

Lesson 6: Discipline and Control

It is the right of every child to be disciplined by wise and reasonable parents. A parent uses control and discipline to guide the child. Human beings by nature, tend to lean towards evil. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

Surely the soul is wont to command (towards) evil except, such as my Lord has mercy on.
(12:53)

Without discipline human beings are prone to wrongdoing. A child is especially vulnerable to such tendencies for he lacks the wisdom and maturity of an adult. It is easier and more pleasant to follow the dictates of the soul. To follow what is right, morally and logically, requires a firm will. This does not come automatically to a child, but can be developed through discipline.

A good home has certain rules which children must follow. Children feel better when they know they are expected to follow certain guidelines in their daily life. Not only does life become more organized, but they are also freed from the burden of making decisions for themselves when not really in a position to do so. Although they may outwardly resent it, all children need some discipline to feel secure in life.

Discipline and control in Islam is not equal to dictatorship. Good parents take into consideration the age and understanding of the child, his circumstances, and other relative factors. Rules are then made accordingly.

Sometimes the child's wishes are considered and a compromise is made. There is certain flexibility rather than rigid adherence to the rules. However there is no doubt that Islam expects parents to remain in control, to make sure the children follow certain etiquette in behavior rather than a chaotic do-as-you-please attitude.

[Advantages of Discipline](#)

Safety from physical and moral danger

A child with no discipline will be free to do whatever he wishes. At a young age this may often result in physical harm. As he grows, a lax attitude towards his behavior and associations may result in moral dangers. Discipline and control helps ensure the child does not stray into unwanted and unseemly territory.

Avoids wrong influences

A child is often naive, and believes what others tell him, especially his peers. A child without control may have the wrong friends, get involved in the wrong activities, and generally begin to have very different morals and values from the parents.

A chance to be successful

The child who is disciplined has a much better chance of succeeding than the child who is not. He can achieve better at school, be more mature and intelligent, and get accustomed to good habits.

Feels loved and secured

Lack of discipline at home is often interpreted as lack of attention from the parents. This could be due to lack of love or lack of time. Both of these are harmful for the child. Discipline, however hateful, is a sign of concern and love from the parents. It brings with it a security and sense of belonging.

What to control?

Many parents agree that control is necessary, but are not sure of exactly what should be controlled. How much of a child's life should the parents control? The following are some important aspects of a child's life that should be regulated by parents.

Going out

As a child grows, he often requests to go out with friends. A parent should be in full control as to where the child is going, with whom, and for how long. Allowing the child to go whenever and wherever he pleases is sure to invite trouble.

Friends

The influence of friends is greatly emphasized in Islam. The Holy Prophet (S) says: *The conduct of everyone will be according to the beliefs and principles of his friend.*

Good friends can make a great difference to the molding of character. Thus a parent has to be vigilant of the child's friends. Always being in the company of one who has loose morals, or a dirty tongue, or other

such vices, will rub off on the child.

Discourage very close connections such as frequent telephone calls, sleeping over at each other's homes etc. Moderation in all fields is necessary for progress. It is necessary for a child to have friends but it is also necessary that the parents know whom the child befriends.

Language

The tongue is reported to be the source of great good and great evil. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir says: *Indeed this tongue is the key to all good and all evil, so it befits a believer to guard his tongue the way he would guard his gold and silver.* Parents should control the type of language a child uses. Dirty and swear words should be completely forbidden.

Some children pick up various odd ways of speaking from school. These words may not necessarily be filthy, but are indicators of an attitude that must be avoided. Examples, are "who cares?" "get a life" "buzz off" etc. Such expressions vary from place to place, but in general are prominent in today's younger generations. Parents must teach their children to avoid such expressions for they go against the dignity and character of a good Muslim.

Time

No child can be forced to follow a tight schedule set by parents. This is unrealistic. On the other hand, however, it is irresponsible to allow children do whatever they wish with their time. It is necessary to control the amount of time spent on leisure activities. They cannot be allowed to play and watch television as much as they desire. Children must be encouraged to do some useful things with their time. Examples could be taking up a good hobby, learning computer programs, accessing beneficial web-sites etc. It is up to each parent to decide what is most suitable for his children.

Behavior

Although every parent knows he has to instill good manners into his children, many children still get away with unacceptable forms of behavior. Rudeness, asking for things from others, shouting at elders, disrespect in the mosque or at people's homes etc. are all examples of behavior that should not be tolerated. When such behavior is seen even after warnings are given, the child must be punished appropriately. It should be made clear to the child that there are some limits that he cannot cross without facing the consequences. Discipline in this way helps the child control himself.

Some Important Points

1. When disciplining a child, the parent should refrain from becoming a dictator. A rule is not to be followed because "I say so" but because it is the right thing to do. The basis of all discipline is the safety and progress of the child. Talk to your children often about why you set rules and enforce certain laws.

Inspire them with stories of great characters, through books and verbal narration. Do not allow the child to fear you. Allow him to air his view sometimes even if you do not agree with him. Hear him out and then explain why you think he needs to be corrected.

2. Be in control of yourself when disciplining. Sometimes parents go overboard in their attempts to discipline. The home becomes a military camp with strict rules being enforced all the time. It is advisable that parents temper their discipline with gentleness and love. A harsh venting of anger is not discipline. Physical force and nagging should be avoided. Parents should say what is necessary without making it a long lecture and bringing up old problems. This way the child will take it more seriously rather than shrugging it off as just another lecture. Harsh disciplining could also lead to despair in the child. He may assume that he can never acquire the behavior expected of him. This happens when expectations are impractical and inappropriate.

3. When a mistake has been made, allow the child to make amends. Let him apologize and if necessary, carry out the designated punishment. This could include the loss of a privilege, writing lines, time out, or some extra chores. A variety of punishments may be used to ensure that the child does not get away with misbehavior. However, after that has been done, the parents should not continue to be angry and refuse to talk to the child in a normal manner. It is better to get over the anger and become friends again soon. Prolonged anger produces sadness and sometimes resentment in the child.

4. Teach the child internal control. Parental control is external. It is good and necessary. But better than that is internal control, when a child learns to discipline himself. He should be able to stop himself from inappropriate actions even when the parents are not around. This is only possible if:

a) He has learnt the value and wisdom of the rule. So, for example, if he understands that it is against one's dignity to be rude and call others names, he may stop himself from doing it. The child must have conviction that what he should do is really best for his personality. That will automatically make him do it.

b) The parent has not continuously nagged him about it. Constant nagging produces resentment and anger. This could then be channeled to a defiant following of wrong behavior even when the child understands it is wrong.

c) He has seen the respect given to those who behave in the right way. If the child has been exposed to examples, contemporary or in history, who have earned respect and popularity because of their good manners and virtues, he becomes more inclined to follow their path. If he has only been fed on television stars and the examples that abound in today's modern society, he will not aspire to acquire good morals. It is the duty of parents to create an urge in him to have a respectable personality.

Wise Words

May Allah have mercy on the one who helps his child towards righteousness by being good to him,

appealing to him, teaching him knowledge, and training him.

Imam Ali (a)

1. Luqman the wise told his son;

My son, if you learn good etiquette when you are young, you will benefit from it when you are older. Whoever values good etiquette will give importance to it. And whoever gives it importance will take the trouble to learn it. And whoever takes the trouble to learn it will struggle in its search. And whoever struggles in its search will achieve it, and benefit from it.

My son! Get accustomed to carry out your own duties and works. And be patient over the difficulties you encounter from others. If you wish to acquire honor in the world, cut off your hopes from what lies with others. Surely the Prophets and the Righteous reached their status by cutting off their hopes.

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