force their children and use frequent threats of punishment or 'sin' may inadvertently repel their children away altogether from religion. Of course, parents need to ensure that the basic Islamic teachings are practised in an age appropriate fashion, but the key is to lovingly advise and guide rather than impose and rebuke. For any genuine and long lasting learning to take effect, creating a positive environment is essential.

■ Islamic Rites (*Arkan*)

It is important to take things slowly because it takes time for people to embrace change. The reason why some children rebel against their parents at puberty is often because of the sudden imposition of rules without the necessary groundwork. So, for example, Islam has

commanded that children must perform *salah* from the age of ten onwards, but has advised parents to begin the preparation for this from the age of seven. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has said:

Command your children to pray at the age of seven. At the age of ten, punish them [for omitting it] and separate them in their beds. (Abu Dawud and al-Hakim)

Similarly, it is prudent to begin the practice of fasting or, for girls, wearing the headscarf, from before puberty, else the sudden imposition of Islamic practices at puberty is overwhelming and alien. Islamic practices should not, however, be taught as empty and meaningless rituals. They are a means of creating discipline within one's self and also within society; a means to express love and gratitude to The Creator and a means to make ourselves better human beings. These are the messages that should accompany the practice of rituals otherwise children are in danger of abandoning them once they become independent of their parents.

It is the role of parents to teach their children through words and actions and to enforce gentle, loving discipline (never physical) in order to ensure that children practice their religion. We can lead our children to the Right Path, but we cannot force them to practice. Even the Prophet Nuh عليه السلام could not save his own son, nor Prophet Lut عليه السلام his own wife.

■ Islamic Manners (*Adab*)

Islam is not just a religion of empty rituals to be performed at specific times. It is a way of life and a means to elevate the character of the individual to the highest level in every sphere of life from eating and drinking to relationships with others. When every individual in a community behaves with Islamic manners then that community as a whole is elevated. That community shines like a beacon in the dark for

other communities and becomes something that others are drawn to in a positive way.

The manner in which children eat, drink, play and talk are all a reflection of their family background, home environment and innate character. Nothing is too trivial in the moulding of a fine character, as Abu Hafs 'Umar ibn Abi Salamah said:

'I was a child under the care of the Prophet ﷺ. While eating, my careless hand would move around in the plate. The Prophet ﷺ said, "My son, start in the name of Allah with the right hand and take the nearest food". From then onwards I used to eat the way he taught me.' (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Adab is at the heart of Muslim social life. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the epitome of excellent human behaviour even before he was commissioned as a prophet. He was the kindest of his people; he served his people with humility and persistently taught them how to be good to others, without having any desire of return. Emulating him to the best of one's ability is the most rewarding goal in a Muslim's life.

These are just some of the areas in which parents should endeavour to perfect their own behaviour and teach their children:

- Greetings: How to greet other Muslims and non-Muslims; who should greet whom first and how to respond to another's greeting.
- Permission: How to seek permission to enter into someone's room or another person's house.
- Speech: How to speak in a low tone of voice; how to address others with respect and especially elders; the use of good and decent language in every day speech that is neither proud nor boastful; the use of Islamic terms within speech, such as *insha'Allah* and *masha'Allah*.

- Promises: Parents should not promise something, however trivial, to their children that they cannot fulfil otherwise it counts against them as a lie. Children should be taught to think carefully about what they promise to do and to fulfil a promise once they have made it no matter how small.
- Punctuality: Parents need to ensure that they are punctual in all their actions whether it is getting their children to school on time, performing *salah* or arriving at a function when invited by the host (not two hours later as is customary!). Children should be encouraged to play their part in assisting their parents to achieve this.
- Eating and drinking: It is good practice for a family to begin and end each meal with a *du'a*; to ensure that each and every mouthful of food consumed is not only halal but also pure (*tayyab*). Children should see and be taught the etiquette of eating with good manners and drinking while seated and of not eating on the streets.
- Mannerisms: To lower the gaze, to smile, not to walk harshly on the ground, not to whisper to one person while another is in the room, to share, not to laugh at another person's misfortune are all small but important facets of a Muslim's character, to name but a few.

Many of these things are simple every day habits that become second nature and can be carried out without effort or thought.

■ Cleanliness (*Taharah*)

Cleanliness and purity are the starting points for many acts of worship, such as *salah* and touching a *mushaf* (a printed Arabic Qur'an):

The key to the Garden is prayer and the key to prayer is cleanliness. (at-Tirmidhi)

It truly is a noble Qur'an, in a well-protected Book. No one may touch it except the purified.

(Qur'an 56: 77-79)

Allah is Pure and loves purity and cleanliness both physical and spiritual:

Allah loves those who repent and loves those who purify themselves. (Qur'an 2:222)

Thus we see from these Qur'anic *ayat* and hadith that cleanliness, both inner and outer, is an essential part of the faith, and this should be reflected in the daily activities of a Muslim.

In terms of physical cleanliness, the following habits may be helpful to implement on a regular basis:

- Obviously the Muslim home is a place where all the members of a family perform *wudu* multiple times a day. Children can also be taught *wudu* side by side with their parents at a young age to ingrain the correct procedure. It is also important to point out to children the value of using a small amount of water and the etiquette of not splashing it all over the bathroom.
- If children are given a full *ghusl* on Friday morning, it will help them to, not only learn the basics of how to perform *ghusl*, but also emphasise the importance of the day of *Jumu'ah*.
- The nails of young children should be kept clean and short and, for boys, the hair should also be kept short. For both girls and boys, the hair should be kept clean and brushed.
- Children should be dressed in clean and decent clothes from a young age. Obviously as they grow they will want more say in how they dress, but the basic rules of cleanliness and decency should still hold.

The home environment is a reflection of the people who live in it. Ideally the house should be tidy, organised and clean. This does not mean that it has to look like a show-home all the time. However, a home with piles of dirty dishes in the sink, overflowing laundry baskets and paperwork all over the place, is not a relaxing and harmonious place to live and worship. It goes without saying that the responsibility for maintaining the tidiness of the home does not just fall to the mother, but is a joint responsibility of all the family members.

■ Modesty (*Haya*)

Modesty (*haya*) is a vital ingredient in *Iman* and an inherent part of human nature. It was a natural reaction of the first human beings to cover their bodies. The following ahadith emphasise this point:

Iman consists of more than sixty branches and modesty (haya) is a part of faith.(al-Bukhari)

Indecency disfigures everything and modesty (haya) enhances the charm of everything. (at-Tirmidhi)

Immodesty is rampant in the sexually permissive societies that we live in from the manner in which people dress and behave in public to the lyrics of songs and TV programming. It is therefore doubly important that we encourage modesty within our homes. Some ways in which this can be implemented are:

- Children should have separate beds by the age of ten and boys and girls should have separate bedrooms.
- All members of the family should knock on the door if they wish to enter into another person's room.
- Family members should not get dressed and undressed in front of each other and there should be a basic dress code in place for everyone. Although the rules of hijab do not apply if everyone in