

Raising Children in Islam

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We are all aware of the notion that an appropriate "role model" is a central character in our children's upbringing but whom they trust and accept enough to idolize is another factor. One of the dilemmas we are facing today arises from a clash of values between modern and classical ways of living. If we ever want to be able to influence our children's behavior in a positive way there should exist a mutual understanding and a common bond between the present and the previous generations.

With such a relation, no elderly person would ever feel lonely or deserted. The youth on the other hand will find an opportunity to enjoy a taste of experiences and memories lavished upon them by their elderly. But who is brave enough to take the first valuable step and bring the two generations closer to one another?

Parents for one thing, can play an important role as mediators. Children, whose parents respect the elders, have a natural tendency to follow the example of their parents and respect their elders in every way. It is said that children are not always attracted by the conduct of their elders. What is left out of this saying is that we have the power to teach our children through .our own behavior and manner

The Role Of The Parents

A good way of approaching this matter is giving the youth some air. They must be free to speak-up, express their opinions, vote and decide for themselves. This would certainly open their minds and build up their characters while supplying them with ample self-esteem. Then the boundaries must be respected. They should be reminded to display self-control whenever it is considered necessary; for example in the presence of elders.

Reverence rendered by the youth in this way, will elevate the relation to a higher, more intimate level. Continual "do's-and-don'ts" are poisonous, and would most certainly outrage our youngsters. This does not imply bringing up uncontrollable and disobedient kids who would not pay attention to what others have to say. Modesty is the only true path to choose. And the task of teaching this to the youngsters is thrust upon the parents. Good manners and reverence toward elders are considered as great treasures we can leave behind for the next generation.

.So let's leave them a valuable inheritance they would thank us for

Variability

Bringing up children according to the standards of the changing world of today seems indispensable. It is wonderful to keep up with the excelling society, but not at the price of dismissing our national ethnicity or religious background while yielding to foreign cultures without a second thought.

Imam Ali (AS) counsels: "Do not force your own customs upon your children for they are in other times than yours."

This is not to be confused with the notion of falling away from your own culture. Living up to the standards of the modern society differs from following the example of the western way of life, and importing their customs and styles blindfolded.

We have already talked about the bond that should exist between previous and present generations. Once the elders have taken in the fact that youngsters are living in different times than their own, they will come to a more realistic view and understanding of them.

Correspondingly, once the youngsters recognize the fact that their parents and grandparents come from a different society, they will confront them with a rational, more understanding approach. What you have to keep in mind is sustaining our fundamental principles of belief, .which is obtained through mutual understanding and respect between the two generations

The Youth

Contrary to elders, youth are known to be rather tender, and more easily hurt. That is why we must master the art of approaching them correctly. To flourish their talents they need to be recognized and praised at home and in public. The Prophet (SAW) attracted the attention of the youth by treating them with nothing but respect.

"Never mistreat your youngsters, for they are particularly sensitive. It was them who backed me up and formed an alliance with me at the time when the elderly were waging a war against me."

Their clear conscience allows them to accept the truth more readily than most elders. The Prophet (SAW) teaches us that by supporting the youth, you will lead them toward the path of prosperity. So let's take the first step towards developing an understanding between the two generations, and making way to a peaceful and more intimate relationship that will benefit both .the elderly and the youth

Religious Training Of Children

Parents have been given the noble duty of guiding the future generation. It is their task to

ensure that their children get a sound religious education. In this way they are carrying on the work of the Prophets, who guided the people. The Holy Qur'an says: "O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is man and stones." (Holy Qur'an 66:6).

In today's society, a lot of emphasis is placed on secular education. A child is pushed to strive for excellence in academics. A college or university education is a necessity, both for boys and girls. Education is indeed very important, but the significance of religious education for a balanced personality must not be over-looked. The world is producing a generation that knows a lot, but is greatly deficient in moral and spiritual values.

The Prophet (SAW) was once talking to his companions about the importance of religious education. He told them he was "baree" (far) from the parents of the last times. They asked him the reason and he explained those parents would give a lot of importance to secular education, but neglect the religious education. May the Almighty protect us from being amongst them.

What exactly is meant by religious education? The following are some necessary parts of a :religious training

Beliefs

In God - A firm belief in the Creator is the source of all good. If a child grows up by believing in God, he will learn to be conscientious. Life will hold meaningful and responsible. Children must be taught about the existence of God, and the abundance of blessings he has bestowed upon us. Nature, Science etc. should all be used to point out the greatness of the Creator. Expose the child to books and films that show people with firm faith in God, and illustrate how the faith helps those overcome obstacles and problems.

Children should not be given the impression that Allah would like to punish humans for every wrong they do. Some parents and educators warn children about the punishment of Allah in order to scare them into being good. Although it is necessary to talk about punishment at times, it is of greater advantage to focus on the positive side. Allah is greatly merciful, loves us and is willing to help and guide us. Teach children to love Allah, trust in Him, and to ask from Him all their needs. This positive attitude will help the child build a lasting relationship with Allah.

In the Hereafter - Children should be gradually introduced to the idea of death and the life hereafter. Although it may be confusing to younger children, it is advisable that parents should talk about it from time to time, especially as the children grow older. A death in the family or community could be used as an example that all humans are mortal, and each one of us will go

the same way. It is best to be honest with the child.

In the Prophets and Imams – It is necessary for children to understand the role of the prophets, and have love for the holy Prophet (S) and the Imam (A). This can be taught by reading stories of their lives to them. It is also important to attach significance to the occasions when we commemorate their births and deaths.

Going to Masjid or religious centers on these occasions helps to a great deal. They remember the said personality and also learn something about him or her. It is a great way of keeping their faith alive

Rituals

Although beliefs are most important, parents also have to teach practical part of following religion. Faith and action do go together. From a young age, a child should be encouraged to pray, recite the Qur'an, perform wudhu etc. Some parents think it is a bother to have young children do these things and wait until they are almost baligh. The love for such actions does not develop, and may then have to be forced to carry them out. It is much better to start at an early age when the children are willing to imitate the parents and have an interest in praying and doing wudhu.

The daily prayers are the most important action in Islam, and it is the duty of all parents to ensure that the children pray properly and regularly. The Prophet (S) said: "Teach your children the prayer when they are seven, and beat them if they do not recite it when they are ten."

Thus when the child becomes baligh and does not wish to pray it is necessary to force him to do so. It should be mentioned that children need to be observed when they first begin to pray by themselves. Many children pray very quickly, and the actions resemble a quick exercise rather than a prayer. If possible, parents should try and pray with their children, at least sometimes. It is not a good idea to tell children to pray by themselves in their rooms. Out of the view of the parents. This could encourage them to skip some prayers altogether, and then lie about it. Shaytan is very strong, and the child is easily too preyed.

Another important part of religious training is to teach the child to recite the Qur'an. It is a right of the child. Many parents are already aware of this responsibility and strive to make their children good recitors of the Qur'an. But one must be wary not to do it compete with others, or to show off to the community. Some children become fluent recitors of the Qur'an but are not regular in their prayers and are generally lax in their obedience to Allah. The child should also be encouraged to understand the Qur'an. This could be done by reading the translation occasionally, or even learning the Arabic language

Morals

This is an extremely important aspect of Islam and should not be ignored. Good morals are the key to virtuous life. The child should be taught about noble characteristics such as honesty, kindness, justice, contentment etc. He should be taught to avoid jealousy, backbiting, greed, extravagance etc. a small reminder, or a simple discussion often makes a lasting impression. Many children remember the advice given to them by their parents and grandparents long into adulthood. Parents should never underestimate the effect of their words and deeds on the hearts of their children

Be A Model To Your Children

Actions speak louder than words. No pieces of advice of a parent refrains child from backbiting if the child often hears the parents backbiting themselves. When the child is exposed to these vices, it is very likely that he will grow up following the same. A good example from the parent works even without words. Although it may seem a huge task to be able to be a good model for the child, parents should know that it is the only way they can really teach their children. No other way is as effective as mentioned

Relate Stories

Stories are a very appealing way to teach lessons. The Qur'an says: "In their narrations there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding." (Holy Qur'an 12:111)
Children are especially fascinated by stories. They can become absorbed in a story without realizing that they are learning some lessons. Parents should encourage them read Islamic and moral books

Questions And Answers

Children ask a lot of questions. Sometimes parents may lack the answers and must admit to look it up. But it is unfair to ignore the questions or dismiss them as unimportant. The more they ask the more they learn. An interest in his question and confusions will help the child develop his mental and intellectual abilities. Encourage the child to learn more by asking more

Some Don'ts In Religious Training

à Don't do it harshly. Getting angry with the child and forcing him leads to resentment. It is

better to explain, and discuss with the child.

à Don't overdo it. Teach religion in moderate doses. Overdoing it can be harmful and can be a burden for a child.

à Don't teach Islam to show off. Children should not be taught to be religious, so parents can be proud of them in the community.

à Don't make Islam a burden. Some parents believe that Islam is too difficult. Although they practice it, they pass on the feeling that to them hijab, fasting and other such rules are really a great burden this, will discourage the child

A Child's Need For Love

The need to be loved is the unexceptionally strong in all human beings. From childhood to old age, humans want to be loved by those around them. Love connects people in the strongest ways. It produces care and concern, without which no one would take the responsibility of looking after others. Love makes the difficulties of life bearable, and helps ease the struggles of life. The love given to a child is more important than any other material goods the family can provide.

Life cannot just run on cold and hard rules. The warmth of love is necessary to infuse spirit and joy in life. A home without love, however orderly and organized, has not fulfilled its true purpose. A family is not just a micro-organization where the needs of members are met. This could be done by a state run facility. A family's outstanding characteristic is that members love one another, and this emotion binds them together.

Love or lack of it has a profound effect on the lives of children. Their mental capabilities, their fluency of speech, their observations and deductions on life, are all affected by it. That is why Islam emphasizes the display of love to one's family. The prophet (S) loved his grandsons dearly, and often showed great affection to them in public. He encouraged his companions to show affection to their children

Effects Of Love

A child who knows he is loved has a great head start on life:

1. He is happier and calmer. A child, who is at peace with the world, is able to bear disappointments better. Without love, a child's world is bleak. Such a child often resorts to misbehavior to get attention.
2. He is more confident of himself. He knows that he is worthy of being loved, and that is a

great boost to his self-esteem.

3. He can form better relationships with others. A loving relationship with the parent makes the child a kinder, more loving person. Lack of love hardens the heart.
4. Has a positive outlook on life. A child who is loved looks at the world with enthusiasm. He will be eager to try and experience new things. A loveless home produces a negative outlook.
- .5. The child would be more responsive to what the parents tell him

Letting The Child Know He Is Loved

It goes without saying that most parents love their children dearly. It is a natural instinct placed by the Almighty into the heart of all parents. This love for children is a sign of the wisdom of Allah, for without it on parent would have borne all the pains and troubles of raising a child. However, many parents think that children know, without being told, that parents love them.

They do not realize that children need to be reassured constantly.

The effects of love must be evident in the speech and behavior of the parents. Children do not have the wisdom and insight like adults to realize that even punishments and reproaches are signs of love. They often perceive the actions of the parents as a proof of the lack of love. It is

thus very important to display love to the child, or at least inform him about it in subtle ways.

The display of love varies with the age and level of the child. It is most important at the very young age when children need to be very cuddled and hugged. For a baby, physical display of love is necessary for positive growth and development. All through the toddler year's physical affection remains the most prominent way of displaying love. As the child grows, this changes to less direct ways of showing affection. The occasional physical touch is necessary. Love shows its bright face in the form of a smile, a tender tone, a patient ear, etc. A parent's full .attention tells the child he is loved enough to warrant it

The Love of a Mother

There is no doubt that the love of a mother is a very special gift from the Almighty for a child. It differs from the love of a father, or the love of any person. The tender hand of a mother and her soothing voice has calmed many troubled children.

Mothers are thus the main instruments of transmitting love to the child. At its best, the love of a mother is completely unselfish, wanting nothing in return for the tremendous span of time .and energy spent in raising the children

Unconditional Love

Some parents only love their children if they fulfill certain expectations. Gender sometimes plays a great role. So a boy after a few daughters' elicits create affection and attention. Some families just prefer boys, even if they have equal numbers of both. Such gender biases are greatly condemned in Islam. The Holy Prophet (S) showed great love and respect for his daughter despite the taunts of the Arabs.

Some parents only show their love for the child if he is attractive, behaves well, and generally lives up to their expectations. Such a love is conditional. All children have faults, and the parental reaction to these faults sometimes convinces a child that he is not loved at all. A child .deserves the unconditional love of the parents

Excessive Love

A potential danger for many parents is excessive love for the children. It is often difficult to control the intensity of emotion one feels for a child. Thus, a child may be showed with a lot of love, often misdirected. Everything in excess is harmful and much love is detrimental to the child.

Excessive love is when the parent pampers the child, refusing to let him face any trouble or difficulty, tending to his every need, and giving in to his desires. Its results could include:

1. The child becomes totally reliant on the parents. Even as he grows, the chances of emotional and mental maturity are slim. He has less courage and feels offended easily and becomes more like a soft egg which needs constant protection.
2. The demands of the child who is excessively loved are unending. He will constantly want more - more attention, more treats, more toys etc.
3. He may become very egoistic, and expect the same degree of attention from others in his life. The child feels that he is the center of the world for his parents, and thus all things should revolve around him.
4. When others will not give him the same attention and pampering he has known from his parents, he will be unable to bear the disappointment. Often such people lose confidence in themselves, and feel they are not worth much as they have not been granted the degree of .attention they believe is their due

How To Build Your Child's Confidence

Not everyone is seen as worthy or is accepted in the society. Instead, we reserve praise and

admiration to the few who have been blessed from birth with the characteristics we wrongly value most highly -beauty, brains and riches. It is a vicious system, and we must counterbalance its impact by helping young people to develop self-esteem. All children are created worth wise and are due the rightful personal respect and dignity. But how can we, as parents, build strong egos and indomitable spirits in our children? There are :strategies by which we can instill confidence and self-worth

Examine Your Own Values

Are you secretly disappointed because your child is ordinary? Have you rejected him, at times, because he lacks charm or is awkward? Do you think your child is stupid? A sizeable portion of a child's self-concept emerges from the way he thinks you see him. When the child is convinced he is loved and respected by the parents, he is inclined to accept his own worth as a person.

Many children know they are loved by their parents, but don't believe they are held in high esteem by them. A child can know that you would give your life for him, yet still detect your doubts about his acceptability. You are nervous when he speaks to guests. You interrupt to explain what he was trying to say, or laugh when his remarks sound foolish. Parents need to guard what they say in the presence of the children.

Parents must also take the time to introduce children to good books, to fly kites and play football with them, listen to the skinned-knee episode and talk about the bird with the broken .wing. These are the building blocks of esteem

Teach a "Think Positive" Policy

One of the characteristics of a person who feels inferior is that he talks about his deficiencies to anyone who will listen.

While you are blabbing about your inadequacies, the listener is forming an impression of you. He will later treat you according to the evidence you have provided. If you put your feelings into words, they become solidified as fact in your own mind.

Therefore, we should teach a "think positive" policy to our children. Constant self-criticism can .become a self-defeating habit

Help Your Child Compensate

Our task as parents is to serve as a confident ally, encouraging when children are distressed, intervening when threats are overwhelming, and giving them the tools to overcome the obstacles. One of those tools is compensation. An Individual counterbalances weaknesses by capitalizing on his strengths. It is our job to help our children find those strengths. Perhaps a child can establish his niche in arts. May be he can build model airplanes or keep rabbits or play football. Nothing is more risky than sending a child into adolescence with no skills, no unique knowledge, and no means of compensating. He must be able to say: "I may not be the most popular boy in the school, but I am the best football player in the team." I recommend that parents assess a child's strength, and then select a skill with the best chance for success. See that he gets through the first stage. If you find you have made a .mistake, start again on something else. But don't let inertia keep you from, teaching him a skill

Help Your Child Compete

A parent who opposes the stress placed on beauty, brawn and brains knows his child is forced to compete in world that worships those attributes. Should he help encourage his "average" child to excel in school?

I can give you only one opinion. I feel I must help my child compete in his world as best he can.

If he is struggling in school, I will seek special coaching. We are allies in his fight for survival. But while helping my child to compete, I also instruct him in the true values of life: love for .mankind, integrity, truthfulness, and devotion to Allah

Discipline With Respect

Does punishment, and particularly spanking, break the spirit of a child? The answer depends on the manner and intent of the parents. A spanking, in response to willful defiance, is a worthwhile tool, but belief in corporal punishment is no excuse for taking about your frustrations on little child; it offers no license to punish him in front of others or treat him with disrespect.

It is important to recognize however, that one way to damage self-esteem is to avoid discipline altogether. Parents are the symbols of justice and order, and a child wonders why they let him .get away with doing harmful things if they really love him

Avoid Overprotection

Preparation for responsible adulthood is derived from training during childhood. A child should be encouraged to progress on an orderly timetable, taking the level of responsibility appropriate for his age. An overly protective parent allows the child to fall behind his normal timetable

Violence Against Children Growing

In 1989, the convention on the rights of the child was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The convention sets universal legal standards for the protection of children against neglect, abuse and exploitation as well as guaranteeing their basic human rights, including survival, development and full participation in social, cultural, educational and other endeavors necessary for their individual growth and well-being. The convention came into force on September 2, 1990.

Nevertheless, violence against children is escalating, over the world. Every day we hear of new kinds of violence. The statistics made available by government, international organizations and social groups are just a drop in the ocean considering that countless cases go unreported. Child abuse is not a new social disease, because history tells us it has always existed. But its tentacle are spreading throughout the globe, and it has become more sadistic, pervasive and hideous. Modern scientific advancements have reduced infant and child mortality leading to a higher survival rate among children. But technological innovations have yet to find a panacea for child abuse and its damaging consequences. Whether physical, sexual, emotional or in the other forms of maltreatment, it has become universal scourge.

As the WHO neo-natal and infant mortality, through better health, sanitation and immunization programs, the issue of protecting children from violence will have to take on increasing priority. Children are like flowers. Their physical and mental makeup is very fragile. Physical abuse can lead to a permanent disability. Its mental effect can also be traumatic with most children suffering live-long emotional damage.

Ill-treatment of children takes various forms and the worst is sexual abuse for the sexual gratification of adults. One in every 10 children is sexually abused, according to the WHO. The disturbing fact is that, in most cases, the victims are abused by people they knew and trust. For such children it's a long struggle for the rest of their lives and many never recover from physical pain and fade.

In most cases the victims are girl children and they carry their trauma into adulthood. Because of the stigma attached to this form of abuse, many victims or their families refuse to report or even talk about such things. Thus the victim carries the burden for the rest of his or her life without any psychiatric help.

As society becomes more and more permissive and degenerate, a greater number of children become targeted, as they are defenseless and can be held at ransom or otherwise suborned.

Those who sexually abuse children are mentally sick and require medical attention. On the other hand, parents should educate and equip their children to protect themselves or expose those who violate their persons. Sexually abused children also need more love, care and attention to help prevent them from having mental disorder later on.

Studies suggest that as many as one-third of the adult female population and one-fifth of the adult male population experiences some form of sexual abuse in childhood.

The number of maltreated children continues to grow. Children, particularly abandoned and street children and those from poor sections are used as cheap labor. In some countries children are used as cheap sport from poor, third World countries used as jockeys in camel racing.

Every day, countless children suffer as casualties of war, as victims of racial discrimination, apartheid aggression; as refugees and displaced children forced to abandon the security of their homes; as disabled or as victims of neglect, cruelty and exploitation.

Society has a heavy responsibility to combat violence against children and to allow them to grow as normal, healthy and happy children