

Parenting to Build Moral Intelligence in Children

Week 2

Agenda for today

- Review and recap
- The stages of moral development
- The importance of modelling
- Drawing out your child's moral reasoning

Review

- Definition
- Assessing our children's (and our) MQ
- Why is it especially important today
 - Lack of protective factors and increase in risk factors
 - State of morality
 - Lack of clear definition of morality
 - Parenting practices today
 - Media influence

Stages of Moral Reasoning

The Islamic View

- Islam has divided the upbringing of a child into three stages from birth to age 21. The division is based on the following hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.): “The child is the master for seven years; and a slave for seven years and a vizier for seven years; so if he grows into a good character within 21 years, well and good; otherwise leave him alone because you have discharged your responsibility before Allah.”

- The same hadith has been explained by Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a.s.): “Let your child play up to seven years; and keep him with you (for education and training) for another seven years; then if he succeeds (well and good); otherwise, there is no good in him.”

Stages of Moral Reasoning

As explained by modern psychology . . .

Stage 0: Egocentric Reasoning (appears around age 4)*

- “I should get my own way”
- Reason to be good: to get rewards and avoid punishment

* Ages indicate reasonable developmental expectations for a child of normal intelligence growing up in a supportive moral environment.

Stage 1: Unquestioning Obedience (appears around kindergarten age)

- “I should do what I’m told.”
- Reason to be good: to stay out of trouble.

Stage 2: What's-in-it-for-me Fairness (early elementary grades)

- “I should look out for myself but be fair to those who are fair to me.”
- Reason to be good: Self-interest: What's in it for me?

Stage 3: Interpersonal Conformity (upper elementary grades and early to mid-teens)

- “I should be a nice person and live up to the expectations of people I know and care about”
- Reason to be good: So others will think well of me and I can think well of myself.

Stage 4: Responsibility to the “System” (high school years or late teens)

- “I should fulfill my responsibilities to the social or value system I feel part of.”
- Reason to be good: To keep the system from falling apart and to maintain self-respect as someone who meets my obligations.

Stage 5: Principled Conscience (young adulthood)

- “I should show the greatest possible respect for the rights and dignity of every individual and support a system that protects human rights.”
- Reason to be good: The obligation of conscience to act in accordance with the principle of respect for all human beings.

How is this helpful? To summarize . . .

Moral training starts from day one

- It's never too early to start. Parents who respond instantly to a newborn's cries lay an important moral groundwork. "You work to understand what the baby's feeling," says Barbara Howard, a specialist in developmental behavioural paediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "Then the baby will work to understand what other people are feeling." Indeed, empathy is among the first moral emotions to develop.
- Moreover, the reliable availability of the caregiver instils trust in the infant which lays the basis for future moral development

- The importance of establishing empathy and trust in newborns aligns perfectly with the Islamic concept of the child as a sayyid or master during the first few years (the imprint period)
- Modeling of good morality is crucial at this stage

- The Holy Prophet (saw) has said:
- “Never beat the children if they cry. Fulfill their needs. Because, for the first four months of the life of a child, its cries are a witness to the Existence and Unity of Allah, Almighty.”[1]
- [1] Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 104, Page 103

- Moral reasoning develops with age
- It needs guidance
- Chronological age does not equal moral stage in all cases, in other words children develop morally at different stages
- Parents have a great role to play in developing their child's moral reasoning and higher level thinking

Creating the context for moral growth: Parenting practices that promote the development of a strong conscience

- 1. Be a strong moral example**
2. Develop a close, mutually respectful relationship
3. Share your moral beliefs
- 4. Expect and demand moral behaviours**
- 5. Use moral reasoning and questioning**
6. Explain your parenting behaviour

A word on expectations

- Clear expectations create strong connections between parent and child. Moreover such a connection is a strong indicator of whether or not your child will engage in high risk (or immoral) behaviour

Ron Tuffel in *Childhood Unbound*

Being a strong moral example

Modelling

Imam Ali (as):

- “The person who is in the lead should first reform himself and then try to correct others. Before teaching the norms of good behaviour to others he should set an example himself. One who educates himself in learning and manners is more deserving of respect than he who only teaches the norms of good behaviour to others.”

Nahj al-Balagha.

Being a strong moral example

How well do you “walk the talk”?

- You tell your child to say you are not home when someone phones
- You take a “sample” from a store’s candy bin in front of your child without paying
- Your child oversleeps and misses school, and you write a note saying she was unwell
- You do the majority of your child’s work on a project and have him sign his name
- You buy a ticket for a “child under 12” even though your child is older
- You keep the extra change that the shopkeeper gives you by mistake

Imam Ali (as)

“When the talking tongue is silent on sermonizing and the actions of the sermonizer speak for themselves, then no ears can keep the sermon out and nothing is more effectively beneficial than this.”

Ghurar al-Hikam, Page 232



Words of Wisdom

“Do not worry that your children do not listen to what you say. Worry that they watch everything that you do”.

Everything you say
and do makes a
difference.

What message are
you sending?

Some reflections on modeling morality

- We send a message as to what we value most by the choices we make and by our conduct. Our allocation of time reflects what is valuable to us.
- Are we willing to be challenged in our choices and admit that we are wrong?
- Are we open to accepting responsibility, apologizing and making amends when we make mistakes?
- Do we admit it when we are unclear about our own views or when we don't know why we believe what we do?
- Do we express our opinion clearly and are we able to share our life experiences and wisdom?

Beyond modelling: The parental role in building MQ

- Proactive through the use of story, discussion and sharing of life lessons
- Reactive through the effective use of discipline when children make mistakes

- Although modelling has the strongest impact on children, there is clearly a place to teach values through listening and talking
- Given the many messages that children receive from different sources, if you are silent on moral issues, then yours may be the only voice missing in their lives
- In the present climate, we cannot assume that our children share our moral values or that they automatically know and accept the Islamic perspective



"Before we learn this song, it's important to understand that cutting off the tail of a mouse is never acceptable."

Building moral intelligence through dialogue and discussion of moral dilemmas

- Moral dilemma generally refers to the situation, where you have to choose between two alternatives, that generally are equally unpleasant.
- Read the situation and think about it for yourself
- Then use family time to discuss it with your children
- Feel free to share your opinion but do listen to the children's view non-judgementally
- The idea is to help develop their moral thinking rather than berating them for not thinking the right thing

Some suggestions for effective discussions

- Choose a comfortable time for talking – riding in the car, taking a walk, doing dishes
- Use a casual lead-in. For example, I heard this story, and I am curious to know what you think about it . . . Or I read about this controversy and I wonder what your opinion is on the subject
- With young kids, it often helps to make it concrete by drawing pictures and using props
- After you tell the story, you may want them to repeat it to make sure they have the facts straight

Some suggestions for effective discussions (contd.)

- Ask kids about their judgement on what the character should do?
- Try paraphrasing what they say so you and they know you got what they meant
- Draw out your child's reasoning including the reasons behind the reasons. Eg if they should someone should return the wallet because it is stealing, ask why stealing is wrong.
- Test their limits by inviting them to think of other reasons, better reasons of why something is wrong
- Respond to their reasoning in a respectful way. Hmm that is an interesting way to look at it, I had not thought of it that way.

Some suggestions for effective discussions (contd.)

- Encourage them to think deeply by continuing the conversation after they have given you their first answer. Eg: what else could it be? Do you think there may be another reason?
- After they share their views, feel free to share your thoughts and the Islamic rulings on the subject
- If your child does not appear willing at first, it is better to come back to it at a later time

- Research shows that children who engage in these kinds of conversations have a more developed sense of morality and are less likely to engage in risky behaviour

Examples of moral dilemmas – feel free to use your own

- The process of conversation is much more important than “getting it right”

A moral dilemma (for younger children)

- Samir was walking to the store. His mom's birthday was coming up and he was feeling bad because he had not been able to save enough money for a present. He found a wallet on the sidewalk with \$10 in it – just what he needed to buy the present! The wallet had the name and address of the person that it belonged to.

A moral dilemma (for younger children)

- What should Samir do and why?
- What would be a good reason for Samir to return the wallet and why? Can you think of any other reasons?
- Would it be stealing to keep the money? Why is it wrong to steal?
- What if the owner of the wallet was rich and greedy and would not even give Samir a reward for returning it – should he return the wallet then?
- What if the owner's name was not in the wallet? What do you think Samir should do then?

A moral dilemma (for reflection and family discussion with older children)

- **Samir was in third grade when he was caught cheating on his math quiz.** He had been doing poorly in math and his parents had threatened that if he didn't raise his grades they wouldn't let him play on the baseball team. So he cheated. When the teacher asked him about it, he denied it at first, but finally admitted to writing down the answers ahead of time.
- A parent conference was called and Samir had to sit with his parents, the teacher, and the principal to discuss the school policy on cheating and lying. On the way home, his father told Samir he was deeply disappointed in him and expected more from him in the future. That night, Samir felt like the whole world was against him, but he also felt guilty for letting his parents down.

- That weekend, Samir and his family went to a movie. When they got to the ticket window Samir's dad asked for children's tickets for both Samir and his 16 year old brother, Sohail. Samir looked over at his brother, who stared down at the sidewalk and hunched his shoulders hoping the ticket seller wouldn't notice that he was well above the age for a child's ticket. The ticket seller glanced suspiciously back and forth between the father and the brother, and then, with a doubtful look on her face, she handed them the two child's tickets. This happened every time they went to the movies, and it always made Samir feel weird.

- On the way home from the movie, Samir asked his father why it was okay to lie and cheat the theatre out of money but not to cheat on his math quiz. His dad responded that sometimes its okay to lie as long as nobody gets hurt.
- The rest of the way home Samir just got more and more confused. Cheating on his test hurt nobody. He didn't steal the answers from any of the other students. If he hadn't gotten caught, he would have been praised. How was what he did different from what his dad did over and over again? And should he continue to stay silent the next time his dad lied?

Questions to guide discussion

- What is Samir's dilemma?
- Have you ever seen an adult or friend do something you felt wasn't right? What did you do? How did it make you feel?
- Do you think Samir should try to talk to his father again about his lying at the movies?
- Who might Samir have hurt by cheating on his quiz?
- Samir's Dad said it was okay to be dishonest if no one was hurt. Who do you think might have been hurt by his lying at the movie ticket office?
- Have you ever felt like doing (or have you actually done) the "wrong thing" because you felt like it was worth it? Do you still feel that it was worth it?

Questions and comments?

