

# **Beyond Hope and Dua: A Strategic Framework for Parenting Muslim Tweens in the West**

*Evidence-based Parenting Guidance from the Quran, Sunnah, and Behavioral Science*

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## **Chapter 1: “The World They Inherit” (Background)**

- Understanding the unique pressures of Muslim tweens in the West
- Digital landscape realities (what's actually happening online)
- Peer dynamics, identity crisis, and the “double life” phenomenon
- Grounded in: Prophetic awareness of context (Makkan vs Madinan approach), “each generation is born into a different time”

## **Chapter 2: “The Prophetic Parenting Framework” (Islamic Foundation)**

- How the Prophet ﷺ raised confident, resilient young believers
- The balance of *tarbiyah* (nurturing) vs *ta'dib* (discipline)
- Shifting from external control to internal conviction (10-14 is the critical window)
- Common misapplications: cultural authoritarianism dressed as Islamic obedience

## **Chapter 3: “The Communication Bridge” (Practical Skills)**

- How to talk so they'll listen / how to listen so they'll talk
- Understanding tween brain development and emotional volatility
- Repairing ruptures and rebuilding trust when communication has broken down
- Grounded in: Prophet's communication with youth (Ibn Abbas, Anas, etc.)

## **Chapter 4: “Building Unshakeable Identity” (Internal Resilience)**

- Faith as personal conviction vs inherited tradition
- Addressing doubts and questions with honesty
- Helping them articulate “*why I'm Muslim*” in their own words
- The danger of spiritually outsourcing to your Islamic weekend school

## **Chapter 5A: “The Body, Puberty & Sexuality” (Critical Issues - 1)**

- Age-appropriate sex education from an Islamic framework
- Navigating puberty with dignity (menstruation, wet dreams, physical changes)
- Addressing curiosity vs shame-based approaches
- Preparing them before peers/internet educate them incorrectly

## **Chapter 5B: “Technology, Screens & Digital Wellness” (Critical Issues - 2)**

- Understanding what they're actually accessing online
- Practical boundaries that don't rely solely on restriction
- Social media's impact on identity and mental health
- Teaching digital literacy and critical thinking

## **Chapter 6: “Red Flags & When to Worry” (Action Planning)**

- Normal tween behavior vs concerning patterns
- Signs of bullying, depression, anxiety, radicalization
- When to seek professional help
- Building your monitoring approach without becoming invasive

## **Chapter 7: “Your Family’s Roadmap”**

- Consolidating the framework
- Creating personalized action plans (30/90/180/360 days)
- Accountability and support systems
- Troubleshooting and Neurodivergent parenting
- Closing reflections and commitments

**Note: All cases studies presented are based on true stories but identities have been replaced**

**Compiled by: Dr. Ali Shehata**

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# CHAPTER 1: “THE WORLD THEY INHERIT”

## *Understanding the Unique Pressures Facing Muslim Pre-Teens in the West*

### Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the fundamental differences between growing up Muslim in a Muslim-majority country vs. the West
  - Understand the digital landscape and its impact on identity formation
  - Identify the “double life” phenomenon and why it develops
  - Grasp the intensity of peer pressure and social dynamics at ages 9-14
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The Prophet ﷺ said: “*Every child is born upon the fitrah, and it is his parents who make him a Jew, Christian, or Magian.*” (Bukhari & Muslim)

But here’s what we often miss: **the environment shapes how that fitrah is nurtured or challenged.** The Makkan Muslims raised their children differently than the Madinan Muslims—not because Islam changed, but because the *context* changed.

Your parents raised you in one context. Your children are growing up in another. **This is not a criticism of you or them—it’s a recognition of reality.**

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## PART 1: THE IMMIGRANT PARENT BLIND SPOT

**The Most Common Mistake:** Many immigrant parents (or children of immigrants) measure their children’s experience against their own childhood in Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Somalia, Malaysia, etc.

**Case Study #1: “But I Turned Out Fine”** *Ahmed’s father grew up in Cairo in the 1980s. He had freedom to roam the neighborhood, spent summers with extended family, and Islam was everywhere—hearing the adhan five times every day, weekends there included Friday so he could attend jumu’ah with his family, Ramadan decorations, everyone fasting together in Ramadan, everyone celebrating Eid across the city. When Ahmed asks to go to a friend’s house, his father thinks: “I was doing this at his age, no problem.”*

*But Ahmed’s “friend’s house” could likely mean:*

- A home where Islam is mocked or misunderstood
- Access to unsupervised television, internet and gaming
- Exposure to content his father can’t imagine
- Peer pressure around haram normalized as “no big deal”

**The Reality Check:** Your childhood had **built-in Islamic infrastructure**—communal reinforcement, cultural norms aligned with faith, and natural consequences for stepping outside bounds. Your child has **the opposite:** they’re swimming upstream in a culture that contradicts Islamic values at nearly every turn.

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**Quranic Principle:** Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ

“O you who believe, guard yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones...” [66:6]

In your home country, society did over half that work. Here, **you're doing 100% of it.**

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## **PART 2: THE CONVERT PARENT CHALLENGE**

**Most common mistake:** Trusting that the community that you accepted will also keep your children safe. While converts are far more familiar with the evils in their own society, they often have misconceptions that the Muslim community in which they live has rooted out these problems.

**Case study #2: “But Fatima’s family are Muslim, so my Mariam should be safe.”** *Mariam’s parents are both converts to Islam from over 15 years ago alhamdulillah. Mariam, who is now 12, has befriended Fatima who was born into a Muslim family that came from overseas many years ago. When Mariam tells her parents that she is going to spend the night at Fatima’s house, her parents are happy as they feel that their daughter is going to be in a safe friendship with a Muslim family. They think, “Alhamdulillah, we can rest at ease tonight knowing she will be in a good environment without any haram.”*

*But, sadly, Fatima’s house could also present the following challenges:*

- A home where, though Islam is practiced, culture may sometimes take the forefront
- Access to unsupervised television, internet and gaming
- Exposure to content Mariam’s parents would never imagine being in a Muslim home
- Peer pressure around haram normalized as “no big deal” or “people I know always do it”

**The Reality Check:** We often assume that Muslim parents we know from the masjid have the same conviction and understanding that we do, and sadly, this is not always the case. Anyone who has visited a “Muslim country” has seen things normalized there that go against the belief and practice of most devout Muslims and that can be a hidden danger to your child.

*\* I want to make it clear that these are not blanket statements, not generalizations of anyone in the Muslim community. It is from the general understanding of Allah’s command in surat an-Nisaa:*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا خُذُوا حِذْرَكُمْ

“O you who have believed, take your precaution ....” [4:71]

Hence, the believer is one who is cautious and examines things before moving forward, and sadly, when it comes to our children, sometimes we are simply too trusting and not cautious enough.

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## PART 3: THE DIGITAL NATIVE REALITY

**Understanding Their World:** Regardless of where you grew up, your child is likely to be the first generation to grow up with:

- Smartphones as extensions of their identity
- Social media as the primary social space
- Instant access to humanity's best and worst
- An algorithm designed to addict, not educate

### Research Reality:

- Average age of first pornography exposure: **11 years old** (before you think they're ready for “the talk”)
- Hours per day on screens for this age group: **7-9 hours** (more time than they spend with you, at school, or sleeping—and far more time than organizations like the AAP recommend for this age group which is only approximately about 2 hours per day for leisure activities)
- Percentage who've experienced cyberbullying: **59%**
- Percentage who've seen content promoting self-harm, suicide, or eating disorders: **over 40%**

**Case Study #3: “He's Just Playing Games”** *Reem's 12-year-old son Yusuf spends hours on Discord “playing Fortnite with friends.” She thinks: harmless fun, at least he's home and safe.*

*Reality: Yusuf's Discord has:*

- Adult strangers engaging kids in “friend groups”
- Conversations about girls, dating, and explicit content shared casually
- Mocking of religion (“your parents make you pray? that's so cringe”)
- Gradual desensitization to haram becoming normal

*Yusuf doesn't tell his mom because:*

- He doesn't think it's a big deal (everyone talks like this)
- He's embarrassed
- **He knows she won't understand his world**

**The Prophetic Model:** The Prophet ﷺ was **intensely aware** of what the youth around him were exposed to. When young men came to him struggling with desires, he didn't dismiss them or shame them—he **acknowledged the reality** and gave practical guidance. The following hadith illustrates this awareness and how he was not judgmental to the young man, but patient, kind and logical:

Abu Umamah reported: A young man came to the Prophet ﷺ and he said, “O Messenger of Allah, give me permission to fornicate.” The people turned to rebuke him, saying, “What is this? What is this?” The Prophet ﷺ quieted them, and then said to him, “*Come here.*” The young man came close and he told him to sit down. The Prophet said, “*Would you like for others to do that with your mother?*” The man said, “No, by Allah, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet replied, “*Neither would people like it for their mothers. Would you like for others to do that with your daughter?*” The man said, “No, by Allah, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said, “*Neither would people like it for their daughters. Would you like for others to do that with your sister?*” The man said, “No, by Allah, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said, “*Neither would people like it for their sisters. Would you like that people do that with*

*your aunts?”* The man said, “No, by Allah, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said, “*Neither would people like it for their aunts.*” Then, the Prophet placed his hand on him and he said, “*O Allah, forgive his sins, purify his heart, and guard his chastity.*” After that, the young man never again inclined to anything sinful. (Ahmad—authenticated by al-Arnaoot)

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## PART 4: THE IDENTITY CRISIS YEARS

**Why Ages 9-14 Are Critical:** This is when children move from “**I’m Muslim because my parents are**” to either:

-  “**I’m Muslim because I choose to be**” (internalized faith), or
-  “**I’m Muslim but...**” (fragmented identity leading to double life)

### The Double Life Phenomenon:

- At home: prays, wears hijab, speaks respectfully
- At school: hides identity, compromises values to fit in, lies about family/faith
- Online: sometimes a third persona entirely

**Why It Happens:** Not because they’re bad kids. Because they’re trying to survive in **two incompatible worlds** without the tools to integrate them.

**Research Shows:** Identity formation in adolescence is the **#1 developmental task**. When it's disrupted or fragmented, it leads to:

- Anxiety and depression
- Risk-taking behavior
- Vulnerability to radicalization (both secular and extreme religious)
- Leaving Islam entirely in young adulthood

**Case Study #4: “The Straight-A Student Who Left Islam at 18”** *Zainab was the “perfect” daughter—hijab, good grades, memorized Quran. Her parents were shocked when she removed hijab in college and stopped practicing.*

*What they missed:*

- She never internalized *why* she practiced—only *what* to do
- She was never allowed to ask hard questions
- Her faith was a performance for parents, not a conviction
- College gave her the freedom to finally be “herself”

**The Warning:** If your child reaches 18 without having wrestled with and **owned** their Islam—meaning actually made the decision to accept Islam themselves out of conviction—they will either:

1. Abandon it when they’re no longer under your roof, or
2. Cling to it rigidly without depth (vulnerable to extremism)

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## PART 5: PEER PRESSURE & BULLYING

**The Intensity You May Not Remember:** At 9-14, peer approval is **sociologically and neurologically more important** than almost anything else. Their brains are wired to seek belonging. Moreover, their behavior changes depending on whether they are alone or with their friends, as can be nicely summarized by this quote:

*“...it seems like people accept you more if you're, like, a dangerous driver or something. If there is a line of cars going down the road and the other lane is clear and you pass eight cars at once, everybody likes that. [...] If my friends are with me in the car, or if there are a lot of people in the line, I would do it, but if I'm by myself and I didn't know anybody, then I wouldn't do it. That's no fun.”*

Anonymous teenager, as reported in *The Culture of Adolescent Risk-Taking*<sup>1</sup> (Lightfoot, 1997; p.10)

This neurological reality isn't a flaw – it's how Allah designed adolescents to seek community. This neurological reality shows why tweens make different decisions in groups vs. alone—their brains are wired to seek peer approval during these years. Thus, it's not just “bad friends”—it's **brain development** + peer context.

The question is: which community are they finding?

### Common Scenarios:

- Being the only one who doesn't date
- Being mocked for praying or fasting
- Being excluded from social events (birthday parties with free mixing, school dances, prom, etc.)
- Being asked to explain/defend Islam after every terrorist attack in the news

### What They Won't Tell You:

- How exhausting it is to be “different”
- How much they crave just being “normal”
- How they're bullied not just by non-Muslims, but sometimes by cultural Muslims who think they're “too religious” or not cultural-enough (“How come you don't speak Arabic?”)

**The Prophetic Lens:** The young Sahaba faced mockery in Makkah. The Prophet ﷺ didn't tell them “just ignore it” or “be tougher.” He:

- **Validated their struggle**
- **Taught them resilience strategies**
- **Built a support system** (Dar al-Arqam—a safe space)
- **Modeled dignity under pressure**

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<sup>1</sup>Lightfoot C. *The culture of adolescent risk-taking*. New York: Guilford Press; 1997.

## CONCLUSION: THE PARADIGM SHIFT NEEDED

**What This Chapter Should Have Done:** If you walked in thinking your job was to “make sure they pray and don’t date,” I hope you now see: **your job is to equip them to navigate a hostile environment while maintaining their faith, identity, and mental health.**

This requires:

- **Awareness** of their reality (not your nostalgia)
- **Empathy** for their struggles (not dismissal)
- **Strategy** that accounts for their specific pressures (not generic advice)

**The Goal of This Seminar:** By the end of today, you will have a **framework**—rooted in Quran, Sunnah, and proven pedagogy—to raise children who:

- Own their Islam with confidence
- Navigate challenges with resilience
- Communicate openly with you
- Emerge as strong, grounded young adults

I end with the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ:

*“A person will adopt the ways of his best friend, so let one of you look carefully at whom he befriends.”*  
(Tirmidhi—authentic)

And from the teachings of the early scholars:

Ibnul-Jawzee reported in *Dhammul-Hawaa (Censuring the Desires)* that Ibraaheem ibn Ishaq al-Harbee<sup>2</sup> (d.285 H) said:

“Keep your children away from evil companions, before it happens that you have immersed them in, and dyed them, with affliction”,

and elsewhere he said:

“The beginning of the corruption of children comes about from one another.”

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<sup>2</sup> Hanbali scholar from Baghdad who has critically acclaimed works in hadith sciences and fiqh

## CHAPTER ONE WORKBOOK EXERCISES:

1. **List 3 ways your child’s experience differs from your own childhood.** Be specific.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Ask your child (in a non-judgmental way):** “What’s the hardest part about being Muslim at school?”  
Listen without fixing or dismissing.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. **Audit one week of your child’s screen time.** What apps? How many hours? Do you know what they’re accessing? Do you have parental controls switched on?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 2: “THE PROPHETIC PARENTING FRAMEWORK”

### *What Islam Actually Teaches About Raising Children (Not What Your Culture Says)*

#### Learning Objectives:

- Understand the Islamic foundation for parent-child relationships
- Distinguish between *tarbiyah* (nurturing) and *ta'dib* (discipline)
- Learn how the Prophet ﷺ raised confident, resilient young believers
- Identify common cultural distortions of Islamic parenting principles
- Recognize the critical shift from external control to internal conviction (ages 10-14)

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**Quick Recap:** In Chapter 1, we established that your children are growing up in a radically different context than you did. The question now is: **What does Islam actually teach us about how to parent in ANY context?**

**The Problem:** Much of what we call “Islamic parenting” is actually cultural practice wrapped in religious language. For example:

- “Children must obey parents absolutely” (often misapplied)
- “Strictness = piety” (cultural, not Islamic)
- “Questioning = disrespect” (shuts down healthy development)

**The Goal of This Chapter:** Strip away cultural baggage and return to the **actual Prophetic model** of raising young believers.

#### Foundational Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

*“Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of a people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband's home and his children and she is responsible for them...”*

(Bukhari & Muslim)

**Key word:** رَاعٍ (ra'in) - **shepherd**. Not dictator. Not boss. **Shepherd.**

What does a shepherd do?

- **Guides** the flock to good pasture (doesn't drag them)
- **Protects** from predators (alert and aware of dangers)
- **Tends** to the weak and injured (compassion)
- **Knows** each sheep individually (personalized care)

This is the Prophetic parenting paradigm.

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## **PART 1: THE PROPHETIC MODEL - HOW THE PROPHET ﷺ RAISED YOUNG BELIEVERS**

### **A. He Showed Affection Publicly**

The Prophet ﷺ was physically affectionate with children - kissing them, carrying them, playing with them - even when others criticized him for it.

#### **Hadith:**

Anas ibn Malik reported: I never saw anyone more compassionate toward children than the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. (Muslim)

#### **Another narration:**

Al-Aqra' ibn Habis saw the Prophet ﷺ kissing his grandson Al-Hasan. Al-Aqra' said, "I have ten children and I have never kissed any of them." The Prophet ﷺ looked at him and said, "*Whoever does not show mercy will not be shown mercy.*" (Bukhari & Muslim)

#### **Another narration:**

Abu Qatadah reported: The Prophet ﷺ came out to us with his grand-daughter, Umaamah, the daughter of Abul al-'As and Zainab (his daughter), on his shoulder. The Prophet ﷺ prayed and when he bowed, he would put her down. When he arose, he would lift her up. (Muttafaqun alay—agreed upon by Bukhari and Muslim)

#### **One more narration:**

Abu Huraira reported: A man came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he complained about the hardness of his heart. The Prophet said, "If you want to soften your heart, feed the poor and pat the head of the orphan." (Ahmad)

#### **Application:**

Many of us grew up in cultures where physical affection was rare, especially from fathers. This created emotional distance. The Prophet ﷺ modeled the opposite - warmth, tenderness, and public—though appropriate—displays of love for children.

**Important note:** As many of us have sadly witnessed in recent years, there is a fine line between kindness and compassion to children and abuse. There have been already several high-profile cases of Muslim people, most often men, who have taken advantage of this beautiful sunnah to use it toward satisfying their own sick and evil desires. As Muslims, we have to be careful in this regard, and at the same time, not allow a child in our care to be abused or molested with the excuse that someone is just very affectionate or that "it's just cultural".

## Research backs this:

Children who receive consistent physical affection (hugs, kisses, appropriate touch) have:

- Higher self-esteem
- Better emotional regulation
- Stronger parent-child bonds
- Lower rates of anxiety and depression

In a 2013 article out of UCLA<sup>3</sup>, they reported that physical demonstrations of love and affection from a parent result in children being emotionally happier and less anxious. This study indicates that a child's brain actually physically changes as a result of this love. Similarly, child abuse and lack of affection also have a demonstrably negative impact on children both mentally and physically, seen to cause numerous health and emotional disorders throughout the child's life.

Additionally, a 2019 study from University of Notre Dame<sup>4</sup> demonstrated that children who receive affection from their parents are happier as adults. Among the three data sets that they looked at, all three of which showed the significant impact of positive touch on children, was a survey over 600 adults to understand how they were raised. This survey included questions on how much positive physical affection/touch those adults had received as children. Those adults who reported more love in childhood showed decreased rates depression and anxiety, and were found to be more kind overall. Those reporting less affection, on the other hand, demonstrated more mental health challenges, higher social anxiety and discomfort, and struggled to relate to other people's perspectives as adults.

### Case Study #1: "My Dad Never Hugged Me"

*Khalid, now 45, is a successful engineer. But he admits he struggles to show affection to his own 12-year-old son. When asked why, he says: "My father never hugged me. I don't even know how."*

*The cycle continues - not because of Islam, but **despite** Islam.*

**Your Task:** If you struggle with physical affection, start small:

- A pat on the head or hand on the shoulder when they do well—this is the guidance of the Prophet ﷺ when he advised people with hard hearts to pat the head of an orphan.
- Sitting close during family time
- A hug before bed

Your tween may initially resist (especially boys around this age), but **consistency breaks down walls and it models the behavior that will make them more successful and emotionally intelligent as adults.**

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<sup>3</sup> J.E. Carroll, T.L. Gruenewald, S.E. Taylor, D. Janicki-Deverts, K.A. Matthews, & T.E. Seeman, Childhood abuse, parental warmth, and adult multisystem biological risk in the Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults study, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 110 (42) 17149-17153, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1315458110> (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Narvaez D, Wang L, Cheng A, et al. The importance of early life touch for psychosocial and moral development. *Psicol Reflex Crit.* 2019;32(1):16. Published 2019 Aug 2. doi:10.1186/s41155-019-0129-0

## B. He Listened to Them and Took Them Seriously

The Prophet ﷺ didn't dismiss children's concerns or questions. He engaged them thoughtfully.

**Hadith:** Abdullah ibn Abbas reported: I was riding behind the Prophet ﷺ when he said to me, “*O young man, I shall teach you some words of advice: Be mindful of Allah and He will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, then ask Allah alone; and if you seek help, then seek help from Allah alone. Know that if the nation were to gather together to benefit you, they would not benefit you except with what Allah had already prescribed for you. And if they gathered together to harm you, they would not harm you except with what Allah had already prescribed against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.*” (Tirmidhi - authentic)

### Notice:

- The Prophet ﷺ is speaking to a **young boy** (Ibn Abbas was 10 or less at the time)
- He's teaching him **deep theology** - not dumbing it down
- He's having a **one-on-one conversation** during a journey
- He addresses him respectfully: “O young man” (يَا غُلَامُ)

### This is the model:

Don't underestimate your child's ability to understand profound concepts. **Engage their minds.**

### The pattern:

The Prophet ﷺ:

1. Addressed young people directly
2. Gave them practical wisdom they could apply
3. Connected their actions to ultimate purpose (Paradise)

Contrast this attitude and practice to much of what we see today where we tell our children that “this is adult talk” and tell them to go play. Or we sit and talk as adults at the dinner table and tell our young men and women to “sit at the kid's table”. And then we are surprised that our boys are twenty and still unable to be responsible, or that our girls are still pushing off adulthood!

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## C. He Let Them Make Age-Appropriate Choices

### Hadith:

Abu Hurairah reported: Al-Hasan ibn Ali took a date from the charity dates and put it in his mouth. The Prophet ﷺ said, “*Kikh! Kikh! (spit it out) – don't you know that we do not eat charity?*” (Bukhari & Muslim)

## What this shows:

- Al-Hasan (the Prophet's grandson, probably around 3-5 years old) was allowed to wander and explore
- The Prophet ﷺ **corrected him gently** without shaming
- He **explained why** (we don't eat charity)

## As children grow older, the Sahaba gave them more autonomy:

Ibn Umar reported that when he was around 13-14, he wanted to join the Battle of Uhud. The Prophet ﷺ examined him and **said he was too young**. But a year later, at the Battle of the Trench, when Ibn Umar was around 15, **the Prophet ﷺ allowed him to participate**. (Bukhari & Muslim)

## Lesson:

The Prophet ﷺ:

- Had **age-appropriate boundaries** (Uhud = too young)
- But **respected development** (Trench = ready)
- Didn't infantilize or arbitrarily restrict

## Application for Tweens:

This is the age to **gradually expand their autonomy** in decision-making:

- Let them choose extracurriculars (within halal bounds)
- Give them input on family decisions where appropriate—let them be part of the discussion
- Let them manage small responsibilities (chores, homework, budget)

**The goal:** By 18, they should be making **most** of their own decisions. If you wait until 18 to suddenly give freedom, **they'll crash**.

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## D. He Corrected with Wisdom, Not Harshness

**Hadith:** Anas ibn Malik reported: I served the Prophet ﷺ for ten years. By Allah, he never said to me, “Uff!” (an expression of annoyance). He never said about anything I did, “Why did you do that?” And he never said about anything I neglected, “Why did you not do that?” (Bukhari & Muslim)

## Think about that:

A young boy, serving the Prophet ﷺ for **ten years**, and not once did the Prophet ﷺ:

- Snap at him in frustration
- Shame him for mistakes
- Make him feel inadequate

## Another powerful example:

Mu'awiyah ibn al-Hakam reported: While I was praying with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, a man sneezed. I said, “May Allah have mercy upon you!” (يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ). The people stared at me with disapproving looks, so I said, “Woe to me! Why are you staring at me?” They began to strike their hands on their thighs. When I saw them

urging me to be silent, I became silent. When the Prophet ﷺ finished the prayer, **may my father and mother be ransomed for him, I have never seen a teacher better than him before or since.** By Allah, he did not scold me, nor did he beat me, nor did he revile me. He only said, “*Know, that this prayer must not contain any of the speech of people. It only consists of glorifying Allah, exalting Allah, and recitation of the Quran.*” (Muslim)

**Notice the man’s reaction:**

*“I have never seen a teacher better than him.”*

Why? Because the Prophet ﷺ:

- Didn’t embarrass him publicly
- Didn’t yell or punish
- **Taught him the principle** calmly

**Contrast this with many of our approaches:**

- Yelling when they make mistakes
- Shaming them in front of siblings or guests
- Bringing up past failures repeatedly

**The Prophetic way:** Correct the action, **preserve their dignity.**

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## **PART 2: TARBİYAH VS. TA’DIB - THE TWO PILLARS OF ISLAMIC PARENTING**

### **Understanding the Terms:**

1. **Tarbiyah** (تَرْبِيَّة) - From the root ر-ب-و (to nurture, cultivate, grow)

- Think of a gardener tending to a plant
- Providing what’s needed to grow: water, sunlight, nutrients
- **Nurturing, guiding, developing**

### **Quranic example:**

وَقُلْ رَبِّ أَرْحَمُهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيْتَنِي صَغِيرًا

*“And say, ‘My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up (rabbayani) when I was small.’” [17:24]*

**The word used is رَبَّيْتَنِي - from the same root as tarbiyah.**

2. **Ta’dib** (تَأْدِيب) - From the root أ-د-ب (to discipline, instruct in proper conduct)

- Teaching adab (good manners, proper behavior)
- Setting boundaries and consequences
- **Structure, correction, discipline**

## Both are necessary.

*Tarbiyah* without *ta'dib* = spoiled, entitled children

*Ta'dib* without *tarbiyah* = obedient but emotionally damaged children

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## The Balance:

### Ages 0-7: Heavy *Tarbiyah*, Light *Ta'dib*

It has been authentically reported that Ali ibn Abi Talib said:

*“Play with your child for the first seven years, then discipline him for the next seven years, then be his companion for the next seven years.”*

And this, in general, is a principle that has been adopted by the scholars of Islam. A more modern scholar has stated:

- Between the ages of birth - 7: you play with them. You teach them Islam, but make the learning easy and don't be harsh with them. The prayer should be introduced to the child in the latter portion of these years, as advised by the Prophet ﷺ in the authentic hadith: *“Command your children to pray when they are seven years old, and discipline them for it (prayer) when they become ten years old; and arrange their beds (to sleep) separately.”* (Sahih Abu Dawud—al-Albaani)

## What this means:

- Early childhood = **nurture, play, bond, explore**
- Don't expect perfection
- Correct gently when needed, but prioritize connection

## Notice:

- Before age 7 = involve them in the prayer, but there is no command and no discipline yet (remember that at this age, children look up to their parents and want to copy everything that they do. Take advantage of that by modeling the best of behavior and worship for them so that it is easy for them when they turn 7 to be consistent and to build their own foundations).
- Age 7 = **command** (start teaching)
- Age 10 = **discipline** (add consequences for neglect)
- But **not before 7** - you don't punish a 5-year-old for not praying

### Ages 7-14: Balanced *Tarbiyah* and *Ta'dib*

- Now you **teach structure** (prayer times, responsibilities, consequences)
- But you're still **nurturing** (explaining why, listening to struggles)

Between the ages of 7 - 14: this is the age where you discipline and make more effort for them to memorize Qur'an and hadith. They should know how to honor and respect others, and towards the end stages know how to properly sit in a *halaqah* or *dars* (lesson).

### **Ages 14-21: Light *Ta'dib*, Heavy Companionship**

- By now, ideally, they should be **self-regulating** (internal conviction, not external control)
- Your role shifts to **advisor, mentor, friend**
- You're no longer enforcing – you're **guiding**

Between the ages of 14 - 21: the parent should be his child's companion and you begin to involve them in consultation over various issues and take their opinion. You help them to make better decisions, but at the same time, you sometimes have to watch them fail so they can learn consequences.

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### **Case Study #2: "Why Doesn't My Son Pray?"**

*Hamza is 13. His father makes him pray, sometimes forcefully. Hamza prays at home to avoid conflict, but never prays at school or when his father isn't around. The father is frustrated: "I've been making him pray since he was 7! Why doesn't he want to pray?"*

#### **The Problem:**

The father gave *ta'dib* (discipline) but neglected *tarbiyah* (nurturing the WHY).

Hamza knows **how** to pray. He doesn't know **why** it matters **to him personally**.

#### **The Fix:**

- Stop "making him" and start **asking him** about his relationship with Allah
- Share **your own** struggles and victories with salah
- Connect prayer to **his life** (calming anxiety, finding direction, etc.)
- Let him experience natural consequences (feeling spiritually empty) instead of forced compliance

This is, unfortunately, a very common problem in the Muslim community worldwide today. I have spoken to countless parents who express the same problem with their kids. Much of it comes back to how we approached them when they were younger. I find that parents who pray at home, and make the prayer a family activity, have better results with having their kids pray when they are older.

The second important aspect that I have personally noticed is that parents who take the time to help their kids understand the value of prayer are also successful at getting their kids to pray. Those kids have established some relationship with Allah that carries them on their own, and they have a concrete understanding of the "why" of praying, not just the "how".

**Important Pit-Fall:** I talk to a lot of parents who avoid waking their teenage kids up to pray fajr, and some who also don't encourage their kids to fast in Ramadan, because of school. It is essential for all of us to understand two very important points when it comes to this practice:

1. Our Prophet ﷺ taught us that the early part of the day is the most blessed part of the day when he said: “Allah has blessed the early hours of the day for my Ummah.” (Sahih at-Targheeb—al-Albaani)<sup>5</sup>

I have often lamented this hadith because it is sadly the habit of most of us to go back to sleep after fajr, and for a number of Muslims, they only go to sleep after fajr!

Those early hours are a blessed time—try to stay awake and see how much you can accomplish; you will be surprised. For our kids, they should be taught to sleep early, which only happens when we lead by example, and thus, to wake up early for fajr and take advantage of these blessed hours at the start of every day. Their grades will improve, they will be healthier and they will be more successful.

2. This practice also shows our kids what the real priorities are for us—that we are willing to forgo the obligatory prayer in order to get ahead in the *dunya*. I am never surprised when I meet Muslims who shy away from waking up their kids for this reason, and then discover that they are struggling to get their kids to pray at all. Their kids are often very successful people—in the *dunya*—but have traded the life of the Hereafter for this life by their actions. Remember Allah’s words:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْقُوتًا

“Truly, the performance of prayers is a duty on the believers at appointed times.” [4:103]

And the words of our beloved Prophet ﷺ when he was asked by Abdullah ibn Mas’ud, “O Messenger of Allah, which deeds are best?” He replied:

“Prayer on time.” I said, “Then what, O Messenger of Allah?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Good treatment of your parents.” I said, “Then what, O Messenger of Allah?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “That people are safe from your tongue.” (*al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr lil-Ṭabarānī* - authentic according to al-Albaani)

**The goal at this age:** Shift from “He prays because I make him” to “He prays because he chooses to.”

If he reaches 18 still praying only because of you, **he’ll stop soon after he’s free.**

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## PART 3: COMMON CULTURAL DISTORTIONS OF ISLAMIC PARENTING

### Distortion #1: “Obedience to Parents is Absolute”

#### The Cultural Claim:

“Islam says children must obey parents in everything. Questioning is disrespect.”

#### The Islamic Reality:

Obedience to parents is **conditional** - it cannot contradict obedience to Allah.

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<sup>5</sup> Sakhr ibn al-Ghamidi reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “O Allah, bless my nation in their early morning.” Sakhr said, “When the Prophet prepared a company or army, he would dispatch them at the start of the day. When he prepared a trading convoy, he would dispatch them at the start of the day and they would acquire much wealth.” (Tirmidhi, ibn Maajah)

## Hadith:

*“There is no obedience to anyone in disobedience to Allah. Obedience is only in what is right and good.”*  
(Bukhari & Muslim)

## What this teaches:

- Respect ≠ blind obedience

## Application:

If your tween asks, “Why do I have to do this?” that’s not disrespect – **it’s healthy development**. I would, though, suggest that they are educated to ask in a gentler and more respectful manner, such as asking, “Can you explain to me why this is right?”

Answer the question. If your reason is “because I said so,” you’re training them to **not think critically** - and that’s dangerous in a world full of deception.

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## Distortion #2: “Strictness = Strong Faith”

### The Cultural Claim:

“The stricter I am, the more religious my child will be.”

### The Islamic Reality:

The Prophet ﷺ was **gentle**, not harsh.

## Hadith:

*“The religion is easy, and no one overburdens himself in his religion, except that he will be unable to continue in that way. So do not be extremists, but try to be near perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded. Gain strength by worshipping in the mornings and afternoons and during the last hours of the night.”* (Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Rajab explained this hadith further in his Commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari, *Fath al-Bari*, by saying:

This hadith teaches that it is not from the *Sunnah* to go to extremes in religion, particularly by overburdening oneself with acts of worship that cannot be performed except with great hardship. Thus, the meaning of the words of the Prophet ﷺ, “*No one overburdens himself in his religion, except that he will be unable to continue in that way*”—religion is not to be approached in an extreme manner, and whoever does so will be defeated<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibn al-Muneeb said: This hadeeth is one of the signs of Prophethood. We have seen and the people before us saw that everyone who goes to extremes in religious matters will be cut off and doomed. It does not mean that we should not seek to be more perfect in worship, for that is something praiseworthy. Rather what is forbidden is the kind of extremism that leads to getting bored with it, or going to such extremes in doing voluntary acts that one ends up forsaking that which is better, or it leads to delaying the obligatory act until the time for it is past, like one who stays up and prays all night, until sleep overcomes him at the end of the night and he sleeps

It was also narrated that Mihjan ibn al-Adra' said: I came with the Prophet ﷺ, and when we were at the door of the masjid, we saw a man who was praying. He asked me, "Do you think he is sincere?" I replied, "O Prophet of Allah, this is So and so, and he is one of the best of the people of Madinah, or one of those who pray the most of the people of Madinah." He then told me, "Don't let him hear you lest you be doomed" – two or three times – "for you are an ummah for whom I want ease." (Ahmad—hasan)

According to another hadith: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The best of your religion is that which is easiest, the best of your religion is that which is easiest." (Ahmad—hasan)

And according to another report narrated by 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas that the Prophet ﷺ said:

*"This religion is deep, so approach it gently and do not make yourself hate the worship of Allah as the traveler who does not let his ride rest will not reach his destination and his ride will be unable to keep going."* (al-Sunan al-Kubra by al-Bayhaqi—classed as *da'eef* by al-Albaani in *al-Silsilah al-Da'eefah*)

Despite the weakness in the chain of this hadith, the scholars have stated that its meaning is valid and corroborated by the earlier hadith. This, the one who does not let his riding animal rest will not reach his destination, and he will become stranded or cut-off, because his animal is unable to continue, hence exposing him to disaster. Had he been gentle to his riding animal and taken it easy during his journey, his animal would have been able to travel the distance with him and get him to his destination safely.

### Research shows:

**Authoritarian parenting** (high control, low warmth) produces children who are:

- Outwardly compliant but inwardly resentful
- More likely to rebel when given freedom
- Anxious, fearful, and lacking self-confidence
- Poor decision-makers (because they've never been allowed to choose)

**Authoritative parenting**<sup>7</sup> (high control **and** high warmth) produces children who are:

- Internally motivated
- Confident and resilient
- Better at self-regulation
- More likely to maintain faith into adulthood

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and misses offering Fajr prayer in congregation, or until the preferred time for it is over, or until the sun rises and the time for the obligatory prayer ends. (*Fath al-Bari*)

<sup>7</sup> He, C., Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools). "Authoritarian vs. Authoritative Parenting."; See UCLA hand-out in the PDF

### Case Study #3: “The Hammer Father”

*Ibrahim rules his home with an iron fist. His 12-year-old daughter Amina wears hijab, prays all five prayers, never misses Quran class. He’s proud. But what he doesn’t know:*

- *She prays out of fear, not love*
- *She resents Islam because it’s associated with his anger*
- *She’s already planning to leave it all behind the moment she’s 18*

*At 19, she runs away with a boy she met online. No hijab, no prayer, no Islam. Ibrahim is devastated. “I did everything right!”*

#### **What went wrong:**

He focused on **external compliance** (*ta’dib*) and ignored **internal conviction** (*tarbiyah*). Ibrahim loved his daughter deeply. But he expressed that love through control, not connection. She never felt his love—only his expectations.

#### **The principle:**

You can **force behavior** for 18 years. You cannot force **belief**.

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### Distortion #3: “Emotions are Weakness”

#### **The Cultural Claim:**

“Don’t cry.” “Be tough.” “Stop being so sensitive.”

#### **The Islamic Reality:**

The Prophet ﷺ **cried**, and he taught others to express emotions.

#### **Hadith:**

Anas ibn Malik reported: We entered upon Abu Sayf, the husband of the wet nurse of the Prophet's son Ibrahim as he was dying. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ took Ibrahim, kissed him, and took in his scent. Then, we came to him later and Ibrahim was taking his last breaths. **The eyes of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ began to flow with tears.** Abdur Rahman ibn Awf said, “O Messenger of Allah, even you cry?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “*O Ibn Awf, it is mercy.*” Then, he wept again and said, “*The eye sheds tears and the heart grieves, but we only say what pleases our Lord. O Ibrahim, we are certainly grieved by your departure.*” (Bukhari)

#### **The lesson:**

- Grief is natural and permissible
- Tears are a sign of **mercy** (رَحْمَةٌ), not weakness
- The Prophet ﷺ modeled emotional authenticity

#### **Application for Tweens:**

This is an **emotionally volatile age** - hormones, identity struggles, social pressures. When your child cries or gets angry:

- **Don't dismiss it** (“You're being dramatic” or “Just get over it”)
- **Don't shame it** (“Stop crying like a baby”)

**Instead ... you should:**

- **Validate it** (“I can see you're really upset”)

**Research shows<sup>8</sup>:**

Children whose emotions are consistently **invalidated**<sup>9</sup> grow up to:

- Suppress feelings (leading to anxiety/depression)
- Struggle with emotional regulation
- Have difficulty forming healthy relationships

Children whose emotions are **validated** learn to:

- Process feelings healthily
- Communicate needs effectively
- Develop resilience

**Distortion #4: “My Way is the Only Islamic Way”**

**The Cultural Claim:**

“This is how we’ve always done it. This is Islam.”

**The Islamic Reality:**

The Sahaba had **different approaches** to Islamic practice, and the Prophet ﷺ allowed room for *ijtihad* (personal reasoning) in areas not explicitly legislated.

**Example:**

Some Sahaba were stricter, others more lenient. **Both were valid** as long as they didn’t contradict clear Islamic principles.

<sup>8</sup> Shi Z, Fan L, Wang Q. Scrutinizing parental minimization reactions to adolescents' negative emotions through the lens of Chinese culture. *J Res Adolesc.* 2024;34(2):380-394. doi:10.1111/jora.12918

<sup>9</sup> Buckholdt KE, Parra GR, Jobe-Shields L. Intergenerational Transmission of Emotion Dysregulation Through Parental Invalidation of Emotions: Implications for Adolescent Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors. *J Child Fam Stud.* 2014;23(2):324-332. doi:10.1007/s10826-013-9768-4

### **The danger:**

When you conflate **culture with Islam**, you make it harder for your child to distinguish between:

- What is *fard* (obligatory) - like prayer
- What is *mustahabb* (recommended) - like *tahajjud*
- What is *mubah* (permissible) - like career choice
- What is **cultural** - like only marrying within your ethnicity

### **Case Study #4: “You’re Not Really Muslim if You Don’t...”**

*Faiza's parents insist she must become a doctor, marry a Pakistani man, and live nearby. They frame these as “Islamic” requirements. When Faiza wants to study art and marry an Arab Muslim, her parents say she’s “abandoning Islam.”*

### **The result:**

Faiza feels **Islam itself is suffocating** when actually it’s **cultural expectations** masquerading as Islam.

**The cause:** This scenario is often seen in people who have limited understanding of Islam. They often learned Islam from their surroundings, and not by studying, and hence, they do not know the diversity that lies within the religion.

### **The fix:**

Be **ruthlessly honest** about what is Islam vs. what is your preference. This can only happen when we take the time to study and learn the religion itself. This not only opens our eyes to the broadness and ease of Islam, but also models the behavior we want our children to adopt by studying Islam themselves.

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## **PART 4: THE CRITICAL TRANSITION - FROM CONTROL TO CONVICTION**

### **The Tween Years (10-14) are the Window:**

This is when your child’s brain is **actively forming identity**. They’re asking (even if not out loud):

- Who am I?
- What do I believe?
- Why do I do what I do?

**Your job:** Help them transition from:

- ❌ “I’m Muslim because my family is Muslim.”
- ✅ “I’m Muslim because I know it’s true.”

## How?

### 1. Let them ask hard questions

Don't panic when they ask:

- “Is all music really haram?”
- “Why can't I have a girlfriend like my friends?”
- “How do we know Islam is true?”

These are **signs of healthy development**. Answer honestly. If you don't know, say so and research together.

### 2. Share your own faith journey

Tell them:

- Why **you** pray
- Times you struggled with faith
- How you came to conviction

Make Islam **relatable**, not just inherited.

### 3. Let them own their practice

Instead of: “*Did you pray Fajr?*” (policing)

Try: “*How's your salah going? Anything I can help with?*” (partnership)

**Remember:** Establishing prayer as a family when they are young will make it more likely that they will pray when they get older. It also discourages them to pray alone, something the Prophet ﷺ warned against when he said:

*“If three people in a town or in the desert do not establish prayer among them, then Satan has overcome them. You must establish the congregation, for the wolf eats the lone sheep.”* (Sahih Abu Dawud)

### 4. Celebrate their spiritual wins

Notice when they:

- Pray on time or read Quran without being reminded
- Remember Allah in various circumstances
- Make *dua* in difficulty
- Show Islamic character (honesty, kindness, etc.)

**Affirm it:** “I'm really proud of how you handled that. That was strong *iman*.”

## CONCLUSION: THE PROPHETIC PARENTING CHECKLIST

By the end of the tween years, your goal is a child who:

- ✓ Feels loved unconditionally (not just when they perform)
- ✓ Knows why they're Muslim (not just what Muslims do)
- ✓ Can think critically (not just follow blindly)
- ✓ Sees you as a safe person (not just an authority figure)
- ✓ Practices Islam from conviction (not just compliance)

The Prophetic Model Summary:

- **Affectionate** - show love physically and verbally
- **Engaged** - listen to them, take them seriously
- **Wise** - correct with gentleness, preserve dignity
- **Balanced** - nurture (*tarbiyah*) and discipline (*ta'dib*)
- **Authentic** - model the faith you want them to have

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## CHAPTER TWO WORKBOOK EXERCISES:

1. Identify one cultural practice you've been treating as "Islamic." Be honest. Where did it come from?

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2. This week, implement one aspect of the Prophetic model:

- Physical affection (one hug per day)
- Deep conversation (ask a meaningful question and really listen)
- Validation (affirm one thing they did well Islamically)

3. Reflect:

- How was your relationship with your parents?
- What do you want to repeat with your children?
- What do you want to break?

# CHAPTER 3: “THE COMMUNICATION BRIDGE”

## *How to Talk So They’ll Listen, and How to Listen So They’ll Talk*

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Understand the neurological and emotional changes affecting tween communication
  - Learn the Islamic framework for respectful, effective dialogue
  - Master active listening techniques that build trust
  - Identify communication patterns that shut down connection vs. those that build it
  - Develop practical strategies for difficult conversations
- 

**Critical question:** How do you actually **talk** to a tween who:

- Rolls their eyes when you speak?
- Keeps calling you “bro”
- Gives one-word answers to your questions?
- Shuts down or explodes when you try to discuss important topics?
- Seems to speak a different language entirely?

### **The Reality:**

Communication is the **bridge** between you and your child. When that bridge is broken, everything else fails - your guidance doesn’t reach them, their struggles don’t reach you, and the relationship deteriorates.

### **The Goal of This Chapter:**

Learn how to **rebuild and maintain** that bridge using Islamic principles and proven communication strategies.

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## **PART 1: UNDERSTANDING THE TWEEN BRAIN - WHY COMMUNICATION GETS HARDER**

### **What’s Happening Neurologically:**

Between ages 10-14, the brain undergoes massive reconstruction - comparable to the changes in early childhood.

### *The Developing Tween Brain*

An important part of the cognitive development in this age group happens is the prefrontal cortex, which controls logical thinking and manages impulses (sometimes referred to as “the brakes” because it stops you from making bad decisions). But the prefrontal cortex isn’t fully developed in tweens and teens. In girls, full development happens sometime in their late 20s, whereas in boys, it can be as late as their early 30s. Hence, teens are far more likely to make decisions based on emotions as opposed to logic.

At the same time, the limbic system, or the part of the brain responsible for emotions, is already well developed by this age, usually completing its major remodeling by ages 10-13, making it active before the prefrontal cortex has fully matured. As a result, teens are over-reliant on this part of the brain, which helps to explain their often impulsive, emotionally charged decisions, especially when under stress<sup>10</sup>.

### ***Stress Tolerance in Tweens and Teens***

The brain also possesses an area called the “zone of tolerance” which is responsible for stress tolerance in teens. This zone widens as the brain develops and eventually contributes to an adult’s ability to manage stress more effectively. In tweens and teens, though, this “zone of tolerance” is smaller and less developed, leaving them more susceptible to stress (increased “fight or flight” response) and more likely to demonstrate impulsive behaviors.

Increased stress in tweens and teens also has a negative effect on memory and decision-making because it shuts down the parts of the brain that transform short-term memory into long-term memory. This can explain why it can be difficult for tweens and teens to recall prior discussions or to learn from prior mistakes. Moreover, the “stop” system, that part of the brain which tells us when to stop arguing, also shuts down when we experience stress, causing difficulty for teens to break off when they should.

### **Summary of Key Changes:**

#### **1. The Prefrontal Cortex (Decision-Making Center or “brakes”) is Under Construction**

- This is the part responsible for:
  - Logical decision-making/thought
  - Impulse control
  - Planning ahead
  - Considering consequences
  - Regulating emotions

#### **What this means:**

When your 12-year-old makes a baffling decision (like posting something embarrassing online or lying about homework), it’s not necessarily defiance—their **decision-making hardware is literally incomplete**.

#### **2. The Amygdala (Emotional Center) is in Overdrive**

- This is the brain’s “alarm system”
- In tweens, it’s **hyperactive** while the prefrontal cortex (“the brakes”) is weak

#### **What this means:**

Small problems feel like **catastrophes** to them. When they say “Everyone hates me” because one friend was busy, they’re not being dramatic—their brain is genuinely perceiving threat.

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<sup>10</sup> Arain, M., Haque, M., Johal, L., Mathur, P., Nel, W., Rais, A., Sandhu, R., & Sharma, S. (2013). Maturation of the adolescent brain. *Neuropsychiatric disease and treatment*, 9, 449–461. <https://doi.org/10.2147/NDT.S39776>

### 3. Heightened Sensitivity to Social Feedback

- The tween brain is **wired** to care intensely about peer opinion
- Rejection or embarrassment activates the same brain regions as **physical pain**

#### **What this means:**

When you criticize them in front of siblings or bring up failures publicly, it **literally hurts** like a physical injury.

#### **Research Shows:**

Brain scans reveal that when teenagers feel rejected or criticized, their brains show activity patterns similar to those experiencing physical pain<sup>11</sup>. This isn't weakness—it's neurobiology, and for many people, it continues well into adulthood.

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#### **The Islamic Lens:**

Did the Prophet ﷺ understand this about young people? **Absolutely.**

#### **Hadith - The Prophet's ﷺ Awareness of Emotional Sensitivity:**

Anas ibn Malik reported:

A young boy used to serve the Prophet ﷺ. One day, the boy was sent on an errand by the Prophet ﷺ but got distracted and played instead. When the Prophet ﷺ went looking for him, he found the boy playing in the marketplace. The Prophet ﷺ came up behind him and tapped him gently on the back of the neck. When the boy turned around, the Prophet ﷺ smiled at him and said, “*O Unais, did you go where I sent you?*” The boy, ashamed, said, “O Messenger of Allah, I am going now.” Anas said, “I swear by Allah, I served him for nine years and he never said to me about anything I had done, ‘*Why did you do that?*’ nor about anything I had neglected, ‘*Why did you not do that?*’” (Muslim)

#### **Notice:**

- The Prophet ﷺ **corrected privately** (came to him, didn't summon him publicly)
- He used **gentle humor** (tapping the neck playfully)
- He **smiled** (disarming, not threatening)
- He gave the boy a **chance to make it right** (“did you go?”)
- He **never shamed** for mistakes
- He **didn't embarrass him** in front of his friends

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<sup>11</sup> Kross, E., Berman, M. G., Mischel, W., Smith, E. E., & Wager, T. D. (2011). Social rejection shares somatosensory representations with physical pain. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 108(15), 6270–6275. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1102693108>

## The Principle:

The Prophet ﷺ understood that young people need **dignity preserved** especially when being corrected and even more when in front of their peers.

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## Common Communication Mistakes Parents Make:

Based on this neurological and Islamic understanding, here are the **top mistakes** that damage communication:

### Mistake #1: Lecturing Instead of Conversing

- You talk **at** them for 20 minutes
- They tune out after 30 seconds
- Nothing lands

#### Why it fails:

The tween brain shuts down when overwhelmed with information. They're not being disrespectful—they're experiencing **cognitive overload**.

### Mistake #2: Public Correction

- Criticizing them in front of siblings, relatives, or friends
- “Why can't you be more like your brother?”
- Bringing up past failures in family gatherings

#### Why it fails:

As we saw, their brains process this as **pain**. You've just made an association between yourself (the parent) and pain, not safety.

### Mistake #3: Dismissing Their Feelings

- “You're overreacting.”
- “It's not a big deal.”
- “Stop being so emotional/dramatic/sensitive.”

#### Why it fails:

You're telling them their **internal reality is wrong**. This teaches them to: (1) not trust their own feelings, (2) not share with you in the future.

### Mistake #4: Asking Questions You Don't Want Honest Answers To

- “Why would you do something so stupid?”
- “What were you thinking?”
- These aren't real questions – they're **attacks disguised as questions**.

**Why it fails:**

They learn that your “questions” are traps. They stop answering honestly or stop answering altogether—the case of the silent tween that just stands there and has no response for you.

**Mistake #5: Talking When Emotions Are High**

- Trying to have a rational conversation when they (or you) are angry, hurt, or defensive

**Why it fails:**

When the amygdala is activated (“fight-or-flight” mode), the prefrontal cortex goes **offline**. No learning, problem-solving, or connection can happen.

**PART 2: THE PROPHETIC COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK**

The Prophet ﷺ was the **master communicator**. Let’s extract his principles:

**Principle #1: Lead with Gentleness****Quranic Foundation:**

Allah says to Prophet Musa and Harun when sending them to Pharaoh (one of the worst tyrants in history):

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى

“And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah].” [20:44]

**The Logic:**

If Allah commanded **gentleness** toward Pharaoh, how much more should we use gentleness with our own children?

**Hadith:**

Jabir reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

“Shall I not tell you upon whom the Hellfire is forbidden tomorrow? It is everyone gentle, lenient, accessible, and easy-going.” (Musnad Abī Ya’lá—authenticated by al-Albaani)

**Application:**

Before speaking to your tween (especially about something they did wrong), ask yourself:

- Is my **tone** gentle?
- Am I about to **beautify** this conversation or **tarnish** it?

## Principle #2: Validate First, Then Guide

The Prophet ﷺ never dismissed people's feelings or concerns. He **acknowledged them first**, then offered guidance.

### Example - The Young Man Wanting to Fornicate:

We referenced this in Chapter 1, but let's examine it from the **communication strategy** perspective:

Abu Umamah reported:

A young man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "O Messenger of Allah, give me permission to fornicate." The people turned to rebuke him, saying, "What is this? What is this?" **The Prophet ﷺ quieted them** and said, "*Come here.*" The young man came close and sat down. The Prophet ﷺ said, "*Would you like that for your mother?*" The man said, "No, by Allah." The Prophet ﷺ said, "*Neither would people like it for their mothers. Would you like that for your daughter?*" The man said, "No, by Allah." The Prophet ﷺ said, "*Neither would people like it for their daughters...*" Then the Prophet ﷺ placed his hand on him and prayed, "*O Allah, forgive his sins, purify his heart, and guard his chastity.*" After that, the young man never again inclined to anything sinful. (Ahmad—authenticated by al-Arnaoot)

### Notice the Communication Steps:

1. **Protected his dignity** - stopped others from rebuking him publicly
2. **Invited closeness** – "Come here" (not "Go away, you sinner!")
3. **Asked questions instead of lecturing** - engaged his thinking
4. **Connected to his values** - used his love for his mother/daughter/sister
5. **Ended with dua and physical touch** - affirmed love and hope

### The Result:

The young man's heart was transformed - not through shame, but through **dignified, values-based dialogue**.

**Application:** When overwhelmed, tweens sometimes need time to get control of their emotions before they can approach a problem. You can recommend that they take a walk, listen to something calming, or go to a calming room without sensory input (no screens). Validate their feelings by acknowledging what they're going through by saying something like, "I understand that you're feeling overwhelmed right now and that's ok." These simple words can go a long way in making them feel heard.

---

## Principle #3: Keep It Brief and Clear

The Prophet ﷺ was known for concise, memorable communication.

### Hadith:

Aisha reported:

*"The speech of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was not like yours (rushing). Rather, he would speak in a clear, separated manner, such that anyone who sat with him would memorize it."* (Abu Dawud - authentic)

### Application:

When you need to communicate something important to your tween:

- **One main point** per conversation (can be hard when you want to say many things)
- **Clear, simple language**
- **Pause** between sentences (let it sink in)
- **Don't hesitate to repeat without lecturing** (another *sunnah*)<sup>12</sup>

### Example:

#### ✗ The Lecture (What NOT to Do):

“You know, when I was your age, we respected our parents. We didn't talk back. And another thing, you need to stop spending so much time on your phone. I've told you a thousand times. And your grades are slipping. And what's going on with math? You used to be good at math. Are you even trying? And why is your room always a mess ...?”

#### ✓ The Prophetic Way:

“I noticed you've been really stressed about school lately. Want to talk about it?”

[Listen]

“What if we came up with one small thing you could do this week to feel more in control?”

---

### Principle #4: Use Questions, Not Accusations

The Prophet ﷺ often **asked questions** to guide people to truth rather than imposing it.

#### Example - Abdullah ibn Abbas:

When the Prophet ﷺ wanted to teach Mu'adh bin Jabal (a teenager), he **asked** him questions:

“Do you know what the rights of Allah upon His servants are? Do you know what the rights of the servants upon Allah are?” (Bukhari)

This **engaged** his thinking rather than making him a passive listener.

#### Application with Tweens:

Instead of:

✗ “You lied to me about where you were!”

Try:

✓ “Can you help me understand what happened? I'm confused because you said you were at the library, but your friend's mom said you were at the mall.”

---

<sup>12</sup> Anas ibn Malik reported: When the Prophet ﷺ would speak, he repeated himself three times until he was understood. Whenever he came to people and greeted them with peace, he would greet them three times. (Bukhari)

- ✓ Avoid blaming your tween directly. Instead of saying, “You’re always coming home late,” try, “I get pretty worried when you’re not home on time.”

Putting the focus of the conversation on how you feel, instead of what they did, can limit defensive reactions as well as create space for talking in a more peaceful, calm and constructive way.

#### Why this works:

- It invites **explanation** instead of defense
  - It assumes **good intent** initially (maybe there's a misunderstanding)
  - It keeps the door open for **honest conversation**
- 

### Principle #5: Correct Privately, Praise Publicly

#### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Whoever covers (the faults of) a Muslim, Allah will cover him in this world and the Hereafter.”* (Muslim)

#### Application:

- When your tween does something wrong → **private conversation**
- When they do something right → **acknowledge it** (in front of family or peers where appropriate)

#### Why this matters:

Public correction = humiliation = resentment = communication breakdown

Private correction = dignity preserved = trust maintained

---

## PART 3: HOW TO LISTEN SO THEY’LL TALK

Most parents focus on **how to talk** to their kids. But the real skill is **how to listen**.

#### The Problem:

Your tween stops talking to you not because you don’t talk well, but because **they don’t feel heard**.

---

### Active Listening - The Islamic and Psychological Foundation

#### Allah Commands Us to Listen:

الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمْ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

---

“Those who listen to what is said and follow the best of it. They are the ones guided by Allah, and they are truly the people of understanding.” [39:18]

In this noble ayah, Allah begins with listening before action, as the wise person must first listen carefully so as to be able to decide the best course of action. As Imam as-Saadi stated in his tafsir of this ayah:

This refers to all that is said. They listen to all types of speech that they hear, in order to distinguish between that which should be given precedence and that which should be avoided. It is a sign of their prudence and maturity in thinking that they follow the best of speech ...

Hence, the scholar ibn Abdul Barr reported: Yazid ibn Abi Habib said, “Verily, the speaker only awaits a trial, and the listener only awaits mercy.” (*Jāmi’ Bayān al-‘Ilm*) Those who rush to speak, rush to mistakes, whereas the one who listens patiently, mercy is expected to descend upon them.

And in general, the scholars of Islam have advised the believer: **don’t interrupt, don’t speak over, listen attentively.**

If this is the adab (etiquette) when listening to **any** speech, how much more with our children who are **entrusted to us?**

### **The 5 Levels of Listening:**

#### **Level 1: Ignoring**

- Not listening at all
- Looking at your phone while they talk
- “Uh-huh” without eye contact

#### **Level 2: Pretending**

- Acting like you’re listening but thinking about something else
- “That’s nice, dear” (you have no idea what they just said)

#### **Level 3: Selective Listening**

- Only hearing the parts that interest you or confirm your assumptions
- Waiting for them to finish so you can make your point (only waiting for your turn to talk)

#### **Level 4: Attentive Listening**

- Actually hearing the words
- But not necessarily the **emotions** behind them

#### **Level 5: Empathic Listening (GOAL)**

- Listening to **understand**, not to respond
- Hearing both the words **and** the feelings
- Seeking to see the world through **their eyes**

**Most parents operate at Level 1-3. Tweens need Level 5.**

---

## **How to Practice Empathic Listening:**

### **Step 1: Stop Everything**

When your tween wants to talk (especially about something important), **stop what you're doing.**

- Put down your phone
- Turn off the TV
- Turn your entire body to face them (a sunnah reported about the Prophet ﷺ)
- Make eye contact
- Show them: **You matter more than anything else right now.**

### **Step 2: Listen for Feelings, Not Just Facts**

When they say: *"School was terrible today"*

Don't jump to:

✗ "What happened? Did you get in trouble? What did you do?"

Instead:

✓ "Subhan Allah, sounds like it was a really hard day. Do you want to talk about it?"

**You're naming the emotion** (hard day) before asking for details.

### **Step 3: Reflect Back What You Hear**

This is the most powerful tool in communication.

#### **Example:**

**Tween:** "Nobody invited me to Sara's party. Everyone's going except me."

#### **Level 3 Response (Selective Listening - Dismissive):**

✗ "Well, you don't need to go to every party. Besides, Sara's not even a good friend."

#### **Level 5 Response (Empathic Listening - Validating):**

✓ "That must really hurt - like you're being left out."

[Pause. Let them respond.]

✓ "It's hard when it seems like everyone else is included."

#### **Notice:**

- You didn't **fix** it
- You didn't **dismiss** it
- You **named the feeling** (hurt, left out)
- You **validated** the experience (it IS hard)

### What happens next:

Because they feel **heard**, they'll often open up more. Or they'll sit with the feeling and process it. Either way, **you've been their safe place.**

### Step 4: Ask Permission Before Giving Advice

After listening, resist the urge to immediately fix or lecture.

Instead, ask:

- ✔ “Do you want my thoughts on this, or did you just need to vent?”

### Why this works:

- Sometimes they just need to be **heard**, not **fixed**
  - Asking permission respects their autonomy
  - They're more likely to actually **hear** your advice if they've asked for it
- 

### Case Study #1: “She Never Tells Me Anything Anymore”

*Ghada's 13-year-old daughter Leila used to share everything. Now, she comes home from school, goes straight to her room, and gives one-word answers.*

*Ghada is hurt and worried. She tries to force conversation: “What happened at school?” “Nothing.” “Did anything interesting happen?” “No.” “Why won't you talk to me?”*

### The Problem:

Ghada is **interrogating**, not **inviting**.

### The Fix:

### New Approach:

- Ghada stops asking direct questions
- Instead, she creates **low-pressure opportunities** for connection:
  - Cooking together (hands busy, less intense eye contact makes it easier to talk)
  - Car rides (side-by-side, not face-to-face)
  - Bedtime check-ins (“Can I sit with you for a few minutes?”)
- When Leila does share something small, Ghada **listens without judgment**:
  - Leila mentions a friend is mad at her
  - Instead of: ✘ “What did you do?” (assumes fault)
  - Ghada says: ✔ “That sounds stressful. Friendship drama is hard.”

### The Result:

Over time, Leila starts opening up again - not because Ghada forced it, but because she **created safe space.**

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## PART 4: REPAIRING BROKEN COMMUNICATION

### The Reality:

Many of you are thinking: *“It’s too late. My relationship with my tween is already damaged. They don’t trust me.”*

### The Good News:

It's **never** too late. Relationships can be repaired.

---

### The Islamic Concept of *Tawbah* (Repentance) in Parenting

We know that Allah accepts *tawbah* when we sin against Him. The same principle applies in human relationships.

### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“All of the children of Adam are sinners, and the best of sinners are those who repent.”* (Tirmidhi - authentic)

### Application:

If you've **damaged** the relationship through:

- Harshness
- Public humiliation
- Dismissing their feelings
- Breaking their trust

You can **repair** it through:

- **Acknowledgment** (admitting you were wrong)
  - **Apology** (asking forgiveness)
  - **Changed behavior** (showing it's not just words)
- 

### How to Apologize to Your Tween (Yes, Really)

#### The Quranic Model – Stand for Justice Even if Against Yourself:

Allah makes it clear that we have to be just, which includes holding ourselves accountable when we have wronged another person, and who can be dearer to us than our own children? He states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ ؕ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ  
فَقِيرًا فَلِلَّهِ أُولَىٰ بِهِمَا ۖ فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَن تَعْدِلُوا ۗ وَإِن تَلَوْتُمْ أَوْ تَعْرِضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

*“O believers, stand firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or your parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So do not follow your whims, lest you fall into injustice. And if you distort your testimony or refuse to give it, then indeed Allah is ever, of what you do, Aware.” [4:135]*

And we mustn't forget the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ reported by Abu Huraira where he asked his Companions:

*“Do you know who are bankrupt?” They said, “The one without money or goods is bankrupt.” The Prophet replied, “In reality, the bankrupt of my nation are those who come on the Day of Resurrection with prayers, fasting, and charity, but also with insults, slander, consuming wealth, shedding blood, and beating others. The oppressed will each be given from his good deeds. If his good deeds run out before justice is fulfilled, then their sins will be cast upon him and he will be thrown into the Hellfire.” (Muslim)*

Hence, this isn't just “good parenting practice” – it's a matter of the *akhirah* as well.

### **A Sincere Parental Apology Looks Like:**

“Amina, I need to apologize. Last week when you told me about your friend problem, I dismissed your feelings and said you were overreacting. That was wrong. Your feelings matter, and I should have listened instead of judging. I'm sorry. What can I do to make it up to you?”

**What NOT to do:** ❌ “I'm sorry you felt hurt” (this blames them for their own feelings)

❌ “I'm sorry, but you were also wrong when...” (the “but” negates the apology)

❌ “I'm sorry I yelled, but you made me so angry” (this justifies the behavior)

### **A Real Apology:**

- Owns the behavior ✓
- Doesn't make excuses ✓
- Asks for forgiveness ✓
- Commits to change ✓
- Seeks a way to make things better ✓

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## **Rebuilding Trust: The 30-Day Communication Reset**

If your relationship with your tween is strained, try this:

### **Week 1: Listen Only**

- No advice
- No criticism
- No fixing
- Just **listen** and **validate**
- Goal: Show them you **can** be a safe person

## Week 2: Ask, Don't Tell

- Instead of: "You need to do your homework"
- Try: "What's your plan for getting homework done tonight?"
- Give them **agency**

## Week 3: Catch Them Doing Good

- Point out **one positive thing** per day
- "I noticed you helped your brother without being asked. That was really kind."
- Rebuild **positive associations** with you

## Week 4: Invite, Don't Demand

- "I'm going for a walk. Want to come?"
- "I'm making tea. Want some?"
- Create low-pressure **connection opportunities**

## Case Study #2: "I Ruined My Relationship with My Son"

*Kareem, 45, admits he was a "hammer father" (from Chapter 2). His 14-year-old son Omar barely speaks to him. Omar prays, but only to avoid conflict. Kareem is terrified Omar will leave Islam the moment he's 18.*

*Kareem tries the 30-Day Reset:*

### Week 1:

- He stops criticizing Omar's prayer
- When Omar mumbles about school, Kareem just listens: "Sounds rough."
- Omar is confused but cautiously continues talking

### Week 2:

- Instead of "Go pray," Kareem asks: "Have you prayed Maghrib yet? I'm about to head to the masjid if you want to come."
- Omar says no. Kareem says, "Okay" and leaves it.
- (Internally, Kareem is dying, but he's trusting the process.)

### Week 3:

- Kareem notices Omar helped his younger sister with homework
- "Hey, I saw you helping Aisha. I was touched by how patient you were. You're a great big brother masha Allah, she's lucky to have someone like you to look up to. Jazak Allah khair."
- Omar shrugs but **doesn't walk away**.

## Week 4:

- Kareem invites Omar to get ice cream after Isha
- Omar is suspicious but agrees
- They talk about sports, school, nothing heavy
- On the drive back, Omar asks: “Baba, why are you being different?”
- Kareem: “I realized I was doing a lot of things wrong. I’m trying to be a better father. I’m sorry for how I’ve treated you before.”

### The Result:

It’s not instant. But over the next few months, Omar starts praying more consistently - **not because Kareem is forcing him, but because the resentment is healing.** The relationship is being **rebuilt.**

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## PART 5: NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Some conversations **can’t** be avoided:

- Discovering they lied
- Addressing inappropriate online behavior
- Talking about faith doubts
- Discussing puberty/sexuality (Chapter 5)

### The Framework:

#### Step 1: Choose the Right Time

- Not when emotions are high
- Not in public
- Not when rushed

#### Step 2: Start with Connection, Not Correction

- “I love you and I’m worried. Can we talk?”
- Sets the tone: **I’m on your side**

#### Step 3: State the Facts Without Accusation

- “I saw your messages to your friend where you said you were at the library, but you were actually at the mall.”
- vs. **✗** “You’re a liar!”

#### Step 4: Ask for Their Side

- “Help me understand what happened.”
- Listen without interrupting

### Step 5: Express Your Concern (Using “I” Statements)

- “I feel worried when you’re not honest with me, because I can’t keep you safe if I don’t know where you are.”
- vs. ❌ “You’re going to get yourself killed!”

### Step 6: Collaborate on Solutions

- “What can we do differently next time?”
- “What boundaries do we need to rebuild trust?”

### Step 7: Reaffirm Love

- “I’m upset about the choice you made, but I love you. That doesn’t change.”

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## CONCLUSION: THE COMMUNICATION BRIDGE MUST BE MAINTAINED

### The Reality:

Communication with your tween requires **daily maintenance**. It’s not a one-time fix.

### The Prophetic Model Summary:

- ✅ **Gentle** in tone and approach
- ✅ **Validating** of feelings first, then guiding
- ✅ **Brief and clear** in your words
- ✅ **Questioning** to engage their thinking
- ✅ **Private** in correction, public in praise

### The Listening Skills:

- ✅ **Empathic** listening (Level 5)
- ✅ **Reflective** responses (“That sounds hard”)
- ✅ **Patient** - let them talk at their pace

### The Repair Tools:

- ✅ **Apologize** when you’re wrong
- ✅ **Rebuild** trust through consistency
- ✅ **Invite** connection, don’t demand it

## Final Thought:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“The strong person is not the one who can overpower others. Rather, the strong person is the one who controls himself when he is angry.”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

**The strongest parents** are not those who control their children through force.

**The strongest parents** are those who control **themselves** - their tongues, their emotions, their egos - and build bridges of communication that last a lifetime.

---

## CHAPTER THREE WORKBOOK EXERCISES:

### 1. Identify your communication level with your tween:

- Are you at Level 2 (pretending), Level 3 (selective), or working toward Level 5 (empathic)?
- Be honest.

### 2. This week, practice ONE empathic listening conversation:

- When your tween shares something, resist the urge to fix, advise, or dismiss
- Just listen and validate: “That sounds [emotion].”
- Notice what happens.

### 3. If you need to repair:

- Is there something you need to apologize for?
- Write out your apology following the framework (own it, no excuses, ask forgiveness)
- Have the conversation this week

### 4. Reflection question:

- When you were a tween, did you feel **heard** by your parents?
- How did that (or didn't that) shape you?
- What do you want to do differently?

# CHAPTER 4: “BUILDING UNSHAKEABLE IDENTITY”

## *From Inherited Faith to Owned Conviction*

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Understand identity formation as the central developmental task of the tween years
  - Distinguish between inherited Islam and internalized conviction
  - Learn how to help tweens articulate “why I’m Muslim” authentically
  - Develop strategies for addressing doubts and hard questions
  - Recognize the dangers of spiritual outsourcing
  - Build a framework for helping tweens own their faith
- 

### **Now the central question:**

What kind of Muslim identity are we building in our children?

### **Two Paths, Two Outcomes:**

#### **Path 1: Inherited Islam**

- “I’m Muslim because my parents are Muslim”
- Islam is a set of rules to follow
- Faith is about external performance
- Questioning is discouraged
- **Outcome at 18:** Abandonment or rigidity without depth

#### **Path 2: Owned Conviction**

- “I’m Muslim because I know it’s true”
- Islam is a comprehensive worldview
- Faith is internal and transforms behavior
- Questions are welcomed and answered
- **Outcome at 18:** Confident, grounded, resilient believer

### **The Goal of This Chapter:**

Learn how to guide your tween from Path 1 to Path 2 during this critical window (ages 9-14).

---

## **PART 1: UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY FORMATION**

### **What is Identity?**

Identity answers three fundamental questions:

1. **Who am I?**
-

2. **Where do I belong?**
3. **What is my purpose?**

For Muslim tweens in the West, these questions become:

1. Am I Muslim **and** Western, or do I have to choose?
2. Do I belong in my family's culture, my peer group, or something in between (third culture)?
3. Is my purpose what my parents want, what society values, or what Allah commands?

### **The Psychological Research:**

Erik Erikson (developmental psychologist) identified **identity formation** as the central task of adolescence. He called it "Identity vs. Role Confusion."

**Success = Clear sense of self**

**Failure = Fragmented, confused identity (the "double life" from Chapter 1)**

James Marcia (building on Erikson) identified **four identity statuses**:

1. **Identity Diffusion** - No exploration, no commitment  
*"I don't know who I am and I don't care"*
2. **Identity Foreclosure** - Commitment without exploration  
*"I'm what my parents told me to be" (Inherited Islam)*
3. **Identity Moratorium** - Active exploration, no commitment yet  
*"I'm trying to figure out what I believe" (This can be healthy or dangerous depending on guidance)*
4. **Identity Achievement** - Exploration followed by commitment  
*"I've wrestled with questions and now I know who I am" (Owned Conviction)*

### **Where Most Muslim Tweens Land:**

- **Identity Foreclosure** (most common in traditional families)  
They adopt parents' faith without questioning → fragile foundation → collapse under pressure
- **Identity Diffusion** (common when parents are uninvolved)  
No clear Islamic identity → vulnerable to any ideology that offers belonging

### **Where We Want Them:**

- **Identity Achievement**  
They've explored, questioned, and arrived at genuine conviction

### **The Islamic Perspective on Identity**

Islam doesn't just allow identity formation - **it demands it.**

### **Quranic Evidence:**

Allah addresses individuals directly, calling them to **personal conviction**:

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Say, ‘This is my way; I invite to Allah with insight, I and those who follow me. And Exalted is Allah; and I am not of those who associate others with Him.’” [12:108]

**Key phrase:** عَلَىٰ بَصِيرَةٍ – “with insight” or “upon clear evidence”

This means: Your faith must be based on *baseerah* (clarity, understanding, conviction), not blind following.

**Another ayah:**

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۚ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

“And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned.” [17:36]

**What this teaches:**

You will be **questioned** about what you followed. “My parents told me,” is not a sufficient answer before Allah. Not only is this answer unacceptable, but this exact attitude has been widely criticized in the Quran, for example, in Allah’s statement:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ ءَابَاءَنَا ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ ءَابَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

“And when it is said to them, ‘Follow what Allah has revealed,’ they reply, ‘No. We will follow what we found our fathers practicing.’ Even if their forefathers had no understanding or guidance?” [2:170]

**Hadith - Personal Accountability:**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“A person will be asked about his youth: how did he spend it? And about his knowledge: what did he do with it?” (Tirmidhi - authentic)

Each person is accountable for **their own** choices, beliefs, and actions.

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## The Danger of Identity Foreclosure (Inherited Islam)

### Case Study #1: “The Perfect Muslim Girl Who Wasn’t”

Sameera, 18, grew up in a practicing family. Hijab at 7, memorized Quran by 12, never missed prayer. Her parents were so proud. She got accepted to a prestigious university across the country.

Within six months:

- Removed hijab
- Stopped praying

- Started dating a non-Muslim
- Told her parents: “I’m finally free to be myself”

*Her parents were devastated: “We did everything right! What happened?”*

### **What Actually Happened:**

Sameera never **owned** her Islam. She performed it to please her parents and avoid conflict. She was in **Identity Foreclosure** - she committed to an identity (practicing Muslim) without ever exploring **why** or developing internal conviction.

College gave her freedom, and she discovered: *She had no idea why she was Muslim beyond “my family is Muslim.”*

### **The scholars have warned about this:**

Imam al-Ghazali wrote in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*:

“The **taqleed** (blind following) of parents in matters of faith is dangerous. A person must arrive at conviction through knowledge and reflection, not merely inheritance.”

### **The Statistics:**

Studies in multiple Western countries show significant percentages of young people raised Muslim no longer identify with the faith as adults. According to a 2017 Pew Research Center survey of American Muslims, it is estimated that 24% of those who were raised Muslim have left Islam. Looking deeper, 55% of these former Muslims no longer identify with any religion, 22% have turned to Christianity, and the remaining 21% of respondents now identify with one of an assortment of other ideologies (Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, or just “spiritual”).

The same survey asked those who left Islam to explain, in their own words, why they are no longer Muslim. Some reported a dislike with organized religion and faith in general (12%), or they do not believe in God (8%), or that they are just not religious (5%). Another 20% reported a specific experience with Islam that turned them away, like never connecting with the faith (9%) despite being raised as Muslim, or having a disagreement with the principles of Islam (7%). Others reported a preference for other religions or ideologies (16%) or “personal growth experiences” (14%), such as higher education<sup>13</sup>.

### **Application:**

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<sup>13</sup> Mohamed, B. (2018, January 26). *The share of Americans who leave Islam is offset by those who become Muslim*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/01/26/the-share-of-americans-who-leave-islam-is-offset-by-those-who-become-muslim/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202017%20Pew%20Research%20Center,Muslim%20but%20never%20connected%20with%20the%20faith>

If your tween is:

- Praying only because you make them
- Wearing hijab only because you enforce it
- Avoiding *haram* only when you're watching

**They are in Identity Foreclosure.** The moment they have freedom; many will abandon it all.

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## **PART 2: HELPING THEM OWN THEIR ISLAM**

### **Strategy #1: Welcome Questions, Even Hard Ones**

#### **The Problem:**

Many parents panic when their tween asks:

- “How do we know Allah really exists?”
- “Why is Islam the right religion?”
- “Why can't I have a girlfriend if we're not doing anything haram?”
- “Why do I have to pray five times a day?”

#### **Common (Wrong) Responses:**

- ❌ “Don't question your religion!”
- ❌ “What's wrong with you?”
- ❌ “These are whispers from Shaytan!”
- ❌ “Just have faith and don't think too much”

#### **Why This Backfires:**

You've just taught them:

1. Questions are dangerous
2. Islam can't withstand scrutiny
3. They can't come to you with doubts
4. They have to figure it out alone (or ask Google/friends/internet)
5. They should hide what they're doing from you

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#### **The Prophetic Model:**

The Companions **asked hard questions** and the Prophet ﷺ **answered them patiently.**

#### **Example 1 - Existential Question:**

Narrated ‘Imran bin Hussain:

While I was with the Prophet ﷺ some people from Banu Tamim came to him. The Prophet ﷺ said, “*O people of Tamim! Accept the good news!*” They replied, “You have given us the good news; now give us (something).” Then, after a while, some Yemenis entered, and he said to them, “*O people of Yemen! Accept the good news, as Banu Tamim have refused it.*” They said, “We accept it, for we have come to you to learn the Religion. So, we wish to ask you about the beginning of this universe.”

The Prophet ﷺ replied, “*There was Allah and nothing else before Him, and His Throne was over the water, and He then created the Heavens and the Earth and wrote everything in the Book.*” (Bukhari)

**Notice:** The Prophet ﷺ didn't say “Don't ask such questions!” He **answered**.

### **Example 2 - Theological Doubt:**

Abu Hurairah reported that some Companions came to the Prophet ﷺ and said:

“We find in our hearts thoughts that are too terrible to speak about.”

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“*Do you really find that?*” They replied, “*Yes.*” He said, “*That is clear faith.*” (Muslim)

### **Explanation (from scholars):**

The fact that they were **disturbed** by doubts and **brought them** to the Prophet ﷺ was a sign of *iman*. They didn't suppress or ignore - they sought guidance. When we try to suppress doubts and not consult with those who have more knowledge, this places our faith in danger and opens us up to deviation. Islam is the only religion where the more you know, the more your faith grows. Thus, in Islam, increase of knowledge is the treatment for doubts.

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## **How to Respond to Your Tween's Hard Questions:**

### **Step 1: Don't Panic**

Their question is not a sign they're losing faith – it's a sign they're **thinking**. This is very **good**.

### **Step 2: Affirm the Question**

“That's a really important question. I'm glad you asked me.”

### **Step 3: Be Honest About What You Know**

If you know the answer: Share it clearly and concisely (remember Chapter 3 - brief and clear)

If you don't know: **Say so**.

“That's a great question and I'm not sure of the full answer. Let's go together and find out.”

### **Step 4: Going Together to Ask Someone of Knowledge**

Remember the guidance that Allah has given to us in the Quran when we don't know an answer:

فَسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“So, go and ask the people of knowledge if you do not know.” [16:43]

**Tafsir:** In this noble ayah, which is found more than once in the Quran, Allah commands the believers to seek out the people of knowledge and understanding when they have questions about their religion. While this is the specific meaning, in a general sense, it applies even to questions beyond the religion, whereby Allah commands that you seek out people who have knowledge in a given field to learn from them, rather than asking people who do not have the requisite expertise in a matter.

In the modern world, we have some additional resources that can make this easy

- Look up trusted and verified scholars’ answers as your question is likely to have been asked by others before you and you can search to see if a scholar whom you trust has already answered this question either in print, on audio or in a video
- Ask a knowledgeable imam/teacher who has expertise in this matter. Again, it is important to seek out only those who have expertise in these matters. Unfortunately, there are a number of people who have the title of Imam, but do not have the knowledge or humility to handle some of these questions and they may reply harshly to you.

**Story:** When I was in medical school, one of my Muslim physician mentors asked me to speak to her son who was having religious “doubts”. When I sat down with him to discuss these doubts, he was very apprehensive, and even told me, “If I tell you the questions I have on my mind, you probably won’t want to talk to me.” He had been made to believe that his questions were heresy by the rigid-minded Imam in that small community, who even threatened to “beat” him for asking these types of questions! Hence, he was totally shut down as a result! And what were these “evil” questions? He wanted to know why we believe in God, and why we believe that Islam is the true way. That’s it! I reassured him by saying, “If these were evil questions, then Allah would not have answered them in the Quran, but in fact, Allah has dedicated a sizeable portion of the Quran to giving reasons for people to recognize His existence, His Lordship and His sovereignty over the creation. Furthermore, the Quran is filled with numerous logical proofs to this end, as well as for why Islam has always been the true way to success and salvation since the creation of humanity.” We then spent a few hang-out chapters discussing these logical proofs and he continued on his path of faith stronger and with more purpose.

### **Step 5: Keep the Conversation Open and Share Your Enthusiasm**

“I really enjoyed learning more about this interesting topic with you. If you have more questions as you think about this, come back to me anytime.”

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### **Case Study #2: “But How Do We Know Islam is True?”**

*Yasser, 12, asks his father Tariq: “Dad, how do we know Islam is the right religion? My friend at school says all religions are basically the same, and another kid tells me I’m going to Hell if I don’t accept Jesus as my savior.”*

### Wrong Response:

✗ “Astaghfirullah! Don’t ever question Islam! This is only from Shaytan!”

[Yasser learns: I can’t ask questions. I’ll ask Google instead—or, even worse, maybe I should accept that invitation to go to Church and learn about how Jesus can save me.]

### Right Response:

✓ “Masha Allah. That’s one of the most important questions anyone can ask, and I’m so happy that you felt comfortable talking to me about this. Let me share why I know that Islam is true, and then we can explore it even further together.”

Tariq then:

1. Shares his own journey to conviction (personal testimony)
2. Points to evidence (Quran’s emphasis on logical arguments, Quran’s preservation compared to all other holy books, scientific miracles, fulfilled prophecies, transformation of the Sahaba, etc.)
3. Acknowledges: “There’s a lot to study. Would you like to watch some YouTube videos on this together?”
4. Recommends age-appropriate resources
5. Checks in weekly: “Any new thoughts about the question you asked?” For slightly older tweens, show them that you also value their process by saying something like, “Have you learned anything new that you can share with me? I would love to learn from you as well!”

### The Result:

Yasser didn’t get the typical canned response of “just accept it because I said so” - he begins to develop **his own understanding, his own conviction and his own reasons** for believing. Over time, it becomes **his faith**, not something inherited. In many cases, this is also a great way for you and your child to bond as you both grow together through learning and developing.

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## Strategy #2: Help Them Articulate Their “Why”

### The Exercise:

Sit with your tween and ask:

**“If a friend asked you, ‘Why are you Muslim?’ - not ‘What do Muslims do?’ but ‘WHY are you Muslim?’ - what would you say?”**

Most tweens will struggle. They’ll say:

- “Because my family is Muslim”
- “Because I was born Muslim”
- “Because Allah said so”

- “I don’t know”

These aren't necessarily **bad** answers, but they're **incomplete**.

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### Help Them Go Deeper:

Work with them to develop a **personal testimony**. This might include:

1. **Theological conviction:**  
“I believe there’s only one God who created everything, and Islam makes the most sense to me.”
2. **Quran’s impact:**  
“When I read the Quran, it speaks to my heart in a way nothing else does while also making sense to my mind.”
3. **Moral framework:**  
“Islam teaches me how to live a good life—how to be honest, kind, and purposeful—while also teaching me to logically use my mind, not just to believe blindly.”
4. **Community:**  
“I’m part of something bigger than myself—the *Ummah*—that gives me a sense of belonging and a connection to a rich tradition of scholarship, poetry, literature and culture. I’m proud of what Muslims have accomplished and want to be part of this global community.”

### The Goal:

By the end of the tween years, they should be able to give a **coherent, personal answer** to “Why are you Muslim?”

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### Strategy #3: Model Your Own Faith Journey

#### The Problem:

Many parents present Islam as if they were born with perfect conviction—no struggles, no doubts, no growth.

This makes the tween think:

- “Something’s wrong with me for having questions”
- “Everyone else has it figured out except me”
- “My parents wouldn’t understand my struggles”
- “I’m just not good enough to be a real Muslim. I should just give up”

## The Solution:

Share your own journey. Be vulnerable.

### Example:

“You know, when I was your age, I also wondered why we pray five times a day. It felt like a lot. But over time, I realized that those five prayers keep me connected to Allah throughout the day. When I skip them, I feel spiritually empty and actually notice how my actions have less blessings in them. It took me years to really **love** prayer—it didn’t happen overnight.”

### Or:

"I went through a phase in college where I questioned everything. I read books, talked to scholars, and really wrestled with my faith. I remember that I even sat with a Christian pastor for several months to better understand the Bible! Believe it or not, that period actually made my *iman* **stronger** because I arrived at conviction on my own, not just because my parents said so.”

### Why This Works:

1. **Normalizes struggle and humanizes the parent** – “Even my parents had questions”
2. **Shows growth is possible** – “They got through it”
3. **Invites them in** – “I can talk to them about this”

## Hadith - The Prophet Ibrahim’s ﷺ Transparency:

Allah informs us in the Quran about how the Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ asked Allah about the resurrection in order to strengthen his own faith:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ ۖ قَالَ أُولَٰئِكَ تُؤْمِنُونَ ۖ قَالَ بَلَىٰ ۖ لَئِن لَّمْ يَآتِيَنَّكَ سَعْيًا ۖ وَاعْلَمَنَّ أَنَّهُ اللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

“And when Ibrahim said, ‘My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead.’ Allah said, ‘Do you not believe?’ He replied, ‘Yes, but I ask only that my heart may be reassured.’ Allah then said, ‘Take four birds and train them to come to you. Then after slaughtering them put on each hill a portion of each of them; then call them - they will come flying to you in haste. And know then that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.’” [2:260]

And our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, commenting on this ayah, said:

“We have more claim to doubt than Ibrahim when he said, ‘My Lord, show me how you revive the dead.’ He replied, ‘Do you not believe?’ He said, ‘Yes, but that my heart may be reassured.’ [2:260] May Allah have mercy on Lut that he wanted a strong support, and had I stayed in the prison as long as Yusuf stayed I would have responded to him who called for me.” (Muslim)

Understanding this hadith: Our Prophet’s ﷺ immense manners are demonstrated in this hadith, where he defends his brother’s from among the Prophets from those who might question their actions or words. It helps us to understand that though they were Prophets, they were still human and that as humans, we still love to seek out reassurance. This helps the rest of us, hence the Prophet’s statement, “*We have more claim to doubt*”. We are the ones who seek out reassurances, and so the example of Ibrahim should give us relief and help us to know that we are not alone, and that seeking reassurance is not a sign of weakness of faith, it is a sign of only wanting more and more certainty from Allah.

### **What this teaches:**

The Prophet ﷺ **showed us that we are not alone in seeking deeper reassurances and that doing so is not a sign of weakness.**

### **Application:**

Let your tween see:

- You seeking to understand your own questions
- You making *dua* with sincerity for guidance and strength
- You struggling with your *nafs* (ego) and overcoming it

**Don’t just tell them to have certainty - SHOW them what it looks like.**

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## **PART 3: THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL OUTSOURCING**

### **What is Spiritual Outsourcing?**

#### **Definition:**

When parents delegate their child’s Islamic education entirely to external institutions (weekend school, Islamic school, online programs) without being involved themselves.

#### **The Assumption:**

“The masjid/Islamic school will make my kid a good Muslim. My job is just to get them there.”

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## Why This Fails:

### 1. Limited Time

- Weekend school = 2-4 hours per week
- Regular daily school = 40+ hours per week
- Social media = 50-60+ hours per week
- Home = 70+ hours per week

### Which environment has more influence?

### 2. Disconnect Between Teaching and Modeling

If the teacher says “Honesty is important,” but the child sees their parents lying, cheating, or cutting corners at home - **the home wins**. But you might be thinking, I don’t lie or cut corners. Consider:

- Someone calls, and you tell your child, “Tell them I’m not home” or “Tell them I’m busy”.
- You make appointments and go late, saying, “It doesn’t matter, it’s not like they will be ready anyway.”
- How many times have you come home early because the boss was out on vacation, or stepped out of work to run a personal errand on company time?
- How many times have you delayed the prayer because you’re watching a game, or on your phone?

### 3. Islam Becomes “That Thing We Do on Weekends”

Instead of a **comprehensive way of life**, Islam becomes a compartmentalized activity - like soccer practice.

### Quranic Warning:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا

“O believers, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire...” [66:6]

**The responsibility is on YOU** - the parent. You can’t outsource it.

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### Case Study #3: “But He Goes to Islamic School!”

*Hamza’s parents enrolled him in full-time Islamic school from kindergarten. They thought: “He’s learning Quran, Arabic, Islamic studies – we’re doing everything right.”*

*But at home:*

- Parents rarely prayed on time
  - Quran was never recited except at school
  - Islamic discussions didn’t happen
  - Parents focused only on academic grades and career prep
-

*At 16, Hamza told his parents: “I hate Islam. It’s all rules and memorization. I’m only doing this because you make me.”*

### **What Went Wrong:**

His parents **outsourced** his Islamic development. School taught Islam as **information** (facts, rules, Arabic). Home never showed Islam as **transformation** (connection to Allah, purpose, joy).

### **The Fix:**

Islamic education must be:

1. **Taught** at school/masjid (knowledge)
2. **Modeled** at home (living example)
3. **Discussed** in family (application and conviction)
4. **Shared** as a lifestyle by friends (extension to community)

**All four are necessary.**

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### **What Spiritual Outsourcing Does to Identity:**

When you outsource, your child’s Islamic identity becomes:

- **External** (something done at a specific place/time)
- **Performative** (checked boxes without internal change)
- **Fragile** (easily abandoned when no longer convenient)

What you want:

- **Internal** (who they are, not what they do)
- **Authentic** (flows from conviction)
- **Resilient** (withstands challenges)

**Perspective:** As someone who has been following this topic for more than 20 years, I have been disappointed, and sometimes even shocked, at the behaviors that I have witnessed from kids attending “Islamic schools”. What many people miss is the typical parents who are too engrossed in their careers, not practicing or barely practicing, Islam at home who feel “guilty” about ignoring their kids and send them to Islamic schools to outsource that education and development. Since these kids come from this type of background, they often import almost every negative behavior and trend that you might see in a non-Muslim public school onto the grounds of the Islamic school, spoiling the other kids. I have witnessed people who are now adults who have PTSD from their experiences at Islamic schools. While this is not a blanket condemnation of Islamic schools, I say this so that we do not approach this decision lightly, or naively. Islamic school remains a better option than public schools, but for those parents willing to make the sacrifice for their children’s futures, there truly is no better option than home schooling. Something to consider ...

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## PART 4: BUILDING IDENTITY AT HOME

### Strategy #1: Make Islam Visible and Normal

#### The Goal:

Islam shouldn't only be something "we do at the masjid" - it must permeate daily life.

#### Practical Ways:

##### 1. Islamic Environment:

- Quran recitation playing in the home
- Islamic art/calligraphy on walls
- *Adhkar* (remembrance) throughout the day
- Saying Bismillah before meals, Alhamdulillah for blessings

##### 2. Islamic Conversations:

- When something good happens: "Alhamdulillah, this is from Allah's mercy"
- When facing difficulty: "This is a test. Let's make *dua*, be patient and trust in Allah's plan"
- When making decisions: "What would be most pleasing to Allah? What would best protect my *iman*?"

##### 3. Islamic Rituals as Family Events:

- Pray together (at least one salah daily as a family)
- Read Quran together (even 5 minutes)
- Pick a book to read together as a family, one chapter a week on a given evening (Stories of the Prophets, The *Seerah* of the Prophet ﷺ, Stories of the Companions, etc.)
- Make *dua* together before bed or practice the sunnah *adhkar* before bed
- Celebrate Islamic occasions (Ramadan, *Eids*, Fridays) and make them fun and memorable

#### Research Shows:

Children who see religion practiced **at home** (not just at religious institutions) are significantly more likely to maintain that religion into adulthood<sup>14</sup>. To read more about this research, you can review the reports developed by the University of Notre Dame's National Study of Youth and Religion, particularly their report on Family Religious Involvement and the Quality of Parental Relationships for Families with Early Adolescents<sup>15</sup>.

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### Strategy #2: Connect Islam to Their Real Life

#### The Problem:

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<sup>14</sup> Smith J. (2020). Transmission of Faith in Families: The Influence of Religious Ideology. *Sociology of religion*, 82(3), 332–356. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sraa045>

<sup>15</sup>[https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/assets/102508/family\\_religious\\_involvement\\_and\\_the\\_quality\\_of\\_parental\\_relationships\\_for\\_families\\_with\\_early\\_adolescents\\_.pdf](https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/assets/102508/family_religious_involvement_and_the_quality_of_parental_relationships_for_families_with_early_adolescents_.pdf)

Many tweens unfortunately see Islam as irrelevant to their actual concerns:

- School stress
- Friendship drama
- Identity questions
- Future anxiety

### **The Solution:**

**Show them how Islam addresses these very issues.**

### **Examples:**

**Tween says:** “I’m so stressed about this test tomorrow.”

**Parent connects to Islam:** “Can I help you review your notes to make sure you’re prepared? Then, after that, let’s make *dua* together. Allah says in the Quran, ‘And when My servants ask you about Me, tell them I am near. I respond to the call of the supplicant when he calls upon Me.’ [2:186] Let’s ask Him for calm, clarity and success. Also, you always have to remember that as long as you do your part, you can rest at ease leaving the rest to Allah, knowing that He will do what is best for you, whatever that may be. Right?”

**Tween says:** “Everyone at school is spreading rumors about me.”

**Parent connects to Islam:** “That’s so painful. You know, the Prophet ﷺ also faced people lying about him. But he responded with patience and continued doing good. Allah sees the truth even when people don’t, and people who are true will also see that. That’s what really matters. It’s happened to me too, and I struggled with it too you know? But, in the end, I discovered that the people that matter in the end don’t buy into those rumors or gossip, and those are the people you want by your side.”

**Tween says:** “I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up.”

**Parent connects to Islam:** “That’s okay - you don’t have to figure it all out now. But think about this: Allah gave you unique talents for a reason. What do you love doing? How could you use that to serve Allah and help people? But in the end, always remember that whatever you choose to do that is pleasing to Allah, I will be proud of you.”

### **The Principle:**

Islam is not **separate** from life – it’s the **lens** through which we understand life.

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## **Strategy #3: Let Them Serve**

### **The Problem:**

Many tweens are only **consumers** of Islam (they attend classes, listen to lectures, memorize Quran) but never **contributors**.

### **The Result:**

They feel like passengers, not participants. Islam is something done **to** them or **for** them, not something they actively engage with.

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### **The Solution:**

**Give them opportunities to serve.**

### **Examples:**

**1. At the Masjid:**

- Help set up chairs
- Teach younger kids Quran
- Volunteer at community events
- Participate in charity drives

**2. At Home:**

- Lead family in the *salah*
- Choose and explain an ayah at dinner
- Teach siblings, or friends, what they learned
- Help parents with Islamic research

**3. In the Community:**

- Visit sick Muslims with parents
- Deliver food to neighbors
- Help neighbors with tasks (carry their groceries from their car, shovel their snow, etc.)
- Participate in *dawah* activities (appropriate to age)

### **Why This Matters:**

When they **serve**, they:

- Feel ownership (“This is my community”)
- Develop competence (“I can contribute”)
- Experience purpose (“My Islam matters”)

### **Prophetic Example:**

The Prophet ﷺ gave young Companions **real responsibilities:**

- Usama ibn Zayd led an army at 18
- Ali ibn Abi Talib was entrusted with the Prophet’s bed on the night of *Hijrah* (teenager)
- Mu’adh ibn Jabal was sent as a teacher and judge to Yemen (early 20s)

**He didn’t wait for them to be “adults” - he developed them through responsibility.**

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## Strategy #4: Celebrate Their Islamic Identity

### The Problem:

In the West, Muslim identity is often framed negatively:

- “You can’t do this because you’re Muslim”
- “Muslims don’t celebrate that”
- It’s all restrictions, no joy

### The Result:

They associate Islam with deprivation, not fulfillment.

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### The Solution:

**Celebrate the beauty, richness, and pride of being Muslim.**

### Examples:

1. **Highlight Muslim Excellence:**
  - Share stories of great Muslim scientists, scholars, leaders (past and present)
  - Point out Muslim role models in various fields
  - “Do you know a Muslim invented \_\_\_?”
2. **Islamic Identity as an Honor:**
  - “You’re part of the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ - the best nation brought forth for mankind”
  - “Allah chose you to be born into Islam – that’s a huge blessing”
3. **Joy in Worship:**
  - Make Ramadan a time of excitement and traditions, not just fasting
  - Celebrate *Jumu'ah* as a special day, even just making a routine of getting an ice cream together
  - When they pray on time: “Alhamdulillah, you just connected with your Creator. I’m so proud.”

### Prophetic Example:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“How wonderful is the attitude of the believer! Everything that happens is good for him. If something good happens to him, he is grateful, and that is good for him. If something bad happens to him, he is patient, and that is good for him.”* (Muslim)

**Islam is optimistic, hopeful, and empowering** - make sure your tween experiences it that way.

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## CONCLUSION: IDENTITY IS BUILT, NOT INHERITED

### The Reality:

You cannot **transfer** your faith to your child like a genetic trait. They have to **build** it themselves.

### Your Job:

You are the **architect** who provides:

- **Materials** (knowledge, experiences, resources)
- **Blueprint** (model, guidance, answers)
- **Support** (encouragement, patience, safety to question)
- **Space** (room to explore safely and arrive at conviction)

### By the End of the Tween Years, Your Child Should:

- ✓ Be able to articulate **why** they're Muslim (not just what Muslims do)
- ✓ Have wrestled with and answered core questions about faith
- ✓ See Islam as relevant to their real-life struggles and joys
- ✓ Feel ownership and pride in their Muslim identity
- ✓ Have experienced Islam as **transformative**, not just informational

### The Warning:

If they reach 18 without this foundation, freedom will expose the cracks. They'll either:

1. Abandon Islam (it was never theirs to begin with), or
2. Cling to it rigidly without depth (vulnerable to extremism or burnout)

### The Promise:

If they reach 18 with **owned conviction**, they'll be:

1. **Confident** in their identity
2. **Resilient** under pressure
3. **Equipped** to navigate challenges
4. **Ambassadors** for Islam in their generation

### Final Thought:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Every child is born upon the fitrah (natural inclination toward truth)...”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

Your tween **has already been set up internally** to believe. Your job is to help them discover **why** what they believe is true.

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## CHAPTER FOUR WORKBOOK EXERCISES:

### 1. Ask your tween the question:

“If someone asked you why you’re Muslim, what would you say?”

Listen to their answer. Don’t correct - just listen. This tells you where they are.

### 2. Share your own faith journey:

Have a conversation this week where you share:

- A time you struggled with faith
- A moment Islam became real to you
- Why you pray/fast/believe

### 3. Identify one area of spiritual outsourcing:

Where are you relying on the masjid/school to do what you should be doing at home?

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What’s one thing you can bring back into the home this month?

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### 4. Create one Islamic family ritual:

Choose something small you’ll do together this week:

- Making *dua* and *dhikr* as a family before bed
- 5 minutes of Quran after dinner
- Friday night *halaqah* at home
- Ice cream or nice lunch after *jumua’ah* (something fun where the kid chooses)

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## CHAPTER 5A: “THE BODY, PUBERTY & SEXUALITY”

## *Navigating Physical Changes with Islamic Dignity*

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Understand the Islamic framework for discussing bodies and sexuality (dignity, not shame)
  - Learn what information tweens need at different stages of puberty
  - Develop strategies for having age-appropriate conversations about physical changes
  - Address the reality of early pornography exposure
  - Teach body autonomy and protection from abuse
  - Navigate the “boyfriend/girlfriend” conversation from an Islamic perspective
- 

### **The Elephant in the Room:**

This is the chapter many of you have been dreading. But here’s the reality:

**If you don’t teach your tween about their body, puberty, and sexuality from an Islamic perspective - someone else will. And it won’t be Islamic.**

### **The Sources Teaching Your Tween (If You Don’t):**

1. **Peers** - often misinformed, crude, hypersexualized
2. **Internet/Pornography** - average first exposure age: **11 years old**
3. **School sex education** - clinical at best, values-neutral or contradictory to Islam at worst
4. **Social media** - unrealistic body standards, hookup culture normalized

### **The Question:**

Would you rather they learn about their bodies in a context of:

- **Islamic dignity, modesty, and purpose, or**
- **Shame, confusion, and distorted worldviews?**

### **The Goal of This Chapter:**

Equip you to have **age-appropriate, Islamically-grounded conversations** about puberty and sexuality **before** the world teaches them incorrectly.

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## PART 1: THE ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK - BODIES ARE SACRED, NOT SHAMEFUL

### The Wrong Approach: Shame-Based “Education”

#### Common mistakes Muslim parents make:

##### Mistake #1: Complete Silence

- Never discussing bodies, puberty, or sexuality
- Hoping they “figure it out” or “the school will handle it”
- Result: Curiosity drives them to unreliable sources

##### Mistake #2: Shame Without Explanation

- “Don’t talk about that!” “That’s haram!” “Lower your gaze!” (with no context)
- Making them feel **dirty** for natural curiosity or physical changes
- Result: They associate their bodies with shame, Islam with repression

##### Mistake #3: Too Much, Too Late

- Waiting until they’re 16 or about to get married
- By then, they’ve already learned from peers, porn, or experimentation
- Result: You’re correcting misinformation instead of building a foundation

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### The Islamic Approach: Dignity, Knowledge, and Purpose

#### Foundational Principle:

The human body is a **trust (amanah)** from Allah, created with **purpose and dignity**.

#### Quranic Evidence:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

“And We have certainly honored the children of Adam...” [17:70]

#### What this teaches:

- The body is **honored by Allah**
- It deserves **respect and care**
- It has **boundaries** because of its sacred nature

#### Another ayah:

إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

“Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned.” [17:36]

**Application:** You will be asked about how you used your body. This makes it **important to understand**, not shameful to discuss.

---

## The Prophetic Model: Direct, Dignified, Gender-Appropriate

The Prophet ﷺ addressed bodily functions and sexuality directly - without shame, but with dignity and appropriateness.

### Example 1 - Menstruation:

Aisha reported:

“Fatimah bint Abi Hubaysh came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I am a woman whose blood flows continuously (*istihadah* - prolonged menstrual bleeding). Shall I stop praying?’ The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘No, that is only a vein. But when your regular period comes, stop praying. When it ends, wash the blood from yourself and then pray.’” (Bukhari & Muslim)

#### Notice:

- A woman asked the Prophet ﷺ directly about menstruation
- He answered **medically and practically** without embarrassment
- He distinguished between normal menstruation and abnormal bleeding
- This shows: **bodily functions are discussed openly when needed for religious practice**

### Example 2 - Wet Dreams (Nocturnal Emissions):

Umm Sulaym came to the Prophet ﷺ and said:

“O Messenger of Allah, indeed Allah is not shy of the truth. Does a woman have to perform *ghusl* (ritual bath) if she has a wet dream?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Yes, if she sees fluid.” (Bukhari & Muslim)

#### Notice:

- A woman asked about a sensitive topic (female sexual arousal/discharge)
  - The Prophet ﷺ answered **clearly and directly**
  - He affirmed: “Allah is not shy of the truth” - **neither should we be**
  - This shows: **sexuality is not taboo in Islamic discourse when discussed appropriately**
- 

## The Principle We Learn:

Islam is **not prudish**. The Prophet ﷺ discussed:

- Menstruation

- Wet dreams
- Sexual relations
- Bodily functions

**But always with:**

- **Dignity** (no crudeness or vulgarity)
- **Purpose** (connected to worship, purity, lawful behavior)
- **Appropriateness** (gender-segregated when needed, age-appropriate detail)

**This is our model for talking to our tweens.**

---

## **PART 2: WHAT TO TEACH, WHEN TO TEACH IT**

### **Age 7-9: Laying the Foundation**

#### **Topics to Introduce (Basic Level):**

##### **1. Body Autonomy and Privacy**

Teach them:

- “Your body is a gift from Allah. You are responsible for taking care of it.”
- “Certain parts of your body are private (*awrah*). No one should touch them except for medical reasons with a parent present, or to help you clean yourself when you’re very young.”
- “If anyone tries to touch your private areas or asks you to touch theirs, say ‘No,’ run away, and tell me immediately - even if they say it’s a secret.”

#### **Why this matters:**

- **Prevents abuse** - empowers them to recognize and report inappropriate behavior
- **Islamic grounding** - *awrah* concept makes boundaries **religious**, not arbitrary

#### **Hadith:**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Teach your children to pray at seven, discipline them for it at ten, and separate their beds.”* (Abu Dawud - authentic)

**Scholarly explanation:** Separating beds at age 10 teaches **boundaries and modesty** as they approach puberty. This hadith shows Islam **anticipates** physical development and prepares children for it.

##### **2. Basic Body Knowledge**

Use correct anatomical terms:

- Not “private parts” exclusively, but **actual names** (penis, vagina, breasts, etc.)
- Why? If a child is abused and tells a teacher “someone touched my cookie,” the teacher may not understand. Clear language protects them.

Explain:

- “Allah made the bodies of boys and girls different. Each has a purpose.”
- “As you grow, your body will change. This is normal and part of Allah’s plan.”

### 3. The Concept of Haya (Modesty)

Teach them:

- Modesty is not shame – it’s **dignity**
- We cover our awrah because our bodies are **honored**, not because they’re shameful
- Both boys and girls have modesty requirements (not just girls)

**Hadith:**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Haya’ (modesty/shyness) is part of faith.”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

Explain to them: “Haya’ means we respect our bodies and others’ bodies. We don’t stare at people, we dress modestly, and we protect our privacy. This is part of being a good Muslim.”

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## Age 10-12: Preparing for Puberty

**By age 10, they need to know:**

### 1. What Puberty Is and Why It Happens

Explain:

- “Allah designed your body to grow from a child to an adult. This process is called puberty.”
- “Your body will change in different ways – you’ll grow taller, you’ll get hair in new places, your voice might change (boys), you’ll develop breasts (girls), and other changes.”
- “These changes mean your body is preparing for adulthood. It’s a sign of Allah’s perfect creation.”

### 2. Changes that Both Genders can Experience

**Wet Dreams (*Ihtilam*):**

- “As you get older, you’ll start having dreams that might make you wake up with fluid on your clothes or sheets. This is called a wet dream.”

- “It’s completely normal and happens to everyone. It means you’re becoming an adult.”
- “When this happens, you need to take a full shower (*ghusl*) before you can pray. *Ghusl* involves washing your hands and then your private parts in the shower first, followed by making wudu, then washing your entire body, right side first and then left side.”

Umm Sulaym came to the Prophet ﷺ and said:

“O Messenger of Allah, indeed Allah is not shy of the truth. Does a woman have to perform *ghusl* (ritual bath) if she has a wet dream?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Yes, if she sees fluid.” (Bukhari & Muslim)

### 3. Gender-Specific Changes

**For Girls (Mother should discuss, or trusted female relative if mother unavailable):**

#### **Menstruation (*Hayd*):**

- “When you're around 9-14 years old, you’ll start your period. This means blood will come from your vagina once a month for about 3-7 days.”
- “This is completely normal and natural, but it can be painful sometimes and you might also feel more irritable. But, don’t worry as it means your body is healthy.”
- “When you have your period, you don’t pray or fast, but you make up the fasts later. This is from Allah’s mercy.”
- “Let me know when it starts so I can help you. There’s nothing to be embarrassed about - Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, had her period and he helped her through it, and she, in turn, helped other women.”

#### **Practical preparation:**

- Show them menstrual products (pads, tampons - explain options)
- Teach them how to track their cycle (simple calendar)
- Discuss managing cramps, hygiene, and dealing with it at school

#### **Hadith:**

Aisha said:

“I used to comb the hair of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ while I was menstruating.” (Bukhari)

**What this shows:** Menstruation didn’t make her “impure” as a person - she still physically interacted with the Prophet ﷺ. This combats cultural taboos that make girls feel dirty or untouchable during their period.

#### **Breast development, body hair, discharge:**

- Explain these are normal changes

- Emphasize *hijab* comes with puberty (religious obligation tied to physical maturity)
  - Reassure her: “Everyone develops at different rates. Don’t compare yourself to others.”
- 

### **For Boys (Father should discuss, or trusted male relative if father unavailable):**

#### **Erections of the penis:**

- “An erection is when the penis becomes harder and stands away from the body.”
- “Erections can sometimes happen from wearing clothes that rub against the penis or during sleep. Sometimes they can also happen for no reason at all. Allah made it possible to allow men to be able to reproduce with their wife, so it’s very normal and part of being healthy.”
- “If you get an erection at a time when you don’t want one, this could feel embarrassing or uncomfortable, but it’s very normal, very common, and you shouldn’t feel bad about yourself.”
- “Sometimes, when you have an erection, some fluid can come out of your penis that isn’t urine. This is also very normal, but depending on the type of fluid that comes out of you, you either have to wash your private parts and remake *wudu*, or you have to take a special type of shower called *ghusl*, before you can pray or read Quran.”

#### **Practical guidance for erections:**

- Tuck the penis into the waistband of underwear or clothes
- Cover the erection by placing a jacket or backpack over the lap
- Take some deep breaths and stay seated until the erection goes away
- Go for a walk to get the blood flowing away from the genitals

#### **Practical guidance for discharge from the penis:**

- Teach them how to do *ghusl* properly
- Reassure them it’s not dirty or sinful – it’s a natural bodily function
- Explain they should change their clothes and wash them if they have discharge

#### **Hadith:**

Ali ibn Abi Talib said:

“I used to experience a lot of pre-seminal fluid (*madhiy*), so I asked al-Miqdad to ask the Prophet ﷺ about it (because I was too shy, being his son-in-law). The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘When you see it, wash your private parts and perform *wudu* as you do for prayer.’” (Bukhari)

#### **What this shows:**

- Even the Sahaba experienced sexual arousal and discharge
- They asked the Prophet ﷺ for guidance without shame (though Ali used a mediator out of modesty)
- The Prophet ﷺ gave **clear practical instruction**

### Voice changes, facial hair, body odor, growth spurts:

- Explain these are signs of manhood
- Teach them hygiene (deodorant, shaving certain parts of the body if needed, *ghusl* for *janabah*)
- Emphasize **lowering the gaze** and modesty apply to boys, not just girls

### Growth of facial hair:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Trim the mustache and let the beard grow; be different from the polytheists.”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

Explain: “As you grow facial hair, this is part of becoming a man. Islam teaches us to maintain our appearance in a specific way - this is part of our identity as Muslims.”

## 3. The Reality of Sexual Attraction

**This is the part many parents avoid – don’t.**

**For both boys and girls (separately):**

Explain:

- “As your body changes, you’ll start noticing people in a different way. You might feel attracted to someone. This is normal and natural - Allah created these feelings.”
- “**But** - Allah also gave us rules about how to handle these feelings. Just because you feel something doesn’t mean you can do anything you want.”
- “In Islam, these feelings are meant for marriage. Until then, we protect ourselves by lowering our gaze, avoiding situations that lead to temptation, and making *dua* for strength.”

### Quranic Framework:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ

*“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them.”* [24:30]

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts...” [24:31]

Explain:

- “Allah doesn’t say ‘don’t feel attraction.’ He says ‘control your gaze and protect your modesty.’”
- “This means: feelings are natural, but **actions** are what we’re responsible for.”

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#### 4. The Boyfriend/Girlfriend Conversation

**Don’t wait for them to ask. Bring it up proactively.**

**The conversation:**

“I know at school, a lot of kids your age are talking about boyfriends and girlfriends, or even dating. Let me explain why Islam doesn’t allow this - and it’s not because we’re trying to make your life hard.”

**First: What is dating for?** In Western culture, dating is how people figure out who they want to marry. They spend time alone together, often physically, to “test if the other person is right for them.”

**Islam’s approach:** We don’t “test drive” relationships. Why?

1. **It leads to haram** - when you spend time alone with someone you’re attracted to, it almost always leads to physical and emotional lines being crossed. Even if you say “we’re not doing anything,” you’re putting yourself in a situation where temptation is high.

The Prophet ﷺ taught us: “*Whoever has faith in Allah and the Last Day, let him not be alone with an unrelated woman without her guardian, otherwise Satan will be the third of them.*” (Ahmad—authentic)

2. **It’s emotionally damaging** - most teenage relationships end in breakups. Each breakup leaves emotional scars. By the time people get married, they’ve been through multiple breakups and can have trouble with commitment and trouble appreciating the person they are with fully, without comparisons to previous relationships.
3. **It’s not realistic** – you’re learning to be in a relationship with someone **without the responsibilities of marriage**. Real marriage involves sacrifice, disagreements, challenges, bills, kids, tough times. Dating is the fun part with none of the reality.

**Allah’s way is always better:**

- You focus on becoming the best version of yourself (education, character, *deen*)

- “When you’re ready for marriage, your family helps you find someone compatible—they know you better than you know yourself. Your eyes will tell you that someone else is good for you, but your brain is usually off during this process (remember the part about the prefrontal cortex not being as developed as your limbic system?) and your choices will not be wise. Let someone wiser and without the emotional fog help you make the best decision for your future.”
- You get to know them in halal ways (with family present, clear intentions) which results in a blessed union later—and we all desperately need that blessing in our marital lives.
- You marry, and **then** you build the deep emotional and physical bond

**I’m not saying this is easy. I know it’s hard when everyone around you is dating. But Allah promises:**

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

“Indeed, with hardship comes ease.” [94:5-6]

And the Prophet ﷺ gave us a special guarantee when he said: “*Undoubtedly, you will never leave anything for the sake of Allah Almighty, except that Allah will replace it with something better for you.*” (Ahmad—authentic)

**The boundaries you keep now protect your heart, your faith, and your future marriage.**

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## Age 13-14: Addressing Harder Realities

**By this age, they need to know:**

### 1. Pornography Exists - And It’s a Trap

**Don’t assume they haven’t seen it. Assume they have or will.**

**The conversation:**

“I need to talk to you about something serious. You’ve probably already seen or heard about pornography - videos or images of people doing sexual acts.”

**Here’s what you need to know:**

**It’s not real.** Pornography is acting. It shows a completely fake, harmful version of intimacy. It’s designed to be addictive - to make you keep coming back for more.

**It’s haram.** Allah says:

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّوْجَ إِذَا هُوَ كَانَ فَحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

“And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way.” [17:32]

Notice: Allah says “**do not approach**” - not just “don’t do it.” Even getting close to zina (through pornography, inappropriate conversations, etc.) is forbidden (سد الذريعة).

And the Prophet ﷺ further informed us just how evil this type of behavior is when he said: “*No one has a greater sense of honor than Allah, so He has made obscenities unlawful in public and in private ....*” (Bukhari and Muslim)

### **It damages you:**

- It changes how your brain works (addiction)
- It makes real relationships unsatisfying
- It objectifies people (makes you see them as bodies, not humans)
- It kills your spiritual connection with Allah

### **If you’ve already seen it:**

- You’re not ruined or beyond help
- Make *tawbah* (repentance) to Allah - He forgives everything if you sincerely repent
- Talk to me or a trusted adult about how to protect yourself going forward
- Install filters on your devices, don’t use phones/computers alone in your room

**This is a battle every Muslim has to fight now. You’re not alone, and with Allah’s help, you can win.**

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### **Hadith on Lowering the Gaze:**

The Prophet ﷺ said to Ali:

*“O Ali, do not follow one glance with another. The first is forgiven, but the second is not.”* (Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi - authentic)

**Explain:** “Sometimes you’ll accidentally see something inappropriate - on a billboard, on someone’s phone, on TV. **The first glance is forgiven** - you didn’t mean to see it. But **the second glance**—when you keep looking or turn back to look again—that’s a sin. This applies to pornography especially. If you stumble on it, **turn away immediately**. Don’t let curiosity trap you.”

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## **2. Same-Sex Attraction**

**Some tweens (or their friends) will experience same-sex attraction. You need to address this before they hear “Islam hates gay people” from the internet.**

### **The conversation:**

“Some people experience attraction to the same gender. This is a reality in our world, and you might even feel this yourself or know someone who does.”

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## **Islam’s position is clear but compassionate:**

**The feeling** (attraction) is not a sin. You don’t control who you’re attracted to.

**The action** (acting on same-sex attraction) is haram. Just like any sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and woman is haram.

**Why?** Allah designed sexual intimacy for a specific context: marriage between a man and a woman. This isn’t arbitrary – it’s tied to the purpose of family, procreation, and the structure Allah knows is best for us.

### **This means:**

- If someone experiences same-sex attraction, they’re tested with controlling it, just like someone attracted to the opposite gender is tested with avoiding zina.
- We don’t hate or mistreat people who have these feelings – they’re our brothers and sisters in humanity.
- But we also don’t celebrate or normalize what Allah has forbidden.

### **If you or a friend is struggling with this:**

- It’s not something to be ashamed of – it’s a test, like any other test
- Talk to someone knowledgeable and trustworthy (me, an imam, a counselor who understands Islam)
- Make *dua* and seek Allah’s help - He helps everyone who turns to Him sincerely

**The Western narrative** says “you are your desires - follow them to be happy.”

**Islam says** “you are more than your desires - control them to find true peace.”

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## **PART 3: PROTECTING THEM FROM ABUSE**

### **The Uncomfortable Truth:**

Sexual abuse happens in Muslim communities. Denying this doesn’t protect our children - **education does.**

### **Statistics<sup>16</sup>:**

- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys experience sexual abuse before age 18
- 1 in 5 children are solicited sexually while on the internet
- 80-90% of abusers are known to the child (family member, family friend, teacher, coach, imam)
- Children who aren’t taught about body safety are more vulnerable
- Fabricated sexual abuse reports constitute only 1% to 4% of all reported cases. Of these reports, 75% are falsely reported by adults and 25% are reported by children. Children only fabricate 0.5% of the time.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://capstonenebraska.com/statistics.html>

## Teaching Body Autonomy (Start Early, Reinforce Often)

### The Framework:

#### 1. “Your body belongs to you.”

- No one has the right to touch your private parts (except parents/doctors for hygiene/health when you’re young)
- You don’t have to hug or kiss anyone - even relatives - if you don’t want to

Imam Ahmad was asked: Can a man kiss a woman who is his mahram? He replied, “If he has come home from a journey and does not fear (temptation) for himself.” Ibn Muflih added, “But he should never do that on the mouth, only on the forehead or head.”

**Cultural note:** Many Muslim cultures force children to hug/kiss relatives. This teaches them **they don’t have bodily autonomy**. Stop doing this.

#### 2. “There are no secrets about your body.”

- If anyone touches you inappropriately and says “don’t tell,” **that’s a lie**. You tell me immediately.
- If anyone shows you inappropriate pictures or videos and says “keep it between us,” **tell me**. Even if that person seems to be religious or an authority, you must tell me.

#### 3. “You will never get in trouble for telling me.”

- Even if you broke a rule (were somewhere you weren’t supposed to be, looked at something you shouldn’t have), **if someone hurt you or made you uncomfortable, tell me. I will help you, not punish you.**

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### Red Flags to Teach Them:

Tell your tween: **If any adult or older kid:**

- Asks you to keep secrets about touching
- Wants to see or touch your private parts
- Shows you pictures/videos of naked people or sexual acts
- Asks you to touch their private parts
- Gives you gifts and asks for “special favors” in return
- Makes you feel uncomfortable about your body

→ **Say NO, leave immediately, and tell me or another trusted adult. If they stop you from leaving, yell as loud as you can for help.**

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### Quranic Principle:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا

“O you who believe, do not enter houses other than your own until you obtain permission and greet their inhabitants...” [24:27]

**Scholarly point:** The Quran establishes **privacy and boundaries** in homes. Children must be taught that their bodies have even **greater** boundaries than homes.

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### If Abuse Has Already Happened:

#### Reassure them:

- “If something like this has happened to you, **it is not your fault**. You are not dirty or ruined. You are loved by Allah.”
- “Please tell me. I will believe you, protect you, and get you help.”
- “Allah is the Most Merciful. He heals all wounds, including this one.”

#### Action steps for parents:

1. **Believe the child** (false accusations are rare; doubting them causes more trauma)
2. **Get professional help** (therapist specializing in childhood trauma)
3. **Report to authorities** (Islamic scholars agree: protecting children > protecting abusers’ reputations)
4. **Spiritual healing** - remind them of Allah’s mercy, their worth, and that they are not defined by what was done to them

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## CONCLUSION: YOU ARE THE FIRST TEACHER

### The Reality:

These conversations are **uncomfortable**. But they are **necessary**.

**Your child will learn about bodies, puberty, and sexuality. The only question is—from who?**

### If you teach them:

- They learn with **Islamic dignity and boundaries**
- They see you as a **safe person** to ask questions
- They’re **equipped** to navigate a hypersexualized world
- They understand their bodies are **amanah from Allah**, not sources of shame

### If you don't teach them:

- ❌ They learn from **pornography, peers, or social media**
- ❌ They form **unhealthy, distorted views** of bodies and intimacy
- ❌ They keep struggles **hidden** because you never opened the door
- ❌ They're **vulnerable** to abuse, temptation, and spiritual harm

### Prophetic Wisdom:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Convey from me, even if it is one ayah.”* (Bukhari)

**Application:** Though I know this feels overwhelming, start with **one conversation**. One topic. One question answered.

You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be **present and willing**.

### Final Thought:

Your tween's body is changing. Their desires are awakening. The world is bombarding them with messages about sex, bodies, and relationships.

**Your silence won't protect them. Your honesty will.**

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## CHAPTER 5A WORKBOOK EXERCISES:

### 1. Assess where you are:

- Have you had **any** conversation about puberty with your tween?
- Do they know the basics of what's happening to their body?
- Have you addressed pornography exposure yet?

### 2. Plan your first conversation:

- Choose **one topic** from this chapter
- Decide **when** you'll talk (this week)

- Prepare **how** you'll start ("I want to talk to you about something important...")

### 3. Gender-appropriate responsibility:

- **Fathers:** Schedule time to talk to your son about wet dreams, erections, fluids, lowering the gaze
- **Mothers:** Check in with your daughter about her period (if started) or prepare her for it (if not yet) and also discuss wet dreams and fluids, as well as their bodily autonomy

### 4. Pray for courage:

- Make *dua* that Allah gives you the words, the courage, and the wisdom to have these conversations with dignity and love

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## CHAPTER 5B: "TECHNOLOGY, SCREENS & DIGITAL WELLNESS"

### *Navigating the Digital World with Wisdom and Boundaries*

#### Learning Objectives:

- Understand what tweens are actually accessing online and why it matters

- Learn the Islamic framework for technology use (stewardship, not ownership)
  - Develop practical boundaries that work (not just “take away their phone”)
  - Address social media's impact on identity, mental health, and faith
  - Teach digital literacy and critical thinking skills
  - Balance connection with protection in the digital age
- 

### **The Reality:**

Your tween is growing up in a world you didn't experience:

- **Born with screens** - tablets as pacifiers, YouTube as babysitter
- **Always connected** - friends, strangers, and algorithms 24/7
- **Algorithmic manipulation** - AI designed to addict, not educate
- **No privacy** - everything tracked, recorded, monetized

### **The Question Parents Ask:**

*“Should I just take away their phone and ban all screens?”*

### **The Answer:**

That's like teaching someone to swim by keeping them away from water their entire childhood, then throwing them in the ocean at 18.

**They will have technology.** The question is: **Will they know how to use it wisely?**

### **The Goal of This Chapter:**

Equip you to raise **digitally literate, Islamically grounded tweens** who can navigate technology without being consumed by it.

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## **PART 1: UNDERSTANDING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE**

### **What Are They Actually Doing Online?**

**Common Parent Assumption:** “My kid just watches YouTube and plays games. It's harmless.”

## The Reality:

### 1. Social Media (Even if “Too Young”)

**Official age limits:** 13+ for most platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, X/Twitter)

#### Actual reality:

- **Average age kids get social media:** 10-11 years old
- Many lie about their age or use parents’ accounts (no age verification on most platforms)
- 95% of kids 13-17 report using a social media platform. About 60% of tweens and teens report using social media every day, and 30% report using social media “almost constantly.”<sup>17</sup>
- “Kid-friendly” platforms (Roblox, Minecraft) have **chat features** where adults prey on children

#### True Story:

A mother in Wilmington, North Carolina shares how an adult preyed upon her eight-year-old daughter within the child-friendly platform, Roblox. A child predator asked her daughter for her phone number over the chat feature on Roblox so he could prey on her away from the eyes of Roblox, and the conversation got even worse over texting with the eight-year-old girl.

“He kept asking her for hot videos and I mean, she would send just like an innocent picture of herself or like an innocent video,” said the girl’s mother. “But you could tell like he kept saying more that wasn’t what he was looking for.” The mother says she has parental controls on all of her kids’ electronics, but it shocked her to find the messages on her daughter’s phone.

**Lesson:** The mother had parental controls but it still happened - parents can’t just “set-and-forget”.

#### What kids are seeing:

- Influencers promoting materialism, vanity, and haram lifestyles
- Comparison culture (everyone’s life looks perfect except theirs)
- Cyberbullying in group chats and comments
- Sexualized content (dance trends, clothing, language, incels, alpha male ideas, manosphere)
- Conspiracy theories and misinformation

### 2. Gaming

**Common Parent Thought:** “At least it’s not social media.”

#### The Reality:

- Most games have **voice chat** and **text chat**
- **Strangers** interact with your child in real-time

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<sup>17</sup> Rideout, V., Peebles, A., Mann, S., & Robb, M. B. (2022). Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2021. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense.

- Gaming communities are often **toxic** (racist, sexist, vulgar language normalized)
- **Loot boxes** = gambling mechanics targeting children
- Some games have **sexual content** or **violence** far beyond what parents realize

### Examples:

- Fortnite, Roblox, Minecraft - all have chat features
- Grand Theft Auto (GTA) - explicit violence, sexual content, drug use (rated M for Mature 17+ but **many tweens play it**). Other examples of popular games include: Baldur's Gate and Cyberpunk

### 3. YouTube/TikTok

#### The Algorithm Problem:

You search for "Islamic reminder" once → algorithm recommends it

You search for "Fortnite fails" 50 times → algorithm **floods** you with gaming content

#### The Danger:

- Starts innocent, **escalates quickly**
- "How to pray" → Islamic content → **Extremist Islamic content**
- "Funny videos" → Pranks → **Dangerous challenges** (Tide Pod challenge, choking game, etc.)<sup>18</sup>
- "Makeup tutorial" → Beauty content → **Unrealistic body standards** → Eating disorders

#### Statistic:

- YouTube's algorithm is designed to maximize **watch time**, not child safety
- It will show increasingly extreme content to keep them watching

### 4. Messaging Apps

#### WhatsApp, Snapchat, Discord, iMessage:

- **Disappearing messages** (Snapchat) - encourages sending things they shouldn't (no evidence left)
- **Group chats** - peer pressure to participate in inappropriate conversations
- **Direct messages from strangers** - grooming, solicitation
- **Forwarded content** – they're seeing things their friends send (often inappropriate)

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### The Islamic Framework: Technology as *Amanah*

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<sup>18</sup> Tide pod challenge is where tweens and teens intentionally eat Tide pods as a "dare". The "choking challenge," also known as the "blackout challenge" or the "choking game," is another dangerous dare where kids intentionally cut off oxygen to the brain in order to feel a "high". This can lead to permanent brain damage, seizures, and even death.

## Foundational Principle:

Technology (phone, internet, social media) is a **trust** (*amanah*) from Allah, not a right.

## Quranic Evidence:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا

“Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due...” [4:58]

## Application:

- The phone is a **trust** - are they using it in a way that honors Allah?
- The internet is a **tool** - are they using it for benefit or harm?
- Time is a **trust** - they will be asked on the Day of Judgment why they spent hours scrolling

## Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“A person's feet will not move on the Day of Resurrection until he is asked about four things: his life and how he spent it, his youth and how he used it, his wealth and how he earned and spent it, and his knowledge and what he did with it.” (Tirmidhi - authentic)

**Explanation:** “How he spent his **life**” includes screen time.

“How he used his **youth**” includes the tween/teen years wasted on TikTok or video games.

**This is not a small matter.**

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## The Research: What Screens Are Doing to Tweens

### 1. Brain Development Impact

We discussed in Chapter 3: the tween brain is under construction.

#### Screens interfere with this construction:

- **Reduced attention span** - algorithms train brains for 15-second dopamine hits (TikTok, Reels)
- **Impaired impulse control** - instant gratification (want something? Google it, buy it, watch it NOW)
- **Sleep disruption** - blue light + stimulation before bed = poor sleep = impaired learning and emotional regulation

## “Dopamine Hits”:

Have you ever felt a rush of happiness or excitement when you bite into your favorite treat, buy something online, watch your favorite team score, or hear a message notification sound on your phone? That little surge is what we call a “dopamine hit.” It is important to understand exactly what it means though—and how it affects our mental health?

Dopamine is a chemical messenger in the brain, often called the “feel-good” hormone, though it’s responsible for more than just causing us to feel good—it also motivates us to look for pleasurable or rewarding experiences. A “dopamine hit” is used to refer to the rush of pleasure or happiness we experience from typically smaller, pleasing moments or encounters. Certain things, like eating sweets, shopping, physical intimacy, watching sports, gambling and social media activate the brain’s reward system, causing a release of dopamine. That release encourages a person to repeat the behavior that caused the release—even if that means compulsively. It is these dopamine surges that cause certain behaviors, like scrolling on social media and gambling, to become addictive, and why we have to be careful with them.

As parents, we have to understand that every digital platform is engineered to deliver constant stimulation—likes, notifications, pings—to trigger dopamine release and keep you glued. With time, this often creates dopamine-driven dependency, like an addiction, on devices, social media, video and gaming platforms. This is why it is so hard to be away from your phone—your brain is literally starving from dopamine! It is also why dopamine related activities are so closely tied to depression, anxiety and ADHD in today’s tech-driven world.

### Statistic:

- Tweens who spend 7+ hours/day on screens are **2x more likely** to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety

### Story:

I was recently discussing with my nurse colleagues how it seems that literally every young woman, from ages twelve and up into the 30’s, all of them either carry a mental health disorder on their chart or they are on mental health medicine. What is happening to our youth that this has become the norm? The answer may just be in the palm of our hands.

## 2. Social-Emotional Impact

### Comparison Culture:

- Everyone’s posting their **highlight reel** (perfect vacation, perfect outfit, perfect life)
- Your tween sees this and thinks **their life is inadequate and boring by comparison**
- Result: low self-esteem, anxiety, depression

### Cyberbullying:

- 59% of tweens have experienced cyberbullying
- Unlike in-person bullying, it’s **24/7** (follows them home via phone)
- Screenshots are **permanent** - embarrassing moments immortalized

### FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):

- They see friends hanging out without them → feel excluded
- They see trends they're not part of → feel left behind
- Result: constant anxiety about social status

### 3. Spiritual Impact

#### Time Displacement:

- Average tween screen time: **7-9 hours/day**
- Time spent in prayer/Quran/Islamic learning: often **less than 30 minutes/week**

#### What's being displaced:

- Quran recitation →  TikTok scrolling
- Family time →  Group chat drama
- Salah on time →  "One more video..."

#### Desensitization:

- Constant exposure to **haram** (haram music, free mixing, immodesty, violence) **normalizes it**
- They stop seeing it as wrong – "everyone does it"

#### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*"Verily, when the servant commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he repents and seeks forgiveness, his heart is polished. But if he increases in sin, the blackness increases until it overcomes his heart."* (Tirmidhi - authentic)

**Application:** Every inappropriate video, every haram song, every immodest image - **small sins accumulate** until the heart is desensitized.

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## PART 2: PRACTICAL BOUNDARIES THAT ACTUALLY WORK

### The Wrong Approach: Total Ban or Total Freedom

#### Option 1: Total Ban

- "No phone until you're 18!"
- "We don't do social media in this house!"

### Why this fails:

- They'll **resent you** and feel isolated from peers
- They'll access it **secretly** (friends' phones, school computers)
- They **won't learn** how to use technology wisely – you're just delaying the problem

### Option 2: Total Freedom

- “Here's a phone, do whatever you want”
- No monitoring, no limits, no conversations

### Why this fails:

- They're **not equipped** to handle the dangers
- They'll stumble into **harmful content** with no guidance
- You've **abdicated** your responsibility as a parent

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## The Right Approach: Gradual Responsibility with Clear Boundaries

### The Principle:

Teach them to **manage** technology in age-appropriate stages, with decreasing oversight as they prove trustworthy.

### Prophetic Example:

The Prophet ﷺ gave young Companions **increasing responsibility**:

- Young children: learned and observed
- Tweens: given tasks with oversight
- Teens: trusted with significant duties (Usama leading army at 18)

**The same applies to technology.**

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## Age-Appropriate Boundaries

### Ages 7-9: Foundation Years

#### Device Access:

- **Shared family devices only** (no personal phone/tablet)
- **Supervised use** (you're in the room)
- **Time limits**: 1-2 hours/day max (total recreational screen time, including TV)

#### Content:

- **Parent-approved apps/websites** only (you download the apps, you lock the app store)
- Educational content, Islamic cartoons, age-appropriate games
- **No social media** (they're too young to navigate it safely)

### Why:

- Building **healthy habits** early
  - They learn: screens are a **privilege**, not a right
  - You're modeling **intentional use** vs. mindless scrolling
- 

### Ages 10-12: Gradual Introduction

#### Device Access:

- **Basic phone** (call/text only, no smartphone) OR smartphone with **heavy restrictions**
- **Parental controls** enabled (Apple Screen Time, Google Family Link, etc.)
- **Time limits:** 2-3 hours/day max

#### Content:

- Still **no social media**<sup>19</sup> (even if friends have it)
  - Research shows: social media before age 13 → higher rates of anxiety, depression, body image issues<sup>20</sup>
- Messaging apps **only for family/close friends** (not group chats with 30 kids)
- YouTube **with restrictions** (YouTube Kids or supervised)

#### Monitoring:

- **You know their passwords**
- Random device checks (not spying, but oversight)
- Phones **charge outside their bedroom** (prevents late-night use)

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<sup>19</sup> SDSU professor of psychology Jean Twenge reports that among teens, heavy users of social media (five-plus hours a day) are twice as likely to be depressed as non-users. Facebook's own research found that using Instagram led to body image issues for many teen girls. Screen time in general (TV, gaming, texting) is also linked to depression, but not as strongly. Depression rates begin to increase after an hour of social media use a day, but the curve is usually more shallow for other types of screen time, with higher depression rates only appearing after three or four hours a day of use. So, two hours a day of social media use seems to be different from two hours a day of TV watching, for example.

<sup>20</sup> The types of use and content children and adolescents are exposed to pose mental health concerns. Children and adolescents who spend more than 3 hours a day on social media face double the risk of mental health problems including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Riehm et al., 2019). This is concerning as a recent survey showed that teenagers spend an average of 3.5 hours a day on social media (Miech et al., 2022). And when asked about the impact of social media on their body image, 46% of adolescents aged 13-17 said social media makes them feel worse (Bickham et al., 2022).

**The Conversation:** “You’re getting older and we trust you. This phone is to keep you safe and let you communicate with us. But it’s a **big responsibility**. We’ll check in regularly to make sure you’re using it wisely. If you show us you can handle it, we’ll give you more freedom. If you break our trust, we’ll scale back.”

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## **Ages 13-14: Increased Freedom with Accountability**

### **Device Access:**

- **Smartphone** with parental controls
- **Time limits:** 3-4 hours/day max (still limited)
- Access to **some social media** (if they’ve proven responsible)

### **Social Media (If Allowed):**

- **Instagram/TikTok<sup>21</sup>:** Only if:
  - Private account
  - You follow them
  - You review who they follow
  - They understand the dangers (comparison, time-wasting, inappropriate content)
- **Better alternative:** Delay as long as possible. The longer they wait, the better.

### **Monitoring:**

- **You still know their passwords**
- Monthly (not daily) check-ins: “Show me what you’ve been watching/posting”
- **Open conversations:** “What’s trending on TikTok? What are your friends talking about?”

**The Conversation:** “You’re becoming more independent. We’re trusting you with more access, but **trust is earned and can be lost**. If we find out you’re hiding things, lying, or accessing inappropriate content, we’ll take steps back. This isn’t about controlling you – it’s about protecting you.”

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## **Non-Negotiable House Rules (All Ages)**

These apply **regardless of age:**

### **1. No Phones in Bedrooms**

- Phones charge in a **common area** overnight (kitchen, living room)

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<sup>21</sup> Caution with tweens/teens having secret accounts that they don’t share with you

- Why: Prevents late-night use, inappropriate content in private, and sleep disruption

**Exception:** If they **need** an alarm, get them a **cheap alarm clock** (not an excuse to keep phone in room)

## 2. Family Meal Time = Phone-Free

- Everyone (including parents) puts phones away during meals
- Why: Models prioritizing face-to-face connection

### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“The best of you are those who are best to their families.”* (Tirmidhi - authentic)

**Application:** Being “best to your family” means being **present**, not scrolling through your phone.

## 3. No Screens During Prayer Times

- When it’s time to pray, devices go down
- Why: Prayer is non-negotiable; screens can wait

## 4. No Deleting History/Using Incognito Mode

- If they’re deleting history, they’re hiding something
- Why: Transparency builds trust; secrecy destroys it

**The Conversation:** “If you’re doing something you’d be ashamed for us to see, you probably shouldn’t be doing it. Allah sees everything, even in incognito mode.”

## 5. Parents Have Full Access

- You know all passwords
- You can check devices **without warning**
- Why: You’re responsible for protecting them

**The Conversation:** “This isn’t spying. This is parenting. When you’re an adult and paying for your own phone, you can have complete privacy. Until then, we’re responsible for keeping you safe.”

## Practical Tools for Monitoring & Limiting

### 1. Built-In Parental Controls

## Apple (iPhone/iPad):

- **Screen Time** feature
  - Set app limits (e.g., TikTok = 1 hour/day max)
  - Downtime (phone locks during certain hours, e.g., 9 PM - 7 AM)
  - Content & Privacy Restrictions (block explicit content, prevent app downloads without permission)

## Android:

- **Google Family Link**
  - Same features as Apple Screen Time
  - Location tracking (know where they are)
  - Approve/deny app download requests

## 2. Third-Party Apps

### Bark:

- Monitors texts, emails, social media for red flags (bullying, sexual content, suicidal thoughts)
- Alerts parents to concerning content
- **Not** full surveillance - focuses on safety

### Qustodio / Net Nanny:

- Web filtering (blocks inappropriate sites)
- Time limits
- Activity reports

### Covenant Eyes:

- Accountability software (originally for adults struggling with pornography, but works for kids too)
- Screenshots flagged content, sends report to accountability partner

## 3. Router-Level Filtering

### Circle Home Plus / Disney Circle:

- Controls **all devices** on home WiFi
- Time limits per device
- Bedtime schedules (WiFi shuts off at 9 PM for kids' devices)

### OpenDNS / CleanBrowsing:

- Free DNS-level filtering
- Blocks adult content, gambling sites, etc. at router level

## Important Note:

Technology changes **fast**. By the time your tween is 14, there will be new apps, new platforms, new dangers.

**Your job isn't to know every app.** Your job is to:

- Stay **curious** (“What’s the new thing everyone’s using?”)
- Stay **educated** (Google “Is [app] safe for kids?”)
- Stay **engaged** (“Show me what you’re into right now”)

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## PART 3: TEACHING DIGITAL LITERACY & CRITICAL THINKING

### The Problem:

Tweens are **digital natives** (grew up with tech) but **digitally illiterate** (don’t understand how it works or how to evaluate it). Remember the undeveloped prefrontal cortex = poor insight and understanding of risk/harm.

### They think:

- “If it’s on the internet, it must be true”
- “If an influencer says it, it must be good”
- “If my friends are doing it, it must be safe”

All false.

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### Skill #1: Recognizing Manipulation

#### Teach them:

##### 1. Algorithms are designed to addict you

“Why do you think TikTok keeps showing you videos? It’s not random. An **AI** is studying what you watch, how long you watch, what makes you keep scrolling. It’s **designed to keep you hooked** so you see more ads. You’re not the customer – **you’re the product.**” Always remember the rule: **“If it’s free, you’re the product.”**

##### 2. Influencers are paid advertisers

“That YouTuber promoting an energy drink? They got **paid thousands of dollars** to say it’s amazing. They don’t care if it’s healthy for you. Same with clothing brands, makeup, games – **it’s all advertising.**”

### 3. Filters are fake

“Every picture you see on Instagram went through filters. No one **actually** looks like that. Comparing yourself to filtered photos is like comparing your real life to a movie – **it’s fiction.**”

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#### Skill #2: Evaluating Information

**Teach them to ask:**

**Before believing something online:**

1. **Who posted this?** (A trusted doctor? A random person? An anonymous account?)
2. **What’s their source?** (Did they link to research? Or just “trust me bro”?)
3. **Does this match what I know from Islam?** (If someone says “Islam allows X” but you know it’s haram, they’re lying)
4. **Could this be fake?** (Deepfakes, AI, edited videos, misleading headlines exist)

**Example:**

You see a video: “Islam says dating is halal!” with 1 million views.

**Ask:**

- Who posted? (Random TikToker with no Islamic credentials)
- What’s the source? (No scholars cited, no Quran/hadith referenced)
- Does this match what you know? (Your parents and local imam say dating is haram)
- Could this be misleading? (**Yes** – they’re cherry-picking or misinterpreting)

**Conclusion:** Don’t believe it just because it went viral. **Verify with knowledge.**

---

#### Skill #3: Protecting Privacy

**Teach them:**

##### 1. Everything you post is permanent

“Even if you delete it, someone may have **screenshotted it**. Even if it’s a ‘disappearing’ Snapchat, someone can save it. **Never post anything you wouldn’t want your parents, teachers, or future employers to see.**”

**Story:**

We have all heard the stories of students who lost their scholarships, or adults who have lost their jobs, politicians who were humiliated—all because of a poorly thought-out post or video they once made. Don’t be one of them.

---

## 2. Don't share personal information

Never post:

- Your address or school name
- Your phone number
- Your location in real-time
- When you're home alone

**Why?** Strangers can use this information to harm you.

## 3. Stranger danger applies online too

If someone you don't know in real life messages you:

- **Don't respond**
- **Tell me immediately**
- **Block them**

Even if they claim to be:

- A Muslim
- A teen your age (they could be lying)
- Someone who "just wants to be friends"

**Real predators pretend to be safe.**

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## Skill #4: Recognizing Red Flags

**Teach them to tell you immediately if:**

- Someone asks them to keep secrets
- Someone asks for any pictures (especially inappropriate ones)
- Someone offers them money/gifts to do something
- Someone says "Don't tell your parents"
- They see content that makes them uncomfortable (violence, sexual content, hate speech)
- They're being bullied or threatened online

**The Conversation:**

"If **any** of these things happen, you will **never** get in trouble for telling me. I don't care if you were somewhere online you weren't supposed to be - **your safety matters more than the rule you broke.** Tell me, and I'll help you."

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## PART 4: SOCIAL MEDIA & IDENTITY FORMATION

### The Danger:

Remember Chapter 4: **identity formation** is the central task of the tween years.

**Social media hijacks this process.**

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### How Social Media Distorts Identity

#### 1. Performance > Authenticity

- Tweens learn to curate a **fake version** of themselves for likes
- They perform happiness even when struggling<sup>22</sup>
- Identity becomes: “Who do I need to be to get approval?”

**Result: Fragmented identity** - they don't know who they really are

#### 2. External Validation > Internal Conviction

- Self-worth becomes tied to:
  - Number of likes
  - Number of followers
  - Comments on posts

**Result: Fragile self-esteem** - if a post flops, they feel worthless

#### 3. Comparison > Gratitude

- They're constantly comparing:

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<sup>22</sup> Tracy Clayton, from BuzzFeed, tweeted to her followers: “im curious. if youre comfortable doing so, post a picture of you that you shared on social media where you were actually having a really tough time in life even tho you look perfectly fine in the picture.” This tweet received almost three thousand responses, was retweeted 30k times, liked 22k times and showed how fake social media can truly be. Perfect illustration of the "highlight reel" problem - even the people posting know they're faking, but they do it anyway.  
<https://x.com/brokeymcpoverty/status/1017098515347066880?lang=en>

- Their body to influencers
- Their life to friends' highlight reels
- Their possessions to what others post

**Result: Chronic dissatisfaction** - never appreciative for what they have

Hadith:

Abu Dharr reported: "My dear friend, the Prophet ﷺ encouraged me to develop virtuous traits. He instructed me not to look at those above me and to look at those below me. He instructed me to love the poor and be close to them. He instructed me to maintain my family ties even if they turn their backs. He instructed me not to fear the blame of the blamer in the matter of Allah. He instructed me to speak the truth even if it is bitter. He instructed me to increase in declaring there is no movement or might but in Allah, for it is a treasure among the treasures of Paradise." (Ibn Hibban—authenticated by al-Arnaoot)

**Quranic Antidote:**

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

*"We have certainly created man in the best of stature."* [95:4]

**Application:**

"Allah created you perfectly. You don't need filters, likes, or followers to have value. Your worth comes from **Allah**, not from social media."

**Hadith:**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*"Look at those who are less fortunate than you, and do not look at those who are more fortunate, lest you belittle the blessings of Allah."* (Muslim)

**Application:**

"Social media trains you to look **up** (at those with more). Islam teaches you to look **down** (at those with less) so you're grateful. Delete Instagram, or use with extreme caution, increase gratitude."

**Practical Steps to Protect Identity**

**1. Delay social media as long as possible**

**Research shows:** Every year you delay = lower risk of mental health issues

**Target:** Age 16+ if possible (not 13, even though that's the legal minimum)

## 2. If they have social media, set strict limits

- **30 minutes/day max** on Instagram/TikTok
- **No posting** (they can view, but not post) until they're mature enough to handle it
- **Private account** only
- **You approve who they follow**

## 3. Encourage offline identity-building

- Sports, hobbies, volunteering, Islamic activities
- **Real-world achievements** > social media validation

## 4. Model healthy tech use yourself

- If you're scrolling through Instagram at dinner, **they'll do the same**
- If you compare yourself to others online, **they'll learn that behavior**

**The best teaching is modeling.**

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## CONCLUSION: TECHNOLOGY IS A TOOL, NOT A MASTER

### The Reality:

Technology is **not going away**. Your tween will use it.

The question is: **Will they use it, or will it use them?**

### The Islamic Principle:

وَأَبْتِغِ فِي مَاءِ آتِنَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ ۗ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا

*“But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and do not forget your share of the world.” [28:77]*

### Application:

Technology is part of “your share of the world.” Use it - for education, connection, networking, halal entertainment.

**But** - always with the **akhirah** in mind. Will this bring you closer to Allah or further?

### Your Job as a Parent:

- Set **clear boundaries**
- Teach **digital literacy**
- Model **healthy use**
- Stay **engaged** in their digital life
- Protect them from **dangers**
- Equip them with **critical thinking**

### Final Thought:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Take benefit of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your preoccupation, and your life before your death.”* (Sahih al-Jaami’—al-Albaani)

### Application:

Their **youth** and **free time** are being consumed by screens. Help them use these blessings **before they’re gone**.

## CHAPTER 5B WORKBOOK EXERCISES:

### 1. Audit your family’s tech use:

- Track screen time for one week (yours and your tween’s)
- How many hours/day are screens dominating?

### 2. Implement one boundary this week:

- Phones charge outside bedrooms
- No screens during meals
- App time limits on social media

### 3. Have a tech conversation:

- Ask your tween: “What apps are you using most? Can you show me?”
- Don’t judge - just listen and learn

### 4. Evaluate your own modeling:

- Are you on your phone during family time?
- Do you scroll before bed?

- Are you setting the example you want them to follow?

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## CHAPTER 6: “RED FLAGS & WHEN TO WORRY”

### *Recognizing When Normal Tween Behavior Crosses into Crisis*

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Distinguish between normal tween behavior and concerning patterns
- Recognize signs of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues
- Identify warning signs of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and eating disorders
- Understand bullying from both victim and perpetrator perspectives
- Know when and how to intervene effectively
- Learn when to seek professional help and how to find it
- Build a support network before crisis hits

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#### **The Parent’s Dilemma:**

*“How do I know if my tween is just being a typical moody adolescent... or if something is seriously wrong?”*

## The Reality:

- Tweens are **expected** to be somewhat moody, withdrawn, and testing boundaries
- But **sometimes** these normal behaviors are masking serious struggles
- And parents miss the warning signs because they think: *“It’s just a phase”*

## The Goal of This Chapter:

Equip you to **recognize red flags** so you can intervene **before** a crisis becomes a tragedy.

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## PART 1: NORMAL VS. CONCERNING - UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

### The Challenge:

Almost **every** concerning behavior has a **normal version** during the tween years.

**The question is:** How much? How often? How intense? How long?

---

### Normal Tween Behavior (Don’t Panic Over These)

#### 1. Mood Swings

##### Normal:

- Happy one moment, irritable the next
- Snapping at you, then apologizing later
- Emotional volatility tied to **specific triggers** (bad grade, friend drama, hunger)

##### Why it’s normal:

- Hormones are fluctuating
- Brain is still developing emotional regulation (remember Chapter 3: prefrontal cortex under construction)
- They’re learning to manage big feelings

##### What to do:

- Give them space when they’re upset
  - Don’t take it personally
  - Check in later: *“Earlier you seemed really frustrated. Want to talk about it?”*
- 

#### 2. Wanting Privacy

**Normal:**

- Closing their bedroom door
- Not wanting to tell you every detail of their day
- Preferring to spend time alone sometimes

**Why it's normal:**

- Developmentally appropriate push for independence
- Building their own identity (Chapter 4)
- Need for personal space to process emotions

**What to do:**

- Respect reasonable privacy (knocking before entering their room)
  - Keep communication lines open: *"I'm here if you want to talk"*
  - Stay connected through other means (family dinners, car rides, activities)
- 

**3. Testing Boundaries****Normal:**

- Arguing with rules
- Trying to negotiate curfew, screen time, chores
- Occasional lying or bending the truth

**Why it's normal:**

- Learning to think independently
- Testing how much autonomy they can have
- Developing their own judgment (even if it's flawed)

**What to do:**

- Hold firm on important boundaries (prayer, respect, safety)
  - Allow negotiation on minor things (what they wear, extracurriculars)
  - Consequence for lying: *"You broke my trust. Here's how you earn it back."*
- 

**4. Peer Focus****Normal:**

- Caring more about what friends think than what you think
  - Wanting to fit in (clothes, slang, interests)
  - Spending more time with friends, less with family
-

### Why it's normal:

- Peer relationships are neurologically prioritized during adolescence (Chapter 1)
- They're learning social skills and building identity outside the family
- This is preparation for adulthood

### What to do:

- Don't compete with their friends – you'll lose
  - Stay connected: mandatory family time (dinners, Friday nights, etc.)
  - Get to know their friends: *"Invite your friends over for pizza"*
- 

## 5. Questioning Faith/Authority

### Normal:

- Asking *"Why do I have to pray?"*
- Challenging your rules: *"That's not fair!"*
- Wanting to know the reasoning behind Islamic rulings

### Why it's normal:

- Moving from inherited faith to owned conviction (Chapter 4)
- Developing critical thinking
- Testing whether what they've been taught holds up under scrutiny

### What to do:

- **Welcome the questions** (don't shut them down)
  - Answer honestly: *"That's a great question. Here's what Islam teaches..."*
  - If they're questioning Allah's existence or Prophethood, engage seriously (Chapter 4 strategies)
- 

## Concerning Patterns (These Require Attention)

**The difference:** It's not the behavior itself – it's the **intensity, duration, and interference** with daily life.

### Red Flag Formula:

- ▶ **Duration:** Lasting **2+ weeks** (not just a bad day or week)
  - ▶ **Intensity:** Extreme or out of character for your child
  - ▶ **Interference:** Affecting school, relationships, or daily functioning
  - ▶ **Multiple areas:** Problems in more than one domain (home + school + friendships)
-

## **PART 2: MENTAL HEALTH RED FLAGS**

### **Depression in Tweens**

#### **What it looks like (different from adult depression):**

##### **1. Irritability more than sadness**

- Tweens with depression are often **angry** and **snappy**, not just sad
- Constantly irritable, picking fights, explosive over small things

##### **2. Withdrawal from activities**

- Used to love soccer, now refuses to go
- Stopped hanging out with friends
- No interest in things that used to bring joy

##### **3. Sleep changes**

- Sleeping **way more** than usual (12+ hours, hard to wake up)
- OR sleeping much **less** (insomnia, up all night)

##### **4. Appetite/weight changes**

- Eating significantly more or less
- Noticeable weight gain or loss

##### **5. Fatigue and low energy**

- Constantly tired, even after adequate sleep
- Everything feels like too much effort
- Complains of being exhausted

##### **6. Difficulty concentrating**

- Grades dropping suddenly
- Can't focus on homework, conversations, or activities
- Seems distracted or mentally "foggy"

##### **7. Feelings of worthlessness**

- *"I'm stupid" "I'm terrible at everything" "Nobody likes me"*
- Extreme self-criticism
- Feeling like a burden to the family

##### **8. Statements about death or dying**

- *"I wish I wasn't here"*
- *"Everyone would be better off without me"*

- “What’s the point of anything?”

### RED FLAG THRESHOLD:

If 5+ of these symptoms persist for 2+ weeks and interfere with daily life → likely depression.

#### Islamic Lens:

Depression is **not a lack of iman**. It's a medical condition, like diabetes or a broken bone.

#### Quranic Evidence:

Even Prophet Yaqub experienced profound grief:

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُونُسَ وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

“And he turned away from them and said, ‘Oh, my grief over Yusuf!’ And his eyes became white from grief, and he was filled with suppressed sorrow.” [12:84]

#### What this teaches:

- Prophets experienced deep sadness and grief
- This doesn’t diminish their faith or righteousness
- **It’s human** - and Allah knows our struggles

#### What to do:

1. **Take it seriously** – Don’t dismiss as “teenage drama”
2. **Talk to them:** “I’ve noticed you seem really down lately. I’m worried. Can we talk?”
3. **Get professional help** - Therapist and/or psychiatrist (we’ll discuss how in Part 4)
4. **Maintain routine** - Still require prayer, school, basic responsibilities (depression thrives in isolation and inactivity)
5. **Be patient** - Recovery takes time

## Anxiety Disorders in Tweens

### What it looks like:

#### 1. Excessive worry

- Worrying about everything: grades, friends, family, health, the future
- Can’t “turn off” the worry
- Worry is **disproportionate** to the actual threat

#### 2. Physical symptoms

- Stomachaches, headaches (often before school)

- Nausea, dizziness
- Rapid heartbeat, sweating, trembling

### 3. Avoidance

- Avoiding situations that trigger anxiety (school, social events, new experiences)
- Making excuses to stay home
- Panic when forced into anxiety-provoking situations

### 4. Perfectionism

- Paralyzed by fear of failure
- Redoing homework obsessively
- Melting down over small mistakes

### 5. Reassurance-seeking

- Constantly asking: “*Am I going to be okay?*” “*Are you sure?*” “*What if...?*”
- Needs repeated confirmation

### 6. Sleep problems

- Trouble falling asleep due to racing thoughts
- Nightmares or night terrors

### RED FLAG THRESHOLD:

**If anxiety interferes with daily life (school refusal, can't sleep, physical symptoms) for 4+ weeks → likely anxiety disorder.**

### Islamic Perspective:

Anxiety is not a lack of *tawakkul* (trust in Allah). Even the Prophet ﷺ experienced a degree of anxiety and sought refuge in Allah.

### Hadith:

Anas reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to say:

*“O Allah, I seek refuge in You from anxiety and depression, from incapacity and laziness, from cowardice and miserliness, and from being overcome by debt and the oppression of people.”* (Bukhari)

### What this teaches:

- The Prophet ﷺ **sought Allah's refuge** from anxiety - he didn't deny its existence
- **Dua and** action (treatment) work together

- *Tawakkul* doesn't mean passivity - it means trusting Allah **while taking means**<sup>23</sup>

### What to do:

1. **Validate their feelings:** “*I hear you. That does sound scary/overwhelming*”
2. **Don't say:** “*Just relax*” or “*You're overreacting*” (this makes it worse)
3. **Teach coping skills:** Deep breathing, grounding techniques (5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you feel, 2 you smell, 1 you taste)
4. **Gradual exposure:** Help them face fears in small steps (not all at once)
5. **Professional help:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is highly effective for anxiety
6. **Spiritual support:** Teach them *adhkar* for anxiety, especially morning/evening remembrances

### Self-Harm

**What it is:** Deliberately hurting oneself (cutting, burning, hitting, scratching) as a way to cope with emotional pain.



### Why tweens do it:

- To feel **something** when they're emotionally numb
- To **release** overwhelming emotions
- To **punish** themselves
- To feel a sense of **control** when everything else feels chaotic

### Warning signs:

<sup>23</sup> Anas ibn Malik reported: A man said, “O Messenger of Allah, should I tie my camel and trust in Allah, or should I leave her untied and trust in Allah?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “*Tie her and trust in Allah.*” (Tirmidhi—hasan)

1. **Unexplained injuries**
  - Cuts, burns, bruises (usually on arms, legs, stomach)
  - Wearing long sleeves at home even in hot weather (to hide marks)
2. **Sharp objects**
  - Keeping razors, knives, or other sharp items in their room
  - Missing scissors, blades, box cutters from the house
3. **Spending long periods in bathroom/bedroom**
  - Locking door frequently
  - Seeming secretive about what they're doing
4. **Blood stains**
  - On clothing, bedding, tissues
5. **Emotional patterns**
  - Self-harm often follows intense emotional episodes
  - May seem calmer or "relieved" afterward

### **RED FLAG:**

**ANY evidence of self-harm requires immediate attention.** This is not "attention-seeking" – it's a serious mental health crisis.

### **Islamic Lens:**

The body is an *amanah* (trust) from Allah.

### **Quranic Evidence:**

وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ

*"And do not throw yourselves into destruction with your own hands."* [2:195]

Self-harm violates this trust - but the child is **in pain** and needs **help**, not condemnation.

### **What to do:**

1. **Stay calm** – Don't freak out or shame them
2. **Express concern:** *"I saw the cuts on your arm. I'm really worried about you. Can we talk?"*
3. **Listen without judgment:** *"What were you feeling when you did this?"*
4. **Get professional help immediately** - Therapist specializing in self-harm and/or adolescent psychiatrist
5. **Remove access to tools** - Lock up sharp objects (but know they'll find other ways if underlying issue isn't addressed)
6. **Teach alternative coping:** Ice on skin (provides sensation without damage), snapping a rubber band, drawing on skin with red marker, intense exercise
7. **Increase supervision** - They should not be alone for extended periods until they're stable

## DO NOT:

- ❌ Yell, shame, or punish
  - ❌ Force them to show you their body
  - ❌ Make them promise to stop (they likely can't without help)
  - ❌ Assume it's "just for attention" (even if it were, that means they desperately need attention/help)
- 

## Suicidal Ideation

The most serious red flag.

Warning signs:

1. **Talking about death or suicide**
  - "I wish I was dead"
  - "You'd be better off without me"
  - "I won't be a problem much longer"
  - Researching methods online
2. **Giving away possessions**
  - Giving away prized belongings
  - "Tying up loose ends" - apologizing to people, saying goodbye
3. **Sudden calmness after depression**
  - If they've been depressed for weeks and suddenly seem at peace, **this can mean they've made a specific plan that they intend to act on**
4. **Risky behavior**
  - Reckless actions that could result in death (not caring about safety)
5. **Withdrawal**
  - Isolating completely
  - Saying goodbye to friends in cryptic ways

## IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED:

If your child expresses suicidal thoughts or you see these signs:

1. **Ask directly:** "Are you thinking about hurting yourself or killing yourself?"
  - Asking does **NOT** plant the idea - it shows you're taking them seriously
2. **Do not leave them alone**
  - Remove access to means (medications, sharp objects, anything they could use)
  - Stay with them or have a trusted adult stay with them
3. **Get help immediately:**
  - **Call 988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline - available 24/7 in the US)
  - Take them to the closest **emergency room**
  - Call their therapist/psychiatrist if they have one
  - In some areas, mobile crisis teams can come to your home
4. **Follow up with professional care:**
  - Intensive outpatient program (IOP)
  - Partial hospitalization

- Inpatient treatment if necessary

### Islamic Lens:

Suicide is a **major sin** in Islam — but a child in crisis is **not thinking rationally**. They are **in pain** and need **compassionate intervention**.

### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Whoever kills himself with an iron instrument will be carrying it in his hand and stabbing himself in his belly in the Fire of Hell forever and ever...”* (Bukhari & Muslim - similar versions for other methods)

### But also:

*“The pen is lifted from three categories of people: a sleeping person until he awakens, a child until he becomes an adult, and a mentally ill person until he regains his sanity.”* (Tirmidhi—authentic according to al-Albaani)

### What this means:

- Suicide is grave, but they may not be accountable due to their mental state
- Our job is to **prevent** it through love, support, and intervention
- If the worst happens, we trust in Allah’s mercy and do not judge the deceased
- Focus on **saving the life** now, not theological debates

## An Important Perspective - What this means:

### Someone in severe mental crisis:

- Depression that has overtaken rational thought
- Psychotic break
- Extreme anxiety/panic leading to irrational action
- Trauma response (PTSD triggering dissociation)
- **Is not in a state of mental competence** (their ‘*aql* is compromised)

### Therefore:

- They likely fall under **“mentally ill person until he regains his sanity”**
  - The pen is lifted - they may not be held accountable
  - We **hope** in Allah’s mercy, not assume damnation
-

## Why This Framework is Pastorally Essential:

### 1. It Prevents Adding Trauma to Tragedy

#### Without this understanding:

- Parents lose a child to suicide
- Muslim community says (explicitly or implicitly): “Your child is in Hell forever”
- Parents are **destroyed** - not only grief, but **despair** about their child’s eternal fate

#### With this understanding:

- Parents lose a child to suicide
  - Imam/community says: “We don’t know Allah’s judgment. Your child was in severe mental distress, and so, we trust in Allah’s mercy and justice.”
  - Parents grieve but have **hope** in Allah’s *rahma*
- 

### 2. It Aligns with Islamic Principles of Justice

#### Allah’s perfect justice means:

- He doesn’t punish someone who **cannot reason**
- A person in severe mental crisis (suicidal ideation due to clinical depression/psychosis) is **not reasoning clearly**
- Therefore, Allah—who is **more merciful than a mother to her child**—will judge with **perfect knowledge** of their mental state

#### This is consistent with:

- The lifting of the pen for the mentally ill
  - Allah’s statement: “Allah does not burden a soul beyond what it can bear” [2:286]
  - The principle that **capability (*istita’ah*) is a condition for obligation (*taklif*)**
- 

### 3. It Encourages Seeking Help (Not Hiding)

#### If suicide = guaranteed Hell (no nuance):

- Families **hide** mental health struggles
- Don’t seek professional help (shame, stigma)

- Don't discuss suicidal ideation openly
- **Result:** More suicides, because people suffer in silence

**If suicide = grave sin BUT mental illness mitigates accountability:**

- Families can **openly** address mental health
  - Seek professional help without feeling like “giving up on *iman*”
  - Discuss suicidal thoughts as a **medical symptom**, not just spiritual failure
  - **Result:** More intervention, more lives saved
- 

## Why This Perspective is “Surprisingly Missing in Discourse”

**The Problem in Islamic Discourse:**

### 1. Lack of Pastoral Training

- Many Islamic scholars are trained in *fiqh* (law), not **pastoral care**
- They know the **ruling** (suicide is haram), but not how to **apply it pastorally** (to grieving families, struggling individuals)

### 2. Cultural Shame Around Mental Health

- Many Muslim cultures treat mental illness as **weakness** or **lack of faith**
  - Suicide is seen as bringing **family shame**
  - So, the harsh framing persists to maintain deterrence
- 

## Scholarly Support for This View:

**Classical scholars also recognized this:**

**Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya** wrote extensively on the relationship between **mental capacity and moral responsibility**.

**Ibn Taymiyyah** discussed how **overwhelming emotion** (*ghalabat al-hal*) can impair judgment.

**Contemporary scholars** like:

- **Yusuf al-Qaradawi** has written on mental health and Islamic law

- **Sherman Jackson** (American Muslim scholar) has discussed suicide in the context of mental illness

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## **PART 3: BEHAVIORAL RED FLAGS**

### **Substance Use/Abuse**

#### **The Reality:**

Muslim tweens **do** experiment with drugs and alcohol, despite Islamic prohibitions.

#### **Why:**

- Peer pressure
- Curiosity
- Accessibility<sup>24</sup>
- Coping with stress, depression, or anxiety
- Rebellion

#### **Warning signs:**

##### **1. Physical signs**

- Red/bloodshot eyes
- Dilated or constricted pupils
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Unusual smells on breath, clothes, in room
- Frequent nosebleeds (inhalants)
- Burns on fingers (marijuana)

##### **2. Behavioral changes**

- New friend group (especially secretive about who they are)
- Dropping old friends suddenly
- Secretive behavior, lying frequently
- Stealing money or valuables (to buy drugs)
- Missing medications from medicine cabinet

##### **3. Mood/personality changes**

- Extreme mood swings
- Paranoia, anxiety, aggression
- Unusually hyperactive or lethargic
- Lack of motivation (marijuana specifically)

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<sup>24</sup> tweens aren't always seeking out drugs; sometimes they're just easily available (at school, friends' houses, etc.)

#### 4. School/activities

- Grades dropping
- Skipping school
- Losing interest in hobbies, sports, Islamic activities

#### 5. Paraphernalia

- Finding pipes, rolling papers, lighters, small baggies, vapes
- Eye drops (to hide red eyes)
- Air freshener (to hide smell)

### RED FLAG:

**Any drug use at this age is concerning.** Tweens' brains are especially vulnerable to addiction.

#### What to do:

1. **Address it directly:** *"I found [item] in your room. We need to talk about this."*
2. **Listen to why:** *"What's going on that made you want to try this?"* (Often there's underlying pain)
3. **Set clear consequences:** Loss of privileges, increased supervision
4. **Get help:** Substance abuse counselor, teen rehab program if needed
5. **Increase connection:** Often substance use fills a void - fill it with family, faith, purpose

#### Islamic Framework:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ

*"O you who believe, indeed intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters, and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so stay away from it..." [5:90]*

#### But also:

The Prophet ﷺ taught us to address sin with **mercy and guidance**, not just condemnation.

Umar ibn al-Khattab reported: In the time of the Prophet ﷺ there was a man named Abdullah who was nicknamed "Donkey," and he would make the Prophet laugh. The Prophet lashed him for drinking wine, and one day the man was brought again and the Prophet ordered him to be lashed. Another man among the people said, "O Allah, curse him! How many times has he been brought?" The Prophet replied, *"Do not curse him. By Allah, I know that he loves Allah and His Messenger."* (Bukhari)

And a similar narration where the Prophet told his followers:

“Do not speak like this. Do not help Satan against him<sup>25</sup>” when a Muslim had said, “May Allah disgrace you” to the drunkard. (Bukhari)

These *ahadith*, in addition to teaching us the proper perspective, are also perfect for parents struggling with challenges like “my child is using drugs”—showing that you can discipline AND still show love to your child.

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## **Bullying - Victim Signs**

### **What it looks like:**

#### **1. Physical signs**

- Unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches
- Damaged or missing belongings (clothes, books, electronics)
- Coming home hungry (lunch money stolen or too afraid to eat)

#### **2. Emotional/behavioral**

- Extreme reluctance to go to school, frequent “sick” days
- Nightmares, trouble sleeping
- Sudden drop in grades
- Withdrawing from friends and activities
- Low self-esteem, self-deprecating talk

#### **3. Social**

- Not invited to parties or events
- Eating lunch alone
- No one calls or texts them
- Excluded from group chats

### **Why tweens don’t tell you:**

- Ashamed
- Fear retaliation will get worse
- Think you can’t help or that you will make it worse
- Don’t want to be seen as weak

### **What to do:**

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<sup>25</sup> don't pile shame on someone already struggling

1. **Create safe space:** “I’ve noticed you seem sad about school. Is someone being mean to you?”
2. **Listen without immediately problem-solving:** Let them share fully first
3. **Believe them:** Don’t minimize (“Kids are just mean sometimes”)
4. **Document everything:** Dates, what happened, witnesses
5. **Contact school:** Meet with teacher, counselor, principal - demand action
6. **Teach coping skills:** Assertiveness, when to walk away, when to get adult help
7. **Build their confidence:** Enroll in martial arts, public speaking, activities where they can excel
8. **Monitor mental health:** Bullying can lead to depression/anxiety/self-harm

### Islamic Lens:

The Prophet ﷺ commanded us to help the oppressed **and** the oppressor.

### Hadith:

Anas reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

*“Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or is oppressed.” A man asked, “O Messenger of Allah, I (know how to) help him if he is oppressed, but how can I help him if he is an oppressor?” The Prophet said, “By preventing him from oppressing others.”* (Bukhari)

### Application:

- Defend your child if they’re being bullied (help the oppressed)
- But also teach them never to bully others (prevent oppression)

## Bullying - Perpetrator Signs

**Your child might be the bully.**

### Warning signs:

1. **Aggressive behavior**
  - Physical fights
  - Verbal cruelty (mocking, name-calling)
  - Intimidating others
2. **Need for power/control**
  - Dominating conversations, games, friend groups
  - Gets angry when doesn’t get their way
  - Enjoys seeing others upset or afraid
3. **Lack of empathy**
  - Doesn’t seem to care when others are hurt
  - Laughs at others’ pain
  - Blames victims (“They deserved it”)
4. **Disciplinary issues**

- Frequent calls from school
- Getting in trouble for fighting, meanness
- Defiant toward authority

### Why Muslim tweens bully:

- Learned behavior (modeled at home or by peers)
- Low self-esteem (tearing others down to feel powerful)
- Trauma (hurt people hurt other people)
- Lack of empathy training

### What to do:

1. **Acknowledge it:** “*The school called. They said you’ve been picking on [name]. This is serious.*”
2. **Understand why:** “*What’s going on? Why are you doing this?*” (Don’t excuse, but understand root cause)
3. **Make amends:** They must apologize sincerely and make restitution (how can I make it better/right)
4. **Consequences:** Loss of privileges, community service, restorative justice program
5. **Empathy training:** Volunteer work, helping younger kids, Islamic education on kindness
6. **Address underlying issues:** If bullying from low self-esteem, trauma, or learned behavior - get therapy

### Islamic Framework:

The Prophet ﷺ was the kindest person, and he commanded kindness.

#### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Do not cause harm or return harm. Whoever harms others, Allah will harm him. Whoever is harsh with others, Allah will be harsh with him.”* (al-Sunan al-Kubrā lil-Bayhaqi—*hasan* according to al-Albaani)

**Application:** Hurting another person is incompatible with Islam and carries serious consequences.

## PART 4: WHEN AND HOW TO SEEK HELP

### When to Seek Professional Help

#### Immediate (Emergency) Help Needed:

- Suicidal thoughts or plans
- Self-harm that is escalating or severe
- Psychotic symptoms (hallucinations, delusions)

- Dangerous behavior toward self or others
- Substance overdose

→ **Go to ER or call 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline)**

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### **Soon (Within Days/Week) Help Needed:**

- Symptoms of depression or anxiety lasting 2+ weeks
- Self-harm that has just started
- Significant behavior changes (withdrawal, aggression, school refusal)
- Eating disorder signs
- Trauma response<sup>26</sup> (after abuse, assault, major loss)

→ **Schedule appointment with therapist and/or psychiatrist**

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### **Eventually (Within Month) Help Needed:**

- Mild anxiety or mood issues that aren't severe, but persist
- Difficulty coping with major life change (move, divorce, loss)
- Social skills struggles
- Academic motivation issues

→ **School counselor or outpatient therapist**

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## **Finding Culturally/Religiously Competent Help**

### **The Challenge:**

Not all therapists understand Islam or Muslim family dynamics. Some may:

- Encourage *haram* solutions
- Misunderstand cultural/religious practices as pathological
- Push values contrary to Islam

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<sup>26</sup> an involuntary physical, emotional, or psychological reaction—such as fight, flight, freeze, or fawn (Fight: Intense anger, irritability, or aggressive behavior; Flight: Anxious, panic-driven attempts to escape or run away; Freeze: Feeling paralyzed, unable to move or speak, or dissociating; Fawn: People-pleasing or complying with the abuser to avoid further harm, often resulting in lost personal identity)—designed to survive overwhelming stress. These reactions can manifest as flashbacks, numbing, hypervigilance, and deep mistrust

## How to Find Good Help:

### 1. Muslim Mental Health Directories:

- **Khalil Center** (<https://khalilcenter.com>) - Muslim mental health services
- **Institute for Muslim Mental Health** (<https://muslimmentalhealth.com>)
- **Naseeha Mental Health** (<https://naseeha.org>) - Muslim youth helpline
- **Maristan** (Muslim therapist directory)

### 2. Ask Your Local Community:

- Imam/Islamic center for referrals
- Other Muslim families who've used services
- Muslim physicians who can recommend

### 3. Questions to Ask Potential Therapist:

- *“Are you familiar with Islam and Muslim cultural practices?”*
- *“How do you incorporate a client’s religious values into treatment?”*
- *“What’s your approach to [specific issue - anxiety, depression, etc.]?”*
- *“Do you use evidence-based treatments?” (Look for CBT, DBT, trauma-focused therapy)*

### 4. Red Flags to Avoid:

- Dismisses importance of religion
  - Encourages *haram* as solution (boyfriend/girlfriend to feel better, abandoning hijab, etc.)
  - Doesn't involve family appropriately
  - No credentials (always verify they're licensed: psychologist, psychiatrist, primary care physician with experience, licensed professional counselor, social worker)
- 

## Types of Mental Health Professionals

Confused about the difference? Here's a breakdown:

### Psychiatrist (MD or DO) or Primary Care Doctor with behavioral health experience:

- Medical doctor specializing in mental health
- Can **prescribe medication**
- Usually focuses on medication management, not talk therapy (though some do)
- Use for: Severe depression, anxiety, ADHD, bipolar, etc. where medication may be needed

### Psychologist (PhD or PsyD):

- Doctoral degree in psychology
- Cannot prescribe medication (in most states)
- Provides therapy (talk therapy, CBT, testing)
- Use for: Therapy, psychological testing

## Licensed Therapist/Counselor (LPC, LMFT, LCSW):

- Master's degree in counseling or social work
- Provides therapy
- Cannot prescribe medication
- Use for: Therapy for anxiety, depression, family issues, etc.

## When You Need Both:

- Child sees **psychiatrist** for medication
  - AND sees **therapist** for weekly talk therapy
  - They should communicate with each other for coordinated care
- 

## What About Islamic Counseling?

### Islamic counselors/imams can help with:

- Faith-based guidance
- Spiritual struggles
- Family mediation
- Islamic perspective on life challenges

### But:

- Most are **not** trained in clinical mental health treatment
- Should **complement**, not replace, professional mental health care
- Mental illness (depression, anxiety disorders, etc.) requires clinical treatment

### Best Approach:

- **Therapist** for mental health treatment
  - **Imam** for spiritual support and Islamic guidance
  - Both working together when appropriate
- 

## PART 5: BUILDING A SUPPORT NETWORK BEFORE CRISIS

### Don't Wait for Crisis

#### The Mistake:

Most parents wait until there's a **crisis** to seek help. By then:

- The problem is severe
-

- Your child is in acute distress
- Wait times for appointments are long (sometimes months)
- You're scrambling in panic mode

### **The Better Approach:**

**Build your support network NOW**, before you need it.

---

### **Your Support Network Should Include:**

#### **1. Trusted Imam or Islamic Scholar**

- Someone who knows your family
- Accessible for questions about faith, family issues
- Can provide Islamic perspective during difficult times

#### **How to build this:**

- Attend lectures, classes at your masjid
  - Introduce yourself and family to imam
  - Don't wait until crisis to reach out
- 

#### **2. Pediatrician or Family Doctor**

- Should know your child's medical history
- Can screen for mental health issues during checkups
- Can provide referrals to mental health professionals

#### **How to use:**

- Annual checkups - ask doctor to screen for depression/anxiety
  - If concerns arise, call them first for guidance
- 

#### **3. School Counselor**

- Sees your child during school day
- Can monitor behavior, mood, academic performance
- Connect you with resources

#### **How to build this:**

- Introduce yourself at the beginning of the school year
  - Give permission for child to see counselor if needed
  - Check in periodically: “How’s my child doing emotionally?”
- 

#### **4. Therapist (Even If Not Currently Seeing One)**

- Know **who you would call** if needed
- Have names/numbers saved
- Research now so you’re not scrambling later

##### **How to prepare:**

- Get 2-3 names from trusted sources
  - Save contact information
  - Some families do “preventive” therapy (check-ins even when things are okay)
- 

#### **5. Other Muslim Parents**

- Parents who “get it” - raising kids in the West with Islamic values
- Can share experiences, advice, resources
- Emotional support

##### **How to build this:**

- Form parent groups at masjid
  - Attend parenting workshops together
  - Text/call each other for advice
- 

#### **6. Extended Family (If Supportive)**

- Grandparents, aunts/uncles who understand and support your parenting
- Can provide additional supervision, love, and connection for your tween
- Backup when you’re overwhelmed<sup>27</sup>

##### **How to use:**

- Regular visits/calls
- Involve them in your child’s life

---

<sup>27</sup> Do not underestimate the need and importance of respite care for parents, and don’t hesitate to offer to someone

- But set boundaries if they undermine your parenting
- 

## The Power of “It Takes a Village”

### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“The believers are like a building, each part strengthening the other,” and he interlaced his fingers to demonstrate. (Bukhari & Muslim)

### Application:

You are **not meant to parent alone**. Build a community around your child so that:

- If they won’t talk to you, they have another trusted adult
  - If you’re struggling, you have support
  - If crisis hits, you have a team ready
- 

## CONCLUSION: VIGILANCE WITH COMPASSION

### The Reality:

Parenting tweens means living with **constant tension**:

- Trust them ← → Monitor them
- Give freedom ← → Protect them
- Respect privacy ← → Stay aware

**It’s exhausting**. But it’s necessary.

---

### The Islamic Balance:

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ

“Take what is given freely, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the ignorant.” [7:199]

### Application to Parenting:

- **Take what is given freely:** Accept their efforts, even if imperfect
  - **Enjoin what is good:** Teach, guide, set expectations
-

- **Turn away from the ignorant:** Don't engage every battle - pick what matters
- 

### Your Job:

- ✓ **Be vigilant** - Notice changes, ask questions, stay involved
- ✓ **Be compassionate** - Mental health struggles aren't moral failures
- ✓ **Be proactive** - Build support network before crisis
- ✓ **Be humble** - Know when you need help and seek it
- ✓ **Be hopeful** - Allah is the Healer, and most tweens come through this stage successfully

### Final Thought:

Allah said in the Quran:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا - إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

*“So, surely with hardship comes ease. Surely with (that) hardship comes (more) ease.” [94:5-6]*

And He also reminded us:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

*“When My servants ask you about Me; I am near. I respond to one's supplication when they call upon Me. So, let them respond to Me and believe in Me, that they be guided aright.” [2:186]*

**You have the strength to navigate this.** And when you don't, **ask for help**—first, from Allah, and then from professionals, from your community—and know that it will come to you.

**That's not weakness. That's wisdom.**

---

## CHAPTER SIX WORKBOOK EXERCISES:

### 1. Red Flag Assessment:

- Review the red flags discussed
- Do you see any concerning patterns in your tween right now?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- If yes, make a plan this week to address it

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Build Your Support Network:

- Write down 5 people/resources for your network:

1. Imam/Islamic scholar: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Pediatrician: \_\_\_\_\_
3. School counselor: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Therapist (potential): \_\_\_\_\_
5. Trusted Muslim parent friend: \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Have a Check-In Conversation:

- This week, ask your tween: *“How are you doing? Really. Is there anything you’re worried about or struggling with?”*
- Just listen. Don’t immediately fix or advise.

## 4. Research Mental Health Resources:

- Find 2-3 Muslim-friendly therapists in your area
- Save their contact information
- You may not need them now, but you’ll have them when/if you do

# CHAPTER 7: “YOUR FAMILY’S ROADMAP”

## *From Today to One Year: A Strategic Action Plan*

### Learning Objectives:

- Synthesize all principles from Chapters 1-6 into actionable steps
  - Create personalized 30/90/180/360-day action plans
  - Identify your family's top 3 priorities
  - Develop accountability systems for implementation
  - Learn how to course-correct when things go off track
  - Leave with concrete next steps to implement immediately
- 

### **The Challenge:**

This manual contains **a lot of information**. Without a plan, you'll:

- Feel overwhelmed
- Try to change everything at once
- Burn out in two weeks
- Revert to old patterns

### **The Solution:**

**A strategic, phased implementation plan** that builds habits over time.

### **The Goal of This Chapter:**

Upon reading this, you will have a **written roadmap**—specific actions for the next 30, 90, 180, and 360 days; and beyond, *insha Allah*.

---

## **PART 1: ASSESSMENT - WHERE ARE YOU NOW?**

**Before you can plan forward, you need to assess honestly.**

## Exercise: The Parenting Self-Assessment

### Instructions:

Rate yourself **honestly** on a scale of 1-5 (1 = struggling significantly, 5 = doing well) in the following areas:

---

### 1. COMMUNICATION

- I listen to my tween without interrupting or immediately problem-solving
- My tween feels comfortable coming to me with problems
- I validate their feelings even when I don't agree with their perspective
- I apologize when I make parenting mistakes

Score: \_\_\_ / 5

---

### 2. ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

- My tween can articulate WHY they're Muslim (not just what Muslims do)
- Islam is visible and practiced daily in our home (not just weekend school)
- I welcome my tween's questions about faith without shutting them down
- I model my own faith journey (they see me pray, read Quran, make dua)

Score: \_\_\_ / 5

---

### 3. BOUNDARIES & DISCIPLINE

- I have clear, consistent rules that my tween understands
- I enforce consequences calmly and follow through
- I balance firmness (on important matters) with flexibility (on minor issues)
- My discipline focuses on teaching, not just punishing

Score: \_\_\_ / 5

---

### 4. AFFECTION & CONNECTION

---

- I express physical affection regularly (hugs, pats on shoulder, etc.)
- We have regular one-on-one time (not just correcting behavior)
- I know my tween's current interests, friends, and concerns
- My tween knows I love them unconditionally

Score: \_\_\_ / 5

---

## 5. TECHNOLOGY & SCREEN MANAGEMENT

- I have clear rules about screen time and enforce them
- I know what apps/games my tween uses and monitor appropriately
- Phones are not in bedrooms overnight
- I model healthy tech use myself

Score: \_\_\_ / 5

---

## 6. MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

- I regularly check in on my tween's emotional wellbeing
- I know the signs of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues
- I have a support network in place (therapist contacts, imam, etc.)
- I would recognize if my tween needed professional help

Score: \_\_\_ / 5

---

## 7. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT & SEXUALITY

- I've had age-appropriate conversations about puberty and body changes
- My tween knows they can ask me questions about their body without shame
- I've addressed pornography, sexual attraction, and boundaries
- I've taught body autonomy and protection from abuse

Score: \_\_\_ / 5

---

Total Score: \_\_\_ / 35

## Interpretation:

- **30-35:** You're doing well *masha Allah* - focus on maintaining and deepening
  - **22-29:** Solid foundation - identify 2-3 areas to strengthen
  - **15-21:** Significant room for growth - prioritize 3 areas for intensive focus
  - **Below 15:** Don't panic - this manual is your starting point, pick 1-2 areas to begin
- 

## Identify Your Top 3 Priorities

Based on your scores, which 3 areas need the most attention?

Write them here:

1. **Priority #1:** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Priority #2:** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Priority #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

These will guide your action plans.

---

## PART 2: THE 30-DAY FOUNDATION

### Philosophy:

The first 30 days are about **stopping the bleeding** and **building connection**.

Don't try to fix everything. Focus on **stabilizing** and **opening communication**.

---

### Week 1 (Days 1-7): STOP & LISTEN

**Goal:** Pause all major new initiatives. Just observe and listen.

### Daily Actions:

#### 1. The 10-Minute Check-In (Daily)

- Every evening, spend 10 minutes with your tween
  - **Ask:** "How was your day? What was the best part? What was hard?"
  - **Your job:** Listen without fixing, advising, or lecturing
  - **Don't:** Interrogate, criticize, or use this time to correct behavior
-

\* Remember that if you haven't had good communication with your tween, they may not say much at this stage. You have to be patient and give it time. The more you continue to come to them with sincerity, without judgment or criticism, the more likely they will be to open up to you—but it may take time.

### **Prophetic Model:**

The Prophet ﷺ would ask companions about their day and truly listen.

Anas reported:

“The Prophet ﷺ was the best of people in character. If he extended his hand to me, he would not withdraw it until I withdrew mine.” (Tirmidhi - authentic)

**Application:** When your tween is talking, **don't pull away** (literally or emotionally). Face them with your whole body, put down what you're doing, keep eye contact and stay engaged.

---

## **2. Observe Without Judgment (Daily)**

- Notice your tween's patterns:
  - When are they most open to talking? (car rides, before bed, during activities?)
  - What triggers their mood changes?
  - How much time are they actually on screens? What kind of content is on their screens?
  - Who are they talking to/texting?

**Write down observations** – you'll need this data for later planning.

---

## **3. Pause Major Conflicts (This Week Only)**

- Unless it's about safety, prayer, or respect - **let minor battles go this week**
- This isn't permanent – it's strategic
- You're **de-escalating** so you can rebuild connection

### **Why:**

If your relationship is tense, they won't process anything you're trying to teach. First, **repair the bridge**.

---

### **Week 1 Summary:**

- Daily 10-minute listening check-in
  - Observe patterns and behaviors
  - Pause non-essential conflicts
  - Begin rebuilding emotional connection
-

---

## Week 2 (Days 8-14): REPAIR & RECONNECT

**Goal:** Address any relational damage and strengthen connection.

**Actions:**

### 1. Apologize If Needed (Once, Sincerely)

**If you've been:**

- Too harsh
- Dismissive of their feelings
- Absent/distracted
- Hypocritical (demanding prayer while you don't pray on time)

**Do this:**

Sit down with them and say something like:

"I've been thinking about how I've been parenting you, and I realize I haven't been [listening/patient/present/etc.]. I'm sorry. I want to do better. Can you forgive me? And will you help me by letting me know when I'm falling back into old patterns?"

**Quranic Principle:**

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ

*"O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives ...."* [4:135]

Admitting you were wrong = **justice**, even against yourself.

**Important:** Only apologize if it's **genuine**. Don't use it as manipulation ("Ok, I'm sorry, now you need to...").

---

### 2. Create a Ritual of Connection (Choose One)

**Pick ONE weekly tradition** that's just for connection (not correction):

**Examples:**

- **Friday Night Family Time:** Pizza, games, no devices

- **Saturday Morning Breakfast:** You cook their favorite meal, just talk
- **Sunday Afternoon Walk:** Just the two of you, no agenda
- **Weeknight Routine:** Read Quran together after Maghrib (even 5 minutes)

### The Rules:

- No lecturing
- No bringing up problems
- Just **being together**

### Why This Matters:

The Prophet ﷺ had regular **positive** interactions with young people, not just correction.

Anas served him for **10 years** and said:

“He never said ‘*Uff!*’ to me, never asked ‘Why did you do that?’ or ‘Why didn’t you do that?’” (Bukhari & Muslim)

**But also:** They spent **time together** - the correction happened in the context of **relationship**.

---

## 3. Express Affection (Daily)

### Physical:

- Hug them at least once/day
- Pat their head/shoulder
- Sit next to them (not across from them)

### Verbal:

- “I love you”
- “I’m proud of you”
- “I’m grateful Allah gave me you as my child/put you in my life”

**Even if they push back** (“Dad, that’s weird”), **keep doing it**. They need it more than they’ll admit.

---

### Week 2 Summary:

- Apologize sincerely if needed
- Establish one weekly connection ritual

- Express affection daily (physical + verbal)
- Continue 10-minute check-ins from Week 1

---

### Week 3 (Days 15-21): ESTABLISH ONE NEW BOUNDARY

**Goal:** Implement ONE concrete change based on your top priority.

**Choose Based on Your Priority:**

**If Priority #1 is TECHNOLOGY:**

- **Implement:** Phones charge outside bedrooms starting tonight
- **How:** Family meeting to explain, purchase alarm clocks if needed, enforce consistently

**If Priority #1 is ISLAMIC FOUNDATION:**

- **Implement:** Family reads 5 minutes of Quran together after Maghrib daily and watches YouTube *tafsir*
- **How:** Start with one surah, take turns reading, discuss briefly

**If Priority #1 is COMMUNICATION:**

- **Implement:** Weekly one-on-one time (30-60 minutes) with each child
- **How:** Put it on calendar, let them choose activity, protect this time

**If Priority #1 is PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT:**

- **Implement:** Have the first puberty/body conversation this week
- **How:** Use Chapter 5A guidance, choose gender-appropriate parent, schedule dedicated time

**Key Principle:**

**One change at a time.** Don't overwhelm them (or yourself).

---

**How to Introduce a New Boundary:**

**1. Family Meeting:**

- Explain **why** (not just “because I said so”)
- Listen to their concerns
- Negotiate minor details if appropriate (but hold firm on the core boundary)

## 2. Write It Down:

- Clear rule
- Clear consequence
- Post somewhere visible (fridge, family bulletin board)

## 3. Follow Through Consistently:

- No exceptions for the first 21 days (habit formation)
- If they test the boundary (they will), calmly enforce consequence

## 4. Praise Compliance:

- When they follow the rule: “I noticed you put your phone in the kitchen last night without me asking. That shows maturity. *Jazak Allahu khair.*”
- 

## Week 3 Summary:

- Implement ONE new boundary (based on top priority)
  - Hold family meeting to explain and discuss
  - Enforce consistently
  - Continue check-ins, connection ritual, and affection from Weeks 1-2
- 

## Week 4 (Days 22-30): SPIRITUAL RESET

**Goal:** Bring Islam back to the center of your home.

### Actions:

#### 1. Family Dhikr After Fajr (5 minutes)

#### What:

- Everyone gathers after Fajr
- Recite together:
  - *Subhan Allah* (33x)
  - *Alhamdulillah* (33x)
  - *Allahu Akbar* (34x)
  - Brief *dua* for the day

#### Why:

- Starts the day with Allah
-

- Family does *ibadah* **together**
- Models that worship is **daily**, not just Friday/Ramadan

### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ taught these *adhkar* after every prayer (Muslim). Make it a family habit.

---

## 2. The “Why I’m Muslim” Conversation (From Chapter 4)

### This week, ask your tween:

“If someone asked you why you’re Muslim—not what Muslims do, but WHY you believe—what would you say?”

**Listen to their answer** (don’t correct immediately).

### Then share YOUR answer:

“Here’s why I believe...”

**This plants seeds** for Chapter 4’s goal: helping them articulate their faith.

---

## 3. Audit Spiritual Outsourcing (From Chapter 4)

### Ask yourself:

- Am I relying on weekend school to teach Islam while I don’t practice at home?
- When was the last time I read Quran **not** during Ramadan?
- Do my kids see me pray on time, or do I delay until convenient?

**Pick ONE area** where you’ve been spiritually outsourcing and **bring it back home**.

### Examples:

- Start praying Maghrib as a family (everyone together)
  - Read a surah with translation after dinner once/week
  - Listen to Islamic podcast in car instead of music
-

## Week 4 Summary:

- Family dhikr after Fajr daily
- “Why I’m Muslim” conversation
- Audit and address one area of spiritual outsourcing
- Continue all practices from Weeks 1-3

---

## 30-DAY FOUNDATION SUMMARY

By the end of 30 days, *insha Allah*, you will have:

- Re-established connection** (daily check-ins, affection, listening)
- Repaired any damage** (apologized, created positive rituals)
- Implemented one new boundary** (based on top priority)
- Centered Islam in your home** (family *dhikr*, spiritual conversations)

This is your **FOUNDATION**. Everything else builds on this.

---

## PART 3: THE 90-DAY EXPANSION

### Philosophy:

Now that you’ve stabilized (30 days), you can **expand** into deeper areas.

**Goal:** Address your **Priority #2** and deepen **Priority #1**.

---

### Days 31-60: DEEPEN PRIORITY #1

#### If your Priority #1 was TECHNOLOGY:

**Month 1:** Phones charge outside bedrooms

**Month 2:** Add:

- App time limits (30 min/day for social media or gradual weaning/reduction if they use it 2+ hrs/day)
- Weekly tech conversation (“What are you watching/playing? Show me” or “Can I watch with you?”)

- Monthly device check (review apps, messages, search history)
- 

**If your Priority #1 was ISLAMIC FOUNDATION:**

**Month 1:** 5 minutes Quran after Maghrib daily

**Month 2:** Add:

- Thursday or Friday night family *halaqah* (discuss one Islamic topic: names of Allah, *seerah* story, *hadith* with commentary)
  - Start reading a book together (Stories of the Prophets, *seerah* for youth, Commentary on 40 Hadith)
  - Attend one Islamic event as a family this month (lecture, community dinner, volunteer event)
- 

**If your Priority #1 was COMMUNICATION:**

**Month 1:** Weekly one-on-one time

**Month 2:** Add:

- Learn their love language (words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, physical touch) and intentionally use it
  - Practice empathic listening (Chapter 3) in daily interactions
  - Start “rose/thorn/bud” at dinner (best part of day, worst part, what you’re looking forward to)
- 

**Days 61-90: ADDRESS PRIORITY #2**

**Use the same phased approach:**

**Week 1 (Days 61-67):** Observe the current state

**Week 2 (Days 68-74):** Research and plan your approach

**Week 3 (Days 75-81):** Implement one concrete change

**Week 4 (Days 82-90):** Reinforce and adjust

---

**Example:**

**If Priority #2 is PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT/SEXUALITY:**

- **Week 1:** Assess what your tween already knows (or doesn’t know)
  - **Week 2:** Review Chapter 5A, prepare talking points
-

- **Week 3:** Have the first age-appropriate conversation (puberty basics)
  - **Week 4:** Follow up, answer questions, provide resources (books, trusted websites)
- 

## 90-DAY EXPANSION SUMMARY

By the end of 90 days, you will have:

- ✓ **Deepened Priority #1** (moved from basic implementation to sustainable habit)
- ✓ **Addressed Priority #2** (started concrete actions in second area of need)
- ✓ **Maintained your foundation** (daily check-ins, affection, connection rituals still happening)

You're now **25% through the year with measurable progress.**

---

## PART 4: THE 180-DAY RHYTHM

### Philosophy:

By 6 months, you're not implementing **new** things constantly – you're **sustaining rhythms** and **course-correcting**.

**Goal:** Make the changes from Months 1-3 **automatic** and address **Priority #3**.

---

## Days 91-120: SUSTAINABILITY CHECK

### Questions to ask:

1. **What's working?**
    - Which practices have become habits?
    - What's making a visible difference in your relationship?
  2. **What's slipping?**
    - Which boundaries are you inconsistently enforcing?
    - What did you start strong but is now fading?
  3. **What needs adjustment?**
    - Is the 10-minute check-in too short? Too long? Wrong time of day?
    - Is your connection ritual feeling forced or genuine?
-

## Action:

1. **Double down** on what's working.
2. **Revise or drop** what's not.

## Prophetic Principle:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*"The most beloved deeds to Allah are those that are consistent, even if they are small."* (Bukhari & Muslim)

**Application:** Better to do **3 things consistently** than **10 things sporadically**.

---

## Days 121-150: ADDRESS PRIORITY #3

Use the same 4-week implementation cycle:

**Week 1:** Observe

**Week 2:** Research/Plan

**Week 3:** Implement

**Week 4:** Reinforce

---

## Days 151-180: MID-YEAR FAMILY RESET

**Hold a Family Meeting (30-60 minutes):**

**Agenda:**

### 1. Celebrate Wins:

- What's better than 6 months ago?
- Where have we grown as a family?
- **Everyone** shares one thing they appreciate about the family changes

### 2. Address Struggles:

- What's still hard?
- What do we need to work on together?
- Are there rules that need adjusting?

### 3. Set Next 6-Month Goals:

- **Parent:** "Here's what I want to improve..."
  - **Tween:** "Here's what would help me..."
-

- Write down **1-2 family goals** for the next 6 months

### Why This Matters:

#### You're modeling:

- Self-reflection
- Accountability
- Collaborative problem-solving (*shura*)
- That parents don't have all the answers

This is *tarbiyah* (nurturing growth together).

---

## 180-DAY RHYTHM SUMMARY

### By the end of 180 days, you will have:

- ✓ All 3 priorities addressed (at least initial implementation in each area)
- ✓ Sustainable rhythms established (you're not white-knuckling through habits)
- ✓ Family buy-in (tween sees you're serious and they have input)
- ✓ Course-correction completed (dropped what doesn't work, strengthened what does)

You're now halfway through the year. The second half is about deepening.

---

## PART 5: THE 360-DAY VISION

### Philosophy:

By one year, you're **living differently** as a family. The goal is to look back and see **transformation**, not just minor tweaks.

---

### Days 181-270: ADVANCED PRACTICES

Now that foundations are solid, you can tackle harder topics:

#### From Chapter 4: Identity Building

- Monthly "Why I'm Muslim" discussions (rotate topics: *Tawhid*, *Akhirah*, Quran, Prophethood, doubts; consider the excellent *aqeedah* series by Umar al-Ashqar<sup>28</sup>)

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.kalamullah.com/umar-al-ashqar.html>

- Family Quranic study (pick a surah, study it together over several weeks using tafsir)
- Islamic service project (volunteer together: feed homeless, visit sick, raise money for charity)

### **From Chapter 5A: Sexuality & Boundaries**

- Second-level conversations (if first ones happened in Month 2-3):
  - Discussing pornography explicitly
  - Same-sex attraction (if relevant)
  - What to do if a friend comes out or pressures them to date

### **From Chapter 5B: Digital Wellness**

- Evaluate whether social media is appropriate yet (if they're 13+)
- If yes: Teach them to curate a healthy feed (unfollow toxic accounts, follow beneficial content)
- If no: Maintain delay and continue teaching digital literacy offline

### **From Chapter 6: Mental Health**

- If you've noticed red flags: Therapy is now established, monitor progress
- If things are stable: Periodic mental health check-ins become routine

---

## **Days 271-330: IDENTITY & INDEPENDENCE**

**As they approach the end of the year (and possibly new age/grade level), increase autonomy:**

### **From Chapter 2: The *Tarbiyah/Ta'dib* Balance**

**Ask yourself:**

- Am I still doing things FOR them that they should do THEMSELVES?
- Where can I shift from control to coaching?

**Examples:**

**Age 10-11:**

- They should: Pack own school bag, choose own clothes, make simple meals, manage homework schedule (with oversight)

#### **Age 12-13:**

- They should: Wake up with alarm (not parent), handle conflicts with siblings first (parent mediates only if necessary)

#### **Age 14:**

- They should: Make most daily decisions independently, come to parent for advice (not permission) on minor matters, be responsible for own grades/activities

#### **The Goal:**

**By 18, they're self-regulating, not parent-controlled.**

**You're building that muscle now** (ages 10-14) through **gradual responsibility**.

**Common mistake:** Thinking that children should pray on their own. We must remember that “*iqamat as-salaah*” which is so frequently mentioned in the Quran means to establish the prayer = pray together. Either you are praying in the masjid with the *jama'ah* or you pray together at home.

---

### **Days 331-360: YEAR-END REFLECTION & PLANNING**

#### **Final Family Meeting (60 minutes):**

##### **1. Look Back:**

- Compare to 12 months ago (pull out your initial assessment from Day 1)
- Where has Allah blessed you with growth?
- What challenges did you overcome?

##### **2. Give Thanks:**

- Each person shares: “One way I see Allah’s mercy in our family this year...”
- Make *dua* together, thanking Allah for guidance

### 3. Set Year 2 Vision:

- What does Year 2 look like?
- New goals? New challenges? New areas to address?

### 4. Recommit:

- Renew your commitment to Prophetic parenting
  - Renew your commitment to each other
- 

## 360-DAY VISION SUMMARY

**By the end of 360 days, you will have:**

- ✓ **Transformed your relationship** (from adversarial/distant to connected/collaborative)
- ✓ **Centered Islam** (daily practices, spiritual conversations, service)
- ✓ **Equipped your tween** (mentally, spiritually, physically for adolescence)
- ✓ **Built systems** (boundaries, communication, support network)
- ✓ **Increased autonomy** (shifted from control to coaching)

**This is not perfection. This is progress.**

---

## PART 6: ACCOUNTABILITY & COURSE-CORRECTION

### Reality Check:

You **will** mess up. You **will** have bad weeks. Life **will** get in the way.

**The question is: How do you get back on track?**

---

## Build Accountability into Your Plan

### 1. Weekly Check-In (With Yourself or Spouse)

Every Sunday evening (or whatever day works):

- What went well this week?
- What didn't?
- What's one thing I'll do differently next week?

Write it down (journal, notes app, wherever).

**If married:**

Do this together. Hold each other accountable lovingly.

---

### 2. Monthly Review (30 minutes)

First of every month:

- Review your 30/90/180/360 plans
- Am I on track?
- What needs to be adjusted?
- Celebrate small wins

**Prophetic Practice:**

The Prophet ﷺ would regularly take account of himself.

Umar ibn al-Khattab said:

*“Take account of yourselves before you are taken to account and evaluate yourselves before you are evaluated, for the Reckoning will be easier upon you tomorrow if you hold yourselves accountable today.”* (Muḥāsabat al-Nafs li-Ibn Abī Dunyā)

**Application:** Self-assess regularly so you can course-correct before you're completely off track.

---

### 3. Quarterly External Accountability

Every 3 months, talk to:

- Your parent (if living)
  - A trusted Muslim friend/parent
  - Your imam/Islamic counselor
-

## Ask them:

- “How do you see me as a parent?”
- “Where am I doing well? Where do I need to grow?”
- “Will you check in with me in 3 months on [specific goal]?”

## Why External Accountability Matters:

We have blind spots. Others can see what we can't.

---

## When You Fall Off Track

### It WILL happen. Here's how to recover:

#### 1. Don't Catastrophize

##### Wrong Response:

“I didn't do the 10-minute check-in for two weeks. I've failed. This whole plan is useless.”

##### Right Response:

“I got off track. That's human. I'll restart tomorrow *insha Allah*.”

##### Quranic Principle:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا

“O believers! Regularly turn to Allah in sincere repentance ....” [66:8]

**Application:** Repentance isn't one-time. It's a **constant** return to the right path. Same with parenting.

---

#### 2. Identify the Obstacle

##### Ask:

- Why did I stop?
- Was the goal unrealistic?
- Did something external happen (illness, travel, crisis)?
- Am I trying to do too much? Do I need someone to help?

##### Then adjust:

- Lower the bar temporarily (5-minute check-in instead of 10)
  - Remove one commitment to make space
  - Ask for help (spouse, family member, friend, etc.)
-

---

### 3. Restart Small

**Don't try to restart everything at once.**

Pick **ONE thing** from your plan and do it tomorrow.

Just one.

**Example:**

- You've fallen off the daily check-ins, weekly connection time, family Quran reading, and tech boundaries
- **Restart with:** Daily check-in only
- Once that's consistent for a week, add the next thing

**Prophetic Wisdom:**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few.”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

---

## PART 7: FINAL CHARGE & COMMITMENT

**The Reality:**

This manual intends to give you knowledge. **Knowledge alone changes nothing.**

**What actually changes things:**

- Having the intention to please Allah
- Implementation of knowledge-based actions
- Consistency
- *Tawakkul* (trust in Allah while taking action)

---

**The Commitment**

**Before you leave today, commit to:**

## 1. Write Down Your 30-Day Plan (Right Now)

Take 5 minutes. Write:

- Week 1: What I'll do *insha Allah*: \_\_\_\_\_
- Week 2: What I'll do *insha Allah*: \_\_\_\_\_
- Week 3: What I'll do *insha Allah*: \_\_\_\_\_
- Week 4: What I'll do *insha Allah*: \_\_\_\_\_

**Don't leave today without this written.**

---

## 2. Share It with Someone

**Tell:**

- Your parents
- A trusted friend
- Another parent from this seminar

**Note:** Spouse is not optional—your spouse must be part of this from the beginning.

Say: “I’m committing to [X, Y, Z]. Can you check in with me in 30 days?”

**Why:** Public commitment = higher success rate.

---

## 3. Make *Dua*

**Right now, make the following *dua*:**

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

“Our Lord! Bless us with spouses and children who will be the joy of our hearts, and make us role-models for the righteous.” [25:74]

قَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَصْلِحْ لِي فِي ذُرِّيَّتِي ۗ إِنَّي تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَإِيَّكَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

“Our Lord! Make us both submit to You and from our descendants a nation that will submit to You. Show us our rituals, and turn to us in grace. You are the Acceptor of Repentance, the Most Merciful.” [2:128]

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا ۗ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

“My Lord! Inspire me to be grateful for Your favors which You blessed me and my parents with, and to do good deeds that please You. And place righteousness in my offspring. I truly repent to You, and I truly submit to You.” [46:15]

---

## **PART 8: TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON OBSTACLES**

### **The Reality:**

Even with the best plan, you’ll face obstacles. Here are the most common - and how to navigate them Islamically.

---

### **OBSTACLE #1: CO-PARENT DISAGREEMENT**

#### **Scenario A: One Parent is Committed, the Other is Not**

#### **The Problem:**

- You’re implementing boundaries (no phones in bedrooms)
- Your spouse undermines you: “Don’t listen to your mother/father, they’re being too strict” or just as bad, arguing with you in front of the child, “Why are you being so extreme? I never heard anyone do these things before!”
- Your tween learns to play you against each other
- Your efforts are sabotaged

#### **Why This Happens:**

- Different upbringings (one raised strict, one raised permissive)
- Different levels of Islamic practice (one practicing, one not)
- Different priorities (one values *deen*, one values *dunya* success)
- Different scientific understanding of parenting (remember that many have the “*Bismillah Attitude*”<sup>29</sup>)
- Power struggle between parents (using kids as pawns)

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<sup>29</sup> Say *Bismillah* and leave it to Allah = I don’t have to do anything other than say *Bismillah* and things will magically work out

## Islamic Framework:

### Quran on spousal cooperation:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً

“And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy.” [30:21]

**Mawaddah (affection) and rahmah (mercy)** should extend to **parenting together**, not just marriage.

---

## What to Do:

### 1. Private Conversation First (Not in Front of Kids)

Schedule a calm time to talk:

- “I’ve been thinking about how we’re raising [child]. I want us to be on the same page. Can we talk about our approach?”
- Share what you learned in this seminar/manual
- **Ask, don’t accuse:** “What are your thoughts on [specific issue - screen time, prayer, modesty]?”

### 2. Find Common Ground

Even if you disagree on details, you likely agree on:

- You both want your child to succeed
- You both want them to be happy
- You both want them to be safe

### Start there:

- “We both want [child] to thrive. I think [boundary X] will help with that and here is why. What do you think?”

### 3. Compromise Where Possible (But Not on Core Islamic Values)

**Negotiate on minor issues whenever possible:**

- Screen time: You want 1 hour/day, spouse wants 3 hours → compromise at 2 hours
- Curfew: You want 8pm, spouse wants 10pm → compromise at 9pm

**Don’t compromise on:**

- Prayer (non-negotiable in Islam)
- Modesty/hijab (once puberty hits, it’s obligatory)
- Protection from clear haram (pornography, dating, alcohol)

## If spouse is pushing you to compromise on Islamic fundamentals:

### Quranic Principle:

وَإِنْ جَاهِدَاكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا ۖ وَصَاحِبِهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا

*“But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness...” [31:15]*

### Application:

- Don't obey in what contradicts Allah's command
- But maintain kindness and respect in the relationship
- **For your tween:** You can explain age-appropriately, “Your mom/dad and I disagree on this, but Islam is clear, so we're following what Allah commanded.”

## 4. Agree on “United Front” Rule

Even if you disagree privately, **never undermine each other in front of the kids.**

### The agreement:

- If one parent sets a rule, the other doesn't contradict in the moment
- Disagreements are worked out privately
- Once you agree, both enforce consistently

### If your spouse breaks this:

- Address it privately: “When you told [child] they didn't have to follow my rule, it undermined me. Can we agree to discuss disagreements privately first?”

## 5. Seek Third-Party Help if Needed

If you can't resolve it:

- Meet with a **trusted imam** or **Islamic marriage counselor**
- Frame it as: “We want what's best for our child, but we're approaching it differently. Can you help us find an Islamic framework we can both work with?”

## 6. If Spouse Refuses to Cooperate

This is the hardest scenario.

### What you CAN control:

- Your own behavior and modeling
- Your one-on-one time with your tween

- The boundaries you enforce when you're the primary caregiver

### **What you CAN'T control:**

- Your spouse's choices
- What happens when you're not there

### **Do your best and make dua:**

The Prophet ﷺ was sent to guide, but not everyone accepted. Even prophets had family members who rejected their message (Nuh's son, Lut's wife).

**Your responsibility:** Do everything in your power.

**Allah's domain:** Guidance of hearts, including your spouse's and child's.

Make *dua* constantly

## **OBSTACLE #2: EXTENDED FAMILY INTERFERENCE**

### **The Problem:**

- Grandparent/aunt/uncle undermine your rules: "Don't listen to your parents, they're too strict"
- They give your tween things you've forbidden (unrestricted phone, junk food, staying up late)
- They mock Islamic boundaries: "Hijab? She's too young for that" or "Let him have fun, he's just a kid"

### **Why This Happens:**

- Generational differences (they parented differently)
- Cultural vs. Islamic confusion (they think you're "too religious")
- They want to be the "fun" grandparent
- They don't understand Western challenges (immigrant parents who think it's still like "back home")
- The "*Bismillah Attitude*"

### **What to Do:**

#### **1. Set Clear Boundaries (Respectfully)**

##### **Private conversation with your parents/in-laws/aunt/uncle:**

- "We love that you want to spend time with [child]. We're raising them with certain values and rules. When you undermine those rules, it confuses them and makes our job harder."
- **Be specific:** "When [child] is with you, these are our non-negotiables: [prayer times, screen limits, no junk food after 8pm, etc.]"

##### **Frame it Islamically if they're Muslim:**

- “The Prophet ﷺ said we’re responsible for our children. We’re trying to fulfill that responsibility. We need your help, not your opposition.”

## 2. Supervised Visits if Necessary

If they can’t respect boundaries:

- Visits happen at your home (where you control environment)
- OR you’re present during visits at their home
- Limit overnight stays if they consistently violate rules

**This isn’t disrespect – it’s protection.**

### Islamic Principle:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“There is no obedience to anyone if it is disobedience to Allah. Truly, obedience is only in that which is good.”*  
(Bukhari and Muslim)

**Application:** Respect and kindness is an obligation to parents, but respecting parents doesn’t mean compromising your child’s *deen*.

## 3. Have Your Tween Navigate It

If they’re old enough (12+), teach them:

- “I love Grandma/Grandpa, but they have different rules than we do at home. When you’re with them and they offer you something we don’t allow, you can politely say, ‘My parents prefer I don’t do that. Can we do [alternative] instead?’”

This teaches them:

- Respectful boundary-setting
- Not throwing you under the bus
- Navigating family dynamics

## OBSTACLE #3: FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

### The Problem:

- “I can’t afford Islamic school”
- “I can’t afford therapy for my child”
- “I work two jobs - I don’t have time for daily check-ins”

## The Reality:

Financial stress is real. But **most of what we've included in this manual is free.**

## What DOESN'T Require Money:

- Daily 10-minute check-ins (free)
- Affection (hugs, words of affirmation - free)
- Listening (free)
- Family Quran reading (free if you have a Quran or smartphone)
- Connection rituals (walks, cooking together - free)
- Modeling prayer and faith (free)

## What DOES Cost Money (and Alternatives):

- Islamic school →  Homeschool + free online Islamic curriculum (Islamic Online University)
- Private therapist →  School counselor (free), community mental health centers (sliding scale), telehealth options (often cheaper), emotionally-intelligent and psychologically aware Imam
- Expensive parental controls →  Built-in phone controls (Apple Screen Time, Google Family Link - free)

## Islamic Perspective:

### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“The best of you are those who are best to their families, and I am the best of you to my family.”* (Tirmidhi - authentic)

**He didn't say:** “The best of you are those who spend the most money on their families.”

**He said:** “Best to their families” - which is **time, attention, character, and love.**

## What to Prioritize if Resources are Limited:

1. **Your presence** (even if you work long hours, maximize quality time when you're home)
2. **Consistency** (even 5 minutes of daily connection > 2 hours on weekends inconsistently)
3. **Modeling** (your own practice of Islam costs nothing but transforms everything)

---

## OBSTACLE #4: “MY TWEEN WON'T COOPERATE”

## **The Problem:**

- “I tried the 10-minute check-in. They won’t talk to me.”
- “I invited them to connection time. They refused.”
- “I apologized. They said ‘Whatever’ and walked away.”

## **What to Do:**

### **1. Start Smaller**

If 10 minutes is too much, start with 2 minutes.

If they won’t talk, just sit in the same room while they do homework. Say nothing. Just be present.

**Consistency over time breaks down walls.**

### **2. Don’t Give Up After One “No”**

**Tween refuses connection time:**

**Wrong response:** “Fine. I tried. They don’t want a relationship.”

**Right response:** Keep offering. Every week. Without pressure.

“Hey, I’m going for ice cream Saturday. Want to come?”

Week 1: “No.” → “Okay, maybe next time.”

Week 2: “No.” → “Okay, offer stands whenever you want.”

Week 3: “...Maybe.” → Small win.

### **Prophetic Example:**

The Prophet ﷺ invited people to Islam for **years** before they accepted. Some never did in his lifetime.

**He didn’t stop offering.**

### **3. Address the Underlying Issue**

**If they’re refusing connection, ask yourself:**

- Is there unresolved hurt? (Did I damage the relationship and not fully repair it?)
- Are they testing me? (Will you actually stick with this, or quit like before?)
- Is something else going on? (Depression, peer issues, trauma?)

**Sometimes refusal isn’t about you – it’s about something deeper.**

## Consider:

- Therapy (professional help to work through whatever's blocking connection)
- Give it more time (if relationship has been tense for years, it won't heal in 2 weeks)

## 4. Pray Specifically

### Make this *dua*:

اللَّهُمَّ أَلِّفْ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِنَا وَأَصْلِحْ ذَاتَ بَيْنِنَا وَاهْدِنَا سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَنَجِّنَا مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

“O Allah, bring our hearts together, reconcile between us, guide us to ways of peace, and deliver us from darkness into light ....” (Abu Dawood—authentic)

### Then keep showing up.

---

## OBSTACLE #5: “I’M THE PROBLEM”

### The Hardest Realization:

Sometimes the biggest obstacle is **you**.

### Signs you might be the obstacle:

- Your anger is out of control (yelling, harsh words)
- You’re not practicing what you preach (demanding they pray while you don’t)
- You’re too rigid (no flexibility, everything is a battle)
- You’re too permissive (no boundaries, trying to be their friend)
- You’re emotionally absent (physically there but checked out)

### What to Do:

#### 1. Own It

#### Quran:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ

“Say: I am only a human being like you...” [18:110]

**You're human. You will mess up.**

**The question is:** Will you humble yourself and change?

## **2. Get Help for Yourself**

**If you struggle with:**

- **Anger management** → Therapy, anger management program, Islamic counseling
- **Your own faith** → Adult Islamic classes, therapy, spiritual mentorship
- **Mental health** (depression, anxiety, trauma) → Professional treatment

**You can't pour from an empty cup.**

**Fix yourself first, then you can effectively parent.**

## **3. Apologize and Start Fresh**

**To your tween:**

“I've realized that I've been part of the problem. I've been [too harsh/absent/hypocritical/etc.]. I'm working on myself. I'm getting help. I'm sorry. Will you give me another chance?”

**Then actually do the work.**

**Islamic Principle:**

وَلَا تَسْتَوِ الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ۚ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

“Good and evil cannot be equal. Respond (to evil) with what is best, then the one between whom you have a feud with will be like a close friend.” [41:34]

**Use repentance (*tawbah*) as a template for repairing the relationship. With repentance, we must:**

1. Recognizing the sin
2. Feeling remorse
3. Stopping the behavior
4. Committing to not return to it
5. Making amends

**Apply this to parenting failures.**

---

## APPENDIX A: Unique Challenges in Neurodiverse Children – ADHD

### ADAPTING FOR NEURODIVERGENT TWEENS: ADHD CONSIDERATIONS

#### The Reality:

An estimated 8-12% of children have ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder). If your tween has ADHD, the strategies in this seminar still apply, but they need **adaptation**, not abandonment.

#### Key Principle:

ADHD is not:

- ❌ Laziness
- ❌ Lack of discipline
- ❌ Bad parenting
- ❌ Willful disobedience

ADHD is a **neurodevelopmental difference** in how the brain processes attention, impulse control, and executive function.

#### Islamic Lens:

Allah creates diversity in His creation:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَخْتَلَفُ الْأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَالْوَلَوَاتِكُمْ

*“And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors...” [30:22]*

**Application:** Neurodiversity (including ADHD) is part of Allah’s design. Your job is to **work with** their brain, not against it.

---

## How ADHD Affects the Strategies in This Seminar

### The Challenge:

Tweens with ADHD often struggle with:

- **Sustained attention** (can't focus for extended periods)
- **Impulse control** (act before thinking)
- **Working memory** (forget instructions quickly)
- **Time perception** (10 minutes feels like an eternity or passes in seconds)
- **Emotional regulation** (feelings are more intense, harder to control)
- **Executive function** (planning, organizing, following multi-step directions)

**This means:** Standard approaches need to be **shorter, simpler, and more structured.**

---

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR PARENTING ADHD TWEENS

### 1. Shorter Everything

- Shorter conversations (5 min vs. 10 min)
- Shorter consequences (same day, not next week)
- Shorter tasks (break big jobs into tiny steps)

### 2. External Structure

- Timers, checklists, visual schedules
- Routines posted on wall
- Reminders (not nagging - literal written/phone reminders)

### 3. Movement is Medicine

- Let them fidget, stand, pace while talking/learning
- Active connection time (shoot hoops while checking in)
- Physical outlets daily (sports, martial arts, running)

### 4. Praise Proactively

- ADHD kids hear “stop/no/don’t” 20,000+ times by age 12
- Actively look for good behavior and name it: “I noticed you put your dishes away without being asked - that shows responsibility”

### 5. Consequences, Not Lectures

- ADHD kids tune out lectures
- Keep correction brief: “Rule was X. You did Y. Consequence is Z.”

- Then move on - no 20-minute moral discourse

## 6. Forgive Quickly

- They will forget, interrupt, act impulsively
- Correct the behavior, don't shame the child
- Reset daily – yesterday's mistakes don't define today

---

## WHAT ADHD IS NOT

### It's not:

- An excuse for sin or haram behavior
- A reason to abandon Islamic obligations
- Permission to be disrespectful

### It is:

- A reason to **adapt HOW** you teach/enforce (not what you teach/enforce)
- A call for **more patience** and **more structure**
- An invitation to see your child as Allah sees them: **perfectly created**, uniquely wired

### Prophetic Wisdom:

The Prophet ﷺ adapted his teaching to different people:

- Taught Ibn Abbas (young boy) deep theology
- Taught Mu'adh (scholar) advanced *fiqh*
- Taught Bedouins (simple desert folk) with analogies and brevity

**He met people where they were.**

**You do the same** - meet your ADHD tween where **their brain** is, not where you wish it was.

---

## WHEN TO SEEK ADDITIONAL HELP

## **If your tween has ADHD, consider:**

### **1. Medication Evaluation**

- ADHD medication (stimulants like Adderall/Ritalin or non-stimulants like Strattera) can be **life-changing** for many kids
- Work with a psychiatrist or developmental pediatrician
- Islamic scholars have confirmed: ADHD medication is **permissible** (it's medical treatment, not "drugs")

### **2. Therapy**

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for coping strategies
- Organizational coaching
- Social skills training if needed

### **3. School Accommodations**

- 504 Plan or IEP (legal accommodations in US schools)
- Extended time on tests, preferential seating, breaks, etc.

### **4. Parent Training**

- Programs like "Parent Management Training" or "Positive Parenting Program" adapted for ADHD

**Don't go it alone** - ADHD is manageable with the right support.

---

## **ADAPTATIONS BY CHAPTER**

### **Chapter 2: Communication (10-Minute Check-In)**

**Standard Approach:** 10-minute daily check-in

#### **ADHD Adaptation:**

- **Shorten to 4-5 minutes** (their attention span is shorter - quality over quantity)
- **Use a timer** they can see (helps with time perception)
- **Keep it active** if possible (talk while walking, throwing a ball, doing dishes together - movement helps focus)
- **Ask specific questions** (not "How was your day?" but "What was one good thing and one hard thing today?")

**Why this works:** ADHD brains focus better with **movement, brevity, and structure.**

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## Chapter 3: Boundaries & Consequences

**Standard Approach:** Explain rule, set consequence, enforce consistently

### ADHD Adaptation:

- **Write rules down and post them visibly** (ADHD = working memory issues, they genuinely forget)
- **Keep rules to 3-5 maximum** (too many = overwhelm)
- **Immediate consequences** (delayed consequences don't work - ADHD brains struggle with future-oriented thinking)
- **Visual reminders** (checklists, charts, timers for tasks)
- **Praise more frequently** (ADHD kids hear “no” constantly - actively catch them doing good)

### Example:

- ❌ “If you don't finish your homework this week, no video games next weekend”
- ✅ “Homework first, then 30 minutes of video games. Timer starts when homework is done.”

**Why this works:** ADHD brains need **immediate feedback** and **external structure** (they can't create it internally yet).

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## Chapter 4: Spiritual Practices

**Standard Approach:** Family reads Quran 5 minutes after Maghrib

### ADHD Adaptation:

- **Start with 2-3 minutes** (then build up slowly)
- **Assign a specific role** (they read one ayah, or they hold the *mushaf*, or they find the surah)
- **Incorporate movement** if needed (standing, walking back and forth while reciting)
- **Vary the format** (one day reading, next day listening to recitation, next day watching tafsir video)

**Why this works:** ADHD brains need **novelty** and **active participation** to stay engaged.

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## Chapter 5B: Technology & Screen Time

**Standard Approach:** Set time limits, enforce consistently

### ADHD Adaptation:

- **Use app-based timers** they can see (Apple Screen Time with visual countdown, not just parent announcing “time's up”)
- **Transition warnings** (“5 minutes left, then screens go away”)

- **Alternative activity ready** (don't just take screens away - have something engaging ready, or they'll melt down from boredom/transition difficulty)
- **Consider ADHD and screens carefully** (screens are especially addictive for ADHD brains - may need stricter limits than neurotypical kids)

**Why this works:** ADHD brains struggle with **transitions** - warnings and alternatives ease the shift.

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## Chapter 7: The 30-Day Plan

**Standard Approach:** Implement multiple changes over 4 weeks

### ADHD Adaptation:

- **ONE change at a time** (not one per week - literally ONE until it's automatic, then add the next)
- **Visual progress tracking** (sticker chart, checkboxes - ADHD kids need to SEE their progress)
- **Celebrate small wins immediately** (not "at the end of the month" - TODAY)
- **Expect setbacks** (ADHD = inconsistency is the norm, not failure)

### Example 30-Day Plan for ADHD Tween:

- Week 1-2: Just the 5-minute check-in (nothing else)
- Week 3: Add one boundary (phones in kitchen at night)
- Week 4: Add 2 minutes of family Quran

**Why this works:** ADHD brains get **overwhelmed by too much change** - go slower than you think necessary.

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## FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

**Many successful Muslims have ADHD** (or likely did, historically - it wasn't diagnosed then):

- High energy
- Creativity
- Hyperfocus on interests
- Entrepreneurial thinking
- Quick problem-solving

**These are GIFTS when channeled properly.**

Your job: **Provide the structure their brain can't create internally** (yet), while nurturing their strengths.

### Hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*"Make things easy and do not make them difficult, cheer people up and do not repel them."* (Bukhari)

**Application:** Parenting ADHD = make Islam easy (through adaptation), don't make it difficult (through rigidity). Cheer them up (celebrate wins), don't repel them (by constant criticism).

**You can do this. And Allah is with you.**

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## **CONCLUSION: The Final Reminder**

**You are not alone.**

### **Hadith:**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“The believers are like a building, each part strengthening the other,”* and he interlaced his fingers to demonstrate. (Bukhari & Muslim)

### **Application:**

- You have turned to Allah, identified your weakness and placed your reliance upon Him
- The other parents in this webinar are your support network
- The imam/counselor you identified in Chapter 6 is part of your team
- Your family, if supportive, is your backup
- And most importantly: **Allah is with you**

**You have everything you need, *insha Allah*.**

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## Closing Thought

### The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you is responsible for his flock.”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

You are a **shepherd** to your tween.

### A shepherd:

- Guides (doesn't just command)
- Protects (from danger they can't see)
- Tends (heals wounds, feeds, nurtures)
- Knows each sheep individually (not one-size-fits-all)

### This is your calling.

Not perfection. Not control.

### Shepherding.

With wisdom. With mercy. With consistency. With Allah's help.

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**May Allah bless your efforts. May He make your children the joy of your eyes in this life and the next. May He guide you to guide them. Ameen.**

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## IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS (WORKSHEET)

**Before you stand up, complete this:**

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### MY TOP 3 PRIORITIES:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
-

## MY 30-DAY PLAN:

### Week 1 (Days 1-7): STOP & LISTEN

- Daily 10-minute check-in:  Yes, I commit
- Observe without judgment:  Yes, I commit
- Pause major conflicts:  Yes, I commit

### Week 2 (Days 8-14): REPAIR & RECONNECT

- Apologize if needed:  Yes /  Not needed
- Create connection ritual (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Express affection daily:  Yes, I commit

### Week 3 (Days 15-21): ESTABLISH ONE BOUNDARY

- The ONE boundary I'm implementing *insha Allah* (based on Priority #1):  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Date I'll introduce it, *insha Allah*: \_\_\_\_\_

### Week 4 (Days 22-30): SPIRITUAL RESET

- Family recitation or *morning dhikr* after Fajr:  Yes, I commit
  - "Why I'm Muslim" conversation:  Yes, I commit
  - Area of spiritual outsourcing I'm addressing: \_\_\_\_\_
-