



Your Child Development Guide

Q & A Series

Child Development



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The conceptualization and recommendations stated in the responses are very general and purely based on the limited information that was provided in the question. The answers are solely the responsibility of the counselors, in their attempt to tackle challenges and problems facing the questioners, with no any responsibility whatsoever on OnIslam.net. The questions are slightly edited to keep their originality.

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Introduction

The implementation of positive early childhood development (0-3 years) is one of the toughest missions in life. It is also the base upon which the coming years of the child's development relies.

Mothers- especially single mothers – are real heroines, taking care of these little creatures who are both a blessing and a great responsibility.

For them, we offer this short e-book as a guideline on how to raise positive children and take note of their growth and development.

Onislam.net's counseling team is honored to provide this help and support to the great mission of motherhood. We have the pleasure to present our first special coverage of parenting topics.

In this e-book, mothers will find answers to over 15 questions about early childhood development (0-3 years) received from Onislam visitors and answered by a team of professional counselors.

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More Attached to His Father than to Me

I am a working woman who is out at work five days a week from 6am to 5pm. My son is seven months old. Due to a lack of child care, my husband works on the weekends and I work on weekdays. My son is with his father five days a week for 24 hours.



The problem is that I have started feeling jealous because my son is more attached to his father than me. As a mother, this really hurts me. I try not to feel this way, but I am feeling tense. I even cry when my son turns towards his father if he hears his voice from another room – he keeps searching for him, even when he is with me. Please help me in this regard. I know this is not good as he is his father, but still I am unable to control my feelings.

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Social Counselor Hwaa Irfan answers:

As salamu `alaykum sister and may the new Hijri year be a blessing to the ties of kinship within your family insha'Allah.

Alhamdulillah, your son has a parent he can turn to for comfort. So many children today do not experience that comfort and sense of safety that a parent can give. And, alhumdulillah, you have an understanding husband who, despite his position of responsibility at work, is able to balance his commitments between work and home. This is far better than having a nanny to whom the child will grow attached, leaving you and your husband unable to establish the kind of parent-child relationship in which your son seeks guidance and support from you as he grows older. You must give thanks to Allah (SWT) for this blessing.

It is never easy for a mother when she has to leave her child and go out to work, whether this is through desire or necessity. Separation can cause much anxiety for both the child and the mother, which places greater emphasis on *how* a mother spends time with her child rather than *how much*. We all need to feel emotionally secure, and this is more so for a child who is coming to terms with the world that they have been born into. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was aware of this need for emotional security

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to the extent that he would pick up a crying child when the mother was praying.

Your son will not understand why you feel anxious, but he will feel discomfort from what you are experiencing. Children are sensitive to the emotions of others, but are not equipped to understand those emotions. As a professional woman, you are likely to be tired at the end of the working day. You have not had the chance to relax with your son as his father has done. Because of this, you are not privy to the changing needs of your son, from moment-to-moment, and from one developmental stage to the next. Add to this your anxiety over your relationship with your son and you are not left with much emotional space in which to relax with one another.

So first of all, discuss the issue with your husband from the point of view of ways in which you can "share" your son a bit more. It is better to have a common understanding so that there is a joint approach to the problem.

Secondly, it is important for you to accept that it is quite natural for your son to turn towards the sound of his father's voice. If there is a tendency to prevent your son from doing this, it might cause anxiety/fear in your son, as he will not understand why you are preventing him from getting what he wants. It might also have the negative impact of making your son stubborn

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towards anything you ask of him. Instead, take a deep breath, put a smile on your face and a smile in your heart, pick up your son and carry him to his father. This does not mean that you hand him over, or leave him with his father, but it does mean that your son gets to experience both of you in the same space for a period of time, no matter how short.

Thirdly, after you arrive home and you have put the working day behind you, take half an hour to discuss your husband's day. By doing so, you will also learn about your son and what he has or has not been doing. This will help keep you in touch with both your growing child and the needs of your husband – sometimes we can assume too much! In this way, you help to strengthen the ties of relationship between the three of you, and to be more familiar with your son, as you talk, play, and spend time with him.

Fourthly, once you and your husband agree on how you are going to share your son, implement a routine that will allow your son to adjust. For instance, the preparation for bedtime on weekdays (the days you work) can be your responsibility in terms of feeding, bathing, and putting him to sleep. On weekends it can be your husband's responsibility. Just as importantly, there must be times each day when you all do things together, as from this your son gets to experience you as one family, and is therefore more likely to accept you, making

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both you and your husband the significant others in your son's life.

Prophet Muhammad said: "He who does not respect the elderly, or is not merciful to the young... is not of my Nation." (Abu Dawud, #4921, and At-Tirmidhi #1925)

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How Can I Make My Three-Year-Old Love Allah?

My daughter is three years old. I feel it is the right age to start introducing the concept of the existence of Allah.

However, I do not know how to begin; I feel this is a very abstract concept to be grasped by a three-year-old. However, at the same time, I feel it is necessary to start introducing the concept into her awareness; not only the existence of Allah, but the fact that he is the Creator, that his Will is the only thing that can make things happen or not happen, that he is the one who gives us money, food, and people we love, and that we should try to be good people and not do bad things so that Allah loves us and rewards us with Jannah.



I am afraid I may say it in a way that will intimidate her instead of making her understand the concept and love Allah. Please advise me whether it is too early for this or if it is the right time to start. I also need to know the most appropriate way in which to deliver these messages.

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Parenting Counselor Dr. Mona Younes answers:

As-salamu `alaykum sister.

Sister, masha'Allah, I commend you, because although your beloved daughter is still very young, you are very much aware of what should be done in order to provide her with emotional stability and healthy psychological development.

It is clear from your words that you are aware of WHAT should be done; what you are asking is HOW to do it. To understand how to commence the dialogue about Allah as the Creator, His Will, His characteristics, and ultimately his instructions, let us go one step back and try to understand the needs and development of the child.

"An interesting fact that is often not known by parents is that 90% of a child's brain develops during the first five years of their life. The time of an infant's brain development is vital for preparing the child's intelligence, emotional stability, and personality." (A citation from a recently published article of Dr. Hanan Dover, an Adjunct lecturer at the University of Western Sydney).

In other words, the brain is not fully developed when a child is born, in contrast to other organs. This is why a child's primary caregivers (parents or otherwise) can have such a tremendous influence over his emotional and psychological development

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during the first five years of his life. Doesn't this scientific fact remind you of something? It reminds us of the Hadeeth of Prophet Mohammed (P.B.U.H.): *"Every newborn has the correct instinct; his parents make him Jewish, Christian, or a fire worshipper."*

This shows how much a child's experience – and consequently his development and character – is shaped, molded, and impacted by those surrounding him during his childhood. That's why it is very important to interact with the child in a positive way according to his needs. Hence, it is important for parents and those surrounding the child to talk to him, play, sing, and tell stories, as it is through these acts that we are able to 'teach' abstract concepts in a very simple yet effective way. This is so important, because talking, playing, singing, loving, caring, storytelling, and living together in a passionate manner will, insha'Allah, lead to a healthy, emotionally well-adjusted child. Don't forget the Prophetic advice: *"Play with your son [for] seven [years], then discipline him [for] seven [years], then be his friend for seven years, then give free rein to him."* This, of course, goes for both genders. According to the Hadeeth, we are still in the first phase, the phase of 'playing'.

What has all that to do with your question? This is the core of the answer. What you have to do is try to simply convert all abstract concepts (Allah, Creator, His Will, His Blessings...) whilst doing all the previous actions. Children at that age do not need excessive academic or educational activities to develop their

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brain. They need to be nurtured, within the context of their daily life. Here is a set of examples:

Allah, the Creator

If you want to 'teach' your beloved little four-year-old daughter about Allah being our Creator, walk with her in the garden and admire the beauty of flowers. In a very natural context, smile and spontaneously say, "Masha'Allah, what a beautiful flower. Why shouldn't it be beautiful? Isn't Allah its creator?" Look at the sun and relate its creation to Allah. "Masha'Allah, how big is the ocean, the sea, the sun, the sky... Allah is its Creator, Allah is the Greatest, the most Powerful, the most Capable and the most Merciful."

This should be happening in the context of normal daily life – when opening the window and feeling a slight breeze entering the room, when smelling delicious food, when admiring the smiling face of a baby. "Masha'Allah, how Great and Merciful is Allah. It is only Allah who can create such beauty, such perfection."

Blessings of Allah

It is very important at this early age to pinpoint the blessings and bounty of Allah. Again, this has to happen in the context of the routine of daily life. This can be done very easily. "Do you know why we are able to hear? Because Allah blessed us with

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ears. Without His Blessings, we wouldn't be able to hear, see, smell, or breathe." Let your daughter hear your heartbeats, smell roses and other flowers, touch running water, and differentiate between a smooth surface and a rocky one. Always explain what it would be like without each blessing. For example, what would it be like if we were not able to differentiate between woolen clothes and those made of silk or cotton? We wouldn't be able to choose the right clothes to wear when we feel cold and when it is winter. How awful would it be if we could not smell? We wouldn't be able to differentiate between fresh and sour milk, and so on.

Allah and our deeds

It is very important to nurture our children with a passion and love towards Allah. Children at your daughter's age are unable to discern between right and wrong. Hence, it is up to us as parents to nurture their emotions in a beneficial and helpful manner.

One of the ways to do that is to associate 'good deeds' with the Will of Allah (SWT), and His Contentment. For example, "Allah loves those who respect and obey their parents" or "Allah is most pleased with you when you are doing your homework so you can learn, because Allah loves his creations to gain knowledge through education." Again, citing some words from Dr. Hanan's article:

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"By honoring Allah's name and loving characteristics, you are aligning the love of Allah and encouraging good in a way that makes sense to a young child. In this way, a child's brain can be nurtured with love and good thoughts, and the cultivation of good and righteous behavior manifested."

At last, do not forget to make duaa. May Allah bless your little child with the right understanding, a strong faith, and real love and passion towards Allah and Islam.



So Selfish, So Young

How can I deal with a jealous child who likes to have everything for himself and hates his brother and sisters?

Social Counselor Soha Elsaman answers:



As-salamu `alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

Thank you for entrusting us with your question. We ask Allah Most High to guide us to the right way.

My answer to your question would have benefited from some more detail regarding your son's behavior with his schoolmates and his family peers, as this could indicate the source of his problem: Is he self-centered and thus spends most of his time by himself or is he more of a social child?

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If he lacks the will or tendency to play with his peers at school and wants everything for himself, this could be the result of many things, including a childhood disorder that is characterized by a marked deficit in communication and social interaction, a preoccupation with fantasy, language impairment, abnormal behavior such as repetitive acts, and excessive attachment to certain objects. Intellectual impairment or emotional neglect could also be contributing causes. Such children always prefer to be alone; they usually have no friends, as they do not share in playing or socializing. They also avoid group situations and are reluctant to talk in public to avoid being discredited or made fun of by others. Even a bad diet can have a negative effect on behavior.

The most common case is the jealousy found between siblings, which results from excessive pampering by parents. If this pampering then suddenly stops with the birth of a new baby, children usually attribute this to the newborn sister or brother, who they believe took all the family's attention. They want the attention that they have been used to and resent the change.

Another possibility is that your son may be feeling a bit lost between two siblings. His older brother is the oldest child and you may be treating him as a grown-up by getting him to share in decision-making, whereas the middle child does not share the same involvement because of his age. He feels that his younger

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brother or sister takes all your love and affection from him, so he ends up with no responsibility and no attention!

As for the treatment, if you think his behavior is likely to be caused by autism or another disorder, then I recommend that you take him to a specialist. However, if you think that it may be a normal feeling of jealousy, then you can try the following tips:

If you blame him for misbehaving, then stop at once. Don't say things like "Why do you hate your brothers and sisters? Why do you want everything for yourself?" Rather, imply this without referring directly to him, as this will cause him to persist in his behavior.

Give him more responsibility (if you are not doing so already) so that he may share some of the decision-making or home duties.

When you give him toys, select toys that must be played with by more than one child so that he will have to involve his brother or sister.

When you teach his younger brother or sister, encourage him to come and teach them with you and praise him for his mastery of a particular topic.

Tell him stories from the Qur'an, especially the story of Yusuf (peace and blessings be upon him) and his brothers, and

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indirectly explain to him how Satan made the brothers hate Yusuf.

Try to get him into friendly relationships, particularly within the family context.

Finally, we would like to wish you all the best with your son. Please don't hesitate to contact us again about this issue or any other.

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When and Why Do Our Kids Get So Angry?

As-salamu `alaykum. My baby gets a lot of care from me, or from her grandmother when I am at work, yet she gets angry whenever I take something from her or prevent her from doing something that could harm her. She screams hysterically and gets very upset, although nobody gets angry with her.



We all try to calm her down when she reaches that state, but as soon as she stops crying she starts doing dangerous actions again; if we interfere she cries again and even bites and hits. We try to distract her and draw her attention to something else, but to no avail. She is like this all day long. Should I start to punish her? How should I deal with such a stubborn child? Please help.

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Social Counselor Soha Elsaman answers:

As-salamu `alaykum.

Thank you my dear sister for your trust in us and for your question, which is a common problem for many of us these days.

Children are capable of perceiving and understanding everything in their environment from very young age. Parents have an important obligation to shape their children's behavior before it is too late. What I mean by 'too late' is relative to the child's age range. We also have to understand that each and every period of a child's life requires a different style of handling, which we will touch on later. So, if we don't apply the correct method of upbringing to the correct age range, it becomes too late to use it in later years. That is why it is crucial to educate rather than to remedy.

As for your daughter, she finds crying the easiest and most successful way (from her perspective) to get things done. We must understand that children are intelligent (from a very young age) and they know how to achieve what they want without comprehending its suitability or lack thereof.

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People almost always think that children do not cry on purpose but they cry because they don't know any other way to express themselves. This understanding contradicts all studies and research, as young children actually know what they want but can't distinguish between what is good (beneficial) and what is bad (hazardous). Therefore, children know that crying is the most successful way of attracting attention and, consequently, ensuring their needs and requirements are attended to (such as acquiring desirable objects). That is evident in your daughter's approach; she cries if you don't give her what she wants and she cries more until you fulfill her requirements.

There is also another misconception about what we call "anxious children." No child is born completely anxious or completely calm but there are several things that can influence the degree of a child's anxiety, such as:

Food

There are certain types of food that can make children hyperactive and unsettled, such as an excess of sweets, chocolate, and sugar. Some families also let their children drink tea as they claim that a little tea is beneficial to their health and does no harm, which is a misconception.

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Recreation and entertainment

Some toys make excessively loud sounds, which increase some children's tendency to be anxious.

Balanced playtime and educational time

It is very important to maintain a good balance between children's play time and educational time in the home. We should start educating our children from the age of six months (with what is suitable for their perception at that age). Some families leave their children to play 100 percent of the time, which makes children bored with their toys and so they look for other objects (potentially hazardous) to play with.

Providing all that children ask for

Another major problem is when families immediately provide almost everything that their children ask for, without a valid reason.

Different styles of upbringing

Some children experience inconsistent styles of upbringing from different members of the family (grandparents versus parents).

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Absence of daily routine

Major disruption of sleep time (going to bed late); children sleeping out of their beds (with parents, for example); children insisting on eating and drinking from specific items; or insisting on having what they want to eat.

Below are the remedies for the above problems:

- Choose the right food for your child and cut down on too many sweets and sugar. Try to feed your child organic and natural food. Here is a little trick you can try: slice some fruit on a little plate and put it on your child's table. Then get a small artificial plant and put your child's name on some leaves. When one piece of fruit is eaten (or a cup of milk is drunk), let the child stick a leaf with their name on it on the plant.
- Fill your child's time with positive educational material and activities such as storytelling and role playing. This will help attract the child's attention and also add positively to the child's education. Also, encourage painting (any shapes) and hang the paintings in the bedroom.

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- Teach your child to share and not be selfish. You can do this by allowing your child to play for a short while with other children's toys and then take them away – even if your child cries afterwards.
- Agree on a consistent method of treating your child. For example, if a child is punished by the father, the mother will not interfere and not try to defend the child without understanding the situation, and vice versa. Don't ever allow a child to scream uncontrollably or hit an adult or become out of control without a proper punishment. You must take a stance by (for example) not giving the child what he or she wants or putting the child in their bed until the tantrum stops.
- Introduce a daily routine into your child's life: Children must sleep early and for a long enough time in order for their nervous system and body to benefit from sleep. Be calm in the face of a child's insistence and anger. Don't pay much attention if your child cries over trivial things such as wanting to take a specific toy to bed.

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Remember to be firm but kind with your child. Remember that children may have to be punished by having some toys taken away from them or being put to bed for a while.



The Possible Reasons behind Our Kids' Misbehavior

My three-year-old hits me and screams loudly throughout the day. I have tried everything to get this behavior to subside, but he continues so much that I am constantly anxious from his yelling and whining. What can I do?



Social Counselor Soha Elsaman answers:

As-salamu `alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

Dear Sister, thank you for trusting us with your problem. We ask Allah Most High, Most Merciful, to bring calm to your child.

Your child's case is common and we have certainly seen this pattern of behavior before in very young children. In our experience, such behavior is usually linked to certain stimulating acts from the adults dealing with the child. To be more specific, we think that parents and immediate family could be, without knowing it, supporting this kind of misbehavior in their children.

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I will touch base on a few mistakes that adults often make that could be directly related to this problem:

1. A loving family could inadvertently encourage bad behavior in youngsters (less than 3 years) in the form of jokes, such as getting the child to hit an adult or abuse them, rather than taking a stand against such behavior. Such encouragement from adults will only encourage children to repeat the behavior. The problem with that approach is that children are very intelligent beings, and when they grow a bit older and we then try to discipline them for the same actions, it is too late and too confusing. For the child, nothing has changed. The child is used to doing whatever he or she wants (hitting, kicking, and mistreating others) but now, the same people are unhappy with this behavior – that is confusing to the child. The right way is not to tolerate such behavior from the outset.

The child is testing you and pushing his boundaries to see how much further he can go and how much more he can get away with. A firm stand from the beginning would have put all these problems to bed. **Children need to live within the boundaries that parents establish for them**, so long as these boundaries are reasonable for a child to live, grow, and prosper in a normal way.

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They must also adhere to rules within the household; for instance, if the food is not eaten by a certain time, then the parents should take it away until the next meal. When children are hungry, they will learn to eat all their food with good manners.

Also, a sleeping routine should be followed so that children are put to bed at a specific time each evening, for example 8:00 p.m. If children are not accustomed to sleeping early, then the parents should train them to do so and they will adapt to this lifestyle very quickly.

Although it can be painful in the beginning, it will certainly be worth it in the end. If your child misbehaves again (hits you) you must tap him on his hand and do not smile at all, even if he cries. You must remember that he cries now for the sake of his future. If your child kicks and screams for something he wants in others' hands, you should take him away from it, put him in his bed, and tell him that that is no way to get something he wants; rather, he must ask for it politely. You can also deny him something he wants because it is inappropriate or unsuitable for his age.

2. The extended absence of parents from the home every day means that parents, especially the mother, are unable to

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discipline their children. The amount of time left does not allow parents to successfully implement disciplinary measures, as that is often time consuming and requires observation and follow up. That time may not be available to working parents. If this is the case in your situation, you should seriously consider changing your lifestyle to accommodate your child's needs and give him more of your time.

In the end, I ask Allah again to give you strength and to bring calm to your child, Ameen.

I encourage you to stay in touch with us. If you are not sure how to implement any measure please ask, and we will always try to serve you as best we can.

Jazaka Allahu khayrun.



Biter Child, Biter Mother?

I have a three-year-old old son who always scratches and bites other children. My friend visited us with her two-year-old daughter and my son went up to her and pinched and scratched her cheek very badly. Then a couple minutes later he BIT her.



Whenever there are other small children around, he is a bully and is either pinching, biting, or pushing. I don't know how to make him realize that this is bad behavior and how to stop him from doing this. I get so angry and end up giving him a spanking and a time out. What should I do? Should I bite him back?

Parenting Counselor Du`aa Gamal answers:

As-salam `alaykum, sister.

May Allah bless you and your little son.

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Thanks to Allah that you are a mother. This means that Paradise is at your feet, as our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Paradise is at the feet of the mother." Your child is a gift from Allah and it is very important to carry a great responsibility in raising him physically, emotionally, religiously, and morally. So you have to understand your child and why he's biting.

Your son is not a bad boy; some kids bite more than others, so don't be overwhelmed or confused. Alhamdulillah, he is still very young and you can still instill manners in him.

First of all, sit alone and try to figure out the reasons behind the biting. **There are many reasons behind children's biting:**

- Perhaps he doesn't understand that biting, pinching, and scratching are forbidden. This is just his way of rebelling.
- Maybe he's trying a new way to get closer to you and to the children in the groups.
- He hasn't yet learned how to communicate effectively in other ways. He doesn't have any verbal way to show his frustration. Physical activities are much easier and a much more natural course, especially for a toddler. If another child takes his toy, he may react by hitting or biting.

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- Some children feel they are endangered and bite in self-defense. Maybe he is overwhelmed by his surroundings and bites as a means of regaining control.
- Changes happen in the family that affect him, such as the death of a grandparent or a mother returning to work.
- Perhaps he, like some children, experiences a strong need for autonomy and control.
- Biting is a powerful way to show other kids his weapon and how to hurt them with it.
- Maybe your child is under some kind of stress.
- Perhaps he has a new playmate from whom he is picking up this behavior.

So, just watch to see when and how your child bites. Maybe you will notice a pattern. If your son bites, remain calm and think about what the child experienced just before the incident.

I was facing the **same problem** with my son, who is now two and a half years old. He was a biter between the ages of about eighteen months and two years. He used to bite me, his father, and the kids in the daycare center who were around his age, whether he was laughing and playing or angry and crying. I didn't know why this cute baby had become a biter, but I finally figured out that he wasn't really trying to hurt me (or others) but that he just had a lot of feelings and that's how he expressed them. When I saw him coming to bite me, I said "No biting, please hug" or "Let's play or run together" and he gradually

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cooperated. Actually, we both learned because I had to learn to observe in order to help him put his energy into playing instead of biting.

Now, how can you deal with your child when he bites?

- Avoid rewarding the behavior in any way. If your child bites you, don't laugh, even if it doesn't hurt.
- It's enough at this point to show him – by your facial expression – how angry you are about this behavior.
- Tell him that he must not bite under any circumstances. "No," said sharply, would be an appropriate response.
- Convey to him immediately and clearly that biting isn't acceptable. He's still too young for long explanations about why biting is bad.
- Try to avoid physical punishment as much as you can because, for a child this age, punishing him for the behavior isn't very effective at getting him to stop.
- Don't spank or bite your child if he bites; his aggressive acts will stop when adults stop them.
- Help him learn to negotiate with words rather than by biting or pinching. Ask him to use words to tell you what he needs.
- Help your child find more appropriate outlets for aggressive feelings and frustration, and encourage him to develop self-control.

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- If your child bites your guest's child, remove your child from the situation right away and help him to calm down so he learns to handle emotions differently next time.

Finally, I pray to Allah to bless your family and hope to hear from you again soon, insha'Allah.

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Your Guide to Disciplining a Baby

As-salamu `alaykum . My problem concerns my niece, who is eighteen months old. Her mom works and takes her to a daycare center. I go to college but I spend a lot of time with her. Now the problem is that I don't know how to discipline a child of



this age. I feel like she understands whatever goes on from the emotion I show on my face. I want to know exactly how to handle a baby like her so that when she does something wrong I can take care of it without causing any misfortune. Sometimes, when she does something wrong, I make harsh sounds; sometimes, I tap her on her hands a bit hard. She does not cry because I know it's not painful, but she shows this look of fright and blinks her eyes whenever she sees a hand raised. My heart is wrenched by this so I immediately hug her and kiss her.

She then thinks she has done nothing wrong and repeats what I have forbidden her to do. When I raise my voice she

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immediately stops. I love her so much and I don't want her to be pained in any way, yet I would love her to understand when she is being disciplined. Do you think what I am doing is wrong? If so, how what should I do? I am very much against spanking kids so how can I discipline her? One other thing I have noticed lately is that she cries a lot in her sleep and mumbles as if she is fighting. I sometimes wonder whether I am the reason for this. Her mum sometimes does exactly what I do and she is worried too. We have started to think that it may also be a result of the daycare center she goes to. Please could you help me with this situation? Salam and thank you.

Parenting Counselor Soha Elsaman answers:

As-salamu `alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

All praise is due to Allah Most Merciful and peace and blessings on his Messenger Muhammad.

Jazaka Allahu khayran, sister, for your trust in us and your love for your niece.

Unfortunately, a large number of us don't know that children from birth to the age of three are learning and exploring themselves and the immediate world around them through the aid of the mother and the family. Children need to be guided through their first encounters of their environment. This guidance can take place through movement, voice, role play,

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and so on. Children also need proper feeding and caring from the mother at this age. Children deprived of their mothers suffer psychologically, depending on the time they spend away from maternal care and love.

There is also a false belief amongst us that childcare places help young children to be either more sociable or train them to gradually become more compatible with school life. This is, for the most part, wrong because children need to live according to their age. Try to imagine, and you will see that to the child, one year in a two- or three-year-old child's life is a relatively long time. Children have certain needs at each and every stage of their life. Their needs at this early stage, as we mentioned above, are feeding, love, caring, and learning about themselves and their surrounding environment from their mothers.

Additionally, the majority of childcare institutions are there to make money; some are not faithful in their services and are overcrowded, with too many children and impatient staff. In such circumstances, improper handling of children and their needs could easily happen. For instance, we had an incident in the UK where a hidden camera went into a very prestigious childcare institute and filmed a wide range of child abuse taking place. Of course, these children were so small, scared, and below the age of proper speech that they could not tell their

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parents what was happening to them. Bringing up children should be the most important job in any family agenda. Mothers should try to stay with their children, especially at this age, just to bridge the children through this critical stage of their lives.

Regarding your niece crying and mumbling in her sleep, you should first check if there is any related medical condition such as teething or stomach upsets that may be causing this. If not, then I would say that it is from the daycare center that she goes to. You then need to keep a close eye on her during this time as she is unable to talk well enough to tell you what is really going on. Also, try to keep in touch with the other parents with children in the same center to see if they are experiencing similar situations with their children.

The best thing of all, sister, is to take your niece out of daycare and into maternal and family care (the first school of mankind). What your niece is probably experiencing at the moment is lack of security, but because she can't express herself in language she cries and mumbles as if she is fighting.

As for teaching her manners and so on, let me tell you that she is a fortunate child to have a loving aunt like you. Generally, children should be disciplined from a very young age, primarily to prevent them from harming themselves. For instance, a child

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does not know if a cup full of hot liquid (tea or coffee) is hot until they touch the cup.

Children try their way with adults and test how far they can go without punishment. So you are right to warn the child against harmful or improper actions by staring, raising your voice, or tapping her hand. However, you need to stop negating your action immediately afterwards, as this will confuse her and do more harm than good.

There is nothing wrong with what you are doing with her as long as you don't send her mixed messages by consecutively punishing and cuddling her, as we mentioned above.

Also, try to give her alternative options to what you don't want her to do. For instance, if she wants to hold something hazardous or unsuitable for her age, offer her something safe that resembles the thing she wants, as giving her alternatives will teach her to look for good things and avoid the bad. If she picks up some bad words or actions from the daycare, you can counter it by singing some songs to her with new words to help her forget what she picked up. If she is after something unsuitable, don't give it to her, even if she screams or shouts; you must hold your position and teach her to respect it.

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Finally, I wish you all the best. Please keep in touch with us for further consultation or if you have any other questions.

May Allah give you success and patience with her and reward you to the utmost, Ameen.



Toilet Training Gone Wrong

My daughter is almost three years old. I toilet trained her six months ago, and she was doing well – she learned in one week. She was good for five months, but last month she started to wet herself almost once a day. I don't know what has gone wrong after she was doing so well – she never used to wet herself at all. The only change that took place was that she started to go to childcare once a week. Could this be the reason, even though she likes childcare? What should I do? Please help me!



Social Counselor Hwaa Irfan answers:

As salamu 'alaykum concerned parent.

Potty training or toilet training can be one of those phases in child-parent relations that test the mettle of both, especially if parents have a busy schedule. We can sometimes forget that the process of learning when and how to go to the toilet is not a mechanical act that comes with an on-off switch! Each child faces new challenges differently, just as the developmental

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hurdles occur at different phases for each unique child. You were extremely fortunate to have initially trained your daughter in the time-frame of one week, but in general it takes a little longer.

In general a two- to three-year-old child still has a perception of themselves as being a part of the mother and the mother a part of them, and they are still learning how to manage their feelings. Consequently, one could say that your ability to have trained her initially was influenced by the nature of your relationship with her at the time. She was in safe surroundings, surroundings that she was familiar with, and she had developed some notion of what she could or could not do, and how those around her would react.

Conversely, with childcare, as much as she may seem to like it, your daughter is facing a new environment and new relationships, none of which can be like the relationship she had or has with you. And that is probably coupled with the fact that wherever she is at the time of the call of nature, she is not able to get to the toilet/potty in time. It would help to establish understanding of her childcare life so that you can observe whether there are any factors involved that have contributed towards her not being able to sustain what she has been taught to do.

Meanwhile, back at home, take a tension-free approach towards training her again, without expectations. Observe her bodily patterns and behavior so that you can grow accustomed again

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as to when she might want to go. Start with the potty so that you can make it accessible for her, that is, not too far away from her general activities. As she improves, you can move the potty further away to a place where she knows it is and can find it, then when she grows accustomed to this, move the potty further away and repeat the pattern until the potty ends up in the bathroom.

In some traditional cultures, it is normal to find that the child being trained goes without pants. The benefit of this is that they become familiar with their by-products, which usually has the effect of helping them to become more self-disciplined about when and how to relieve themselves, because they find the by-products messy, which makes them feel uncomfortable. So, make sure that she is wearing practical clothing that is not inhibiting, and thus leads to frustration. Toilet training is very much an emotional process, so be merciful so that she does not have any reason to feel guilty or resentful. Besides, she is not doing badly if she only wets herself once a day, so be kind!

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Potty Training Is Driving Me Crazy

My three-year-old daughter absolutely refuses to potty train. She knows how to do it, but she will not do it. We have been working with her for over a year and a half and have had no luck. We have tried treats and stickers to encourage her but she is not interested. Can you offer any other suggestions about how to handle this?



Social & Parenting Counselors Hwaa Irfan and Soha Elsaman answer:

As-salamu `alaykum sister Nagma.

We thank you very much and we sent your question to two of our counselors, Hwaa Irfan and Soha Elsaman.

Our counselor sister Hwaa Irfan answered:

Children at this age do not feel separated from parents as such, meaning that children do not necessarily know their own minds

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and assume that you, as the parents, think and feel as they think and feel. So, if you cannot understand what they understand, this can create a feeling of frustration and confusion. Children may not feel independent enough to do things on their own, particularly willfully controlling bodily actions when it is still involuntary on their part.

Some mothers take the process in stages. First, take off the diaper and always make sure the potty is visible. By taking off the diaper, the skin gets aired and the child slowly grows accustomed to the feeling of being without a diaper. It may be interesting to note that in those families where a diaper is not a part of childcare, children toilet train earlier. But this is when the mother is not obliged to be anywhere else and her time is free for the child.

Wearing a diaper encourages children to become accustomed to the convenience of being able to relieve themselves spontaneously, and to being wet or dirty. By taking off the diaper for an increasing length of time each day, your child can separate her body from the product and actually see the waste product. Yes, it may seem inconvenient to clean up afterwards, but if you enjoin your child to help clean up and put the feces where they should be at that stage of development (in the potty), then gradually, with some gentle coaxing and guidance from you, your daughter will learn what she should do.

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This way, the tension is taken out of potty training and resistance from your daughter is lessened. At the same time, she will grow increasingly aware of the function of her body and will be able to learn to tell beforehand when she wants to go to the toilet or sit on the potty.

When your daughter is ready to do this, she will tell you. You can help this along by asking if she wants to urinate or defecate. It can be trial and error on the part of your child because she is still learning about what her body wants to do. There will be times when she will sit on the potty and nothing will happen, but that is just a part of your child's learning process – a process you must allow for if your child is going to gain control over her bladder and rectum.

As for offering sweets and so on, all your child will learn from this is that if she does not do anything, she will get a treat. The reward should be the achievement of doing something by herself – sitting on the potty, using the potty, and finally being free of diapers.

If you feel good about the small achievements and your child knows that you feel that she has achieved something wonderful, then your child will want to go a step further, insha'Allah. Not only are you offering your child greater mobility, but you are allowing your child to understand that there is a lot more going on in her little environment that she is missing out on because she is being slowed down by having to waddle along. Most

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importantly, be observant and receptive to your child's needs, so if the whole process takes longer than anticipated, it takes longer. If all goes to plan, you will have a mutual understanding that will greatly assist in other areas of your child's development, insha'Allah.

Jazaka Allahu Khayran

Our counselor sister Soha Elsaman answered:

As-salamu `alaykum.

Jazaka Allahu khayran, sister, for entrusting us with your problem. We ask Allah Most High to guide all of us to the straight path and to give us steadfastness on His path.

Your problem is very much related to your child's perception of and her relationship with her parents at this very early stage of her life.

From birth, infants get into a routine of feeding, sleeping, and bathing. They respond to their bodily needs and interaction with their mothers in a similar way. So, once you have established the order and routine of different activities with your children, they will follow it.

Children try their parents. Based on parents' persistence and consistency in their behavior, children react either positively

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or negatively. What this means in real life terms is that when you ask your child to do something and set the rules for it, you have to be positive in your approach and never back off or show signs of retreating from your position, as this may give your children mixed signals and they will simply not adhere to your will any longer. The majority of children are stubborn and will try to see how flexible you are in your stand. Be kind but firm.

When children go to nursery or preschool, the first days in the new environment are difficult and there are many clashes of wills between the teacher and the children until children adjust to their teacher's way and the school regulations. You will most likely find that the child's behavior differs between school and home, where there are different characters with different sets of rules that they have to deal with. I am drawing on this example to help you understand that children adjust to authority and rules. They always start by trying to avoid rules and routines but eventually give in.

When you ask your daughter to do something, including the potty training, you have to be firm and strict with her. That does not mean punishing or harming her, but rather being consistent and persistent in your requests. You can try the following list of tips with her:

- Praise her brother, in her presence, for his adherence to the rules and for learning to use the potty early.

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- If she wets herself, show signs of disgust and tell her that she will not be allowed to touch any toys (especially the toys she loves) as the bad smell may be transferred to them.
- Try not to change her immediately she offends (don't leave her too long though, as this may have a negative effect on her skin), to show that you are not happy with what she is doing.
- Create a flip chart for the potty. Put XX on it when she offends and take away things she likes accordingly.

My advice to you is that you must try all possible solutions with her until something clicks, but as we said, be consistent in your actions with her.

Finally, I wish you all the best and pray to Allah to reward you for your patience.



The Diaper Habit

I'm having real problems trying to get my three-year-old out of diapers. He sometimes uses a potty, but more often wets his pants. He just can't seem to get the hang of it.



Parenting Counselor Mona Salama answers:

Bismillah, alhamdulillah, may all the peace and blessings be on Muhammad and those who follow him to the Day of Judgment.

As-salamu`alaykum, dear sister.

May Allah bless you and your son, and alhamdulillah that He gifted you with your sweet little son who is probably driving you crazy; but this is why children are one of the major causes and means of entering paradise. As our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Paradise is at the feet of the mother." And as effort is required to enter paradise, it is very important for society as a whole that effort is applied in raising children physically, emotionally, religiously, and ethically.

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Before answering your question, I'd like you to be calm and not worry. Just look around you; everybody can go to the toilet without any problem, even school children. What I mean is that it is a natural process that, with patience, will pass, and your child will be no different to others.

You said that he already uses the potty sometimes, but you didn't mention how long and how often you have been trying. So, due to lack of information, I'll start from the beginning.

There are different opinions about the best age to start potty training. Mothers in the Arab world used to train their children very early, often before their first birthday. Recently there have been some voices in the West calling for the same thing, which is preferable, especially for boys so as to reduce the heat around the pelvis. However, others are of the opinion that it is better to start after the age of two so that the child can comprehend the instructions you are giving. To cut a long story short, it depends on the mother's availability and the physiological readiness of the child (bladder and bowel control), motor skills, cognitive and verbal development, and emotional and social awareness, which is not an issue here since you have already started.

Firstly, you should know that the magic word in teaching a child anything is 'step-by-step'. Yes, it will take effort and energy on your part and yes, you will have to clean up accidents. We all learn from our mistakes and your child will not be any different.

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Secondly, potty training is sometimes difficult because the child is used to making urine and bowl motions in a closed place (diaper) and you are now trying to teach him quite the opposite (in an open space).

The Steps:

1-Preparing the Child. This preparation varies between several hours to several days, depending on how ready you and your child are and how much time you set aside.

- Take some time to look at children's books about using the toilet. Reading them to your child will help him understand about getting started. Have a potty chair near your child's play area, where he can sit on it by himself. It's okay if he sits on it with his diaper on at first. During the day, encourage him to 'play potty' with a teddy bear or doll ("Teddy go potty. Teddy's a big boy.") Let the bear sit on the potty and praise it in front of your son. You can even kiss it for doing it in the potty.
- Try to learn the average frequency of urination and defecation, by regular checks every 30 to 45 minutes, then write it down for two to three days. This will help you to figure out approximately how often the child needs to go.
- For a few days, not much will happen. Try asking your child to sit on the potty or a toilet with a smaller cover, three or four times a day. Just two or three minutes is

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long enough. Gradually increase the frequency until it matches the frequency of his urination and defecation. Keep in mind the average time of bowel movements and include it within these times, usually right after a nap or an hour after a drink or meal

- Get a pull-up diaper that is easy for your son to pull up and down. Gradually increase his time without diapers.
- While taking him to the potty or toilet, give him a fun cue that it is time to use the potty so that he will look forward to this 'activity'.
- Make it a fun time by putting some of his favorite toys/playthings there, which he can only have access to while he is there. Stay beside him and talk about interesting things like swimming with his friends or playing in the yard.
- Urge him to relieve himself while sitting by letting him to play with water toys in a bowl of lukewarm water. If the child needs to physically go, he will almost instantly relieve himself. When he does, make a big deal out of it. Praise your son verbally with hugs and kisses and give him a reward of some kind.
- Clean him up by wiping from front to back after using the potty. His arms still can't reach there. Be sure to teach your child to wash his hands with soap and water. Learning how to be hygienic and fulfill the Sunnah can become a natural part of the process.
- Don't force him to relieve himself every time he sits, either verbally or by keeping him there until he gives up.

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Three to five minutes is enough time. Remember that it is a natural and not a mechanical process.

Remember we are only training him and we are now ready to **move to the next step:**

- Allocate two days and choose an appropriate time where there are no major changes in your family schedule. Take off his diaper (and the teddy bear's too) and use 'big kids pants'. Take him to the bathroom every 45 minutes (on average).
- Increase the verbal communication with him. "Today there are no more diapers. You are a man now..." Encourage your child to practice pulling his pants down and sitting on the potty. When your child urinates in the potty, you will celebrate your child's success in a more exciting and rewarding way than before.

After these two successful days insha`Allah, you will need to **follow up** for one or two weeks (some children do not need any follow up), and when he has an accident, encourage him to clean up and change himself.

Children usually try their parents, so set the rules and never go back, as this will only confuse your child. Be kind but firm.

When should you see a doctor?

Patience, understanding, and a lot of positive reinforcement can deal with most difficulties and most stubborn kids when potty

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training. However, if your child is over the age of three or three and a half and has been trying to use the potty for more than six months without much success, you should arrange to see your doctor, with your child, to rule out any medical causes, which are usually easy to deal with.

To be a good, pious mother, you should connect any ordinary action of life to *deen* (Islamic religion/way of life). So here are some **Islamic practices (etiquette) you could teach him along with the potty training:**

- Before entering the toilet, say the *du`aa'* loudly so that he it becomes a habit for him. "*Allahuma ini a`uzu bika min al khubth wa al-khaba-ith.*" (Oh Allah I seek refuge in You from male and female devils)(Muslim)
- When entering the toilet, put your left foot forward first.
- Teach him to maintain privacy and cover his private parts from others. This will teach him *haya*. Try not to face the *qibla* (direction of prayer). Try to keep *qibla* towards your back whilst using the toilet (as much possible).
- Say the *du`aa'* after leaving the toilet. Step out with your right foot and say "*Ghufranak.*" (I seek Your forgiveness) (Ibn Majah)

Don't forget to support yourself and your son with *du`aa'*, relying on Allah (SWT) for all of our needs

And finally - any good is from Allah and any mistakes are from myself.



When to Start Feeding Your Baby Solid Foods

Peace be on you. What is the suitable age to start feeding the baby other kinds of food besides milk? What kinds of food are suitable? May Allah bless and help you!

The Social Counselor Dr. Maryam Bachmeier answers:

First I must explain to you that I am not a medical doctor or a nutritionist. There are many different schools of thought on this. I am just speaking from my own experience as a mother and letting you know my personal preference.



If you are able to breastfeed, do so until the baby is between nine and fifteen months old. In addition to the breastfeeding, you can start to slowly introduce soft solids in the form of puréed vegetables and meats. Introduce these very slowly so that the baby's stomach has an opportunity to learn how to digest the solid food. Increase the amount from one ounce the first week to one and a half ounces the second week and so on until your baby is eating three 'meals' a day.

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At around four to six months, babies can usually tolerate some puréed oatmeal or cream of wheat. When they start to eat solids, they drink less milk. Although I prefer breastfeeding because it really helps with the immune system, at age three months you can start giving a little formula. This will help the baby acquire a taste for it.

Around nine months of age, the baby will be willing to either transition to a bottle or, like my first baby, just start using a cup. When the baby gets a few teeth, you can put some soft cooked broccoli or other vegetables (or other healthy food), chopped up into small bites, on his/her plate. The baby can then start to learn how to chew solid foods.

At first this will be a big mess, and not much will actually get into the baby's mouth, but eventually, if you find a soft food that he/she really likes, the baby will start to learn how to eat. Supplement with the puréed baby food and formula to ensure that the baby is getting enough protein. As your baby gets more teeth, and the ability to pinch fingers together develops, you can start to put small bites of cereal on her/his plate.

By the time the baby is a year old, you will probably not be puréeing much, and the amount of breast milk or formula that the baby wants will have decreased as you will be increasing the amount of tiny bites of solid food that the baby gets. The transition from formula or breast milk to regular milk should be slow. Just start to introduce the whole milk into the formula or

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breast milk a little at a time so that the stomach gets used to it and the baby acquires a taste for it.

By two years of age, the baby will be eating solid food, cut up onto small bites, using his/her fingers, and drinking milk. Some children are allergic to milk and are lactose intolerant. If you find that milk is giving your baby a stomach ache, try to get your baby to drink soy milk or rice milk instead.

I hope this information is helpful for you.



Breastfeeding and Sleeping: What to Do?

Firstly, I appreciate the efforts this website is making for mankind. I have a problem with my daughter; she is now two years and four months old. I want her to stop breastfeeding but now she is big enough to protest, making it very difficult for me to make her quit. I know I am quite late, but I tried four months ago and failed. Can you help me with this problem?



Also one more problem: My eldest daughter refrains from sleeping in her room with her younger sister. She always wants to sleep in my bedroom and if we force her to sleep in her room, she cries hysterically. Why is she so scared, while the younger daughter never complains? I make them recite Qur'an before they go to sleep, but she still wants to sleep with me and not in her room. I would be extremely thankful if you can help me.

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Parenting Counselor Mona Youssri answers:

As-salamu `alaykum, dear mother.

Weaning can be very hard work for the parents if the baby isn't yet ready to give up the special bond with her mother. Nursing is so much more than food to your little girl; she knows that this is the one time she has you all to herself.

During breastfeeding, she feels loved and enjoys skin-to-skin contact, in addition to receiving milk, of course.

Weaning Plan

1. Find other ways to give your daughter her daily doses of close, loving contact.

For example, hold her between your arms while reading a book, take her to the park, or just sit and play with her.

2. It is not recommended that you let your child cry it out or withhold food.

3. Proceed slowly.

First, observe how many feeds she has per day. Choose her shortest and least important feed to eliminate and substitute it with some quality time of hugging, playing, and loving.

Then proceed to substitute one feed every four days in the



same way.

4. Wear clothes that are difficult to nurse in so that she has difficulty reaching your breasts.

5. When she asks for a feed, offer her a favorite snack and drink but do not force her to have it; she will eat it when she is ready.

During these steps, try to get her out of the habit of going to sleep while nursing and put her in her bed when she is drowsy so that she learns to sooth herself to sleep.

6. After eliminating the daytime breastfeeds, you will have reached your final step, which is eliminating her bedtime feeds. This can be dealt with as follows:

- * Establish a bedtime routine: a bath, reading a book, reciting Qur'an, or singing a goodnight song.

- * Stay in her room till she dozes off.

7. Do not return to the habit of giving her a feed after you have stopped it.

8. Again, proceed very slowly. This will also prevent any breast pains.



As for Your Older Daughter

First, rule out any medical illness or nightmares.

Once this has been done, her behavior is probably due to sibling rivalry.

Each one of your daughters seems to be finding that she has you completely to herself for some quality time. If you think about it, when her baby sister is sleeping must be the only time the older girl can have you all to herself.

How to End the Bedtime Battles

- * Make sure she has quality time with you during the day.
- * If she naps during the day, either decrease the naptime or eliminate it altogether. It will be much easier if she is tired enough at night to go to sleep quickly.
- * Establish a bedtime routine with both your girls:
 - Bath time
 - Tooth brushing
 - Story time
 - Soft music or singing a bedtime song.
 - Reciting Qur'an
- * Stay in the room for a while, but not too long. You can also tell them that you are going to do something and will come back in

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a little while (and, of course, do come back).

- * Have a child's night lamp in the room. You can also stick some glow-in-the-dark stars on the wall and ceiling.

- * You might want to give her a soft doll or teddy bear to hug.

- * Make sure you reward her for sleeping in her own bed.

Lastly, my dear mother, I think that your girls are fighting for your attention, so it is very important to give them both equal shares of your love. Take care, because sometimes even an extra kiss to one of them will be considered by them to be more love.

May Allah guide you to raise those lovely girls into good Muslim women.

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Running Out of Milk

I'm a working mother, so I'm pumping my milk to feed my baby, but my supply is going down. What can I do? I've heard that I shouldn't feed my baby honey. Is this true?

Is it important that I feed my baby cereal? I feed this to him once a day. He then eats two jars of squash, peas, green beans, or sweet potatoes later in the day. What nutritional value is in cereal that he will not get from the vegetables?



Parenting Counselor Mona Salama:

As salmu`alaykum,

Working mothers! May Allah be with them. They need all the *du`aa`* they can get, and you are no exception.

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A mother should be able to breastfeed her baby freely and without any stress for two years and she should be paid for this; after all, this child is his country's future. However, pumping is an alternative. Some people will whisper in your ear to stop breastfeeding because your child is over one year old. Don't listen to them. Breastfeeding is very important in the second year, as breast milk is an important source of digestible protein and energy. It strengthens the child's immunity.

As your baby grows older, and learns to explore his world by crawling and walking, he becomes more exposed to germs and illness. Sick babies tend to lose their appetite. Breast milk is ideal for sick babies because it is nutritious and easily digested.

How to increase your milk supply

The best way to increase your milk supply is through suckling. Suckling is a major stimulus, so while at home, breastfeed him as much as you can, and adjust his meal times so that he is a bit hungry when you return from work so that he will suckle more at this time.

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The second way to increase your milk supply is to ensure you remain well hydrated in order to maintain a high content of body fluids.

- Drink three to three and a half liters of water distributed through the day, even when you are away from your child.
- Milk is also a very good stimulus
- 4-5 cups of *helba* (fenugreek) with molasses
- 1-2 cups of *shamar* (fennel)

Your second question is about honey. Honey is a very nutritious substance. It increases the body's immunity against various viral, bacterial, and fungal diseases, it keeps the gastrointestinal tract healthy, and it is a potent anti-allergen.

The best way to take honey is by dissolving it in hot water to make a honey drink and drinking it first thing in the morning. That's how Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to drink it. Allah says in the holy Qur'an:

{And your Lord revealed to the bee, saying: "Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build. Then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of your Lord submissively.

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There comes forth from within it a beverage of many colors, in which there is healing for men; most surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect. } (An Nahl 16: 68-69)

I am aware that some pediatricians would prefer not to give honey to babies until after the age of 12 months out of fear of botulism, but as a nutritionist, I gave my children honey after six months of age. I have never seen a case of botulism from honey where I live, but I know of some cases in some states and in Canada. As a rule of thumb for mothers, for a child below one year (which is not your case), if you know of such cases in your area, wait until after the age of 12 months. Otherwise, give it to him after six months of age.

What nutritional value is in cereal that he will not get from vegetables?

After the age of one year, your child needs foods from the same four basic nutrition groups that you do, and a well-balanced diet is one which contains at least one constituent from each of these groups:

- Meat, fish, poultry, eggs
- Dairy products

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- Fruits and vegetables
- Cereal grains, potatoes, rice, breads, pasta

No food group is more important than the others, and they cannot be substituted for each other. In other words, he needs both cereals and vegetable. He also needs cholesterol and other fats that are very important for his normal growth and development, so they should not be restricted during this period.

Why cereals are great

Plain and simple, cereal is a great way to get a lot of nutrition into a child at one sitting. In fact, a nutritious cereal is like a multi-vitamin and multi-mineral supplement. One cup of a nutritious cereal can supply as much as half the daily nutritional requirements for fifteen of the top vitamins and minerals, plus a VERY important element, which is fiber.

What are cereals?

Cereal crops are mostly grasses cultivated for their edible grains or seeds. Cereal grains supply most of their food energy as starch. Whole grains are good sources of dietary fiber and

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essential fatty acids. They are also a significant source of protein (needed with other protein sources) and other important nutrients. Some of the more popular cereals are: **Maize, Wheat, Rice, Barley, Sorghums, Millets, Oats, Rye, Triticale, Buckwheat, Fonio, Quinoa**. Wild rice is grown in small amounts in North America and teff is popular in Ethiopia but scarcely known elsewhere

Eat the whole grains rather than the milled ones. Removing the outer layers (milling) markedly reduces their nutritional value.

One of the best known grains is barley. It protects the digestive tract, increases immunity, purifies the kidneys, increases good mode and helps in a quicker recovery from illnesses.

"Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) used to recommend At-Talbina (barley soup) and used to say, "It is disliked (by the patient), although it is beneficial." (Buhkari 7 #594)

Fresh foods are much more nutritious than packed or processed ones, which should only be used when fresh food is unavailable. Try these shopping tips:

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Read cereal labels and consider these six criteria for a healthy cereal:

- The grains should be whole (e.g. 'whole wheat' or 'wheat bran', not just 'wheat').
- Protein content should be at least three grams per serving
- The total carbohydrate-to-sugar ratio should be no less than four to one.* This means if the 'Total Carbohydrate' line says 24 grams, the 'sugars' should have a value of six grams or less. That tells you that most of the carbohydrates come from the grain and fibers, not from the added sugars. Also look for the 'five and five' rule = Less than five grams of sugar and at least five grams of fiber.
- Zinc content should be 25 to 40 percent of the recommended daily allowance.
- Iron content should be at least three milligrams per serving (25 to 40 percent of the RDA.)
- Other vitamin and mineral content should be 25 to 40 percent of the RDA.

There are also ingredients that a nutritious cereal should NOT contain.

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- Hydrogenated oils
- Artificial colors and flavors
- Chemical preservatives

Tips for feeding a toddler:

- After the age of one year, your child can eat just about anything, as long as he's not allergic to it, and as long as it's in a kid-friendly form – either pureed, mashed, or cut into small pieces. You could go by the 'rule of one', which is to serve one tablespoon of each food you're eating at a meal for each year of your child's life, plus the breast milk.
- Just beware that he can still choke on chunks of food that are hard and large enough to plug his airway, so make sure anything you give him is mashed or cut into small, easily chewable pieces. Never offer him peanuts, grapes, carrots, whole or large sections of hot dogs, meat sticks, or hard candies.
- Also, make sure your toddler eats only while seated and supervised by an adult. 'Eating on the run' increases his risk of choking.

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- Be sure the food is cool enough so that it won't burn his mouth. Test the temperature yourself, because he'll dig in without considering the heat.
- Avoid foods that are heavily spiced, salted, buttered, or sweetened. These additions prevent your child from experiencing the natural taste of foods, and they may be harmful to his long-term good health.
- By his first birthday (or soon thereafter), he should be drinking his liquids from a cup.
- Encourage self-feeding, as it will build a child's confidence and help him practice his fine motor skills.
- You'll probably notice a sharp drop in your toddler's appetite after his first birthday. This is normal, as his growth rate has slowed and thus he really doesn't require as much food.
- Avoid overfeeding and remember institutive eating.

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- Use sugar and sodium in moderation.
- Food acceptance patterns are learned, so keep offering food that a child has initially refused – 80% of children will eat a new food if exposed to it ten times in a row.
- Offer water to your child several times per day.
- Expect and tolerate child-like table manners.
- Try cereal with juice if you prefer, although milk and cereals are an ideal match, since the proteins in the milk make up for the few amino acid deficiencies in the grain. A combination of milk and cereal means that a person gets a complete protein meal. However, milk can sometimes be replaced by juices high in vitamin C (such as orange, grapefruit, or tangerine), as they increase the absorption of iron.
- Always be a good role model.

All my *du`aa`* to you and lots of kisses to your cute son.

And finally - Any good is from Allah and any mistakes are from myself.



Nightmares of a Three-Year-Old

I have a three-and-a-half-year-old boy and I am starting to tell him about Allah. I tell him that we pray to thank Allah for all the good things he gives us. Two days ago, my son had a nightmare so I told him if we read the Qur`an together before sleeping he will be protected from the animals that bite him in his nightmare.



My husband thinks it is too early to tell him all that. I would like to let him read something to convince him that it is not too early as long as I am not mentioning hell or devils or anything like that. I would appreciate your help.

Parenting Counselors Du`aa Gamal and Abdullah Abdur Rahman answer:

Early childhood development specialists have varied opinions about when and how to introduce religious concepts such as good and evil, shaytan, heaven, and hell. One thing that is certain is that each child is unique. As parents, you spend the

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most time with your child so you are best able to assess his level of comprehension.

Observe your son well. What is his reaction when you talk about his nightmares? Ask him to describe them. If he is unable to describe in detail why he is afraid, then you need not be detailed with him when you talk about what will protect him. The idea is to let him know that Allah (SWT) protects us in the night when we read the Qur'an before going to bed. Telling him that the animals will not bite him if he reads the Qur'an before going to bed is an example of what NOT to do. If you make such promises and in fact your son does have nightmares in which the animals try to bite him, he will lose faith in the power of reciting the Qur'an before sleeping.

Another strategy is to start calming your son down at least two hours before his bedtime. Do not let him watch television or read stories about topics that might be scary for him. Instead, let him play with toys or just spend time with you and your husband. Calm him down before he goes to sleep and remind him about the *du'aa* he should read before he sleeps. Try not to talk about nightmares just before he sleeps. Tell him to think of good things, such as his family and friends.

May Allah (SWT) help you and guide you in raising excellent Muslim children. Thank you for being concerned.

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And Allah knows best.

From Counselor Du`aa' Gamal:

The best age to introduce religious concepts is a subject of controversy amongst the specialists. However, concepts of evil and the hidden should not be introduced too early, as they cannot be made tangible in a child's mind. What he sees in his sleep might help to realize a hidden fear in his daily life, which could mean he is feeling insecure or unsafe emotionally and psychologically in his environment. If we let Allah protect us, He will.

Children usually have nightmares between the ages of two and seven. There are reasons why they have nightmares:

- Maybe the child is worried about something.
- Maybe the child has seen his parents argue or witnessed a bad family situation (strong arguments or abuse).
- Maybe the child has seen a scary movie or video during the day or, more particularly, before going to bed. This would lead to fears of monsters or animals.
- Maybe the child is having difficulty with playmates or in nursery school.
- Maybe there is a contributing physical condition, such as an illness, fever, or accident.



Basically, anything that a child finds upsetting in his life may cause nightmares. Observe your son well to figure out the reason for these nightmares. From your question, it seems that the reason involves a fear of animals.

When your child has a nightmare, there are several things you can do:

- Go to your child immediately and provide comfort. Reassure your child that it was only a dream and is not real.
- Stay with your child, who may even want to sleep with you in your bed.
- Talk with your child about it the next day. Talk about anything he or she wants to talk about, but don't make suggestions or put ideas into his or her mind.
- Ask your child to describe the nightmare. If your child is unable to describe it in detail, drawing or painting it may help.
- Talk to your child about any problems or worries he or she may have.
- Reassure your child by letting him or her know that Allah Most High protects us during the night if we read the Qur'an before going to bed.
- Play and recite the Qur'an before going to bed.

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- Talk to your child about how much Allah loves him or her. Explain how Allah will protect him or her during both the day and night, no matter where he or she is.

There are several things that can be done to help avoid nightmares, such as:

- Find the source of the nightmare.
- Ensure the bedtime routine is happy and calming.
- Do not let your child watch television or read scary stories. A nice story can be soothing, though. So can a bath, a nightlight, or a song.
- Talk about the good things that happened that day, or just talk about anything your child wants to talk about.
- Let your child play with toys or just spend time with you and your husband.
- Remind your child about the *du`aa* (supplication) he or she should read before sleeping.
- Try not to talk about nightmares just before your child sleeps.
- Tell your child to think of good things, like family, friends, or anything else that is pleasant.

If a child suffers from recurrent or very disturbing nightmares, the aid of a therapist may be required.

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And finally – Any good is from Allah and any mistakes are from myself.



To Sleep With Us or Without Us?

As salamu `alaykum. Is it better that our daughter sleeps in her own room or with my husband and me in our bedroom? Sometimes she wakes up at night and sometimes she does not. When she wakes up, she looks for us, so it seems it would be easier if she slept with us. But what about privacy in our bedroom?



Social Counselor Dr. `Abd. Lateef Krauss Abdullah answers:

In the name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. May He bestow His peace and blessings on His messenger, Muhammad, his family, Companions, and all of those who follow them sincerely.

The type of arrangement that you are asking about is called a family bed, wherein the parents and children quite literally all share a bed together until the children reach an age (usually

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about six or seven) when they will stay in their own beds and rooms. Offhand, it is my understanding that the family bed is the traditional sleeping arrangement in much of the Muslim world.

Your child's desire to sleep in your bed is a very natural thing for someone her age, and shows her desire to be close to you and feel protected. As someone who now practices the family bed with my own family, I can say that I find many advantages to it from the perspective of the children, contrary to the way I was raised in the West.

In the West, although the practice of the family bed is becoming more popular, the typical approach is to separate children into their own rooms at a very early age, and to fight the urge to let them sleep in the bed of the parents when they cry. This 'crying out' practice is meant to establish the young child's independence and train them to sleep at night on their own without the need of the parents. Even with this arrangement, however, most parents will experience their children's desire to sleep with them at night, due to nightmares, fear of the dark, bedwetting, and the like.

With the family bed, there are of course costs in terms of privacy for the parents. However, I personally find the family bed better for children, as it allows them additional intimacy with the

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parents that they may not have otherwise, especially if both parents work. I also find that my children have less fear of things like the dark and the 'bogeymen' than I did at their age! In fact, I can still recall some of my childhood fears that stemmed from sleeping alone at a very young age.

There is a wealth of information and research findings on the family bed that can be obtained from the Internet, so I suggest you do some of your own investigation to get more information about it. I know my cousin and his wife, who are non-Muslims living in the U.S., also practice the family bed with their children. Even though it is not the traditional norm in the U.S., many parents are increasingly finding it to be beneficial for the overall health and spirit of the family, as it promotes closeness and warmth.

In an age where parents and children are having more and more problems bonding and relating to one another, the family bed helps to forge intimacy and trust from a very early age, which could have beneficial results later in a child's life.

As for the parents' privacy, it does make things a bit more difficult, and parents have to find creative ways to increase their privacy and intimacy. However, this should not be a major problem – it simply requires another approach.



Endless Tears

As salamu 'alaykum. My daughter is two years old and doesn't sleep well at night. Every night she wakes up crying and I have to put her next to me to go back to sleep. Sometimes she cries and screams for a while. She usually sleeps in a different room, but when she wakes up I take her to my room. Her father and I don't know what to do. Can you please help us? Thank you.



Bismillah, alhamdulillah. May all the peace and blessings be on Muhammad and those who follow him to the Day of Judgment.

Parenting Counselor Mona Salama answers:

As salamu `alaykum.

Getting a good night's sleep is very important, both for the children and the parents. In some stages of our lives we may not be getting even half of what we are used to; this is normal and, to your surprise, can even be a nice change, as it is part of

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the motherhood experience, which is basically a sacrifice, even if children are the garments of this world. Make the most of it and try to enjoy it, as it helps the bond between you and your child grow.

In your question, you said that your daughter “doesn’t sleep well at night” and that she “cries and screams for a while”, but this is only when she is in her bed. Since there is no screaming or crying when she is in your bed, then we can conclude that she does not like sleeping alone, which in fact is very natural. The problem is how to teach your daughter to sleep in her own bed.

Separation: Yes or No?

Separation of children from their parents is an important step in their psychological weaning. It teaches independence, freedom, and responsibly. It also preserves the image of parents, who may be concerned about being seen to act in an inappropriate way, and maintains the intimacy between the husband and wife, which has benefits for the stability of the whole family. However, this should be part of the growing process that occurs when the child is ready to sleep on their own, otherwise, sudden separation could lead to a long-term sense of displacement.

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Firstly, exclude external causes:

- Make sure she is not too cold or too hot, wet, feverish, snoring, or having trouble breathing,
- Keep her bed free from any irritants. Sudden noises, car lights, rats on the roof, and the like may be waking her up.
- Sometimes an ear infection causes a child to wake up suddenly and cry, and ear infections are not always accompanied by a fever.
- Teething and colic are major causes of mood change. She may also be allergic to some food that causes gas (wind), especially when eaten close to bed time, so try to change her supper and take note of any changes.
- Nightmares and night terrors can occur at this age. They increase between the ages of three and eight years, then tend to disappear after the age of twelve. Avoid letting your child watch TV before bed time, limit caffeine, don't tell frightening stories, and certainly don't yell at her.
- Your relationship with your husband will affect your child. Any instability in the family will directly affect the children's behavior and sleep patterns.

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- Don't let her sleep for too long during the day (especially during training), as this may make it more difficult for you to get her to sleep at night.
- Increase her physical activity during the day to ensure she is tired and sleepy at night, but avoid it an hour before bed so as not to increase her mental and physical alertness.

Secondly, follow these general guidelines as much as you can:

- Remove her from your bed to a side crib that is connected to your bed, then after few days (or weeks) separated from your bed. You can even have your child sleep on a mattress on the floor. In the meanwhile, train her to accept her own room.
- Connect all the pleasant things she likes to her room, such as stories, chatting, parties, and games, so she mentally connects her room with nice things. Eventually, she will feel happy when in her room. This is called conditioning.

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- Start the night with a pleasant bedtime ritual at a fixed time and adhere to it. For example, brushing teeth, taking a bath, saying bedtime zikr, and telling stories. When she gets used to the routine, she may get sleepy as soon as you start it.
- Keep a faint light nearby and tell her that you will check on her every now and then. This will make her feel safer.
- It is okay to sleep beside her until she goes to sleep, then go to your bed. In time you will just be sitting beside her for a few minutes. If she wakes up at night, comfort her by cuddling her, patting her on the back, and reassuring her that you are near. Allow her to come to your bed occasionally if you feel she really needs this. When the training is completed these instances will be reduced to a minimum.
- Offer a suitable reward, such as stickers, a toy, or an additional story if she is ready before bedtime or shows good progress.
- Let your husband participate in these rituals every now and then. Sometimes children perform better with their fathers and this will also strengthen his relationship with his daughter and nourish the taste of fatherhood.

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- Say the bed time zikr to her, blow in your hand and pass it over her body, and keep her under the protection of Allah.
- Patience, consistency, and follow through are the keys to successful parenting.

And finally – Any good is from Allah and any mistakes are from myself.

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Trying to Let Go

I have a daughter who will be turning one year old tomorrow. She has been crawling since five months, pulled herself up at six months, and has been cruising since seven months. I thought she would be walking by now, but so far it hasn't happened.



Her doctor estimated that she would walk at 13 1/2 months. He says that it has something to do with a reflex children have to develop in order to catch themselves when they fall. I thought he was wrong when he told me this at her nine-month checkup, but now that she's almost a year old and still not walking, I think he might be right! She is so frustrated right now because she wants to walk, but can't. She loves to walk with her push toys and walks well with them. I can't keep her off them! At ten months she started letting go and trying to walk to me, but she only takes a few steps (three to five) and then collapses into my arms. Does anyone else have a similar situation?

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Parenting Counselor Dr. Salwa Rashad answers:

Dear sister,

I understand your worries and concerns about your daughter's development, but believe your doctor. It is perfectly normal to walk at eighteen months. That is what happened to my grandson. He is now five years old and is running and playing soccer.

Just encourage her to keep trying and maybe she can use a walker that has toys attached to it. You can also take her to play with other kids her age. Kids encourage and teach each other much more than we think. Eventually she will be walking and running.

And finally – Any good is from Allah and any mistakes are from myself.



My Son's Name

Is 'Mohamed Ehsan' an acceptable Muslim name? We found it on the Internet and the meaning mentioned is 'In God's grace'. Is this correct? Or should I rename my son because many non-Muslims bear the same name?

Parenting Counselor Jeewan Chanicka answers:



All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. May He always bless you and your family to always seek His Pleasure and raise you to the ranks of those who follow Muhammad, peace be upon, Him throughout your lives.

I am not sure where you checked the meaning. The name Mohammed means 'revered' or 'praiseworthy' and it was the name of our last prophet in Islam. It is considered to be an honor to name our children after the prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, as he was *uswatun hasana* – the most perfect example. This gives our children a great example to strive towards in their efforts to be like him.

As for Ehsan (also spelt Ihsan), it is a derivative of Ahsan, the

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Arabic word meaning 'excellence'. The Hindi form, which is derived from Sanskrit, means 'gratitude'. Ihsan also refers to a state of excellence of a believer who acts and behaves as if he/she can see Allah, and although they cannot, they are constantly aware that Allah can see them.

So, based on this, I don't see any reason to re-name your child.

It is commonly believed that a child or revert to Islam must take an Arabic name. However, this is incorrect. The prophet, peace be upon him, only made people change their name if it had a bad meaning or its meaning opposed the basic beliefs of Islam or enjoined partners with Allah.

My own name – Jeewan – is a Hindi name and it has a good meaning. As such, I have never changed it (much to the annoyance of some people). Some of the names in the Qur'an of prophets are not Arabic. In short, your child has a good name and I don't see any reason why you should change it.

And finally – Any good is from Allah and any mistakes are from myself.

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**Did you enjoy reading this e-Book? Do you have
comments on its content?**

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