

Nurturing Believers

Parenting Advice for Muslim Mothers

Part 6 - Love as the Basis for *Tarbiyah* (continued from Part 5): The Power of Hugs

One of the most powerful tools available to parents is a simple hug, which can be used anytime and anywhere, requires no special equipment, and costs nothing. Its special power lies in how effective it is in fulfilling many different emotional needs of our children, including love, attention, support, trust, and a sense of security, and furthermore, can help settle down tantrums, calm an upset child, and diffuse fights.

A hug is universally comforting. We now have scientific evidences on how hugging is proven to make us healthier and happier, even smarter and stronger!

- It relaxes muscle and releases tension in the body
- It can take away feelings of pain
- It reduces fear and promotes sense of security
- It builds trust and helps with open communication
- It strengthens the immune system
- It boosts self-esteem and self-confidence
- It promotes positivity and optimism
- It allows us to connect with how we are really feeling

We can start unleashing the power of hugs by doing the following:

First, creating a family culture and habit of offering and receiving physical affection

Many parents are not in the habit of offering much expression of love and hugs to their children, usually because they were not raised that way by their parents. We can consciously change that and become physically affectionate with our children, and make them feel that they can reach out and ask for a hug whenever they need or want one.



THE SCIENCE BEHIND HUGS

Hugging causes hormones to be released into our blood resulting in feelings of love and happiness.

A hug instantly raises **oxytocin** levels, which *heal feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anger*. Holding a hug for an extended time lifts one's **serotonin** levels, *elevating mood and creating happiness*.

Science suggests hugging our children atleast 8 times a day, for 15 seconds at a time for maximum benefit.

Remember that being physically affectionate towards one's children is the blessed *sunnah* of our beloved Prophet ﷺ and pleasing to Allah ﷻ. Once the Prophet ﷺ was kissing his grandson Syedina Hasanؓ when a Bedouin sahabi who was watching him do this said, "You love children very much. I have ten children and I have never kissed one of them." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ replied, "Whoever does not show mercy, will not receive mercy." In another narration someone came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked, "You kiss the children? We do not kiss them." The Prophet ﷺ said, "I cannot put mercy into your heart if Allah has removed it from you." Hadrat Usamah ibn Zaidؓ reported: "Allah's Messenger used to put me on (one of) his thighs and put Al-Hasan ibn `Ali on his other thigh, and then embrace us and say, "O Allah! Please be merciful to them, as I am merciful to them." By making the intention of following this wonderful *sunnah* in expressing love for our children physically, we can reap its benefits in this world, and reward in the Hereafter!

Second, respecting boundaries when offering a hug

As parents we should not force a hug upon the child but suggest something like “Do you need a hug?” or “Looks like you need a hug” or “I see you are dealing with a big feeling, a hug can really help.”

It is also very important for them to learn that it is okay to respectfully refuse a hug, even to near relatives or family members and equally important for us not to force our children to give hugs to greet family out of worry of offending someone. This helps children build healthy boundaries and autonomy regarding their bodies, which makes them safer against sexual abuse and molestation.

Third, calming an upset child by hugging it out

A tantrum or misbehaviour by a child is usually a cry for love and affection. Remember that **children are in the most need of our love when they are acting like they least deserve it**. At this time **we must detach ourselves emotionally from the situation** (tell ourselves that this is about *them*, not *us*), and focus on what our *child* needs (love and attention!) rather than on how *we* feel (angry, disappointed, frustrated!), and get down on our knees and open our arms, and offer our child a hug by starting with “Looks like you need a hug.”

Your child can respond in any of these ways:

Child Feels	Child Says/ Does	You Can Respond With
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● scared● sad● annoyed● mildly upset● has a minor injury or mild discomfort	Rushes straight into your hug	Breathe in calm deep breaths as a way to prompt the child to do the same. Speak in soft reassuring words and wait till the child completely relaxes and decides to break free from the hug.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● too upset to accept a hug	Claims he doesn't want your hug	Suggest that YOU need a hug from him instead. If child persists, respect the unwillingness and say “I'll wait, as soon as you feel ready, come give me a good hug.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● very unstable and unable to control the outburst of emotion	Claims he doesn't want your hug	Remain in the open arms position and say “Looks like you really DO need a hug, I am coming to give you one,” and reach out and hold the child in a comforting embrace just breathing calmly and offering validation and that this is a safe space by softly saying “It's okay.”
	Too deep in the tantrum to respond	Continue hugging the child till you sense him relaxing before moving to any further discussion about what got the child upset.

For babies and toddlers, a mother can calm them by holding them in a comforting embrace, breathing calm deep breaths, occasionally speaking in soft reassuring words like “Its okay, I'm here.” Babies are naturally wired to mirror a caregivers breathing and stress levels; if they are held and calmly offered comfort, they begin to relax in response after a few seconds. Hold the hug till the baby is completely relaxed.

Fourth, hugging for no reason

Hugging, and other ways of displaying affection like kissing the forehead, stroking hair, and rubbing the back, are great ways to strengthen bonds of love and deepen our relationship with our children. They don't just have to be used as a reward or a tool, but should be built into our interaction with our children on a regular basis. Sometimes we may not even know that our child is hurting inside or feeling insecure, but our hug can heal them and make them thrive.