

The Positive & Negative C's of Islamic Parenting



by Shahina Siddiqui

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One of the greatest challenges a Muslim will ever face is being a parent. This is one challenge, however, many of us are least prepared for.

Allah tells us in the Quran that our children are our trial and as such we should take the task of parenting seriously, and start learning from each other. In my experience in dealing with my own family and counseling other Muslim families, a model has developed based on what I call "The Positive and Negative C's". I pray to Allah that this humble contribution will help parents and children alike in diagnosing and repairing the health of their families.

POSITIVE C'S

Compassion (Rehmat)

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) stated, "He is not of us who does not have compassion for his fellow beings".

It is interesting to note that when it comes to Hadith like this or Quranic quotes dealing with human behavior, we never stop to think that our children and family members are also our fellow human beings and that these golden rules must also be applied to them.

Compassion is only one component of the concept of mercy (Rehmat) — the others being kindness, respect, and of course love. Remember the displeasure of Prophet Muhammad when a Bedouin told him how he had never kissed any of his ten children.

Consultation (Shura)

The Prophet has related that Allah says "Oh My servant. I look on high handedness as something not permissible for myself, and I have forbidden it for you. So do not oppress each other".

When we consult with each other in the domestic realm, both husband and wife must show respect for each other. This is one of the best ways to bond and to learn to listen to each other and to resolve conflicts. However, the consultation will only be fruitful if it is sincere and not merely a formality. Imposition of one's ideas with scant regard to the welfare of the whole family unit defeats the purpose of the most important Quranic principle of Shura.

Cooperation

This concept of cooperation in Islam is most beautifully illustrated in Sura Al-Asr: "... counsel each other to the truth (Haq), and counsel each other to patience and fortitude (Sabr)".

When a family unit cooperates in this manner, they truly capture the spirit of Islam — the welfare of each member of the family becomes the concern of the other.

Commitment

It is extremely important that our families commit themselves as a unit to Allah and His Prophet(s): "Obey Allah and His Prophet and those in authority over you" (Nisa). This collective commitment gives us an identity and maps out our purpose — namely that we all belong to Allah and are accountable and responsible to Him.

Communication

Communication is more than talking. It is an essential part of family life. It is both talking in a manner in which others can understand you, and hearing in a manner in which you can listen and understand others.

So many times people claim that they have no communication problem since they are always talking. However, the majority of the time they are talking "at" and not talking "to". This mode usually results in the recipient tuning out. Many children at an early age learn to tune out their parents.

When communication is a means to listening, understanding, and exchanging ideas, it is the most powerful tool to effective parenting and the best shield against peer and societal pressures.

It also teaches children skills to problem solving. An important component of positive communication is a sense of humor when parents and children can laugh together. Communication can also be instrumental in passing down family history and thus creating oneness and togetherness by sharing a mutual heritage (children love to hear about family stories).

Consistency

Effective parenting requires that we are consistent in our value judgments, discipline, and moral standards. Many parents inadvertently apply double standards to boys and girls when it comes to social behavior and domestic chores. This is unacceptable, and leads to sibling rivalry and stereotypical males and females.

Confidentiality

Family is with whom we can feel safe and secure. Where we know our secrets are safe and where there is mutual trust. Unfortunately, parents often betray the trust of their children when they discuss their concerns, which they confide in them to outsiders. This leads to mistrust, and sooner or later our children will stop confiding in us. This may take them to find confidants outside the family, sometimes non-Muslim peers, and this can be detrimental to their spiritual and moral growth.

Contentment (Tawakkul)

The greatest gift we can give our children is that of contentment. This can be developed very early in life by encouraging our children to give thanks to Allah for all they have by discouraging materialism by word and example, and by counting the blessings every night and remembering the less fortunate.

Confidence

It is the duty of parents to build confidence in our children through encouragement and honest and sincere praise. By developing confidence, we give our children the courage to stand up for themselves and their beliefs and to be able to deal with opposition.

Control

By teaching restraint and avoiding excess we develop in our children control so that they do not become slaves to their desires (Nafs).

Calm

By encouraging and showing calm in matters of adversity and in times of panic we improve our Taqwa (God consciousness) and teach our children to rely on Allah and to turn to Allah alone for all needs.

Courage

Courage of conviction can only be achieved when we have been able to teach our children true Islam. We should take advantage of every learning opportunity as a family so that our faith (Iman) flourishes and evolves towards Ihsan as a family unit. In this manner we can be a source of strength to each other.

Critical Thinking

The Quran encourages us over and over again to think, reflect, ponder, understand and analyze. However, very rarely do. Parents must encourage children to ask questions. Our response to difficult inquiries from our children is to say "do it because I said so". This discourages the children from developing critical thinking. They become lazy and complacent and easy prey to cult type following. To take things at face value makes us vulnerable.

Charitable

The most important attitude of a Muslim personality is, as Prophet Muhammad stated : "Do you not wish that Allah will forgive you? Then forgive your brothers and sisters". Many relationships break because people are not able to forgive each other. It is important that parents make up in front of their children by forgiving each other after an argument. Prophet Muhammad stated, "Like for your brother what you like for yourself". So if husband and

wife expect respect from each other they should give respect.

A charitable nature also encourages us to overlook people with their shortcomings and to be sensitive and to have empathy.

NEGATIVE C'S

There are many negative C's, which should also be identified so that we can avoid them or at least be aware of them. As you will notice when you go through the whole exercise, the presence of one negative C cancels out a positive C.

Competition

In an authentic Hadith the Prophet Muhammad said: "Look up to one who is greater in piety so you strive to be like him and look upon one who is below you in material status so that you may be thankful to Allah's Grace".

As a Muslim community we are experiencing the opposite. We are literally killing ourselves to gain bigger and better material goods than others and passing this same competitive spirit to our children.

If Br. X's son is going to Yale, my son must go to Harvard otherwise he is a failure, no matter how good a Mumin (believer) he is in comparison to Br. X's son. We are inadvertently putting so much pressure on our children to compete in Dunya (this world) that we are actually hurting their self-esteem and pushing them away. Remember if children don't

find acceptance of who they are and what they are capable of at home, they will find it elsewhere.

Comparison

Comparison is an outcome of negative competition it is cruel and breeds resentment and anger. Many parents compare their children to others and get in the habit of complaining. Grass always seems greener in the neighbor's yard, but closer inspection may reveal the opposite. None of us are perfect, and therefore we should stop looking for perfection in others.

Control

The negative aspect of control shows in the form of a controlling personality e.g. I am the boss so you do as I tell you. In extreme cases this need to control leads to abuse and neglect. Anger is also a weapon of a control freak. In most cases it is the father, however mothers also exhibit this trait.

Criticism

Constant, destructive criticism is a sign of dysfunctional parenting. Continuous put downs and verbal clashing destroys the tranquil atmosphere at home. The self-esteem of the recipients of this criticism is extremely low developing in them a victim mentality. They will either seek abusive relationships or turn their backs on their families. Many runaways come from such a family background.

Corruption

"If the truth was to follow their whims, the heaven and earth and all their inhabitants would be corrupt" (Quran part of 23:71).

Weak Nafs and diseases of the heart lead to poor character, which of course is the result of grudging submission and conditional faith. When we corrupt our Deen (religion) by picking and

choosing what we want, practicing what suits us best and resisting and outright opposing what does not suit our fancy, we pay an enormous price by losing ourselves to the Dunya, and driving our children away from Islam.

Confusion

Parents are confused about their identity and their values. They have not been able to develop a structure of right and wrong based on Quran and Hadith and as such when it comes to implementation give conflicting signals to their children.

We must as parents develop an Islamic frame of reference, which would serve to develop a Muslim conscience in our children and a basis for judgment. Sifting through our cultural baggage and increasing our knowledge can only achieve this.

Contempt

Contempt for others is a result of pride, arrogance, and conceit. We must discourage arrogance in children and be constantly vigilant about it as many Muslim youth are falling prey to this trait and developing contempt towards their parents. It is one thing to praise and quite another to set them up on a pedestal. We should always remember "knowledge is proud it knows so much — wisdom is humble it knows no more".

Consumerism

Consumption, a vice of this society, is creeping into Muslim communities. When wants become needs, and parents start compensating for their lack of time spent with their children with material gifts, we are perpetuating consumerism — anything can be bought. This, however, is not true. So many young people I counsel always say "I could do without this new computer if only my parents would spend more time with me".

The legacy of materialism survives generations since it caters to our baser self. Please watch out for it.

Contradiction

When there is contradiction in word and deed it is called hypocrisy. Children are very sensitive to this vice and can pick a hypocrite a mile away.

When we behave holier than thou in the Masjid but present a different side in other settings, we are giving our children the message it is okay to be a hypocrite.

Carelessness

As Prophet Muhammad reminded us in his last sermon "Shaytan cannot mislead us in major issues of Faith but in minor issues". This is where our carelessness and lack of diligence can lead to weak character.

Colonization

This is a mind set that many immigrant parents have passed down to their children — a sense of inferiority, a complex as such, that European and Western cultures are superior and better than that of their country of origin. This is a mentality that encourages imitation, following and serving rather than leadership.

There are many more positive and negative C's that I could discuss but perhaps it would be entertaining if families could sit together and see how many they can come up with, and perform a diagnostic test of their own families based on this humble contribution.