



My bully's name is
"MOM"



DISCIPLINING WITHOUT ANGER

10 Prophetic
Methods for
Correcting your
Children's
Mistakes



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The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was a prolific educator. Every recorded interaction with his companions, his neighbours, his wives and his children is filled with beneficial knowledge. Regardless of which stage of our lives we occupy, we can derive benefit from the ultimate example of the Prophet's beautiful character. As parents, we turn to the example of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to gain inspiration and valuable teaching methods.

Allah (سبحانه و تعالی) says of his Prophet:
"Verily, You (Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character" (68:4).

Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her) described the Prophet (ﷺ), saying:
"His character was just (a reflection of) the Quran."

The way in which the mistakes of children are corrected has a significant impact on how they will understand their relationship with the world and their relationship with their parents. Before attempting to analyze how the Prophet corrected the mistakes of his community members, we first have to understand that he was a man that was looked up to in every way. Whether it was his closest allies or his worst enemies, all those who met Muhammad (ﷺ) respected him and trusted his word. Even before he was a Prophet, he was known as Al-Amin or the trustworthy.

Building mutual love, respect and trust is the start and essence of any good parent-child relationship. Your child must see you as someone worthy of his respect. He must see a parent who keeps his word, a parent who is gentle and merciful and loving, a parent who is firm and strict when the situation calls for it, and a parent who is consistent in all of these things. If your child respects you, he will naturally dislike the prospect of displeasing you and pay attention to your expectations of him.

Always have the wisdom and foresight in applying these principles and methods depending on your own unique situation and child.

In response to people's mistakes, the Prophet (ﷺ) never harmed them, nor did he use demeaning names or derogatory comments to insult them. His reactions were always appropriate and measured. Above all, his interactions with his fellow believers always left them feeling positive and encouraged, not downtrodden and hurt.

Among the many effective teaching methods the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used, the following 10 methods are particularly relevant to correcting children's mistakes.



1. OFFERING An ALternative to inCorreCt Behaviour

When the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) witnessed someone doing or saying something incorrect, he would instruct him or her to stop and then offer an alternative.

It was reported that Bilal came to the Prophet (ﷺ) to offer him some good quality dates. The Prophet (ﷺ) asked him, “Where is this from?” Bilal said, “We had some poor quality dates, and I sold two measures of those for one measure of these so that we could give them to the Prophet.” When the Prophet (ﷺ) heard that, he said, “Beware! Beware! This is definitely riba (usury)! This is definitely riba! Do not do that. If you want to buy (the superior dates), sell the inferior dates for money and then buy the superior kind of dates with that money.”

This example highlights the balance and fairness of Islam that takes into account human needs and human nature. While extramarital relations are forbidden, marriage is allowed. While business involving interest is forbidden, trading and ethical business practices are allowed. While eating certain types of food is forbidden, eating other food items is allowed. There is always an alternative path in Islam; there is always something positive that can take the place of something negative.

When instructing your child to stop doing or saying something that is incorrect or offensive, always give them an alternative. For example, instead of angrily throwing out the crayons because your child drew on the wall, hang some large poster paper up and tell her: *Here, draw on this instead.* If your child says something hurtful

when he is upset, stop him, then help him find better and more acceptable words that he can use to express himself when he is frustrated or angry.

To a curious developing child, the continuous use of the word “no” and “stop” without ever offering an alternative is akin to asking your child to stop discovering and exploring and using his or her mind.



2. Being prACTiCAL in mODEling corReCT BehAViour

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) taught his followers Islamic concepts and rulings in simple and easy-to-understand language and actions. He always modeled the correct behaviour in a straight-forward and practical way.

The Prophet (ﷺ) once asked a companion to perform wudu in front of him. When he noticed that the companion was performing wudu incorrectly, he stopped him and showed him how to do it properly by actually performing it himself.

In some cases, the Prophet (ﷺ) would also ask the person who made a mistake to go back and do the action again, this time in a more correct or pleasing way.

For example, there was a companion who was taking some food to the Prophet (ﷺ) when the Prophet was at the top of the valley. The companion entered upon him without asking permission to enter and without greeting him. So the Prophet (ﷺ) requested of him: “Go out and say, ‘Assalaamu alaikum, may I enter?’”

This was a way of reinforcing correct behaviour by actually asking the individual to repeat the action in the correct way.

When was the last time we modelled correct behaviour for our children by physically getting down to their level and showing them what we mean? While verbal instruction is important, it has to come hand-in-hand with action. Actions often really do speak louder than words.



3. Being consistently attentive



The Prophet (ﷺ) was particularly attentive and used to observe people's words and actions in order to set them aright.

This point is illustrated through the well-known instance where a man came into the mosque and prayed. Then when he was finished his

prayer, the Prophet told him, "Go back and pray, for you have not prayed." The man returned and prayed once more, but was met by the same response: "Go back and pray, for you have not prayed." When it happened yet another time, the man asked the Prophet to teach him how to improve his prayer, and the Prophet obliged.

This example actually has many different layers and lessons that can be extracted from it. One of them is the Prophet's keen observation skills. He didn't instruct the people then turn his back on them and allow them to continue in their errors. He taught them, and then observed them to ensure they understood and correctly applied his teachings.

By setting aside the time to consistently interact with and observe your child's words and actions, you will have the opportunity to help her tweak negative tendencies before they become entrenched habits.

If you are constantly waiting for a better time or a less busy day to interact with and closely observe your child, you will miss your chance to guide her towards good actions in baby steps. Suddenly deciding to be an involved and attentive parent after 16 years of being MIA won't go over very well with your child. By then she already has a routine, a set of friends, and a certain attitude towards her education and family. If you try to jump in and ask her to drastically change, you're in for a rude awakening.



4. ReMAining CALM

Children often make mistakes because they aren't mature enough to do otherwise. And sometimes they simply don't understand the gravity of what they're saying or doing. Remain calm and be gentle when addressing their mistakes.

It is difficult to remain calm while we deal with our children's imperfections, but we can take inspiration from the well-known instance where the Prophet (ﷺ) dealt calmly with the Bedouin who urinated in his mosque. When the man began to urinate, the companions became extremely angry and wanted to stop him right away. But the Prophet instructed them to let the man finish.

Following this, he called the Bedouin over and said: "These mosques are not the places meant for urine and filth, but are only for the remembrance of Allah, prayer and the recitation of the Quran." Then he told the companions to pour water over the affected area, and that was the end of the matter. He dealt with this situation in a calm, kind and level-headed way using simple words of instruction.

If anger is always your immediate reaction to your child's mistake, this will only serve to alienate her. It may even set her on a path of avoiding you and being dishonest because she fears your harsh reaction. Instead, be calm and inviting, using words and actions that will bring her comfort and reassurance.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said to his companions: "You have been sent to make things easy and not to make them difficult."

It's also important to make a distinction between someone who is committing a sin out of ignorance or immaturity versus someone who is consistently doing it out of spite or stubbornness. The latter may have to be dealt with differently.

"Your Lord has written (prescribed) Mercy for Himself, so that if any of you does evil in ignorance, and thereafter repents and does righteous good deeds (by obeying Allah), then surely, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (6:54).



5. EXPLAINING the Reasoning

As parents, sometimes the easiest go-to explanation for everything is “because I said so.” But when the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) instructed someone to fix an error in his/her actions, he would always give the reason or explanation behind that instruction.

The Prophet (ﷺ) passed by a companion whose thighs were not covered, so he said to him: “Cover your thighs, for the thigh is ‘awrah.”

This is a simple example but it succinctly illustrates the point. He doesn’t sternly say, “Cover your thighs!” without explaining the reason. He said *cover it because it is ‘awrah* (and obviously, the companions already understood the meaning of ‘awrah, which for men is the private area between the navel and knee).

If your children are doing something wrong, tell them to stop and explain why the action is incorrect (then, give them an alternative action that is better). Naturally, the explanations you give your children have to be age-appropriate. But don’t lie or avoid the explanation altogether because it may lead to an “awkward” conversation. You should give them an appropriate, truthful explanation so they understand that you are not exploiting your parental authority over them.

This will also foster your child’s trust in you, knowing that when you ask her to do something or avoid something, there is a reason.



6. Showing COMPASSION AND ACKNOWLEDGING Remorse

Abu Hurairah (ra) narrates: While we were sitting with the Prophet a man came and said, "O Messenger of Allah, I am doomed!" He said, "What happened?" He said, "I had intercourse with my wife when I was fasting (in Ramadan)." The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Are you able to free a slave?" The man said, "No." He said, "Are you able to fast for two consecutive months?" The man said, "No." He said, "Can you feed sixty poor people?" The man said, "No."

Then the Prophet (ﷺ) remained silent for a while, and whilst we were like that, a large vessel of dates was brought to the Prophet (ﷺ), and he said, "Where is the one who was asking?" The man said, "Here I am." He said, "Take these and give them in charity." The man said, "Is there anyone more poor than me, O Messenger of Allah? For there is no household between the two mountains (of Madina) that is poorer than my household." The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) smiled until his pre-molar teeth could be seen. Then he said, "Feed it to your family."

This man who committed a serious sin came to the Prophet to seek his help, and instead of being punished or severely scolded, he actually left that gathering with food for his family! If this kind of compassion and understanding was shown to a grown man, it should surely be shown at least equally to children.

The caveat here is that the man was not arrogant or stubbornly repeating his sin. Rather, he was remorseful and was sincerely seeking advice on how to rectify his mistake.



As parents, we should remove ourselves from the notion that every error made by our children must be met with severe punishment to "teach them a lesson." If your child makes a mistake, then becomes remorseful and seeks your forgiveness, meet her with a compassion and mercy that complements your concern. This doesn't mean letting your child get off scot-free or allowing her to repeat mistakes without facing certain consequences. But make a conscious decision to choose gentleness, compassion and mercy, even in the midst of disciplining.

Your compassion will soften your child's heart toward you and she will understand that she can be open and honest with you about her future struggles without fearing your overreaction.



7. Avoiding Favouritism

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) did not play favourites. When it came to addressing the punishable errors of people in his community, he did not prefer one person over another.

The people of Quraish were worried about a well-off, honourable lady from Bani Makhzum who had committed theft and was facing the punishment for it. They asked Usama ibn Zaid to intercede with the Prophet (ﷺ) on the woman's behalf.

When Usama spoke about that to the Prophet (ﷺ), he said to Zaid, "Do you try to intercede for somebody in a case connected with Allah's prescribed punishments?" Then he got up and delivered a sermon saying, "What destroyed the nations preceding you, was that if a noble amongst them stole, they would forgive him, and if a poor person amongst them stole, they would inflict Allah's legal punishment on him. By Allah, if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad stole, I would cut off her hand."

If your children do something incorrect, don't let your love and loyalty blind you to their errors and cause you to become biased toward them. Rather, your love and loyalty should lead you to ensuring that your children fix their negative behaviours. Once they transgress certain limits and step on other people's rights, it becomes necessary for them to apologize and make amends with those whom were wronged.

Avoiding favouritism also means being fair to both male and female children alike. Don't constantly be harsh in response to

your daughters' mistakes while simultaneously being lenient with your sons' mistakes. This is the kind of cultural baggage that is detrimental to our families.



8. knowing when to be direct AND when to be indirect



In some cases, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) would not confront people about their mistakes directly. Instead, he would make general statements in their presence.

The Prophet (ﷺ) once said: “What is the matter with some people who raise their gaze to the heavens whilst they are praying?” He spoke out strongly against it, to the extent that he said, “Let them stop it, or their eyesight will be taken away.”

He had surely seen the individuals who were doing this action, but he chose to advise the community in a general and indirect way instead of speaking directly to those who erred.

Using this approach can have several benefits. You can turn it into a “teachable moment” and teach your whole family about a certain issue without necessarily casting blame on any one of your children. In addition, by not identifying who the individuals at fault are, you stave off negative reactions from others. It also conceals an embarrassing mistake and avoids putting the person who erred on the defensive.

This approach only works if you speak in general terms and the other family members don’t know who is being referred to – if they already know, the approach essentially becomes passive-aggressive and will only yield negative effects.

In many instances, the Prophet (ﷺ) also corrected people’s errors directly and advised them privately so as not to expose their mistakes. Adopting this method into your parenting repertoire also has many benefits as it saves the child from the ridicule of others and may make it easier to for him or her to accept your advice.



9. Dealing with mistakes Right away

Avoiding awkward or difficult situations will not make an issue go away. Avoidance is a foreign concept in the Sunnah. The Prophet (ﷺ) often used to hasten to address people's mistakes and would avoid putting it off.

This point is evident in the incident of the three men who, after discovering how much the Prophet (ﷺ) worshiped Allah, had considered their personal worship insufficient. They decided amongst themselves to do more acts of worship. One of the men said, "I will offer the prayer throughout the night forever." The other man said, "I will fast throughout the year and will never break my fast." The third man said, "I will keep away from women and will never marry."

The Prophet (ﷺ) heard about this and came to the men, asking, "Are you the same people who said such-and-such? By Allah, I am more submissive to Allah and more afraid of Him than you; yet I fast and break my fast, I do sleep and I also marry women. So he who does not follow my tradition in religion, is not from me (not one of my followers)."

He didn't wait for these men to come back and approach him. Instead, he went to where they were and addressed their misconceptions right away. They had made a serious error by committing to perform acts of worship that were not a part of the Prophet's teachings. The more serious the error, the more likely he (ﷺ) would try to deal with it right away.

Kids don't often have a great memory span. By the time the day passes, they may have already forgotten that they made a mistake to begin with, or no longer see what "the big deal" is. Waiting to fix their mistakes until the next day when you're not as busy might not yield the same effective results as you handling the matter on the spot (when possible). Your interest in fixing their errors will also wane the longer you put it off. By the next day, you may be too distracted to even remember the incident.

Keeping this in mind, a parent should still be aware enough to choose a suitable time to speak with the child. If that means waiting until the other parent comes home, until after dinner or until after the baby is asleep, that's okay.

Responding to their errors in a timely way indicates to your kids that you are (rightly) concerned about what they said or did, and will always take the means to correcting their errors. They come to accept that they will surely and quickly face the consequences of misbehaving.



10. ACcepting AND prAising the GOOD

If we see our kids doing something wrong, we sometimes become blinded by anger. We can easily lose sight of the fact that one mistake might have been made in the midst of numerous good things that we don't acknowledge.

The Prophet (ﷺ) was once in the presence of some young girls who were singing and beating a hand-drum (duff). The songs were eulogizing some of their forefathers who had been killed at the Battle of Badr. In the midst of their singing, one girl sang, "Among us there is a Prophet who knows the future." The Prophet (ﷺ) said to her, "Do not say this; say what you were saying before."

Although they said something incorrect, the Prophet (ﷺ) still accepted what was good and only asked them to stop what was wrong. He didn't become angry and ask them to completely stop singing. When you treat a child (or anyone for that matter) in this way, they will feel respected even while you are asking him or her to stop an incorrect action.

Another significant example is of one Muslim man at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) who was punished on several occasions because he used to drink alcohol. One day he was brought to the Prophet on the same charge yet again and was lashed. Following that, a man among the people said, "O Allah, curse him! How frequently he has been brought (to the Prophet on such a charge)!" The Prophet replied to the man saying, "Do not curse him, for by Allah, I know he loves Allah and His Apostle."

This man was undoubtedly committing a very serious sin. Yet, even after enacting the punishment upon him, the Prophet (ﷺ) quickly came to his defense, acknowledging that there was still much good within the man's heart!



Put things into perspective and try not to lose sight of all the wonderful and kind things your child did over the course of a day simply because he made one mistake. Just as you address a mistake and try to rectify it, you should also strive to continuously acknowledge your child's good qualities and the positive things he has said and done.



Your children are an *amanah* (trust) given to you by Allah (سبحانه و تعالی). Caring for them with mercy, compassion and understanding is a heavy and serious responsibility. Applying these 10 principles has to be done in the spirit of care and wisdom; they cannot all be applied to every situation and with every child.

Don't always wait for your child to make mistakes in order to correct him or her. Address mistakes before they happen by being in a consistent state of teaching and encouraging positive behaviour. But of course, regardless of how effective we are at teaching children right from wrong, they will make mistakes (as we all do). It's in our nature as human beings to make mistakes.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was an expert in human nature. He didn't expect unrealistic things from people. Nor should we expect unrealistic levels of obedience, maturity or behaviour from our children. He knew that people were not created to be perfect, but they were created to strive to worship God in the best way they could. Our responsibility has never been to be or to produce perfect people. Rather, our responsibility is to strive, and to teach our little ones how to strive too.

These pointers are far from all-encompassing. They are only meant to give you a glimpse into the amazing wisdom the Prophet (ﷺ) employed in his teaching methods. He truly was the best and most effective teacher.

May the peace and blessings of God be upon him.

Source:

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