

ALI047b - Family Life in Islam

Article 5

Developing a Pattern of Respect

Respect is the **core** of family relationships and harmony. A family is constantly changing and growing, if not in numbers of members, then in life experiences. Respect can be practiced in each new situation to establish and continue a pattern of respect among the family members.

Family members know when they are being respected, and they know when they are practicing respect in return. Sometimes the guidelines for respect are clear; they have been spoken out loud, shared, and demonstrated. Other times, these guidelines are silently in place to follow and to honor.

To develop a pattern of respect in the family, open communication should be present. Members should be honest, straightforward, and trustworthy with each other. If communication and trust occurs between family members on a regular basis, it makes establishing the family rules for respect much easier. This also allows family members to ask questions about what is expected of them and to participate in setting those guidelines.

Family members may give each other permission to make mistakes or even to fail when trying to show respect. As family members grow, they learn to relate to each other differently. When someone in a family sees another member trying to practice respect--encouragement and praise should be given.

Respectful actions can be appreciated, recognized, welcomed, and supported. Each family member is unique and has his or her own style and personality. Together, families may celebrate respect for each other and for their family as a whole. Every situation is different and should be treated as a great chance to practice...to try again... and to establish the pattern of respect!

Respect and Feelings

Feelings are the emotional and physical responses to what we think about and how we react to daily events. Feelings are natural—we can't stop them from happening. Because we are all different, we respond to feelings in various ways, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. By acting responsibly towards our feelings, in both words and actions, we can learn to respect ourselves and others.

It is hard to act responsibly when our actions are a result of our feelings. Often myths and erroneous statements complicate these feelings. Do either of these myths about feelings sound familiar?

"Feelings, that sissy stuff." Recognizing that feelings are real and natural for everyone is important. Some of us may never acknowledge that emotions or feelings are a part of living. It

may be difficult for some of us to talk about our feelings. An important step in building self awareness and relationships with others is learning about personal feelings. Most individuals learn to accept feelings, both good and bad.

Feelings don't exist—so no one should talk about them. Denial of feelings can damage relationships and can build up emotions to the point of eruption of negative behavior, such as when an angry person hits the table. Thinking that we cannot talk to those we respect about our feelings may cause a "shut down" emotionally. Talking about personal feelings with friends and family may help. Instead of denying feelings, give them words. Feelings tell us something about ourself, just like an information chart.

Respect and the Hidden Hurts

Webster defines hurt as, "to cause physical pain or injury to." When one family member physically hurts another it is usually obvious: there is a red mark, bite, or bruise. Because this physical hurt is obvious, it is somewhat easier to treat.

Hidden Hurts—Another definition of the word hurt is "to cause mental distress." This is a hidden hurt. When a family member is constantly teased or reprimanded about weight, height, freckles, grades, or shortcomings, the person may feel hurt. In another situation, there may be a family member who feels hurt or emotionally abused where he or she is belittled, or when there is a lack of love or support between family members. When this behavior continues over time, the hurt family member may develop a negative sense of self-worth or may show extremes in behavior, such as being aggressive, withdrawn, or passive.

Hidden Hurts Influence Children—If a child is experiencing this hurt, it can delay his physical, emotional, or cognitive development. Children's minds and spirits are often more fragile than their bodies. The hurt of having their feelings wounded can deeply affect children. These hurts do not disappear; they stay, fester and become a part of the child's "self-picture" which she or he carries through life. Often children who are experiencing such emotional hurt will exhibit physical, emotional, or verbal symptoms that recur throughout life. Family members need to think about what they say to each other. Words can hurt as much as slaps, and can be more dangerous to individuals within the family and to the family as a whole.

The concept of respect is simple—but it's not easy. Respect involves feeling good enough about yourself to feel good about somebody else...their feelings, their importance, and their opinions. Each of us is so very different from one another. It's not just our color, religion or where we live. It's about all our past experiences, what we need, and our goals. Our differences sometimes lead to conflict. If we value each other and stay away from the idea that being different is wrong, then everybody wins. Respect is not something that just happens. It takes practice.

When respect starts in the family with kindness, understanding and reaching out by listening, it really becomes a very positive habit. When parents and children respect and appreciate themselves and each other, it automatically spreads outside the home...into schools, workplaces and neighborhoods.