

279342 - How to Deal With Stubborn Children in Islam

the question

My question has to do with my two daughters, who are four and two years old. I am finding it very difficult to discipline them, because every time I try to deal with them gently, I end up screaming at them or hitting them, or saying things I do not want to say, and I feel resentment. My daughters do not listen to what I say. If I say anything to the older one, she answers back and says a lot, and the younger one has started to be very stubborn, which makes me angry. Please note that I have gone through some difficult circumstances that have made me tense. What is the solution? How can I make my daughters obedient? How can I make myself more patient?

Summary of answer

1- Raising children in Islam is a challenging but rewarding task. By relying on Allah and following His guidance, parents can raise children who are kind, compassionate, and God-fearing.

2- Muslims parents should handle children's stubbornness with wisdom, deliberation and patience. Parents should show love and a sincere desire for children's well-being out of love and care for them. The acceptable alternative to physical or verbal mistreatment is punishment that is fair but firm. This includes time-outs, loss of privileges, or other consequences that are appropriate for the child's age and behavior.

Detailed answer

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The importance of relying on Allah in raising children

Raising children in general, and daughters in particular, requires great help from Allah, may He be exalted. In ancient times it was said: "The parents are to discipline their children, but righteousness comes from Allah." (*Al-Adab Ash-Shar'iyah* by Ibn Muflih 3/552)

This is an important principle in raising children . Many parents think that they are able to discipline their children with the educational skills, smartness and intelligence that they have.

They think that by putting the children in the best schools, educating them in the most prestigious fields and letting them mix with the upper classes that they will have managed to discipline them and control their behaviour.

Dangers of relying on one's own knowledge and abilities

This is a serious mistake.

Yes, parents are required to take all available measures that will help to discipline the children and give them a good education. But, unfortunately, the problem arises when parents rely on these measures, by way of trusting them, relying on them and thinking that they are sufficient and very effective.

If Allah leaves a person to his own devices, he will go astray, and if He leaves him to rely on his knowledge, he will be humiliated.

Allah said to our Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), who was the Messenger of Allah:

{Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills.} [Al-Qasas 28:56]

Allah's Prophet Nuh (peace be upon him) could not do anything for his son, to the extent that he ended up among the disbelievers.

When Nuh conversed with his Lord, and cried out to Him,

{My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges!} [Hud 11:45]

Our Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, said to him:

{O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant.} [Hud 11:46]

Hence one of the [supplications of the Prophet](#) (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he offered every day, morning and afternoon, was: "*Ya Hayyu ya Qayyum, bi rahmatika astaghith, aslih li sha'ni kullahu, wa la takilni ila nafsi tarfata 'ayn* (O Ever-Living, O Self-sustaining and All-sustaining, by Your mercy I seek help; rectify all my affairs and do not leave me to my own devices even for the blink of an eye)." (Narrated by al-Hakim; classed as sahih by Al-Albani in *Sahih Al-Jami'*, (5820)

Reflect on this important matter of which many parents nowadays are heedless:

We should not rely on ourselves with regard to [raising our children](#) , and we should not rely on our smartness and knowledge.

Rather we should rely on the strongest support, the refuge, the One Whose aid and help are to be sought, the Lord of the Worlds, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

For He Alone is the One Who controls people's hearts and directs them, and people's forelocks are in His Hand. If it be His will to guide them, He will guide them, and if it be His

will to let them go astray, then He will let them go astray. Glory be to Him, how mighty, wise, all-knowing, kind, and all-aware He is.

Importance of handling stubbornness with wisdom and patience

One of the main measures to be taken in this regard is [handling stubbornness](#) with wisdom, deliberation and patience. That is because responding to stubbornness with stubbornness will only lead to more stubbornness!

In that case, the matter will end up like a tug-of-war: the more one side pulls, the more motivated the other side will become to pull even harder.

But if the mother lets go of her end of the rope when dealing with her child, and stops dealing with him in the same confrontational manner, the child will soon have no reason to continue being stubborn, and he will go back to his normal state of weakness and will refrain from doing any more mischief.

The stubborn child is usually very smart and always resorts to tricks to do the things he wants to do.

In most cases, such a child feels oppressed by the people around him, his siblings, relatives, parents and grandparents, because they criticise him a great deal and treat him harshly, which makes him feel resentful.

These two factors, together, lead to a kind of alienation from society, and cause the child to develop the urge to take revenge on society.

This usually appears in the form of stubbornness and violent behaviour that [rebels against social norms](#) .

Therefore what you must do, in this situation, is respond to his use of tricks and attempts to prove his smartness by ignoring and tolerating what he is doing.

And you must respond to the child's feelings of being oppressed by showing him compassion and understanding.

And you must respond to his rebellious and stubborn attitude by showing love and a sincere desire for his well-being, out of love and care for him.

At the same time, you must be firm in matters in which discipline is required, without being harsh or trying to show that you are able to stand up to him and challenge him. Then you should realise that dealing effectively with children cannot be done except by avoiding two things and doing two things.

The need to avoid mistreating children verbally and physically

The things that you should avoid are: mistreating the child verbally, by using harsh words, and mistreating him physically, by beating him.

Rather what you should do is choose kind words and show physical affection.

To explain further:

What is meant by verbal mistreatment is using demeaning words about the child's character, not about his actions, such as saying that he is careless, a liar, violent or other negative words.

What you should do is try to show kindness to the child when dealing with such negative situations. This means limiting the negative description to his actions, whilst describing his character as the opposite of his actions, mentioning good characteristics and virtues.

So instead of describing him as careless, we can say to him: You are organised, so how could you do something so careless?

Instead of describing him as a liar, we can say to him: You are honest, so how could you say something that never happened?

Instead of describing him as violent, we can say to him: You are compassionate, so how could you hit your brother so violently?

And so on and so forth.

What is meant by physical mistreatment is every humiliating act of physical aggression which is aimed at causing pain and taking revenge, such as beating the child severely in a way that goes beyond the disciplinary smack that is permitted according to Islamic teaching, and reaches the level of causing pain and taking revenge. That is because according to Islamic teachings, there are three levels of hitting or striking.

The lowest level is smacking for the [purpose of discipline](#) , and the highest level is striking for the purpose of administering a hadd punishment. In between the two comes striking for the purpose of administering a punishment at the discretion of a judge.

If we reflect on striking for the purpose of administering a hadd punishment – which is the highest level – we will find that there are restrictions enjoined in Islamic teaching which make it less painful than the type of beating given nowadays by some parents to their children.

The jurists say that if a man who is healthy and strong is flogged as a hadd punishment, he should be flogged with a branch of average size, that is not too fresh and not too dry, not so light as to cause no pain and not so thick as to cause injury [by breaking the skin].

They stipulated that the one who administers the flogging should not raise his arm above his head to the extent that the whiteness of his armpit can be seen, and he should avoid hitting the most vulnerable parts of the body [the striking of which could cause death], and he should distribute the blows over the person's body [and not strike one spot repeatedly].

They are unanimously agreed that there should be no striking of the face, private parts or most vulnerable parts of the body. (See: *Hashiyat Ibn 'Abidin* (3/147); *Az-Zarqani* (8/114); *Ar-Rawdah* (10/172) and *Al-Mughni* (8/313-315)

If these conditions are stipulated with regard to flogging, which is the most severe type of striking, then what do you think about smacking for the purpose of discipline?

Striking for the purpose of discipline is as mentioned in the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance – [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.} [An-Nisa' 4:34]

Al-Qurtubi said in his *Tafsir* (5/172):

“The striking referred to in this verse is striking for the purpose of discipline, and should not be severe. It is the kind of striking that does not break bones or cause injury to any faculty, such as poking and the like. The aim behind it is to bring the woman to her senses and make her mend her ways, and nothing else.

So it is little wonder that if the beating leads to death, there is liability.

The same applies to one who smacks his son in order to teach him the Quran, discipline him and teach him good manners.

In *Sahih Muslim*, it says: “Fear Allah with regard to women, for you have taken them as a trust from Allah, and intimacy with them has become permissible to you by the word of Allah. Your rights over them are that they should not allow anyone whom you dislike to sit on your furniture. If they do that, then strike them, but in a manner that does not cause pain.”

[This was narrated by Muslim in the lengthy hadith of Jabir about Hajj].

Then he (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

‘Ata’ said: I said to Ibn ‘Abbas: What is meant by striking that does not cause pain? He said: Hitting with a siwak and the like. This was narrated by at-Tabari in his *Tafsir* with a sahih isnad.”

Acceptable alternative to physical or verbal mistreatment

The acceptable alternative to physical or verbal mistreatment is punishing the child by depriving him of something.

What is meant by depriving him of something is taking something away for the purpose of discipline, within certain restrictions; it does not mean deprivation in an absolute sense, without restrictions.

So for example, depriving the child of play for ten minutes is a kind of depriving him, in a restricted sense, for the purpose of discipline. The aim thereof is to impose an intangible punishment for the purpose of correcting his behaviour.

Making the child sit in the “naughty chair” or “time-out chair” for a number of minutes commensurate to his age (ten years = ten minutes) is also a kind of depriving him for the purpose of discipline.

Another example is deducting a small amount from his pocket money.

As for punishing the child by depriving him of playing for an entire day or more, or depriving him of his pocket money altogether, this will make him get used to punishment to the extent that it becomes no longer effective. If that happens repeatedly, the child will soon get used to it and will start to look for other available alternatives, if he is punished with this kind of deprivation, without restrictions.

Another method is dealing with the child by using a star chart, negative and positive. This is also very useful.

In this method, the child is given one or more stars for every positive behaviour.

One or more stars is taken away for every negative behaviour.

You should have a system for these stars, by agreeing, for example, that when the child reaches ten stars, he will receive a prize, and when he reaches twenty stars, you will take him out on a fun trip, and so on.

As for kind words, that includes three things:

1. Loving words, such as saying to your daughters: “I love you,” and similar words. That is because expressing feelings of love is something that was encouraged by the

Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in his teachings.

It was narrated from Abu Karimah al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Karib that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "If a man loves his brother, let him tell him that he loves him." (Narrated by *Abu Dawud* (5124) and *At-Tirmidhi* (2392); classed as sahih by Al-Albani)

This expression of love should happen on a daily basis and be unconditional; it should not be said only on special occasions or when the child does actions or behaves in a way that is approved by his mother and father.

1. Words of appreciation and praise, even for the smallest things, because a lot of criticism and continual scorn will have a negative impact on the child's character and will weaken it greatly.
2. Words of support and encouragement, to encourage the child in what he is good at or in his general activities, and to support him psychologically so that he will carry on developing his skills.

Physical affection also includes three things:

1. Hugs on a daily basis that are not connected to the child's actions or behaviour, as noted above with regard to expressing love that is not subject to any conditions.

This is one of the things that may play a great role in making the child's emotions stable.

1. Positive physical touch, such as patting the child's head or shoulders, and other kinds of positive touch.

That is instead of negative touch, which usually happens in the context of stubbornness and bad behaviour.

1. Sharing in non-tangible and tangible ways.
 - Non-tangible ways may mean looking with interest and admiration at what the children do of activities, hobbies or practising their special skills.

- Tangible ways may include joining in their games and jokes in a positive manner, and joining in with them when they are doing something serious or when they are playing.

How Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) dealt with children

We will conclude here by mentioning something that the best of humanity, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did when interacting with children:

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was one of the best people in attitude. One day he sent me to do an errand for him, and I said: By Allah, I will not go. But in my heart I intended to go and do what the Prophet of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had told me to do. Then I went out and passed by some boys who were playing in the marketplace. Then the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) caught me on the back of my neck from behind. I looked at him and he was smiling. He said: "O Unays, did you go where I told you to go?" I said: Yes, I am going, O Messenger of Allah. (Narrated by Muslim, 2310)

And it was narrated from him (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: I served the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) for ten years, and by Allah he never spoke any word of contempt to me, and he never said to me for any reason, why did you do such and such? Or why did you not do such and such? (Narrated by al-Bukhari (6038) and Muslim (2309))

This is how the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was with a servant, so how do you think he was with his children?

Shaddad ibn Aws (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came out to us for one of the night prayers [Maghrib or 'Isha'], carrying Hasan or Husayn. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) went forward and put the child down, then he said the takbir for the prayer and

started to pray. He prostrated during his prayer, and made the prostration lengthy. My father said: I raised my head and saw the child on the back of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) whilst he was prostrating, so I returned to my prostration. When the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had finished the prayer, the people said: O Messenger of Allah, you prostrated during your prayer and made the prostration so lengthy that we thought that something had happened, or that revelation was coming to you.

He said: “None of that happened, but my son rode on my back and I did not want to rush him until he had had enough.” (Narrated by An-Nasa’i (1141); classed as sahih by Al-Albani)

This is paying attention to children’s needs, even in the context of worshipping Allah, the Most Great, the Most High!

We ask Allah to guide our children and help us to understand how to deal with them in the way that will be most effective in guiding them to righteousness, will fulfil our duties towards them, and will make the Lord of the Worlds, may He be glorified, pleased with us.

And Allah knows best.