

Motherhood in Islam

Session Seven

From the Holy Qur'an

42. *So it (the ship) sailed with them amidst the waves like mountains, and Nûh (Noah) called out to his son, who had separated himself (apart), "O my son! Embark with us and be not with the disbelievers."*

43. *The son replied: "I will betake myself to a mountain, it will save me from the water." Nûh (Noah) said: "This day there is no saviour¹ from the Decree of Allâh except him on whom He has mercy." And a wave came in between them, so he (the son) was among the drowned.*

44. *And it was said: "O earth! Swallow up your water, and O sky! Withhold (your rain)." And the water was diminished (made to subside) and the Decree (of Allâh) was fulfilled (i.e. the destruction of the people of Nûh (Noah). And it (the ship) rested on Mount Judi, and it was said: "Away with the people who are Zalimûn (polytheists and wrong-doing)!"*

45. *And Nûh (Noah) called upon his Lord and said, "O my Lord! Verily, my son is of my family! And certainly, Your Promise is true, and You are the Most Just of the judges."*

46. *He said: "O Nûh (Noah)! Surely, he is not of your family; verily, his work is unrighteous, so ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge! I admonish you, lest you be one of the ignorants."*

Sura Hud, verses 42-46

Anger in Children

Dealing with angry children is the most difficult part of a parent's job. It is unpleasant to see one's child getting very angry, especially if this happens often. Anger is a normal emotion, however, and it is not reasonable to expect that children should not have any anger at all. Children should learn appropriate ways of expressing anger, and understand that some ways are unacceptable. It is the responsibility of the parent to teach the child the basics of anger management. This should not be done by punishing the child for showing anger. Some parents want to punish anger because they don't like aggression. Punishment is not the most effective way to communicate to children what we expect of them. Explaining, modeling, and setting rules with consequences are much more effective.

The following points are useful when dealing with children who often get angry:

1. Find out what makes your child angry. Often, there are particular situations that may spark a child's anger. Understanding them may help the parent prevent the onset of anger by avoiding such situations.

2. Identify the early warning signs of anger. Children often don't recognize anger. In fact, many times they act out before they realize what happened. Identifying early warning signs helps children become more aware of their feelings, which in turn gives them more opportunity to control their responses to these feelings.

3. Step Back. Teach your child to take a break from the difficult situation and to get alone for a few minutes. One of the healthiest responses to anger at any of its stages is to step back. During that time the child can rethink the situation, calm down and determine what to do next.

4. Never try to reason with a child who is enraged. When children are enraged they can no longer think rationally and their anger controls them. Unfortunately, many parents try to talk their children out of anger, often leading to more intensity. The intensity can build from

frustration to anger to rage before anyone realizes it. Talking about the situation is important but it can wait until after the child has settled down.

4. Help the child choose a better response. After the child has stepped back and settled down, it's time to decide on a more appropriate response to the situation. Parents who address anger in their children often respond negatively, pointing out the wrong without suggesting alternatives. Instead, parents should give them choices of more appropriate responses. These choices are actually skills to be learned.

Expressions of Anger in children

Whining

One of the most common expressions of anger and discontent in children is through whining. Parents are sometimes at a loss as to how to respond to whining. Some try to appease the children, and give them what they want. This is especially true if the whining is done in public and is embarrassing. Since whining is often the beginning of a full scale conflict, parents try to avoid that, and give in to the demands of the child. However, this can reinforce the whining, and teach children to use it to get what they want. To stop children from whining, parents can try the following tactics:

- a) Consequences. The child is told that whining will result in an immediate consequence that will not be pleasant. So if the child whines in public, he is taken home, or at least out of the place.
- b) Assertiveness. Parents talk to the children calmly and firmly, rather than responding with anger. Anger only escalates the whining and could result in a conflict.
- c) Good communication. When there is good communication between parents and children, the children feel positively about themselves and will be less prone to whining. Whining often stems from reasons beyond the specific situation and is an indicator of built up resentment and anger.

Tantrums

When a child has a tantrum, he displays anger and frustration. It could be a full blown tantrum, with the child kicking and screaming. Or it could be a silent one, where the child sulks and refuses to speak. Tantrums vary according to age and personality, but are causes of great annoyance and embarrassment to parents. Tantrums are common in younger children who cannot use words to express themselves. The reasons behind tantrums are varied. They include being tired, asserting independence, hunger, boredom etc. Tantrums can occur anywhere, but are more likely to occur in places like the supermarket, restaurants, places of worship, planes etc.

Taming a tantrum can require a lot of patience on the part of the parent. It is not wise to ignore it as it could escalate greatly. Useful ways of dealing with it include distracting the child, soothing the child by sitting down with him and talking to him in a calm manner, removing the child from public gaze, reminding the child of consequences, time out, etc. Parents can try and avoid tantrums by anticipating the behavior of the child, and taking certain measures necessary to prevent a tantrum. This would need foresight and planning ahead.

Sibling Rivalry

Whenever there are two or more children in a family, rivalry between them is inevitable. It is not abnormal for children to feel jealous of one another. The aim of parents should be to control it and keep it within appropriate limits. It cannot be totally eliminated. When confronted with the achievement of a sibling, many children perceive it as a threat. They are afraid of losing their status. Success of a sibling could result in unfavorable comparisons, greater expectations and lower respect for themselves, both at home and outside. Although this could be entirely imaginary and blown out of proportion, it is necessary to understand why children react as they do. Most sibling rivalry stems from the perceived loss of parental love and respect. Children wish to have the greatest share of their parents love and attention. When siblings take it away from them, even temporarily, it becomes greatly upsetting. Only time and maturity helps the child understand that this loss is only imagined and not real.

Sibling rivalry is due to many reasons. These include feeling one's position is in danger- such as when a new baby arrives, being compared to other siblings, parents giving more attention to one child, finding faults in the presence of other siblings, gender differences etc. To reduce sibling rivalry parents should try to get at the root of the situation, and then act accordingly. All children need to be dealt with justly, according to their age and personalities. Fairness and good communication decreases sibling rivalry.

Disciplining Children

It is the right of every child to be disciplined by wise and reasonable parents. A parent uses control and discipline to guide the child. Human beings by nature, tend to lean towards evil. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: *Surely the soul is wont to command (towards) evil except, such as my Lord has mercy on.* (12:53) Without discipline human beings are prone to wrongdoing,. A child is especially vulnerable to such tendencies for he lacks the wisdom and maturity of an adult. It is easier and more pleasant to follow the dictates of the soul. To follow what is right, morally and logically, requires a firm will. This does not come automatically to a child, but can be developed through discipline.

A good home has certain rules which children must follow. Children feel better when they know they are expected to follow certain guidelines in their daily life. Not only does life become more organized, but they are also freed from the burden of making decisions for themselves when not really in a position to do so. Although they may outwardly resent it, all children need some discipline to feel secure in life.

Discipline and control in Islam is not equal to dictatorship. Good parents take into consideration the age and understanding of the child, his circumstances, and other relative factors. Rules are then made accordingly. Sometimes the child's wishes are considered and a compromise is made. There is certain flexibility rather than rigid adherence to the rules. However there is no doubt that Islam expects parents to remain in control, to make sure the children follow certain etiquette in behavior rather than a chaotic do-as-you-please attitude.

Some important points

1. When disciplining a child, the parent should refrain from becoming a dictator. A rule is not to be followed because “I say so” but because it is the right thing to do. The basis of all discipline is the safety and progress of the child. Talk to your children often about why you set rules and enforce certain laws. Inspire them with stories of great characters, through books and verbal narration. Do not allow the child to fear you. Allow him to air his view sometimes even if you do not agree with him. Hear him out and then explain why you think he needs to be corrected.

2. Be in control of yourself when disciplining. Sometimes parents go overboard in their attempts to discipline. The home becomes a military camp with strict rules being enforced all the time. It is advisable that parents temper their discipline with gentleness and love. A harsh venting of anger is not discipline. Physical force and nagging should be avoided. Parents should say what is necessary without making it a long lecture and bringing up old problems. This way the child will take it more seriously rather than shrugging it off as just another lecture. Harsh disciplining could also lead to despair in the child. He may assume that he can never acquire the behavior expected of him. This happens when expectations are impractical and inappropriate.

3. When a mistake has been made, allow the child to make amends. Let him apologize and if necessary, carry out the designated punishment. This could include the loss of a privilege, writing lines, time out, or some extra chores. A variety of punishments may be used to ensure that the child does not get away with misbehavior. However, after that has been done, the parents should not continue to be angry and refuse to talk to the child in a normal manner. It is better to get over the anger and become friends again soon. Prolonged anger produces sadness and sometimes resentment in the child.

4. Teach the child internal control. Parental control is external. It is good and necessary. But better than that is internal control, when a child learns to discipline himself. He should be able to stop himself from inappropriate actions even when the parents are not around. This is only possible if:

a) He has learnt the value and wisdom of the rule. So, for example, if he understands that it is against one's dignity to be rude and call others names, he may stop himself from doing it. The child must have conviction that what he should do is really best for his personality. That will automatically make him do it.

b) The parent has not continuously nagged him about it. Constant nagging produces resentment and anger. This could then be channeled to a defiant following of wrong behavior even when the child understands it is wrong.

c) He has seen the respect given to those who behave in the right way. If the child has been exposed to examples, contemporary or in history, who have earned respect and popularity because of their good manners and virtues, he becomes more inclined to follow their path. If he has only been fed on television stars and the examples that abound in today's modern society, he will not aspire to acquire good morals. It is the duty of parents to create an urge in him to have a respectable personality.