

Communicating effectively with our children

A four week online course

Week 4

Agenda Week 4

- Housekeeping
- Review from last week
- Questions and concerns
- Keeping the doors of communication open as children grow
- Communicating our moral values to our children

Review

- Tips for effective speaking
- Communicating praise
 - Junk praise versus effective praise
 - Descriptive praise
 - Practice with descriptive praise
- Communicating concerns
 - Ineffective ways to voice concerns
 - Effective ways to communicate concerns
 - The XYZ statements
 - Practice with XYZ statements

How (not) to show concerns



Keeping the lines of communication open as they grow



Many parents report that their children stop confiding in them and talking to them as they grow older and especially as they reach adolescence

There are some things that you can do
and some things that you should avoid
in order to keep the lines of
communication open as your children
grow older

Avoid door slammers

- You don't really mean that
- You should not feel that way
- That is a silly way to think
- Why are you asking me that
- You are too young to know
- Act your age
- You will be fine
- Don't be a baby

Door openers (magic words to learn by heart!)

- What do you think
- Would you like to share more about that
- That is a good question
- **Hmmm, how about that**
- That sounds important to you
- Do you want to talk about it?
- That is an interesting way to look at it
- I would like to hear your point of view on this
- Tell me more
- **Help me understand**
- Sounds like you are feeling . . . Is that right?
- High/low

Discussion

- Do you have any concerns with trying the “Door Openers”?

What are your concerns in trying the door openers?

- What if I don't agree with their point of view?
- Is talking about something encouraging them to try something illegal, immoral or haram?
- It appears too contrived
- What if I don't know the answer to what they are asking
- It makes me uncomfortable
- What if I am also confused about something?

How would you handle this question?
What would go through your mind?
What would you say?

- Mom, I wonder what red wine tastes like?

Concerns with door openers

- Listening to children and asking questions actually has the effect of:
 - Clarifying their confusions about values
 - Helping to build moral intelligence in children
 - Helping to build a strong relationship of trust with the parent
 - **STOPPING** them from engaging in immoral and risky behaviour

Be an “askable” parent: How you handle difficult questions like these will greatly determine the quality of your communication in the future

Communicating our values to our children

- Are you clear about your own values?
- Do you live your values? Do you walk your talk?
- Can you defend the rules in your home based on your value system?
- Do you automatically expect that your children will know and follow your values?

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*

Clear expectations are necessary but not sufficient to instill values in children

- Parents need to communicate their values both through non-verbal (through behavior) and verbal communication

Communicating values through nonverbal communication (modeling)

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

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

Your actions speak so loudly that
children can often not hear what you
say

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

The importance of voicing your values

- Given the environment that our children grow up in, we cannot assume that they will share or even know our values
- Given the messages that they hear from their peers, the media and the society in general, it is vital that we clearly state our own values to our children
- If we are silent about important issues, then ours is the only voice that is missing in sending them moral messages



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

How to communicate values

- Clarify your own values
- Make rules based on family values
- Use teachable moments
- Use dialogue and discussion
 - Real or hypothetical situation
 - Challenge and disagreements are not necessarily bad

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

Questions and comments?

marziahasan@hotmail.com

