
YOUTH DAY MESSAGE

Challenges Facing Parents!

A Jum'ah Lecture for Friday 2 Jumâdal Ūlâ 1426 (10 June 2005)

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The Holy Qur'ân states: ***O' Allâh grant that our spouses and offspring be the coolness of our eyes and cause us to be a model for the righteous.***

One of the most challenging and daunting tasks we face as parents is to develop a meaningful relationship with our children. Teenage years have historically been a difficult period for most parents. Struggling to find their own place in the world, teenagers often rebel against the ways of their parents. Alcohol, drugs, and illicit sexual activity are but some of the hazards they encounter in their quest for independence, joy, and adventure.

- **Every year 3.4 million kids try drugs, and half a million-attempt suicide in the United States.**
- **Twenty percent of children in the United States ages 6-12 have not had a 10-minute conversation with a parent in a month. Their conversation is with TV, which acts as their mother, father, baby-sitter, and teacher. By the time they are teens, children have seen an estimated 18,000 violent murders on TV. This is family life in USA. "Something is wrong with the entire American family," writes Martin Marty, professor at the University of Chicago in the Los Angeles Times. "One has the weird sense that America is a country with many children but without adults."**

Nabî Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam ***'Every child is born on Fitrah (a natural inclination towards Islam). It is his parents who turn him towards Judaism, Christianity or fire-worship'.***
(Mishkât).

Every child is born in a state of pure innocence. It is his social upbringing, the values that his/her parents display that impact and influence his identity. Parents have an enormous responsibility in moulding the character of their children. If they build a strong, trusting, and loving relationship with their children before the teenage years, their children will be less likely to go astray. Children can be a source of enormous tranquility and self-fulfillment yet they can become the root of the

greatest heartbreak, pain and sorrow. The very child that provides joy and happiness can also produce the greatest hurt and sorrow. Our great dreams for our children could suddenly turn into unimaginable nightmares. It **has** happened to Muslim families and **can** happen in our own homes. This is, of course, a very frightening thought for most parents. Some will merely say that: ***“it won't happen to my child.”*** A responsible parent will accept the stark reality and look for ways to prevent such tragic occurrences. It is therefore important that parents adequately prepare to develop a long lasting bond with their children. *If you fail to prepare than be prepared to fail!*

The following guidelines may help us meet the daunting task of rearing our children so that they may in the words of the Holy Qur'ân *'become the coolness of our eyes'*.

Lead by example: We should never permit ourselves to do anything that we are not willing to see our children do. We have to set the example. The Holy Qur'ân states: O' You who Believe! Why do you say things that you yourself do not do?" Teenagers hate hypocrisy, and many of them seem to have built-in radar for detecting it. If we want them to listen to us and take our advice, they must trust us. If we tell them not to drink, but drink ourselves, they will not respect us. If we do not frequent the masjid ourselves, how can we expect them to be regular in their *salâh*? *Children do not need to be told as much as they need to see a role model.*

Treatment of our spouses: Parenting has less to do with what we say to our children and more to do with how we treat our spouses in their presence. Never argue with your spouse in front of the neither children, nor insult or treat him/her with disrespect. *Children learn more from what they see than from what they hear.*

Sympathetic ear: The single greatest challenge that we have as parents is to provide a protective home environment, where they find a father who understands and a mother who listens. They feel secure enough to discuss their emotional needs with their parents. A home where they feel secure from being shouted at for daring to honestly communicate their emotional needs. Ibn Majah reports on the authority of 'Ibn Abbâs *Radhi-Allâhu 'anhu* that the Messenger *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* said: "Honour your children and strive for excellence in their education". *Honour their feelings, praise them, encourage them and educate them.*

Avoid at all costs the following **negative C's**:

- **Competition:** we unduly exert pressure on our children to perform beyond their capabilities. *As a result they feel hopeless and stop believing in themselves.*
- **Comparison:** as a way of criticism breeds resentment and dents the confidence and self worth of an individual
- **Contempt:** when we treat them with disrespect, calling them names and continually insulting them.
- **Consumerism:** where we compensate for the lack of time we spend with them with material gifts. Where we buy their respect and obedience instead of securing their obedience through companionship.

In her book '**Living With Teenagers: A Guide for Muslim Parents**', Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood writes: "Teenagers are idealists---they want to change the world, and make it a better place. These are not bad ideals, and it is a great pity that adults have forgotten their own ideals in the rat race of daily life. You, the parent, may have ended up as just a hard-working nonentity in some quiet niche in life; a teenager who is a real idealist may end up as a famous person, a reformer, a politician, an aid-worker ---who knows. The future lies there before them. It is therefore a foolish parent who tries to ridicule and trample on that young idealism. If it is consistent with Islam, it should be fervently encouraged, and not set at nought." If a teenager is idealistic and wants to improve the world, we should encourage him and help him. If he is full of zeal but lacks the proper direction, we should help him to use that zeal constructively. If we get teenagers involved in helping those in need, community projects and in working for important causes, their zeal could make a tremendous impact.

May Allâh grant us the ability to fulfil and discharge our responsibilities as parents.

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