

Secrets to **Successful Families**

**Healing the Effects of the Past
for a Better Family Life**

Afshan Khan



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Introduction

Many common issues keep raising their ugly heads within our community and I have been compelled to write this series of books in a bid to enable us to move forward and overcome the common pitfalls that can needlessly destroy marriages and families. With Allah's permission, the first book, **Secrets to Successful Marriage**, has provided validation as well as practical solutions for many husbands and wives, as has the second book, **Secrets to Surviving In-Laws**, which deals with the much neglected issue of in-law relationships. This third book, **Secrets to Successful Families**, covers more complex marital and family issues in detail. Most of the common sources of tension and attitudes in marriage have a back story and root cause. This book addresses the common issues in marriages and digs deeper to find those root causes in order to effect lasting solutions. There are six chapters:

What is Behind Troubled Marriages? introduces the idea of emotional baggage that we bring into our married life and how this is at the root of our conflicts within it.

What Gives Rise to Emotional Baggage? delves into the idea of core beliefs and how certain core beliefs arise from specific childhood traumas.

How Does This Impact Married Life? addresses how these childhood experiences manifest as a range of issues in married life including lack of empathy, narcissism, and domestic abuse.

Self-Esteem is at the heart of the whole matter of family – the family we originated from, the family we have created through marriage and the way in which we parent our children and how they will go on to be as spouses and parents. Our behaviour stems from our self-esteem levels and this chapter details how to achieve healthy self-esteem.

Breaking the Cycle offers detailed marital and parenting advice to break the generational patterns that have embedded themselves in our psyche and are affecting our family lives.

Healing the Inner Child presents a range of practical personal growth tools from setting intentions and goals to du'a so that we can begin to heal ourselves as a basis for a stronger family.

As in the previous books, I will tackle the core issues head on, with the aid of real-life case studies, and provide solutions that have been tried, tested and successful in the light of my thirty-five years of counselling Muslim women, couples and young people. As an Islamic counsellor, it is not my job to issue *fatwas* (rulings) or to advise on the matters of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). However, through speaking with scholars and people of knowledge, and also my own study of Islam, I do include some basic Islamic

advice. All Qur'anic translations in this book are taken from Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley's translation - *The Noble Qur'an: A New Rendering of its Meaning in English*.

We know that, ultimately, everything is in Allah's hand and only comes about by His permission. So if I had to give just one piece of advice, it would be this: when you are in the middle of a highly charged, emotional situation, think of what will please Allah – your Creator, and then the people. Doing just that will accomplish much. I pray that what you read in the coming pages will be of benefit to you and that Allah accepts it from me.

What you can do:

- ▶ Practise mindfulness by actively noticing what is happening in the present moment? What are the sensations you feel?
- ▶ Exercise regularly. This can be as simple as a 20 minute walk in your locality.
- ▶ Try focusing in your breathing. A suggested exercise is to breathe in for a count of four and to breathe out for a count of six.
- ▶ Reduce caffeine intake.

Anger

Anger is a really common problem across all the demographics, in women and men. It has various shades and different ways of showing itself from acting passively: ignoring someone or 'forgetting' something important to them or simply giving them the silent treatment; to being aggressive: verbally in terms of screaming and shouting or physically in throwing things, lashing out or actually hitting family members.

Case Study: Anger Problem

Emotional Turbulence: Asim openly admitted, "I have anger problems." His wife had explained he would spit at her and swear at her. He would constantly argue over the smallest issues and throughout the marriage, he had hit her quite a few times. Then I asked him, "You have accepted the fact that you have anger problems, let me ask you, where does this anger come from?"

His Background: Asim simply said, "This is what I saw growing up! This is what my father did to my mother."

His Core Belief: Holding on to anger became a comfort blanket for Asim and his unconscious mind made it acceptable as that is all that he knew. Interestingly and very importantly he would repeat, "I hate doing this, I don't want to do this and I want to get better!" So the comfort blanket was not comforting anymore but the action was familiar and known. It was this that needed to be changed. The familiar needed to be made unfamiliar.

There is an accepted narrative that the receivers of anger must be weak or uneducated or housewives or from 'back home', whether that anger was received as a child or is received as a spouse. However, traumatic experiences in childhood or abusive relationships aren't selective or particular to one type of economic or social background. It can happen to anyone if Allah chooses and destines this for His servant.

So where does all this anger come from? As we have seen from the case study, anger may arise because that is how situations were dealt with by our elders and the pattern is repeated decades later. It may also be fired up when someone feels threatened, because they perceive that their boundaries have been encroached or they do not get, what they perceive is, a need met.

Living or loving someone with anger management problems may always feel like walking on eggshells – daily life is unpredictable and uncertain. It is hard to know what will make them tick or explode, much like a volcano that may erupt at any point in time.

A small, seemingly irrelevant incident will suddenly escalate

into something major. He comes home to find no salt in his dinner and suddenly he is swearing and spitting. She finds the bins haven't been taken out and begins shouting accusatory statements like, "You are so lazy. You never do anything around the house." From the very beginning, it was never about salt or rubbish. The smaller issue at the top of the heap has forced the entire pile of anger to avalanche down. Anger about something that happened in childhood, something the boss said, something the mother-in-law did.

Other people that suffer with this issue are continuously in that mode. They don't need to erupt suddenly. Their behaviour and attitude is based on constant anger and release of frustration. That is what marks their personality. Sometimes anger management problems can spiral out of control into hitting, kicking, punching, throwing things, swearing, breaking items. If issues escalate to a degree at which either yourself, someone else and especially children are in danger and targeted by such abusive behaviour, seeking help immediately is essential.

Some sufferers are conscious of what they are doing, and others seem like they have been taken over by a demon to the extent that they may lose presence and insight. In the case of narcissism, which we will look at in detail later on in this chapter, the perpetrator in addition to being severely angry, may blame their own anger on the spouse, children, work colleagues or the setting, thus justifying it in their own eyes.