






Parenting Advice for Muslim Mothers

Part 5 - Love as the Basis for *Tarbiyah* (Continued from Part 4...)

Very much like ourselves and like everyone we know, our children are also imperfect. If we aim for perfection in our children, we will surely end up disappointed, frustrated, and bitter, and our children will end up with a host of emotional, psychological and behavioral issues because they will know that they have disappointed us. Children thrive when they feel that their parents **accept** them, **love** them and **value** them - despite their imperfections. They need **validation** and **approval** from their parents in order to feel good about themselves. After making a mistake, they need **sympathy** and **support** from their parents to restore their sense of self-worth and regain their confidence.

Unfortunately, most parents are too negative, too critical, and not sympathetic and supportive enough. Most of the time, when their child shares with them **negative emotions** that he may be feeling (e.g. *"I hate that person," "I'm so angry,"* or *"I really want to hit him"*), or he tells you about an **unpleasant experience** that he may have had (e.g. a fight with his best friend, or trouble he has gotten into with a teacher) or a **failure** that he has experienced (e.g. he didn't get the grades he expected, or lost a competition), most parents react by reminding the child about what they did wrong.





If a child expresses anger with another child they might say...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "You shouldn't be feeling like that." - "You are overreacting." - "Good boys don't get angry." - "There is no reason for you to be angry."
If the child got punished by a teacher they might say...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "She did the right thing." - "You deserved it." - "I hope you have learnt your lesson now." - "You shouldn't have made her so upset" - "Make sure it doesn't happen again."
If the child scored low on an exam, they might say...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I told you to work harder." - "I told you not to waste time." - "You should have revised more instead of playing the day before the exam" - "Why didn't you answer all the questions? You must have been in a hurry to finish so you could go and play!" - "You should have written longer answers."

How does this negative reaction affect your child?

The result of your negative comments and reprimand is:




- Low self-esteem and demoralization (*"I can't do anything right," "I can't make anyone happy," "What's the point of trying," "I'm really a bad person," "Even mama thinks I'm bad"*)
- Feelings of isolation (*"No one understands me," "Nobody loves me"*)
- Anger and resentment (*"Mama always blames me"*)
- Detachment and withdrawal in the child...if confiding in you has made you upset with him, next time he simply won't share with you what he is feeling or what is going on in his life.

If instead we react positively, we can console and comfort our child, win his heart and confidence, and open the door to further communication. This includes:

	Listening carefully , without interrupting or prompting.
	Identifying what he is feeling, putting it in words and saying it back to him , for example saying <i>"Seems like you are really disappointed,"</i> or <i>"Sounds like he really hurt your feelings,"</i> or <i>"Sounds like that made you feel really embarrassed."</i> This is known as "Reflective Listening" and it is an extremely useful communication tool to employ with children (and in other relationships!). Not only does it make your child feel that you understand him, but it also helps him understand his emotions correctly (if you have not identified his emotions correctly and he corrects you, this is also helpful and it will still give him the feeling that you are trying to understand, and will actually enable you to understand better what he is going through).
	Validating his feelings , for example by saying <i>"Yes, that was quite an embarrassing situation,"</i> or <i>"I understand why he made you so angry,"</i> or <i>"It's totally justified for you to feel hurt."</i>
	Expressing your sympathy and concern , verbally and physically. For example by saying, <i>"I'm sorry you had to go through that,"</i> or <i>"I'm sorry you're feeling so bad,"</i> and just squeezing his hand or giving him a big hug so his negativity will melt away in your warm embrace!

How then can you correct his mistake?

In a loving, sympathetic way. And perhaps not right away, but at a later time. For example, you could...

	Tell him that the same happened to you, or to someone you know. This normalizes the negative feeling or experience for him, so its negative impact is minimized, and makes him feel further that you truly understand him. Then proceed to tell him how you or the other person dealt with the situation, or made amends to make sure it didn't happen again. In this way you can correct his mistake and give him a solution, without being critical or accusatory.
	Ask your child, "What can we do so that you don't have to go through the same experience again?" In this way he feels that you want him to make amends because you care about <u>him</u> and don't want him to suffer, rather than about his grades or what others think of him.
	Ask him, "Do you think you would do things differently next time?" It is likely that he himself will accept his mistake, and then you can help him come up with the solution. If he says he would do the same thing again, just accept his answer quietly. It is likely that he has understood his mistake, so there is no need to irritate him by rubbing it in.

The world is a harsh and unforgiving place. We need to be our children's safe space where they can admit their weaknesses and failures without being judged or rebuked, their comfort zone where they know they will find a warm hug and acceptance no matter how big their mistake, their pillar of support who will always stand by them and raise their spirits.

To be continued in Part 6...