

BOOK REVIEWS

Noha Alshugairi and Munira Lekovic Ezzeldine. *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*. Irvine, California: Izza Publishing, 2017.

During this challenging time, Noha Alshugairi and Munira Lekovic Ezzeldine present a well written book to help Muslims practice positive parenting in their homes. Alshugairi, a licensed marriage and family therapist and the mother of four children, began her journey into conscious intentional parenting when her teenage son was being raised in the United States. She enrolled in a class on how to parent teenagers, and this class helped her shift into understanding her children's point of view and becoming more of an authoritative parent. After joining Jane Nelsen's workshop on positive parenting, Alshugairi was determined to share what she had learned with the Muslim community. Munira Lekovic Ezzeldine, who is certified as a Premarital Counselor and as a Positive Discipline Educator, believes that parenting is a spiritual journey. She views her three children as gifts from God, even though they require a lot of hard work and sacrifice. The two women met when they were pursuing their Master's degrees in Counseling from California State University, Fullerton.

Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home (2017) begins with a couple of beautiful *du'ā'* (supplications) from the Qur'ān to remind us that Allah is our guide and supporter during this undertaking. Chapter 1 is a strong introduction to understanding the concept of *tarbiya* (teaching and supporting a person during his/her life experiences), which includes life's many domains: religious, moral, intellectual, social, healthy body, psychological, sexual, and so on. It aligns with the philosophy of positive discipline established by Dr. Jane Nelsen. Alshugairi and Ezzeldine describe eight areas in which this philosophy is congruent to Islam: 1. Building Social Interest; 2. Fostering Belonging and Contribution; 3. Understanding the Belief Behind the Behavior; 4. Encouragement; 5. Mutual Respect; 6. Kindness and Firmness at the same time; 7. Short-term versus Long-term; and 8. Focus on Solutions.

The next two chapters emphasize understanding different parenting styles and our children. There are three philosophical approaches in this regard: the first is the authoritarian style, when parents expect blind obedience from their children. The constant threat of punishment may result in a low-confidence, oppressed child who has no control over his/her life. The second parenting style is one with permissive parents, those who are so lenient that they establish no boundaries and allow their children to make all the decisions. Without boundaries and rules, children may feel lost and consistently misbehave. The final approach is the authoritative style variant known as the positive discipline style. This term describes authoritative parents who maintain their parental authority while empowering their children to develop and learn. Such children feel respected and loved, as well as responsible and accountable for their actions. In addition to knowing our parenting style, parents must understand and accept their children's temperament, inner strengths, as well as other influential factors like their birth order.

The book's second part discusses how positive discipline discourages the use of rewards and punishments. Children raised with punishment-based parenting may have reduced self-esteem; seek revenge; and/or become sneaky, resentful, or rebellious. The authors define punishment as when you "do not invite children to think for themselves nor [...] consider solutions to the challenge" (p. 63). As for rewards, these materialistic gains may motivate a child and lead to him/her achieving the desirable results. Unfortunately, rewards lose their effectiveness after a while because the children begin to think only of what they are receiving instead of focusing on right actions. Next, the desirable target "becomes a bargaining chip" (p. 64) to use with their parents. Soon, the children get bored and learn to demand more or better rewards, which quickly causes the parents to feel trapped. If parents cannot use rewards or punishments, then how can they help their children learn, behave, and flourish? The authors invite parents to use the positive discipline tools in their homes to collaborate, nurture, and empower.

Chapter 5, "49 Positive Discipline Tools for Parents," is my favorite section. One essential tool is "Connection Before Corrections" (p. 80). As there are always going to be challenges to overcome, children will trust and listen to the parent who connects with them. After he/she makes a mistake, a parent should not scream, label, shame, or dismiss the child's feelings. A connected parent should acknowledge these feelings, remain calm, remind the child that accidents happen, hug or hold him/her, and take time to process and reflect on the mistake with the child. Listen (p. 113), Be There (p. 77), have Effective Communication (p. 87), and Pay Attention (p. 130) are critical tools. Effective Communication is having a healthy way of sending and receiving a message without misunderstanding. The I-Statements and Reflective Listening is a powerful communication tool that we must learn and teach to our children so they can better express their feelings and wishes within a respectful environment. To show children that they are important in their parent's life, a parent must pay full attention, pause, listen to the child, and be there with "an inviting attitude" (p. 78). A parent should repeat what he/she heard in a kind and understanding tone. Children and teens like to feel listened to, instead of being criticized or judged. In such an atmosphere, a parent can help the child devise a solution using the Problem Solving tool (p. 134).

In the book's third part, Alshugairi and Ezzeldine write about applying these tools during different stages, along with the challenges faced during the parenting journey. The Early Years (0-5 years) is a very critical time in the children's lives, for during it they need to learn routines, self-soothing practices, limitations, toilet training, and, most importantly, Islam and the love of Allah (p. 186). This can be an exhausting time for parents, as they have to deal with temper tantrums (p. 162), school separation anxiety (p. 175), nagging behaviors (p. 169), and food battles (p. 165). During the Middle Childhood Years (6-12 years old), parents face such challenges as disrespect and talking back (p. 194), technology use (p. 200), homework battles (p. 205), forgetting things (p. 207), and friendship (p. 209). Throughout this stage, parents teach and model the importance of responsibility with natural consequences (p. 125), technology and internet safety (p. 202), and mutual respect (p. 121), as well as the prophetic wisdom of choosing righteous friends. Most importantly, parents should pass on the message of Islam-the-Habit (p. 214) and the way to live Islam for life (p. 230) with daily prayers, fasting, and modesty.

Chapter 8 is about the Teen Years (13-18 years old). Many parents find this to be the most difficult stage, for teens go through biological and emotional changes with random mood shifts and rapid behavior changes. There are three priorities when parenting teens: “connect with your teen, pick your confrontations, and work with what is under your control” (pp. 236-238). In this stage, teens begin to form their identities, face peer pressure, and develop risky behaviors. However, parents must accept shifting independence and responsibilities from themselves to their teens, otherwise parents will face power struggles and conflicts with them. Also, it is important for parents to establish guidelines with limitations for the use of electronics “to prevent problems like sexting and pornography” (p. 258). Parents often avoid talking with teens about sex, relationships, drugs, LGBT, and, for some families, mental health issues. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “There is no shyness in matters of religion” (p. 341). Children are curious and want to know about these supposedly taboo issues, so their parents must become the primary source of their education in these sensitive topics.

In her essay “Difficult Conversations” (pp. 340-355), Ezzeldine offers general guidelines to approach some of these difficult topics based on the children’s ages. Chapter 9 is about “Adult Children” and the importance of “Letting Go” (p. 285) while staying connected with a good relationship based upon respect and trust. During this stage, conflicts can break out between parents and adult children over careers (p. 298), marriage (p. 296), sexual orientation (p. 292), money, time, and friends (p. 286). In my opinion, the most difficult conflict is the “Question of Faith” (p. 288), as young adults become more exposed to new values. The authors mention the example of Dr. Mustafa Mahmud, the Egyptian physician and philosopher who lost faith for 30 years and focused on science. However, he eventually returned by connecting science with Islam and showing many Muslims the connection between Islamic knowledge and scientific discoveries. The book’s last section contains a collection of parental wisdom essays addressing different aspects that Muslim families face in the 21st century.

The parenting journey comprises many challenges, lessons to learn, joyful moments, and so many other blessings. After all, parents must remember to make *du‘ā* (supplications) and rely on Allah, as everything is by His guidance and will. Parents must be patient, remain calm, acknowledge their children’s feelings, give them age-appropriate responsibilities, and remain firm and loving in a connecting way. Remember that mistakes are opportunities for learning (p. 119), and children need to face the natural consequences of their actions (p. 125). Also, a parent must have a self-care routine to avoid burn-out and parental frustration and anger.

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