

## The Need For Parenting Workshops In Islamic Schools

Parental Involvement has been a buzzword in the world of education lately now more than ever before in the history of American education. Schools are pushing parents to be involved in their children's academic lives so that they can achieve more. Islamic schools have also jumped on this bandwagon; however the need is not so much on academics but on the social, spiritual and mental development of their children.

Because of this, there is a need for our Islamic schools and community centers to provide parenting classes to give parents some strategies to assist them in combating the negative messages that are anti-family and anti-religious ethics that our society sends. Many parents can't recognize these dangers and only focus on the academic development of their child while many children can be doing well academically but socially they can be struggling. Another issue that parents may not understand is how to navigate the American teenage world. Due to the extension of adolescence it is hard for parents to understand what their child is going through or who is influencing their child because the teenage years have become like a culture unto itself. This can be seen recently in Toronto with the story of the young lady Aqsa Parvez who was killed by her father after having conflicts concerning dress, behavior, and Allah knows best what else. This story shows us that there is a need to reevaluate and educate our parents on how to handle issues like the strong-willed child versus the compliant child, listening to our children instead of the children should be seen and not heard approach, how children are given a message of their individuality instead of a commitment to a group/family on a daily basis, and music, MySpace and dating. All of these issues affect the children who are sitting in

our schools and in order to really educate the whole child we must address them. This also bridges the gap between school and the parents where both parties can be on the same page, which is beneficial for all parties.

The laser-like focus on academics has been very successful on getting our number of doctors, engineers, and lawyers. However, the downside of this is the de-emphasis on character and conduct. There used to be a time where next to the academic grades there were citizenship grades. These citizenship grades were not only a reflection of the child but on the family itself. Now those citizenship grades are not as important not only in the public school realm but also in our Islamic schools. Some of this can be traced back to parents, teachers, and administrators worrying about how children feel (self-esteem) rather than self-respect. This problem is played out everyday in schools where students disrespect their fellow classmates, teachers, and administrators, all because for their entire lives, people wanted to make their lives easier instead of making them respect those in charge and their elders. As Jill Rigby states in her book Raising Disrespectful Children in a Disrespectful World, “As a result of this emphasis on self-esteem, twenty-somethings are returning home rather than facing the world on their own. College kids are flunking out because they don’t know how to manage their schedules. Kids are growing up without problem-solving skills because their parents think love means solving all their problems for them. Many adolescents have no respect for authority because their parents didn’t command their respect. Instead, their parents gave too much and exposed them to too little. In our attempt to build self-esteem in children, we have reared a generation of young people who are failing at life, haven’t a clue who they are, and are struggling to find a reason for living. Their kids fall for the latest craze, healthy or unhealthy. It

doesn't matter, as long as they are in the middle of it. They would rather die than give up their cell phones. And they feel that others have an obligation to serve them.”

If you look at a chart with the results of the 2 parenting goals:

Self-Esteem	Self-Respect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happiness</li> <li>• Greed</li> <li>• Arrogance</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Bad Manners</li> <li>• Selfish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joyful</li> <li>• Humble</li> <li>• Confident</li> <li>• Good Manners</li> <li>• Altruism</li> </ul>

Many of our teachers have to deal with students who have bad manners and when they do write up these students and have a parent-teacher conference, the parent begins to blame the teacher. I know this because I've had this experience in both my public and Islamic school teaching days. On one occasion, I met with a parent of a student who had a particularly foul mouth and was quite disrespectful to others. This student's father came into a meeting instructing a group of teachers how we could teach more so that his child could do better. This left us perplexed and wondering what the meeting was about.

As a community we are in danger from this for a couple of reasons. One reason is that many of our students come from families who are first generation in American. With this comes many challenges but the one pertinent to this discussion is the guilt that many parents feel living in America. This guilt come out in trying to overcompensate and make the kids happy because they realize their kids are missing out on family and culture.

This compensation usually comes in the material realm and giving them whatever they need. The thing that the child is expected to give in return is the good grades which will last probably until school gets tough and they no longer want to work hard. Because they will never have had to do anything difficult, they won't be able to fight through it.

Another problem is the hierarchy in the home. Many of our students don't respect men or dad because the child is the center of attention because with many of our homes, the paradigm is off. In a home where character is the #1 priority, the hierarchy is:

Allah

Spouse

Children

Community

Self

This reinforces to children that they were born into the family that is loving and already has a set order of rules. The husband respects and honors the wife and the wife honors and respects the husband and the children fall in line.

Another problem that can be helped with parenting classes is the teenage years. In America, we've created a whole new culture that has its own language, dress, food, and norms. This culture, popular culture, can be very difficult for parents to deal with because it's different from other traditional cultures and it changes rapidly. Traditional cultures have set norms in terms of dress, food, and behavior that have lasted for hundreds and even thousands of years. When people don't feel like they are part of a tribe, group, or family, they normally join the dominant group. When you have parents that come from a very traditional society, this can be a source of conflict.

- Estimated number of American homes with televisions – 109.6 million
- Average time American kids spend watching television every day – 4 hours
- Before the age of 18, the average child will witness over 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 16,000 murders
- 83% of the episodes of the top 20 shows among teen viewers contained some sexual content including 20% with sexual intercourse
- The video game “Grand Theft Auto: Vice City” rated M (Mature), was the best-selling video game among teens and pre-teens. In it, players can simulate having sex with a prostitute and then killing her.

The teenage years can be very intimidating for parents as the child begins to develop his or her own identity and friendships. Also, parents themselves begin to feel old, which was traditionally a good thing. But in modern-day society, those who are older are seen as less intelligent or not hip. This is the time where the individualism of our society becomes evident. Many teens begin to feel that they are not part of a family unit but that their friends are more important than their family. This is why parents must know who their children are taking on as friends. This is also why it very important for parents to talk to their teens and go into their children’s world in a non-judgmental way. With this approach, children will be given the right answer from people who care about them, not from “friends” who are their age and who have no life experience. Many families are losing their children to this teenage culture because they won’t/can’t talk to your children about your family expectations and where their child fits into this. If parents look at why

friends are so important to all of us, it generally boils down to a point John Maxwell notes in his book Winning with People:

1. Everybody wants to be somebody. Our kids want to matter if they don't feel valued by us, they will feel valued by "friends."
2. Nobody cares how much you know until he knows how much you care. In parenting and in teaching, those under you have to think you care about them in order to do things they may not understand why.
3. Everybody needs somebody. People sometimes have trouble with having confidence in themselves. So they need a good support system.
4. Anybody that helps somebody influences lots of bodies. With teenagers, influence is far more powerful than control, you can't control a teenager and they will do things to show you that they can't be controlled.  
  
Rebellion.
5. Somebody today will rise up and become somebody.

Parents also need training in how to handle the My Space, Face book, music, dating, cell phones, and other popular culture themes. Many parents don't know what these things are, much less the damage and influence that these have on their children. As David Elkind states in The Hurried Child, "Therefore, one consequence to children of television homogenization and the decade long swings between fantasy and reality is to create what we might be called pseudo-sophistication. School age children today know much more than they understand. They are able to talk about nuclear fission, tube worms at 20,000 fathoms, space shuttles, chat rooms, and surfing the net." If parents don't sit

their children down and talk to them about these subjects, there will be real issues. However, if parents are not knowledgeable then children don't take them seriously. Especially in our current society where on television the father is seen as an idiot and the mother and children basically have to work around his stupidity. There is a subtle message in doing this that goes to attacking the head of the household and parents need to be made aware of this.

The teenage years in America have become, as one gentleman put it plainly, a time period where people make excuses for bad behavior. According to Imam Ali (RA), he said during the years from ages 14-21, which we consider the bulk of the teenage years; you should befriend your child at this age group. When young people have their parents as their friends, they go to them for advice, want to spend time with them, and want to emulate them. This time period in a young person's life is difficult for the child but also the parent. Some of the reasons why it is difficult for the child are: puberty, which leads to hormonal and physical changes, the need for their own identity, and wanting more freedom. For the adult, this is a difficult age because of the following reason: the adult is recognizing that they are getting older, which makes them sometimes want to exert more control over their child in a quest to stop the clock. This leads to the same battle they had with the child when the child was 2-3 years old. It's about releasing control. Releasing control is very difficult, especially for many parents in our community because they feel like they have to control what their children are experiencing.

In conclusion, many parents trust our Islamic schools with their most prized possessions – their children. We who are seen as having expertise have a duty not only to put our children in the best possible position to be successful but to also educate their

parents, who are in most cases not knowledgeable about the educational system or society within which their child is involved. As John Taylor Gatto states in his book A Different Kind of Teacher, “A lot of my kids don’t like their families very much either. One of our eighth graders murdered his parents last May for the insurance money. He was thirteen or fourteen (and there wasn’t any insurance money) but he saw a murder like that on television and figured everyone had insurance who wasn’t a kid. That’s an awful thing to say but his disaffection of families is built into the way we school- shutting parents out of the important rooms of their own kids’ lives.”

Now this may sound far-fetched for Islamic schools, but in my experience as a teacher and parent at a couple of different Islamic schools, the amount of pressure, anxiety, and angst between families is enough to make me say that parenting workshops are a must at our Islamic schools, centers, and masjids. As our Prophet (saas) said: “The best thing a parent can give a child is good character.”

## **Bibliography**

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