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Children Are an Amānah, Not an Accessory

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Children are among the greatest blessings Allāh ﷻ can place in a person's life. Their arrival brings happiness, hope, love and a new sense of purpose. Parents naturally think about their children's health, education, clothing, future career and financial security. They want them to attend good schools, succeed in their studies, find respectable employment and live comfortable lives.

However, Islam reminds us that wealth and children are also a test and an adornment of this worldly life. Allāh ﷻ says:

ٱلْمَالُ وَٱلْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَٱلْبَٰقِيَٰتُ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتُ خَيْرٌ عِندَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا

"Wealth and children are the adornment of this worldly life, but the everlasting good deeds are far better with your Lord in reward and in hope." (Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:46)

Yet Islam reminds us that a child is much more than someone whose worldly future must be secured. A child is an amānah - a trust from Allāh ﷻ.

Raising them, known as tarbiyah, is a comprehensive form of worship and the greatest investment a parent can make.

Parents have been entrusted not only with feeding, clothing and protecting their children, but also with developing their īmān, character, emotional wellbeing, manners, worship and relationship with Allāh ﷻ. Allāh ﷻ says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ قُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا ٱلنَّاسُ وَٱلْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا

"O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones." (Sūrah al-Taḥrīm, 66:6)

While culture and environment play roles, there is no single blueprint for upbringing. The responsibility begins at home. It cannot be completely handed over to a school, madrasa, Qurʾān teacher, imam or Islamic organisation. These may assist parents, sometimes greatly, but they can never replace them. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

أَلاَ كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ، وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

"Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock."
(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 7138)

For a mother and father, part of that flock is their own children.

Children Grow Into What They See and Hear

Parents sometimes become frustrated when a child develops an undesirable habit and ask: Where did he learn this from? Why does she behave like this? Sometimes the answer may be much closer to home than we realise.

Children are natural followers and mimic very well. Silent parenting and the parent-child relationship serve as the first madrasah (taʿlīm). When parents act as a positive role model (qudwah), their actions (ʿamal) set the blueprint; a parent's true success is reflected in their children's success.

Children are constantly observing. They notice how their parents speak when angry, how husband and wife speak to one another, how adults speak about relatives behind their backs, how disagreements are handled and how people react when something goes wrong.

A parent may say, "Never lie," but ask the child to tell someone on the phone, "Dad isn't home." A parent may demand respect while insulting their spouse, relatives or even their own children. A parent may order the child to pray while regularly delaying or neglecting Ṣalāh themselves.

Children eventually recognise the difference between what we teach and what we live. This is why one of the most powerful forms of tarbiyah is example.

We should ask ourselves: If my child copied the way I speak, react, worship, apologise, disagree and treat others, would I be happy with the person he or she becomes?

When parents become overly engrossed in worldly gains (dunyā) and fail to give enough time, children can become spiritually or emotionally neglected, becoming like orphans despite having living parents. Parents must actively demonstrate that their children are more important than worldly distractions.

Effective parenting rests on key principles:

- Attention: Listening to and noticing them.
- Acceptance: Showing genuine interest in their lives.
- Approval & Appreciation: Praising their efforts and acknowledging their achievements.
- Affection: Expressing love through action and Sunnah.
- Authority: Setting firm guidelines in a loving manner while explaining the reasons behind rules.

The Home Should Be a Place of Safety

One of the greatest things parents can give their children is not something money can buy: a home in which they feel safe.

A child should feel that home is a place of security, stability, love and guidance. This does not mean that children are never corrected or disciplined. Islam does not teach permissive parenting where every behaviour is accepted. Children need rules, boundaries and consequences.

But discipline and fear are not the same thing. A child should not constantly wonder which version of his father will walk through the door today. A child should not be terrified that a small mistake will lead to screaming, humiliation, threats or violence. A child should not have to live in an environment where anger controls the household.

Parents set the emotional standard of the home. When parents demonstrate composure during difficulty, children learn composure. When parents apologise after making mistakes, children learn humility. When parents speak respectfully during disagreement, children learn how disagreement should be handled.

But when rage, intimidation and abusive language become normal, children may begin to see them as normal ways of dealing with others.

An abusive household does not make a child's future inevitable - people can and do break harmful cycles - but abuse can teach a child abusive patterns. A child who repeatedly witnesses aggression may learn that anger is how power is expressed and that shouting is how problems are solved. Anger often begets anger.

Strength Is Controlling Anger

Islam does not consider uncontrolled anger to be strength. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

لَيْسَ الشَّدِيدُ بِالصُّرَعَةِ إِنَّمَا الشَّدِيدُ الَّذِي يَمْلِكُ نَفْسَهُ عِنْدَ الْغَضَبِ

"The strong person is not the one who overpowers others in wrestling. Rather, the strong person is the one who controls himself when angry." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 2609)

This principle is especially important inside the home. It is relatively easy to appear patient and composed in front of strangers. A person's true character often becomes clearer around those closest to him. The Prophet ﷺ taught:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَفِيقٌ يُحِبُّ الرِّفْقَ وَيُعْطِي عَلَى الرِّفْقِ مَا لاَ يُعْطِي عَلَى الْعُنْفِ وَمَا لاَ يُعْطِي عَلَى مَا سِوَاهُ

"Indeed, Allāh ﷻ is gentle and loves gentleness, and confers upon kindness which he does not confer upon severity and does not confer upon anything else besides it (kindness)." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 2593)

Consider also the experience of Anas ibn Mālik (RA), who served the Prophet ﷺ for ten years. He said that the Prophet ﷺ never even said "uff" to him and did not constantly question him harshly about why he had or had not done something. (Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī, 2015)

That does not mean children should never be corrected. Rather, correction should come from a desire to teach, not simply from a desire to release our anger.

Setting Children Up for Success - or Failure

Good parenting is not only responding to problems after they appear. It means building an environment in which good habits are easier to develop.

Parents are constantly setting their children up either for success or for unnecessary difficulty. If a child has never been taught to pray consistently and suddenly at fifteen is told, "You are old enough now; you must pray five times a day," the parents have made the task much harder.

If Qurʾān has never been heard in the home, Islamic conversation rarely takes place and religious practice is treated as something belonging only to the madrasah, we should not be surprised when Islam feels distant to the teenager. The Prophet ﷺ instructed:

"Command your children to pray when they are seven years old…" (Sunan Abī Dāwūd, 495)

Notice that the instruction begins years before the child becomes fully responsible for Ṣalāh. The purpose is to develop familiarity and habit.

A child should grow up knowing that Ṣalāh is simply part of life. The Qurʾān is part of life. Ḥalāl and ḥarām matter. Telling the truth matters. Respect matters. Kindness matters. Helping others matters. Controlling anger matters. Apologising when wrong matters. These lessons should become part of the atmosphere of the home.

Sūrah Āl ʿImrān (3:38) and Sūrah al-Furqān (25:74) highlight the power of praying for righteous offspring who bring comfort to the eyes.

هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُۥ ۖ قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِى مِن لَّدُنكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ ٱلدُّعَآءِ

"My Lord! Grant me, by Your grace, righteous offspring. You are certainly the Hearer of prayer." (Sūrah Āl ʿImrān, 3:38)

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَٰجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّٰتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَٱجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

"Our Lord, grant us from our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous." (Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:74)

Teach Īmān Before the World Teaches Something Else

One of the most beautiful examples of parental guidance in the Qurʾān is the advice of Luqmān to his son. He first teaches him about Allāh ﷻ:

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَٰنُ لِٱبْنِهِۦ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُۥ يَٰبُنَىَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّ ٱلشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

"O my dear son, do not associate anything with Allāh ﷻ. Indeed, associating partners with Him is a tremendous wrong." (Sūrah Luqmān, 31:13)

He then teaches him awareness that Allāh ﷻ sees even the smallest deed, instructs him to establish prayer, encourage good, remain patient, avoid arrogance, walk with moderation and lower his voice. (Sūrah Luqmān, 31:16–19)

This is tarbiyah. It includes ʿaqīdah, worship, behaviour, patience, humility and manners. Through sincere advice (naṣīḥah) and spiritual guidance, parents guide their children toward Allāh ﷻ.

Parents therefore need to speak to their children about Allāh ﷻ from a young age. Teach them why we worship Him. Teach them that Allāh ﷻ sees them when no human being does. Teach them gratitude. Teach them about the Prophet ﷺ. Teach them what is ḥalāl and ḥarām in an age-appropriate manner.

Do not wait until the teenage years to begin discussing these matters, when friends, social media, entertainment and wider society may already have shaped much of the child's thinking.

The Madrasah Cannot Replace the Parent

One of the mistakes sometimes made by Muslim parents is outsourcing religious upbringing entirely to the madrasah. The child attends Islamic classes for a few hours each week, and the parents feel that their religious responsibility has been fulfilled.

But consider the numbers. Even if a child spends several hours each week learning Qurʾān and Islamic studies, the overwhelming majority of the child's life is still spent elsewhere. What happens during those other hours? What does the child see at home? What conversations take place? Is Ṣalāh prioritised? Does the family discuss Islam? Does the child see the Qurʾān being read? Does the child witness good character? Are the Islamic lessons taught at madrasa reinforced at home or contradicted there?

A teacher may tell a child for thirty minutes about controlling anger. One explosive argument at home can teach an entirely different lesson. A teacher may speak about Ṣalāh, but the example of parents praying every day may teach it far more powerfully.

The madrasah is a support to parental tarbiyah, not a substitute for it.

Allāh ﷻ says:

وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَوٰةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا

"Command your family to establish prayer, and remain steadfast in it yourself."
(Sūrah Ṭā Hā, 20:132)

Notice again: command your family - and remain steadfast yourself.

Character Is Also Part of Islamic Education

Sometimes religious upbringing is reduced to teaching children how to read the Qurʾān, memorise duʿās and perform Ṣalāh. These are undoubtedly essential, but tarbiyah is much broader than this. A child also needs to be taught honesty, patience, generosity, respect, compassion, responsibility, gratitude and self-control. They need to learn how to admit a mistake, apologise when they are wrong, forgive others and deal with disappointment without losing control of themselves. These qualities are not separate from Islamic education; they are an important part of it.

Much of this character development takes place through the way parents themselves behave. A child who regularly sees patience is more likely to understand patience. A child who receives kindness learns how kindness feels and how it should be shown to others. Likewise, a child who is constantly spoken to harshly may gradually begin to communicate with others in the same manner.

The Prophet ﷺ himself showed great affection and mercy towards children. When he kissed his grandson al-Ḥasan (RA) in the presence of a man who said that he had ten children but had never kissed any of them, the Prophet ﷺ replied: "Whoever does not show mercy will not be shown mercy." (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 6013)

The Parents' Responsibility Comes First

Islam places enormous emphasis on honouring one's parents, and this obligation should never be minimised. Even when parents have shortcomings, children remain responsible for treating them with kindness and respect within the limits of the Sharīʿah. At the same time, parents must remember that their own responsibilities towards their children begin much earlier.

A child enters this world knowing nothing about Ṣalāh, manners, respect, responsibility or birr al-wālidayn (honouring and showing kindness to one's parents). Long before the child becomes accountable for fulfilling the rights of his or her parents, those parents have already been entrusted by Allāh ﷻ with the responsibility of nurturing that child. They are required to provide care and protection, teach right from wrong, develop īmān, instil good character, provide beneficial knowledge and prepare the child to live as a responsible Muslim.

This is an important balance. Parents naturally expect their children to respect them, listen to them and fulfil their rights, but those expectations must be accompanied by a serious effort to fulfil the rights of the children as well. It would be inconsistent for parents to neglect a child's religious, moral and emotional upbringing for many years and then focus only on what the child owes them.

Good parenting means first planting the qualities that parents hope to see later: respect is taught through respectful behaviour, mercy through mercy, responsibility through good example and love for Islam through an Islamic environment at home.

This does not mean that parental rights depend upon parents being perfect. No parent is without mistakes, and a parent's shortcomings do not give a child permission to become disrespectful or disobedient. Rather, Islam places responsibilities on both sides. Parents are responsible for nurturing, teaching and guiding their children, while children, as they grow and become accountable, are required to honour, respect and care for their parents.

This balance can also be seen in Sūrah Luqmān. The Qurʾān presents Luqmān (AS) advising and nurturing his son, while in the same passage Allāh ﷻ commands human beings to show gratitude and kindness towards their parents. The family therefore functions through mutual responsibility: parents raise their children with guidance, mercy and good character, and children grow to recognise and fulfil the great rights that Allāh ﷻ has given their parents.

The Classical Scholars Understood This Clearly

Imām al-Ghazālī (RA) spoke beautifully about childhood . He described a child as a trust in the care of the parents and the child's heart as "a precious uncut jewel", receptive to whatever is repeatedly placed before it.

He explains that if a child becomes accustomed to goodness and is taught goodness, he grows upon it; but if the child is neglected and accustomed to wrongdoing, the consequences fall partly upon those who were responsible for his upbringing.

Ibn al-Qayyim (RA) gave an equally powerful warning. He wrote in meaning that whoever neglects teaching his child what benefits him and simply leaves him unattended has wronged him greatly. He further explains that many problems found in children later in life originate in neglecting their education and religious upbringing when they were young.

The principle is timeless. Childhood is the period in which habits are being formed, values are being absorbed and character is being shaped.

Building righteous children yields lasting benefits for the broader community. Professionals such as doctors, engineers, and teachers who are grounded in Dīn make a profound impact, serving as an ongoing source of goodness and adornment for their parents.

What Do We Want Our Children to Remember?

Every parent should occasionally ask:

- When my children remember their childhood, will they remember a home filled with Ṣalāh, Qurʾān, kindness and security?

- Will they remember parents who listened to them as well as instructed them?

- Will they remember being corrected with wisdom rather than constantly humiliated?

- Will they have seen me control my anger, apologise for my mistakes and treat others respectfully?

- Will Islam remind them of warmth, guidance and purpose — or only shouting and punishment?

- Most importantly, have I helped them develop a relationship with Allāh ﷻ strong enough to remain when I am no longer around?

Children will eventually grow up. Parents cannot accompany them everywhere, control every friendship or protect them from every temptation.

Our goal, therefore, cannot merely be to produce children who behave correctly while we are watching.

The greater goal is to raise young Muslims whose hearts recognise Allāh ﷻ even when their parents are absent.

Conclusion

Children are an amānah from Allāh ﷻ, and raising them well requires much more than providing food, clothing and education. Parents play the greatest role in shaping a child's īmān, character, behaviour and emotional wellbeing. The home should therefore be a place where children see Islam being practised, good character being lived and discipline being balanced with mercy, patience and affection.

In summary, parents should strive to:

- Build īmān and love for Allāh ﷻ from an early age.
- Establish Ṣalāh, Qurʾān and Islamic values as part of daily family life.
- Teach honesty, respect, patience, responsibility and good manners.
- Control anger and avoid creating an environment of fear, shouting or abuse.
- Remember that children learn greatly from what they see and hear at home.
- Provide emotional safety, affection, encouragement and appropriate discipline.
- Support madrasa and Islamic education at home rather than relying on teachers alone.
- Set a good example in speech, worship, behaviour and dealings with others.
- Fulfil the rights of children while also teaching them to honour and respect their parents.
- Prepare children not only for success in this world, but more importantly for success in the Hereafter.

May Allāh ﷻ help us fulfil this trust in the best manner and make our children people of īmān, good character and righteousness. Āmīn.

References: Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn (al-Ghazālī), Tuḥfat al-Mawdūd bi Aḥkām al-Mawlūd (Ibn al-Qayyim).

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