

3. The right to have a good name.
4. The right to have proper maintenance.
5. The right to have a basic secular and religious education.
6. The right to be brought up according to Islam.

Keeping in mind that the Prophet (SAW) have set forth for us guidelines in how to raise children according to Islam, below are suggestions and steps necessary to facilitate a proper Islamic upbringing in our community.

VI. MODELING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

Prophet Muhammad divided the life of a child from the age of infancy to 21 into three stages, each lasting seven years. During the first stage from 0-7 years old, it must be a priority to instill in children the values necessary for a proper upbringing and to work on character building. Those familiar with child development will agree that that is not the period to introduce complex concepts in Islam and nor is it appropriate to use fear and shame as a tactic to get children to comply with Islamic laws. Instead, Prophet Muhammad teaches us that at this stage we must model appropriate behavior and treat children with grace and respect: in the Hadith of Abu-Dawood, the Prophet was reported saying, thus:

“Respect your children and teach them good behavior and Allah will forgive (your sins).” (2000:119)

We must model Islamically appropriate behavior before young children in our community at the mosque, community events and in day-to-day activities regardless of whether or not we are the parents. Children at this age absorb information quickly and it’s up to us to show them what is and is not acceptable. It is important to also model certain behaviors out loud for example, when beginning a meal we must say “Bismillah,” or “in the name of God,” and when we finish a meal we should thank God. It is also important to watch our language, keep calm and remain respectful before children because we are teaching them how to act. Children must be in a positive environment and the Prophet stresses upon the need for this too: *“It is among the rights of the child on his father to teach him good manners and keep him in good society.”* (Al-Hakeem)

VII. TEACHING ISLAM TO CHILDREN

When children are 8 to 15 years old, they are in the second stage of their Islamic upbringing and adolescence. Children during the first two stages are taught the steps of prayer and ablution, until eventually at the age of nine they should be able to master prayer. In many texts and traditions, it is mentioned that once a child has learned how to pray, God will forgive the sins of the parents. It is important to remember that teaching prayer in gradual steps is more logical than teaching prayer in a very short amount of time (a week, for example).

During this stage, children must be taught formal Islamic knowledge. Many families have opted to entrust this large task to Sunday Schools. This approach remains problematic because children are immersed in secular education five days a week and in religious education only a few hours a week. There must be a form of collaboration between parents and weekend Islamic schools so that children are getting the time and attention needed to meaningfully learn and implement Islamic laws and values. During this stage, females also begin to wear the headscarf; however, they must understand that the basis of *Hijab* is modesty, not simply wearing a cloth on their heads, and that modesty manifests itself in our speech, conduct, friendships, and dress. For both genders, it is important during this stage to limit and eliminate their exposure to un-Islamic television shows, books, and movies due to the large element of anti-religious rhetoric that lies within such things. Furthermore, we must work with the youth at this stage to develop fun and fulfilling alternatives to activities that are forbidden in Islam while also providing them with the reasoning as to why certain activities and television shows are not appropriate for a Muslim to watch.

The final stage of Islamic Upbringing takes place during the ages of 15 to 21, and at this point the hard work of the community in working together to raise a child should manifest itself in the child’s conduct. Unfortunately, many families begin Islamic upbringing at this age! This is an ineffective method as we have witnessed and instead, during this stage, we should be reinforcing important ideas and behaviors taught in the first two stages. The Prophet has suggested that parents now act as a “friend” to their child rather than continue in the role of a teacher. However, we have seen some parents take this concept too far and are unable to remind their teenagers of Islamic answers to the typical teenage problems and concerns. For one, we see far too many Muslim families allowing their teenagers to mix freely with the other gender and attend events like prom. This lends itself to a lack of Islamic knowledge on the part of both parent and teenager. Prophet Muhammad said the two Hadith reported by Tirmidhi: *“A virtuous child is a flower from the flowers of Paradise.”* He also said, *“Among the good fortunes of a man is the virtuous child.”* (Tirmidhi: 112-114)

Islamic upbringing begins in the early childhood years and should continue throughout the teenage years. It is the responsibility of all members of the community to work together to instill in our children the best social, moral, and religious values and these values are found only in Islamic behavior and knowledge, this is the only way that would poster awakening to our youth.

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