

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT CHILDREN (PART 4 OF 5): NURTURE, LOVE, AND EDUCATION

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Islam is a religion concerned with justice and respect and as such, it takes rights and responsibilities very seriously. Islam states that it is the responsibility of each individual to treat all of creation with respect, honour, and dignity. Respect begins with loving and obeying the commandments of God and from this respect flow all the manners and high standards of morality that are inherent in Islam. God expects us, adult believers, to treat children with respect and to nurture, love and educate them. When rights and responsibilities are taken seriously, it enables one to love and respect God.



“And whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, fears God, and keeps his duty (to Him), such are the successful ones.” (Quran 24:52)

Small children need food, drink, sleep and they also need love and compassion. Taking care of their physical needs and disregarding their emotional and spiritual needs is inappropriate .

After the birth of a child, mothers are advised to breastfeed. Breast milk was designed by God to specifically fit the needs of each individual child. Modern science has proven the remarkable qualities of breast milk. Breast milk has disease-fighting cells called antibodies that help protect infants from germs, illness, and even ‘Sudden Infant Death Syndrome’.^[1]

Colostrum, the thick yellow fore-milk made during pregnancy and just after birth, will give babies the best start at life. Milk changes over time to meet the baby’s needs. By the third to fifth day after the birth breast milk has just the right amount of fat, sugar, water, and protein that is needed for a baby's growth.

“The mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years, (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the term of suckling” (Quran 2:233)

However, God does not put the believers into any situation they cannot handle, therefore if breastfeeding is not possible there are alternatives such as using a wet nurse and more commonly feeding the infant baby formula designed specifically for an infants needs.

God does not want to place you in difficulty, but He wants to purify you, and to complete His Favour to you that you may be thankful. (Quran 5:6)

As soon as they are old, enough to understand children should be taught to love God. This is usually easy because children are naturally disposed to know and love God. It is straightforward for them to understand that God is the Creator. It is the parents or caregivers responsibility to teach children that God is One, that there is none worthy of worship but He.

And (remember) when Luqmaan said to his son when he was advising him: “O my son! Join not in worship others with God. Verily, joining others in worship with God is a great wrong indeed. (Quran 31:13)

Parents, guardians, and caregivers are responsible for teaching their children the duties of Islam. Children must be taught the correct way of worshipping God and the best way to do this is by example. From the moment that they can interact with their surroundings children are learning. Even when a very small child hears the call to prayer, he or she will know that it is time for all worldly endeavours to stop while believers focus their attention on God. Children learn this by observing the behaviour of those around them.

From the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, we learn that it is obligatory upon us to teach our children to pray when they are seven years old and to admonish them for not praying when they reach the age of ten.^[2] The reality is that children who live in a household where prayer and correct worship are visible, are eager to pray and often a very young age can be seen bowing and prostrating at their parents side.

At seven years old children must be taught how to pray correctly. By the age of ten children should be admonished for not praying. Whatever discipline is used it should be such that the child understands that praying is important. Beating a child is never an option.

Children should be taught and made to observe those around them performing all the other obligations that come with being a believer in the Oneness of God. Children should be able to see those around them fasting, and performing other acts of worship such as reading Quran. They should also observe their caregivers displaying good manners and morals. The companions of Prophet Muhammad have narrated that

children were taught the basics of Islam from a young age.

We used to observe this fast after that, and we used to make our children fast and make them toys of wool; if one of them cried for food we would give him that toy until it was time to break the fast.^[3]

I was taken for Hajj with the Messenger of God, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, when I was seven years old.^[4]

Islam is a holistic religion; therefore, physical needs pertaining to this world must not be neglected. Children have the right to live safely and securely, and have all their physical needs taken care of. Noted Islamic scholar Imam an Nawawi said, “The father^[5] should bring his children up with good manners in all things, eating, drinking, dressing, sleeping, going out of the house, entering the house, riding in vehicles, etc. He should instil in them the attributes of a good person, such as love of (personal) sacrifice, putting others first, helping others, nobility and generosity. He should keep them away from evil characteristics such as cowardice, stinginess, lack of nobility, lack of ambition, etc. Children must also be protected from physical harm and anything that is likely to lead them towards sinning.

Islam gives children many rights and is concerned with their spiritual, physical, and emotional well being. In the next and final part of this series of articles, we will discuss fairness, equality, and custody issues.

Footnotes:

[1] The (USA) Federal government source for women’s health information. (<http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/benefits/>)

[2] *At-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawood.*

[3] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[4] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[5] This is taken to include mother, caregivers, and guardians.

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