

Lesson 8: Outside Influences

Although many parents try hard to bring up their children in the right manner, a variety of forces sometimes destroy their efforts. The influences of these outside forces often play havoc with the training given at home. This should not be underestimated and parents must be aware of their negative potential. Once the enemy is realized, it becomes easier to control and decrease its impact.

Human society today is stooping to lower and lower levels of morality. Today's children encounter a great deal of negative and immoral influences. To be able to face these regularly but remain morally and religiously intact, they need the help and guidance of wise parents. Children must be taught how to avoid or minimize mental and emotional pollution. Such guidance will be vital for moral stability all through life, as these influences will remain.

Technological advances have made it possible for children to have various forms of evil and degrading entertainment. Television, computer, internet and C.D's are all part of many children's lives. Although there are advantages that can be derived from these sources, parents have to be vigilant to ensure that children are not drawn to the violence and corruption lurking in them.

Television

Much has been said and written about this invention which has become a necessary part of every home. There are some advantages to it. Children can learn from the television. There are some good programs and documentaries that broaden the horizons of a child's life and teach him about the world around him.

However television also has its bad side. Many programs have contents not on par with Islamic values. Children constantly watching shows begin to think that love, beauty, glamour and fun are the aims of life. Wrong messages are absorbed and learnt by the child. These messages are quite effective because they are passed through the medium of sight.

Children are bombarded with images of people seemingly leading fun filled lives. Their behavior, clothing, lifestyles etc. are all totally opposed to Islam. The world, however, seems to admire such people and Muslim children begin to admire them too. They wish to emulate them, and follow their way

of life. This type of subtle brain washing is very dangerous and can greatly influence the mind of a child.

Another disadvantage of television is the amount of violence it shows. It is a known fact that regular viewers of television become immune to violence. Scenes of death and gruesome violence create no emotion in them. Some viewers are even tempted to carry out what they watch. Human beings lose their gentleness and humanness when they watch a lot of violence. The result is scary. Scores of young television viewers have no concern over the killings and murders that have become a part of life in many parts of the world.

Often parents see television as a babysitter. Parents need to keep the children quiet as they do their own work. What they do not realize is that the children are coming under the influence of what they see. Their minds and thinking become attuned to the pictures flashing on the screen. It is much better to have children beside the parent while they are working. A mother who is cooking should try and give her children something to play with from the kitchen utensils. According to their age she could involve them in the cooking and get them to help. Or the children could read or color etc. near where the mother is working. It is better to think out ways of keeping children busy while parents are working rather than to turn on the television.

Books

Books play a great role in enhancing the intelligence of the child. From a very young age, children should be read to, and given books that they can look at by themselves. Board books are available for the very young. A book is the best teacher for a child, a friend who is never far away in times of boredom and loneliness. Reading the correct type of books can influence the child towards what is good and right in life. Parents should introduce their children to a good library and encourage them to read in their spare time.

A great danger is when children begin reading the wrong type of books. Just as books can be a good influence, they can also be a destructive one. A bad book can spoil the mind of a child, filling it with poisonous ideas and views. Many books for children are filled with violence, fantasies, and romance. Comics and other such books may be entertaining but have little or no benefit for the child. Parents should know what their children are reading.

It is not enough to encourage children to read and then leave them to choose whatever they wish. Most children will choose junk literature which has little benefit for the mind or for literary development. Children must be guided towards choosing good books. Not necessarily boring or didactic ones, but ones which have value in their stories and language. Many classics are interesting for children but they need to be told about them. Most libraries these days have information on good books for various ages.

Another good idea is to get some Islamic books for children to read. Islamic literature for children, both fiction and non-fiction, is being published at a fast rate these days. Many of these books are of a very

high quality. Popular genres such as mystery books are now being written by Muslim authors with stories involving Muslim children and Muslim lifestyles. The illustrations and plots of the stories are fascinating for young children. Reading such books allows children a feel for Islamic culture, and enables them to take pride in themselves as Muslims.

Friends

Another great influence on the life of children is the friends they associate with. Many people stray from the straight path as a result of the negative influence of friends. The Qur'an tells us that on the Day of Judgement, people will regret the wrong friendships they had in the world. It says:

On the day when the unjust will bite their hands (regretfully) saying, would that we had taken a way with the Messenger. Woe to us! Would that we had not been friends with so and so. He led us away from the true guidance after it had come to us. (25:28)

There is no doubt that the behavior of a friend can affect a child. He picks up mannerisms, ways of speech etc. from the friends he plays with and works with all day. Especially when children are at school, the hours spent with classmates often have great influence.

Parents should be aware of who their children are friends with. If they find out that a certain friend does not have the right type of character, and is having a negative effect on their child, they should try and discourage the friendship.

Although it is necessary for children to spend time with their friends, parents should discourage going out all the time with friends, especially as the children get older. Many children insist on going to the mall with friends, or going for outings in groups. Such outings should be discouraged .

Friendships with children who share the same values should be encouraged. Children need friends and it is wrong to tell them not to play with anyone. Parents must provide alternatives so children can enjoy happy times with friends who will not have a wrong influence.

By being aware of the influences that affect the child, parents can try and combat them. They can minimize their effects by keeping the child away from them as much as possible. Although it is not possible to protect the child totally from all negative influences, nor is it wise to cocoon him completely, it is important that a young child be protected as much as possible.

As they become older they become more and more exposed to such influences. But then the child is mature enough to hold on to his own beliefs and values, and the damage is much less.

Wise Words

1. The conduct of everyone will be according to the beliefs and principles of his friend.

Holy Prophet (S)

2. Teach your children from our knowledge, what Allah will help them with, so that those who have gone astray (the *Marjaiah*) will not affect them with their opinions.

Imam 'Ali (a)

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