

Seven Strategies to Train Kids this Ramadan

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Holy Prophet Muhammad (saww): "No father has given a greater gift to his children than good moral training."

The many aspects of Ramadan – fasting, prayers, moral values, charity, Holy Quran, family, Eid – provide a valuable opportunity to train kids. Whether they are your own kids or kids you teach, education or training isn't an automatic or easy process. Children don't bring empty minds and fill them with what we say. Training requires effort, energy and a few techniques to take off. Here are some training tips and techniques to transform your children's minds and memories :this Ramadan

Let them get their Hands Dirty

"The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action."

Herbert Spencer

Children learn by "doing". On average, students retain 75 percent of a lesson when they learn through hands-on activities compared to five percent through a lecture or 10 percent through reading (Brunmer, Jerome, "The Process of Learning").

If, for example, you want to teach your kids the concept of Zakat, get them to help you calculate your Zakat, decide where to send the money, and mail the envelopes. Action and implementation can occur while children learn, not necessarily after!

Holy Prophet Muhammad (saww) used to take his daughter Fatima (sa) with him when he went for prayer at the Holy Ka'ba in Mecca. Later, in Medina, he would bring his grandchildren, Hassan and Hussein (as), to the Masjid as toddlers before they knew how to pray.

A concept becomes real and important to children when they experience it rather than simply read about it. They'll remember how to do it years later when you may catch them telling their "Ifriends, "I've been calculating Zakat since I was a kid

Involve their Emotions

When children get emotionally involved in an activity, they rarely want to leave it. Video games and TV shows target children's emotions. As parents and educators, we can use the same technique for training.

Stories, songs, skits, crafts and games grab children's emotions. Once a child is interested and excited, she is more likely to stay attentive till the end and get the message you want to give. Just as we remember events in our lives that were emotionally significant, children remember concepts learned through activities that were "fun", "funny", "exciting" or "different".

Don't be afraid to stir some fun into your training - you don't have to lose any content. Write a song about Eid, create a Hadith treasure box, organize a Ramadan trivia night, or read a story about Ramadan in Medina. If they enjoy it, the kids will come back for more

Reveal the Purpose

We often hear students complain, "Why do we have to do this?" or "This math exercise is pointless". Unfortunately, we often hear responses like, "Because I'm telling you to," "Because you have to", or worse, "You'll get a new MP3 player if you finish the book".

Like us, if children don't see the purpose or importance of an action, they won't have the motivation to complete it. To avoid getting similar comments from your kids about prayer or fasting, make sure they understand the purpose. Before you begin any lesson, whether it's a story about the Companions of the Prophet or an Eid craft, explain exactly why you are doing the activity and what benefits the children will gain from it.

Remind your children that they are doing acts of worship to please Allah (SWT), not you. Explain why we need to please Allah (SWT) and how every action, including washing dishes or math homework, will help us achieve that goal. If children are praying only to please you, when you leave, their motivation and prayers will disappear.

If children are motivated to fast Ramadan or complete the Holy Quran for a material incentive (like a MP3 player), they may never develop a love of Allah (SWT) or an intrinsic desire to perform the action. They may, instead, learn to value material rewards and when the rewards disappear, the actions may disappear with them.

Help your children understand that, for Muslims, rewards don't necessarily come in this life. They may have to wait for the bigger and better rewards of the hereafter

Highlight the Big Ideas

"Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school." Albert Einstein

Ask yourself how many equations or formulas you remember from your Grade 12 Math textbook. It may be five or two or none. Let's be honest - most of us retained very little of the

details we learned.

Children will not retain all the Fiqh rulings of Zakat or Wudu or Salah, and they won't need to! Make sure the little that they retain is exactly what you want them to remember. Focus on the big ideas, such as the awareness that Allah (SWT) is watching us, that we get our rulings from Holy Quran and the Sunnah, that prayer is a means of self-purification, etc. Repeat these ideas every day in different ways. While your children instill these principles in their minds, show them how to learn the rest on their own, when they need it. Help your kids learn "how to learn". Teach them where to find the Fiqh information they need or how to do research on a topic and who to ask for information. They will be better prepared if they master the basics and know how to get the specifics. Memorizing every ruling will be a .waste of their time and yours

Let them Lead!

Children often take responsibilities more seriously than adults. Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw), appointed young adults like Ali, Anas and Usamah ibn Zaid, young adults, for important assignments that sometimes required them to lead even older and more experienced Companions.

Give children leadership over important tasks and step out of the picture. Assign one child to wake up all his siblings for Suhur. Let someone else be in charge of updating the Iftar time every evening. Allow the children to plan, budget and buy Eid gifts for all the relatives. Let them choose which task they want to "be in charge of".

Allow children to make mistakes and realize on their own what they should have done. Experience often trains better than instruction. Once a child goes out into the cold without a jacket, he'll remember, before you can remind him, to put on his jacket next time.

Train kids to be responsible for their own learning. If a child asks, "Does brushing teeth break my fast?" a simple "yes" or "no" may give her the answer, but won't provide any long-term training. Ask her instead, "Where can you look to find that answer? Let's do some research."

Begin the month of Ramadan by asking your children to do a research project on what breaks the fast and what does not. If they find the information themselves, they are likely to remember it and know exactly where to get it again next year.

"The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change." Carl Rogers

Get Excited!

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." W. B. Yeats

Kids catch on to your enthusiasm. Show some excitement and passion about the topic you're teaching. Show your kids that you "can't wait" for Ramadan to begin. Be cheerful at prayer times. Decorate the house in anticipation of Eid.

Holy Prophet Muhammad (saww), taught by example. His character and actions motivated people to love and emulate him. Be the example you want your kids to be. Make a genuine effort to love the activities you want your kids to love

Combine Love with Learning

Al-Aqra b. Habis saw Holy Prophet Muhammad (saww), kissing Hassan (his grandson). He said: I have ten children, but I have never kissed any one of them, whereupon Allah's Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, said: He who does not show mercy, no mercy would be shown to him.

Show children that you love them, regardless of how they perform. Allow each child to progress at his own pace. Saying, "look at your cousin Aminah - she's already finished the fifteenth juz", will only lower your child's self-esteem and discourage what she's already accomplishing.

Excessive competition and comparison can often result in helplessness and lack of motivation for children who learn in different ways or at a slower pace. Allow children to judge their own progress and compare themselves to their former level rather than that of others