



Muslim Mums

Welcome!

Salaam Alaykum

From toddlers to teenagers to adults, sibling relationships either fill our hearts with pride and joy, or leave us feeling torn and frustrated. In this issue of Muslim Mums we explore how, through Islamic and secular teachings, we can nurture strong bonds of love and respect between our children that may last forever.



Feature Article Sibling Love and Loathing By Nazmina Virjee

The very first thing that comes to our minds when one mentions the word 'sibling' is the word 'rivalry'. Whether it is because we have all been through it, or because we witness it daily in our own children, this is a clue in itself that it is a very natural part of growing up if children, who are animalistic and territorial by nature, have to share the same set of parents, toys, and living space.

In actual fact, most sibling relationships are perhaps even more complicated than marriages, since neither do we get to choose our siblings, nor can they be divorced. Yet, they outlast most marriages!

The cause of most sibling antagonism is perceived loss of parental love! Children wish to have the greatest share of their parents' love and attention. When siblings take it away from them, even temporarily, it becomes greatly upsetting. Only time and maturity helps the child understand that this loss is only imagined and not real.

Sometimes, parental love may have nothing to do with it, but children will find something or the other to taunt each other with or bicker about. I remember from my own childhood, playing beautifully with my sisters one minute and being in a fierce verbal contest for the most cutting come-backs the next, whilst my mum's sanity was at stake trying to make sense of who said what to whom first and trying to be as fair as possible at the same time! Within minutes, we would be back to being

friends upstairs while my poor mum was left stewing for hours over how she could solve our disputes, oblivious to our restored peace (albeit short lived)! For a parent it is very unsettling to have two or more parts of yourself constantly at each other's throats on their childhood journey.

There are seemingly two camps of parents out there. There are those who venture knee-deep into aiming to solve every dispute at the risk of premature senility and high blood pressure. Then there are those who walk away saying; 'Unless there's blood, fire or something broken, I don't want to hear about it', at the risk of shutting out real cries for help from a child being constantly victimised. We, of course, with the teachings of our Aimma (as), take the middle path. With the right skills and a light-hearted attitude, there are many things we can do to prevent

in this issue

- Sibling Love and Loathing
- Growing Feet
- Small Things
- Opting for Islamic Schooling
- Helping Children Understand Current Affairs
- Being the Eldest
- Arba'een in Iraq: A Mother's Perspective
- Kids Corner



jealousy between siblings, to nip it in the bud when they are still young, to handle it and manage it effectively when they are older, and to foster deep and lasting bonds between our offspring.

So what are some of the things we can do as parents to nurture a Musa/Haroon sibling relationship, or a Husayn/Zaynab one, as opposed to a Habil/Qabil one?

Take heart in the fact that there are many skills and strategies out there to help us nurture our children's sibling relationships, but I'd like to focus specifically on the wise principles that Islam teaches us about how to effectively manage our children. A lot of these principles seem to contradict modern Western parenting methods, but their wisdom is divine and practical and not theoretical or man-made.

Justice or Equality: This is probably the most important quality for a parent to have when dealing with their children, as it is the parents who set the scene for how the children will behave with each other. Aim to treat each child as an individual, taking into account, age, gender and birth order. The Prophet (saw) always

encouraged his companions to treat their children with justice, saying, 'Maintain justice among your children in gifts, just like you would like them to be just with you in goodness and affection.' The equality has to be there in the act of giving them gifts that no one is left out, but justice is maintained when each child is given according to what is suitable for his age, gender and needs.

It is very important to give them equal attention and affection, regardless of their birth order, gender or age. Imam Ali (as) narrated, 'The Prophet saw a man with two sons, who kissed one of them but made the other one feel left out, so the Prophet said, 'Why do you not treat both of them equally?!' Of course this doesn't mean that every time you hug one child, you have to hug all the rest in turn, as this would ruin the significance of the hug for the child who originally needed it. It means that each child should feel regular and real affection from his or her parents and should not feel left out, especially when everyone is together, through things like in-jokes, snide remarks or displays of affection for another child to the exclusion of himself.

Comparisons: Don't create unnecessary rivalry by labelling, comparing, or casting children in roles, such as 'She's the tidy one, but he just always manages to get so dirty', or showing favouritism, even if the differences between

the two are really marked. A bit of rivalry can be healthy, but must not be initiated by the parents where a child should feel that he will only be respected by his parents if he makes the same grades as the other or scores like his brother. Fierce competitiveness can be avoided by nurturing their individual talents and accepting that every child is unique and different. Comparing children is the single biggest parental contribution to sibling rivalry.

The cause of most sibling antagonism is perceived loss of parental love

Gender Differences: Again, western parenting methods these days overemphasise that boys and girls be treated the same, but there are many studies done to show the detriment of this. Islam has honoured women from when they are little girls, but it is us who deny them of the respect they are due. The Prophet (SAWA) said, 'He who goes to the market and buys a gift to take back to his family is as one who is taking charity to a group of needy people. He should begin (giving gifts) to the female members of his family before the males.'

Instil from a young age that ladies go first, and girls get presents first. If they are all the same gen-

der, then we start from the youngest. There is wisdom in all of this and if we set Islamic principles as the ground rules, this facilitates our life so our children know their natural place and don't become bone-pickers and fight over every chocolate chip of every cookie.

Birth Order: These days a lot of negative emphasis is put by psychologists, authors of parenting books and even parents themselves on birth order. Birth order certainly doesn't cause sibling rivalry but it can provoke it if parents label their children according to their birth order; Islam on the other hand teaches us to honour their birth order. The oldest has a much more defined role, especially if it's a boy. He holds responsibility for his younger siblings on his shoulders, especially in his parent's absence, and they in turn are to respect him. If we nurture such a role in a positive way in

our households, we will find that it will be the glue that holds our children together when they're older, and when the generation gap has widened even more and parents can no longer keep up with their children. I know from experience that when I tell my oldest son: 'Make sure your sister uses her manners when we go to x's house', then he himself will see to it that he keeps her in check, ensuring of course his own good behaviour in the process! Western methods refute this, saying that it causes resentment in the other siblings, but this is only when parents go to extremes, labelling and comparing them. When we nurture respectful sibling relationships where the younger ones have to obey and respect the older ones, and they in turn have

to look after the younger ones, it leads to respect of each other, interdependence between them, and a lighter load on the parents.

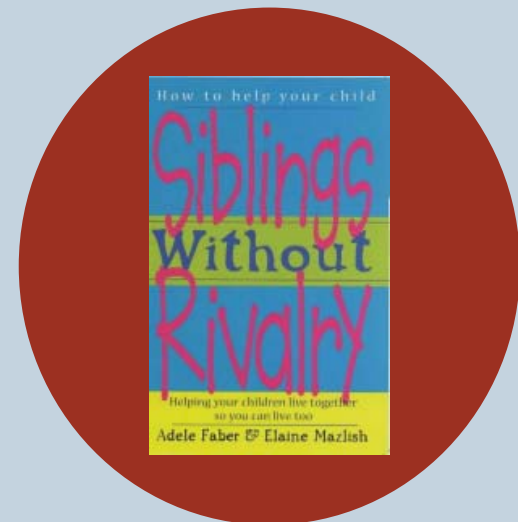
Silat al-Rahm: Make sure above all that you are a living example of sibling cooperation with your own brothers and sisters. Our actions have a much greater impact on children than the best-phrased lectures, and witnessing family feuds, family ties being broken, and silent treatments between uncles and aunts are not going to leave a very good impression in their minds.

Book Review

Siblings Without Rivalry by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

Help is here!

In another essential book by the widely acclaimed authors of *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* (previously reviewed in Issue 2) comes the sanity-saving help parents everywhere have been looking for. Written with humour, compassion and understanding, and illustrated with delightful cartoons, *Siblings Without Rivalry* challenges the idea that constant, unpleasant conflict is natural and unavoidable. Covering topics such as positive and negative comparisons, whether siblings should always be treated equally, the roles children may fall into, dealing with siblings fighting and more, the action-oriented, easy-to-understand anecdotes and stories shows how you can cope with – and deflect – sibling rivalry, and the many ways you can teach your children how to get along.



PREGNANCY – Swimming in Pregnancy

Staying active during pregnancy will help keep your body stronger and more supple. You will have fewer problems with your joints, tendons, intestines, stomach and circulation. Exercise will help prevent constipation, which is commonly experienced during pregnancy and will make it easier for you to avoid gaining more weight than the average 10-12kg (22-26lb).

Swimming is both gentle and effective. If you haven't swum regularly before, you should start by swimming slowly for just 5 to 10 minutes on the first three occasions. You can gradually increase this time to 20 minutes at normal pace, two to three times a week. Don't swim in water that is too warm - the water temperature should be between 18 and 25°C. Using steam rooms and hot tubs is not advised. This includes saunas - don't be

tempted to use these as they can affect blood pressure as well as the body's fluid balance.

Providing your pregnancy is normal, you can continue to swim or exercise throughout the nine months. There are few hard and fast rules about whether exercise is beneficial or harmful in pregnancy. However, you should always stop exercising immediately and contact your doctor or midwife if you start to feel unwell, feel dizzy or experience pain or bleeding.

INFANCY (0-12 Months) – Baby Massage

(Based on *What to Expect in the First Year*, by Murkoff, Eisenberg and Hathaway)

There are a number of reasons why you should consider laying the hands on your baby. The therapeutic touch of massage enhances parent-child bonding; possibly strengthens the immune system; improves muscle development; stimulates growth; eases colic, teething pain and tummy troubles; promotes better sleep patterns; stimulates the circulatory and re-

spiratory systems; and decreases stress hormones (yes, babies have those too). And loving touch, whether massage or just hugging and holding your child, has been shown to decrease aggressive tendencies. Massaging an infant is relaxing for parents as well, and has been found to relieve symptoms of postnatal depression.

If you'd like to learn how to rub your baby, get a book or video, or take a class with a massage therapist familiar with baby massage. Or try these tips:

- Pick a time that's relaxing for you – choose a time when you're unhurried and let voicemail get the phone.
- Pick a time that's relaxing for baby - right after a bath is a perfect time if baby enjoys his bath and has already begun to relax.
- Set a relaxing scene - the area should be quiet and warm, dim the lights to reduce stimulation.
- Lubricate if you like - you can do a dry rub, or use a little baby oil, vegetable oil or baby lotion (but not on baby's head).
- Experiment with techniques - in general, babies prefer a gentle touch, but not so light that it's ticklish.
- Take your cues from baby – he will tell you whether you're doing it right or not, and when it's time to end!



THE TODDLER YEARS –

Keeping Your Cool

(Mainly based on “What to Expect – the Toddler Years”, by Eisenberg, Murkoff and Hatha-way)

Nobody is cool, calm and collected all of the time – particularly when there’s a toddler in the house. But since frequent parental tantrums are not good for you or your toddler, it’s a good idea to try some simple strategies to help minimise the possibility of such explosions. These will be covered over four issues, Inshallah.

Part 2:

- Mind your words. There’s nothing wrong with being angry; anger is a natural emotion. But knowing how to express anger without inflicting physical or emotional pain doesn’t always come naturally. Instead of automatically exploding when your toddler’s doing, or has done, something that makes you angry, train yourself to express your feelings rationally, using words that explain how you feel but aren’t hurtful. Instead of saying, “You’re so bad – you never listen to me!” say, “When you don’t listen to me, I get so angry I feel like screaming.”

- Let it out. If you’re so angry you want to strike out, move away from your child immediately and find a less vulnerable target for your aggressive feelings – punch a pillow (but not so violently that you frighten your toddler), jog in place, do a set of jumping jacks, take a few race-walk laps around the room. Explain to your toddler, “I’m really angry at you right now for doing that. But I think I’ll walk around the room two times so I won’t feel so angry.” Don’t express your anger in ways you don’t want your child to imitate – slamming doors, throwing dishes, or punching walls, for instance. And don’t leave your toddler alone.

- Put it in writing. Keep a notebook handy, and whenever you feel on the verge of losing control, set your angry feelings down on paper. Don’t mince words; get them all out of your system. You’ll be amazed at the therapeutic power of pen and paper.

- Embrace. Not the moment, but your child. Often, hug therapy can magically melt away feelings of anger and effectively stifle the need to lash out. For best results, hug firmly, enveloping your toddler in your arms, while making eye contact. But don’t try hug therapy on a toddler who doesn’t like to be held; that will only further frustrate and infuriate both of you.

THE OLDER YEARS – Love Languages (Part 4 – Acts of Service)

(Based on “The Five Love Languages” by Gary Chapman) Language differences are part and parcel of human culture. If we are to communicate effectively across cultural lines, we must learn the language of those with whom we wish to communicate. In the area of love it is similar. Your emotional love language and that of your child may be as different as Chinese from English, and we must be willing to learn their primary love language if we are to be effective communicators of love; something that is especially important as children grow older. Over a few issues we have focussed on each of the five love languages: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service and Physical Touch. Every child needs all of them, but there is usually one that they speak above the rest.

Acts of Service: When children



are small, parents are continually doing “Acts of Service” for them. If they did not, the child would die. Bathing, feeding and dressing all require a great deal of work in the first few years of a child’s life. Then comes cooking, washing, and ironing. Then comes packing lunches, running a taxi service, and helping with homework. Such things are taken for granted by many children, but for other children those things communicate love.

If your child is often expressing appreciation for ordinary acts of service, that is a clue that they are emotionally important to him or her. Your acts of service are communicating love in a meaningful way. When you help him with a science project, it means more than a good grade. It means “My parent loves me.” When you fix a bicycle, you do more than get him back on wheels. You send him away with a full tank. If your child consistently offers to help you with your work projects, it probably means that in his mind that is a way of expressing love, and “Acts of Service” likely is his primary love language.

*Small Things Make
Big Muslims- Tips for instilling
Islam in your children*
By Nazmina Virjee

In keeping with this issue's 'siblings' theme, here are some practical strategies for instilling love and co-operation between siblings:

1. A child's reaction to the news of a new baby can range from withdrawal to violence and even regressions in their development. That's why parents have to be sensitive to their older children's feelings, acknowledging their feelings about the baby first, and showing them extra love and attention. Also, it's important to refrain from blaming everything on 'the baby' - 'I can't play with you because I have to give the baby his bath', 'Shh, the baby's sleeping'. This is a wonderful way of giving sibling rivalry a jump-start! Use more creative ways, such as, 'My hands are busy, but we can still talk', or 'We'll go to the park when it's 4 o'clock'. Sibling bonds are formed at a very young age and it's important for the older child to be secure in the knowledge that you love him/her regardless of the baby.

2. Language plays a crucial role in setting the ground for love and

cooperation between siblings in a home. It's very important that parents have positive expectations of their kids getting along together and that they voice these expectations using positive language. There's a big difference between: 'Your constant bickering is really giving me a headache - just stop fighting ok', and 'You guys get along so well with each other -this is really not like you'. Even if they are fighting and misbehaving, the secret is to praise the behaviour you want to see, so if Ali is not sharing his blocks with Fatema and she's crying, you might say within earshot of Ali, 'I know my Ali, if you ask him nicely he always shares. He's such a generous boy'.

3. Set a few simple ground rules from the go: For example, No Hurting Each Other (physically or verbally). With younger children, the consequences for breaking the rules should be light, aiming at dissolving their fights rather than building further resentment. Usually Murphy's Law has it that whatever you set as a consequence is what they end up craving most, so what I do with mine is threaten to separate them, 'If you behave hurtfully towards each other, I'm afraid I'm going to have to separate you, and then you'll be all lonely with no one to play with'. My kids can't stand it for even 5 minutes -they're back to playing nicely in no time! Discourage tattling from young - do hear them out but teach them what to do or say, rather than jump in and tell the other party off on their word.

4. Teach them problem-solving strategies and be clear, effective and specific. Often we assume that because they're siblings they should know how to 'get along'. To state, 'I wish you two would just get along' is so vague and wishy washy! We must teach them how to compromise, how to time-share, how to take turns, how to make toy trades/chore trades, model or role play exactly how to ask nicely. Once taught these, our children can really surprise us in wonderful ways where, with a single reminder, they themselves will come up with solutions to their own dilemmas and take pride in being good problem-solvers.

5. If they're already in a fight over a toy, rather than put the children in time-out, it sometimes helps to put the toy in time-out instead, until they can come up with an effective way to share. Give helpful comments such as 'I see one truck but two children who want it - I wonder what can be done? Alternatively it helps to dissolve their squabbles by making you their target instead. If the situation is not too heated yet, grabbing the toy and running with it makes them team up with each other and gang up against you instead. They suddenly forget their feud and burst into giggles. With younger children dissolving the tension is so much more effective than resolving every tiff. A light mood is actually very contagious! The Prophet (SAWA) said, 'Whoever has a child should act childishly with him.'

6. Races are a wonderful motivator when kids are young to get them to put their shoes and socks on, who can get to the car first or who can pick up the blocks



first; but then as they get older and more and more competitive, races can do more harm than good. Gauge early on what kind of child you have - if he or she is fiercely competitive and every loss turns into a tantrum, avoid races with siblings at all cost, because if they lose they will be resentful towards their sibling, and if they win they'll gloat and tease for hours. Instead, team them up to race together either against the clock or against yourself if you have to, so as to encourage solidarity and teamwork in them from a young age.

7. Parents of young children should always remember that there is a lot we can do by way of prevention to set the scene for peace. Even the most agreeable and co-operative children can become crabby with each other when running low on attention or food, when bored or when they have spent too much unstructured time together, or of course, at bedtime meltdown!

8. Older kids: their fights aren't over toys or tangible things that we can divide or put in time-out, but often over attention and privileges. Teach them how to talk through their problems, how to listen without interrupting each other, teach them about sarcasm and the Golden Rule: to treat your sibling the way you want him/her to treat you. Or better still the Platinum Rule: treat your sibling the way he/she wants to be treated! Don't assume that they know these things - a gentle reminder is always welcome. Downplay the situation and be calm. The more aggravated we get, the more aggravated they'll get. Often they don't need us to interfere, but the

'Mummeeeee, she's doing this...' is just part of their own power trips and struggles.

With older children, the general consensus is that unless one of them is really having a miserable childhood or is always the underdog or the physically hurting or teasing is getting out of hand, we shouldn't interfere. We must accept that in order for them to be close and have bonds, it is also important for them to fight and argue. They should share rooms with each other and be very much involved in each other's lives if we are to foster those strong bonds. At the same time nurture their closeness through their differences like letting one help the other with homework in the subjects they are not so good at, for example. It's easier to nurture individual talents when the children are boys and girls, but in a house full of girls or only boys, it is a lot more challenging to manage two boys' obsession with sports and how many more goals they scored than their sibling! This is where Islam teaches us to allow older children to lead younger ones, help them, and train them in certain things. If given the responsibility of overseeing a younger sib's homework or football practice or 'supervising' something, most children will rise to the occasion.

9. Nurture their Relationship: Celebrate Sibling Day (why not - there's Mother's Day and Father's Day?! Pick any day in the year, preferably a month which is empty of birthdays or other celebra-

tions. Take each child shopping separately for gifts for each other. Have decorations, ice cream, cake, and a party where they all promise to always love each other and take care of each other. The Prophet (SAWA) said, 'A gift brings about affection, reinforces brotherhood, and removes grudges. Give gifts to each other and you will love each other.'

There are probably as many tips and strategies for handling sibling rivalry as there are parents out there, each with their own nifty method, but the important thing to remember is to stay calm, relaxed and patient with them and to resort to the Maker and His divine strategies for optimal functioning of His creatures. Sometimes nothing may work and we may have to admit that perhaps the thing we are fighting so hard to remedy and to prevent is actually there for a reason. In the animal kingdom, fighting between siblings prepares them for adulthood, to learn to live with other more hostile animals in the pack, and develops muscle tone, courage, and confidence. Even with human 'cubs', it prepares them for many an unpleasant relationship in the future, as well as teaching them negotiating and problem solving skills. All praise be to Allah, our Wise and Nurturing Creator who fashioned us in this unique way!



Personal Moments

Opting for Islamic Schooling

By Aiman Manji

Children spend eight hours a day at school. That is half the time that they are awake and conscious. School is their window to the outside world. They meet people from different races, religions, backgrounds and personalities, and this reflects in their behaviour and mannerisms. For children, school is where the status quo is established; where their social "norms" are defined; where many of their friendships are developed. School is not just an academic institution; it is far more than that. Bearing all this in mind, my husband and I set out to pick a school in Harrow that we thought was suitable for our son. He started reception, settled in well and had a good mixed group of friends. We had to face the main challenges of having non-Muslim friends and food in the same equation. "Can I go to his house to play?" soon turned into "Can I go round to his house for tea?" (Not as in chai, as in dinner!). Luckily, this particular friend's mum was quite clued up on the whole concept of Halal meat and even offered to cook him chicken wings bought from a "Halal" butcher, which was very endearing.

I reluctantly consented, telling myself that they were Ahle Kitab and it was fine, but felt very uneasy. When I went to pick him up, I noticed alcohol on the table and that just made me cringe. I had confidence that the children had not consumed any, but it just made my stomach turn that my 5-year old was having dinner at a table where there was alcohol. This is the first time that I thought about the whole concept of an Islamic school and it dawned on me how important peers are to children. We need to help them "select" their friends. Firstly, by surrounding them with people who have similar values, and then by going out of our way to harness those friendships and help them develop into healthy and positive ones.

As time went on, little incidents kept on happening and my husband and I carried on discussing the Islamic school option, deciding each time that as long as we concentrated on giving them a strong foundation at home, we would be fine. I was more inclined towards sending them, but not totally convinced. His main concerns were that we would be cocooning them and making them insular. He felt that that would be taking the easy option, that we would be shielding them from the realities and challenges of the social aspects of being a practicing Muslim in the West.

We also had to consider the possibility that in the pursuit of a more Islamic environment, the standard of their secular education may be compromised. We looked at a couple of schools and the stats showed that there was no need to worry on that front. I felt like I was slowly building a case for "the move".

By now, my second son had

also started Year 2 and my older one was moving into Middle School, where they were starting PHSE classes and introducing sex education. My husband and I attended the meeting where they call parents to give them a taste of what is to come in the classes. We asked certain questions that children may ask and we were absolutely mortified at the responses. Suffice it to say that the very behaviour that we would completely discourage and condemn in our home was exactly what they would be encouraging and portraying as "healthy". There was no moral guidance available. If they were asked advice about relationships, by law they were not allowed to favour different gender relationships over same gender ones. This kind of advice from teachers that my child respected made me wonder about this environment further.

I also noticed that my son had started to make negative comments about how his school teachers were dressed. He kept saying that Miss so and so wears really short tops, or tight shirts, or low cut T-shirts. I know that we chose to live in the western world and with that decision came dealing with differences in culture and religion and so on, but within the framework of a western world, we still have options. My husband's "easy option" argument was starting to wane in my eyes and for me, it started to be more about protecting my child and not forcing him to deal with things that he did not have to deal with, at such a tender age, for so many hours in the day.

I felt like my children were struggling with the contradicting messages that they were getting at school and those that I was trying to enforce at home and Madressa. Sending them to an Islamic school would mean one universal message. The sort of behaviour that would be encour-



aged and commended at home would also be advocated at school. They would not have to put on a different mask when they went to school and deal with a completely different outlook. If it is Muharram, for example, and you have been going to majalis and crying for Imam Husayn AS, then you don't have to worry about having to dance in the Christmas concert the next day.

We spoke to children who went to the Islamic school, and their parents. We asked the children what they liked about the school and the main sentiment was that they felt proud to be Muslims, and the problems associated with food and music and parties and socializing with non-Muslims did not exist. Many children said that their friendships were a lot stronger because they felt like they did not have to lie as much about what they thought was cool. Also, that their parents seemed a lot more chilled out about them going over to a friend's because they had confidence that they would pray on time and not be listening to music and so on. Parents, especially those that lived roughly the same distance away from the school as I did, said, "It is hard, but not impossible. And it's worth it."

The big move ensued shortly. Their first day at school was a nightmare for me. We had to be up really early compared to before and out of the door by 7:40a.m. I felt like I spent an eternity on the road getting them to school, and by the time I got home it was 9:30am. Nearly two hours in the car. And that was just the morning run! When my eldest son came home and I asked him about his day, he replied, "Mum, I feel like there is no pressure." I was baffled. More homework. Longer day. 2 hours in the car

with younger siblings. No pressure. How so? He said, "I feel so relaxed because I have already prayed." I was speechless.



As time has gone on, I have seen a lot more benefits in the move to an Islamic school. The spiritual dimension is often brought into their secular teaching from a very young age. When they are learning about the water cycle in science, the teachers will refer to Allah and the wonders of creation. This is an aspect to learning that mainstream schools are not allowed to even touch upon as they are becoming more secularized. I thought that was great because it drives home the message that if you want to be a soldier of the Mahdi, you have to equip yourself with knowledge, both secular and spiritual; here, they were gaining both at the same place at the same time.

Like everything, there are some drawbacks that we have encountered as a result of this move. Parents can be lulled into a false sense of security that everything is fine and that the school is taking care of the spiritual training in terms of Akhlaq. Be warned, the children are not just going to turn into "little angels". Another issue that comes to mind is that they

are not used to being asked and questioned about their faith; consequently, they do not learn how to tackle difficult situations like explaining why they do not listen to music or why they have to pray five times a day.

At present, I feel very sure that I have made the right decision to send them to an Islamic school. There are days when I think, "Do I really need to do this?" It is normally when I am stuck in traffic or have to leave the shops in the middle of some intensive retail therapy in order to pick them up on time.

But that is more in terms of logistics as the school is quite far from where I live, as opposed to the idea of an Islamic school. I have come to the conclusion that I am never really going to know the answer to that question. My children may turn out the same in, or out of, an Islamic school, but I feel that by sending them there I am making sure that there is the reinforcement of one message and that has to be a help to them on their journey, rather than a hindrance.

A wise man once told me that, children are like saplings in a garden. If weeds are allowed to spread around it, their growth can be stifled. However, given the chance to grow and flourish in a healthy environment, a strong tree begins to emerge, one whose roots will get more firmly embedded as it develops. At present, there are only a couple of viable options in terms of Islamic schools around the area that I live in. Like any school, the school that we have opted for has its pros and cons and Inshallah, I hope it will keep progressing to best serve the needs of its students and teachers. I pray that as time goes on, we see an increase in the number of Islamic schools so that we have a wider choice of where to plant our little saplings.



Out of Interest
 Helping Children Understand
 Current Affairs
 By Sukaina Mukhtar

There are many noble qualities which one desires to instill in their children. The Ahlul Bayt possess these various noble characteristics, but more recently, our Mujtahids too, are those we seek to emulate. Two prominent figures who made a colossal impact in the affairs of their time were Imam Khomeini and Ayatullah Khui, who through example and knowledge have had a powerful and positive impact in society. They were on par with the current events and hence were able to make a difference in the society in which they lived. One of the things to enable our children to reach the level of these noble personalities is this focus on current events. Whether it is generosity or the importance of justice which needs to be understood, we only need to read, research and explain, collaborating history and current affairs. Instilling in our children the effects of immoral and moral behavior in relation to the world we live in today, is crucial for generations to come.

So how can we generate interest in our children?

At a young age, children tend to imitate what their parents do. If

we watch the news or read the newspapers, they will observe and watch or read. Sometimes, parents will read and watch the news and put it behind them. Perhaps a discussion with the child will spark their interest. Maybe even research about the history of certain events and relate it back to what is happening today. One day of the week could be appointed for a discussion of current events. Questions could include - what can we do about it? Is it the truth? Alongside the discussions, it is important to ascertain the authenticity of what is being said in the media. Although informative, it can be deceptive and it is vital for a child to understand that what is seen and heard is not always the complete truth.

What age should we start?

The age in which maturity is acquired varies upon each individual. Imam Ali was the only child and first man to accept Islam at the age of 10. Yet, there are people who claim that he was only a child and did not understand what he was doing. Imam Ali used his own intellectual capabilities and judgment to accept Islam. In the case of integrating current events, a parent needs to decide when to integrate and to what level. Is there a specific age when one must begin informing their child of the world around them? How long shall we keep our child in a cocoon?

What about the graphic images that were shown on the news on Palestine, how

can we show this?

Only a parent can decide when they think their child is ready to view and perceive these images. However, I don't know what is worse; Nudity which is shown everywhere in the West, or the Reality of Death, Injustice and Atrocities that continue to occur around us.

Three ideas to help you along:

- Encourage your child to sponsor poor/orphan child (or if young, involve them in the process). Often pictures are provided that may be put up as reminders. If they get pocket money, they can use their own money to sponsor the child
- Make/decorate a coin box for a certain charity (being specific allows a child to relate better). Discuss with the child what can be bought with the money they collected in the Third World Country. Emphasis that "each penny counts." This might make them careful with where they spend money.
- Attend fundraisers and inform the child on the importance of attending and giving towards the fund, especially as they often tend to be related to current events. "You can have fun and give money to those who need it."

Finally, our 12th Imam will be one who will take a stand against the current events of his time. A child will only acknowledge, be concerned and proactive about the larger world around them if they are aware of what is occurring everyday in the different countries around them. Let us expand the visions of the generations to come to prepare them to be the soldiers of the 12th Imam, Inshallah.

I am very privileged to be the eldest of six brothers. It has been a very interesting and rewarding role although of course not without its challenges and frustrations. The age old adage "it takes two to tango" - or in this case six - is never truer between siblings. So let me share with you some insights.

In the early years, as the eldest sibling (and in my case also the eldest grandson), there is a huge weight of expectation on one's shoulders to be the model grandson, son, brother, cousin, nephew, etc. This manifests itself in a number of areas:

- Being the model, or the guinea pig, for the day's (and the previous decades as well!) fashion trends, hairstyles, etc.
- Having the expectation of being seen to be the one setting benchmarks and targets for the younger siblings to aim for, and every time those benchmarks are pushed further out. This starts from the exam results at school and madressa and gets more serious when GCSEs and A Levels come along. The pressure really mounts when you get to 20 and suddenly it is marriage time and you hear the magic words, "if you get married early it will set a good example for the boys."
- Equally, the benchmarks and targets apply to things that you shouldn't be doing to be setting a bad example, like smoking, going out to parties, etc.

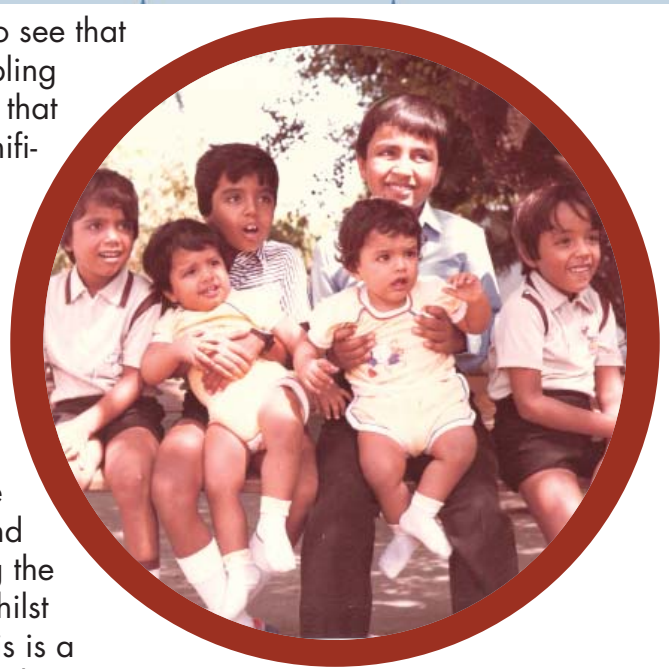
At times it became quite challenging to have to grow up with what I perceived to be an additional layer of responsibilities, just because I happened to be the eldest. However I was very fortunate to have understanding parents and to have grown up in a

joint/extended family to see that the role of the eldest sibling wasn't all that bad and that actually there were significant upsides as well as what could be perceived as negatives.

As we grow, the role of being the eldest sibling may evolve from being the target-setter to taking on more and more of the role and responsibilities of being the leader in the family. Whilst some would say that this is a natural progression, it is by no means a role that is automatic for the eldest sibling, nor is it a role that can exist without the full support, trust and respect of all other members of the family. There are numerous examples where the eldest sibling, whilst being afforded the respect of being the eldest, is not the leader of the family. There is famous saying: "Leaders are made rather than born."

In our case, I have evolved into the role of being head of the family, because this was something that was probably expected of me by my parents, and reflected in the levels of responsibility they gave to me. This meant that I had to grow up much faster than the average person; I have often felt that I went from being an early teenager to being a 20something between two blinks.

Being the leader of the family is a challenging and rewarding role, and requires every ounce of assertiveness combined with compassion that I can find within me - being tough and fair at the same time. To make the role successful, I have had to earn the respect of each of my brothers by demonstrating that when dealing with them, I am fair and even-handed, and most importantly, putting my own self-interest last. Being hu-



man, that is the hardest part of all, but I know that in order to have a long-lasting relationship with my brothers, it is critical not only to be fair and honest but also to be seen and perceived to be fair and honest.

The biggest challenge is providing leadership and guidance for my brothers, and not just directing them or doing everything for them - a trap that lots of people have fallen into but one that I constantly strive to avoid. Otherwise, leadership turns into dictatorship. I could go on and write a whole novel on the subject but the Editor would not be too happy!

When describing our family setup and structure to friends and colleagues, the overriding feedback I get is a combination of yearning and envy - simply because the concept of the extended family unit is one that seems to have been consigned to the history books. Yet, with the help of the Almighty and with the support of my brothers, we are living proof that it is very much a reality which we are all living.

Do I have any regrets? No. Wishes? Yes of course - more siblings, especially a sister.

Travel Focus

Arba'een in Iraq:

A Mother's Perspective

By Sakina Chandoo

By far the most amazing experience of my life has been my ziyarat trip to Kerbala during Arba'een, where I was accompanied by my two young children, my husband and his parents. This experience is one that I would highly recommend to all, including mothers with young families, as it will truly remain with you and your family for the rest of your lives.

Initially, when faced with this opportunity, many worries crossed my mind: How will I cope with the kids? How safe will it be for them out there? How will we manage the long journeys with them? How will we be able to withstand those huge crowds in Kerbala? However, when I came across the following hadith, all my worries were dispelled: 'When a Shia leaves his house with the intention of performing Imam Husain's (a.s.) ziyarat, he is accompanied by 700 angels. They safeguard him from above and below, from the right and the left, from the front and the back, till such a time that he reaches his destination.'

Indeed, during the entire journey, despite overwhelming crowds whose numbers were in the region of 14 million, never at any time did we feel unsafe whilst performing our ziyarat. In fact, the feeling of inner peace that we experienced in the sacred land of Kerbala was unlike any other. In terms of packing for the trip, in addition to clothes and medicine, I made sure that I stocked up on all the kids' food such as cereal and dry snacks (raisins, biscuits, bread sticks, crisps, etc). I also took a good supply of my son's powdered milk and long life milk cartons for my daughter. These

all proved to be very useful, especially since few of these items are available over there. I also took my sons' stroller and travel cot, as facilities for young children there are limited.

Our journey began with a flight to Dubai as we joined a group from there. When meeting the rest of the group, I was surprised to see that amongst them, there were many young mothers who had also brought their children and one of them was as young as 6 months!

From Dubai we took a flight to Najaf, and thereafter, we boarded a coach for Kerbala. This journey is usually 2 hours by road but as we were amongst millions of people making their way to Kerbala for Arba'een, it took 12 hours! Fortunately, I packed enough milk, food, spare clothes and all the essentials for the children in a trolley bag in case of such delays which we were to expect whilst travelling to Kerbala at such a busy time. We also endured many lengthy journeys whilst visiting Samarra and Kadhmain, and therefore, when travelling within Iraq it is advisable to have the necessary supplies for young children at hand. I could never have imagined that my children would withstand such a journey, but they were hardly any trouble at all and ended up sleeping most of the time which showed me just how much our Imam takes care of his guests.

Travelling together with my husbands' parents was a great

help to me, especially with the children, as we would take it in turns to look after them along the way. My mother-in-law looked after Fatema Zahra most of the time during the entire trip, which meant that I only had Muhammad Ali to take care of. This not only made things much easier but it gave me more time to perform all the ziyarats.

In Kerbala, we would perform our ziyarats as a family during the day, and at night, I would leave the kids asleep at the hotel with my husband to join a group of young mums for a late night amaal session at the Haram. We would then return to the hotel so our husbands could then spend their time at the Haram; this way, we established a routine around the kids whereby we could all benefit from the ziyarat.

The hotels in Iraq were not quite the five star accommodations that we are all used to and facilities over there are basic. However, it was amazing how comfortable we felt staying there and how the children got used to the place without any difficulty. Fatema Zahra even mastered using the eastern style WC with portable seat almost straight away!

Many people asked me how we managed to get through those large crowds when performing the ziyarat with young children. The fact is during Arba'een, there are endless processions and millions of people take to the streets of Kerbala, such that the crowds began right from our hotel until the entrance of the Haram of Imam Hussain and Hazrat Abbas. However, we managed to get



across those crowds every day and from the first day in Kerbala, both the children got the chance to touch and kiss the Zarih of Imam Hussain.

Arba'een is truly the best time of year to spend in Kerbala as the atmosphere is amazing, and we were able to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain in a way we had never done before. We witnessed public displays of mourning by millions on the streets and heart-rending plays being performed within the Haram on the tragedy of Kerbala. These scenes were accompanied by poetry in Ara-

bic, which brought tears to our eyes and overwhelming grief to our hearts. I even saw a miracle outside the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Abbas with my very own eyes!

The benefits of this spiritual journey for the children are apparent till today. Fatema Zahra learned so much on the whole trip and her knowledge of Imam Hussain and the tragedy of Kerbala increased immensely. Furthermore, after witnessing millions of people performing matam, reciting salawaat and praying salah in the Haram, my son learned to do all these things with such enthusiasm that till today, whenever he hears

matam, salawaat or even salah being recited, he will eagerly join in!

All in all, spending Arba'een in Iraq was truly the greatest experience for me and my family and one that we will never forget. It is no wonder that Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has said: 'If one of our Shias goes for Imam Husain's (a.s.) Ziarat, then he will not return but all his sins will be forgiven. For every step that he or his mount takes, 1,000 virtues are written for him, 1,000 sins are forgiven and his status is elevated by a 1,000

degrees.'

Children's Book Review The Children's Islamic Library

This issue, rather than review a book for you and your children, we thought we'd invite you to do it! Recently opened, the Children's Islamic Library located at Dar-al-Tableegh holds a wide range of material for both parent and child. This ranges from the latest children's books to adventure novels, board games to books for young adults, Adam's World DVDs to interactive CD-ROM games, and much more.

Regular story times and activity days are also held at the library, where we have Islamic arts and crafts activities, circle time with Islamic rhymes for the little ones, games and toys play, garden play and stories for the children. The online system allows you to register as a member, browse the items available at the library, reserve books to pick up at a later date, renew books that you have borrowed and write reviews to share your thoughts with other parents.

So don't forget to check out the library and help your children

to learn and love this amazing religion through fun and memorable ways! To make a donation to the library, or for more detailed information, please visit www.childrensislamiclibrary.com,



Kids Corner

The 15th of Shabaan is almost here. It is the day on which our twelfth holy Imam Al-Mahdi was born. On this special day, we write him a letter to wish him. This letter has a special name called 'Ariza'. Arizas can also be written on other days, for example, when we feel sad or lonely and need Imam Mahdi's help.

But where can we post this letter? Well, no one knows exactly where the Imam lives. So we roll up our Arizas and put them in the river or sea. By Allah's miracle, our Arizas reach our Imam and inshallah he will answer our prayers and come to our help.

Below is a scroll for you to cut out and write your own letter to your Imam. If you cannot write yet, you can draw pictures or even just hold the Ariza and say your letter to your Imam out loud.



HONEYBEARS MONTESSORI NURSERY



- * For children aged 2 – 5 years
 - * Morning, afternoon and full time sessions available
 - * Grant funding for 3 – 4 year olds
 - * Fully qualified staffing team
 - * Ofsted regulated
 - * We also offer Leaps and Bounds, French and IT!
 - * 10% discount for new starters
- * For more information or to arrange a visit please call Sajeda Kassam – 0775 169 4480
or call the nursery – 0208 426 1855

*Eastcote Methodist Church, Pamela Gardens,
Eastcote, Middlesex, HA5 2QU
www.honeybearsmontessori.co.uk
info@honeybearsmontessori.co.uk*

Maz Beauty



When you see the difference you feel the difference...

SPECIAL OFFER!

**With any treatment worth £20 or more, get
eyebrow threading absolutely FREE!**

For any enquiries or bookings, call Masuma on:

Tel: 07904 046 083

www.mazbeauty.co.uk

**LATE APPOINTMENTS
AVAILABLE!**



Shia Ithna'asheri Madressa
Husaini Islamic Centre
Wood Lane, Stanmore
Middlesex, HA7 4LQ
office@madressa.net
admin@madressa.net

Muslim Mums Team

Fatema Haji
Fatema Gulamhusein
Shaheen Merali
Sakina Kermali
Mariam Merali
Farhanaz Merali
Aliya Gulamhusein

We would like to thank all our contributors and advertisers for their efforts and generosity.

For all inquiries and comments please do not hesitate to contact us at: muslimmums@madressa.net



Dubai Family Holidays

Sometimes you just need a break!



Atlantis The Palm

One & Only Royal Mirage



Habtoor Grand Resort & Spa

Jumeirah Beach Hotel

... And Many More

Kids Go Free Dubai Family Holidays!

Call or email for a family holiday deal to Dubai and beyond

Excellent deals in **ECONOMY, BUSINESS & FIRST**

020 8426 8444

dubai@cruyton.com

chat free at www.cruyton.com

