What Islam says about Parents' role in raising Children

Posted on March 6, 2018

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Introduction

Islamic teaching presents parenting as a relationship of responsibility, mercy, justice, education, and accountability before Allah. Children are not treated merely as possessions, symbols of status, or sources of future financial support. They are a trust whose physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual development must be protected. The Qur'an links family responsibility with worship and moral conduct, while the Prophetic tradition repeatedly emphasizes guardianship, compassion, fairness, and the duty to guide without injustice. Parents are expected to provide food, shelter, healthcare, education, affection, boundaries, and religious instruction, and children are expected to honor their parents, speak respectfully, assist them, and care for them in old age. Qur'an 17:23–24 places kindness to parents immediately after the command to worship Allah alone, demonstrating the seriousness of filial responsibility (Khattab, 2016). Yet parental authority is not absolute. Islamic sources also distinguish lawful obedience from participation in wrongdoing. A balanced account therefore treats the family as a system of mutual rights in which authority is joined to compassion and accountability.

Children as a Trust and Shared Parental Responsibility

The idea that children are a trust changes parenting from personal preference into a moral and religious obligation. The Prophet Muhammad taught that each person is a guardian responsible for those placed under his or her care, including responsibilities within the household (Al-Bukhari, 1997). This principle applies to both mothers and fathers. A father's duty is not exhausted by financial provision, and a mother's central role in pregnancy, nursing, care, and early development does not make her solely responsible for a child's emotional or religious formation. Parents should cooperate in decisions involving health, discipline, education, worship, relationships, and safety. When parents separate, responsibility continues because the child's need for stability does not disappear with the marriage. Treating children as a trust also means rejecting neglect, humiliation, exploitation, and favoritism. Parents are accountable for how authority is used. A child should therefore be guided toward maturity rather than controlled for the sake of parental pride. The purpose of authority is to

cultivate a morally responsible person who can eventually act independently while retaining respect for family and faith.

Spiritual and Moral Education Through Example

Spiritual education in Islam includes belief, worship, character, patience, gratitude, honesty, modesty, justice, and responsibility toward others. Qur'an 31:13–19 presents Luqman advising his son about worship, prayer, patience, humility, social conduct, and avoidance of arrogance, offering a model of instruction that combines doctrine with everyday behavior (Nasr et al., 2015). Parents therefore teach most effectively when their own conduct supports what they say. A parent who demands truthfulness while lying routinely weakens the lesson, just as a parent who insists on prayer while treating worship as unimportant sends a contradictory message. Children also need age-appropriate explanation. Commands alone may produce temporary compliance without understanding, while a home in which questions are welcomed can help children develop a more durable religious identity. Qur'an 66:6 places responsibility on believers to protect themselves and their families, but protection should not be interpreted as coercion without wisdom. Islamic moral education is strongest when guidance, routine, conversation, personal example, and sincere affection reinforce one another over time.

Love, Mercy, Physical Care, and Education

Islamic parenting includes emotional warmth as well as rules. Prophetic reports describe Muhammad showing affection to children and criticizing emotional hardness; in one narration, he responded to a man who said he never kissed his children by connecting mercy shown to others with mercy received (Al-Bukhari, 1997). This principle challenges the assumption that distance or fear automatically produces strong character. Children benefit from listening, praise for sincere effort, predictable routines, and correction that does not make love appear conditional on grades, appearance, or obedience. Physical responsibility includes nutrition, shelter, medical care, hygiene, safety, and financial support according to means. Qur'an 2:233, in discussing nursing, emphasizes reasonable provision and warns against using the child as a cause of harm between parents (Khattab, 2016). Education should include religious and worldly knowledge because literacy, science, communication, vocational skill, critical thinking, and technology can help children support themselves and serve society. Seeking professional medical or psychological help when needed is compatible with responsible Islamic care rather than evidence of weak faith.

Justice, Discipline, and the Limits of Authority

Justice among children is a recurring Islamic principle. A well-known hadith records the Prophet instructing a parent to treat children fairly when asked to witness a gift given selectively to one child (Al-Bukhari, 1997). Fairness does not require identical treatment when children have different

medical, educational, or financial needs, but differences should be based on legitimate need rather than favoritism involving gender, appearance, personality, or achievement. Discipline likewise should aim at teaching rather than releasing parental anger. Boundaries, routines, consequences, and correction are necessary, but humiliation, threats, uncontrolled violence, and public shaming can damage trust and emotional development. Parents should consider why behavior occurred: aggression may follow bullying, poor school performance may reflect a learning difficulty, and dishonesty may be reinforced by fear of extreme punishment. Understanding a cause does not remove accountability; it helps parents choose a proportionate response. Islamic authority is therefore strongest when justice and mercy operate together. Children should understand both what is expected and why, while parents remain willing to acknowledge their own mistakes.

Respect for Parents and Obedience Within Islamic Limits

Children are instructed to honor parents, especially as they age, but Islamic teaching does not require obedience to wrongdoing. Qur'an 31:15 provides a clear example: even if parents pressure a child toward religious disobedience, the child should refuse the wrongful command while continuing to accompany them with kindness in worldly matters (Khattab, 2016). This principle prevents parental authority from becoming absolute control. Respect includes polite speech, reasonable assistance, gratitude, maintaining family ties, and care during illness or old age, yet adult children also become responsible for their own lawful decisions about work, marriage, residence, and other matters. Parents can advise based on experience, but consultation is healthier than perpetual domination. The relationship changes as children mature from dependence toward adult responsibility. Islamic ethics therefore holds two ideas together: parents possess a highly honored status, and every human being remains accountable to Allah for personal conduct. Disagreement need not become disrespect, and respect need not become participation in injustice. Strong families learn how to preserve both conscience and affection when decisions are difficult.

Righteous Children and the Long-Term Meaning of Parenting

Islam gives parenting a long-term spiritual meaning by teaching that the good a parent helps cultivate can continue beyond the parent's lifetime. A hadith in *Sahih Muslim* states that after death, ordinary deeds cease except for continuing charity, beneficial knowledge, and a righteous child who prays for the deceased (Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, 2007). This does not mean children exist primarily to generate reward for parents. Each child has independent dignity, responsibility, and a relationship with Allah. The continuing benefit arises because sincere parenting can transmit habits of prayer, honesty, generosity, learning, and service that later benefit other people. Parents therefore invest most deeply when they cultivate character rather than status. Wealth, prestige, academic success,

and professional achievement can be valuable, but they do not substitute for integrity and compassion. Qur'an 18:46 describes wealth and children as adornments of worldly life while placing lasting good deeds above temporary status (Nasr et al., 2015). Parenting is thus evaluated by the quality of guidance and example, not by how impressive a child appears socially.

Conclusion

Islam places parents in a respected position while making that position accountable. Mothers and fathers are responsible for physical care, financial support, emotional security, education, spiritual guidance, justice, and wise discipline. Children, in turn, are expected to honor their parents, speak kindly, provide assistance, maintain family ties, and pray for them. Neither side receives unlimited power over the other. Parents should not use religion to justify cruelty, favoritism, or control of every lawful adult choice, and children should not use independence as an excuse for contempt or abandonment. The Qur'an and Prophetic tradition repeatedly join authority with mercy and obedience with moral limits (Khattab, 2016; Al-Tirmidhi, 2007). The strongest Islamic family is therefore not one built on fear or outward reputation but one in which faith is visible through service, communication, fairness, self-control, and compassion. Parents teach most convincingly through the behavior children observe every day, while children honor parents most meaningfully through gratitude and care that continue even after they become independent adults.

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