

Raising Children the Prophetic Way

RAISING CHILDREN THE PROPHETIC WAY

*A Complete Guide to Tarbiyah From Before Birth
to Adulthood*

A Darul Hikmah Publication

Rooted in Knowledge. Relevant to Life.

Preface

Why Parenting Feels Harder Than Ever

You are tired in a way that has very little to do with sleep.

Maybe it's the fifth time this week you've asked your child to do something and been met with silence, or a slow eye-roll, or outright refusal and you've heard your own voice rise in a way you didn't plan and don't feel proud of afterward.

Maybe it's the quiet dread of watching your teenager disappear into a phone for hours at a time, having no real idea what's actually reaching them through it.

Maybe it's simpler and heavier than either of those: a nagging sense that you are doing less for your child's dīn than your own parents somehow managed to do for you, in a world that was, by every account, easier to raise a Muslim child in than the one you're raising one in now.

None of this is in your head. Parenting a Muslim child in Nigeria today carries pressures that didn't exist for your parents, and certainly didn't exist for theirs. The extended family that once shared the load of raising a child is, for many households, thinner and more scattered than it used to be. A compound that once held three generations under one roof now often holds one exhausted couple managing everything alone. The cost of living has made

the quiet, unhurried presence Chapter 5 of this book will describe as essential to early childhood feel like a luxury squeezed between two jobs and a long commute. A phone now sits in a ten-year-old's pocket carrying more unsupervised influence than an entire neighbourhood once had access to. And advice arrives from every direction at once. You have a scholar on one WhatsApp status, a psychologist on Instagram, your own mother's very different generation of instincts often contradicting each other, leaving you less sure of your footing rather than more.

If you have picked up this book already exhausted, already unsure whether anything you're doing is working, you are not failing at something every generation before you found

easy. You are doing something genuinely harder than what came before you, with fewer of the structural supports that used to make it easier and the guilt many parents carry, quietly, about not doing enough, is very often guilt for falling short of a standard that was never actually realistic to begin with, given what's actually stacked against you.

This book will not pretend any of that pressure away. What it offers instead is something more durable than a set of modern hacks or trending techniques that will feel dated within a few years: a framework drawn from the same sources that guided the single most successful generation of parents in human history, the Companions who raised children under Prophetic guidance, in circumstances that

carried their own version of hardship, and produced from it people whose character reshaped the world. Their tools were not complicated. They were rooted in a few unchanging ideas; what a child actually is in the sight of Allah, what tarbiyah actually means, how a heart is actually formed applied with patience, consistency, and mercy, across years rather than achieved overnight.

This book is organised in six parts. It begins with the foundation beneath everything else, what your child actually is, in Allah's sight, and what "training" a child even means in Islam. It moves through the real, distinct stages of a child's upbringing, from before birth through adolescence. It covers what to actually instil belief, Qur'an, prayer, character and how

parents actually carry that out day to day, through example, correction, du'ā, and the wider household around them. It addresses the specific modern pressures this preface has already named directly like screens, peer influence, a mixed environment, and the moment a teenager pulls away entirely. And it closes with something practical to hold onto afterward, not just ideas to agree with and forget.

You will not finish this book and become a flawless parent. No chapter in it asks that of you. What it asks is smaller and more achievable: that you understand, clearly, what you are actually holding and that you begin, this month, carrying it a little more deliberately than before.

Chapter 1

The Trust You Didn't Know You Held

A Naming Day, and a Question Nobody Asks Out Loud

Picture a compound in Osogbo on a Sunday morning, seven days after a baby girl has been born. The aqīqah is being prepared, a ram has been slaughtered, relatives have travelled in from three different towns, and an elder is preparing to whisper the adhān into the baby's ear before her name is announced to the gathered family. There is joy everywhere. There is also, quietly, a kind of ownership being distributed without anyone naming it out loud.

This is our family's child now. She carries our name. She will grow up under our watch, learn our ways and inherit our reputation.

Nobody in that compound is wrong to feel that pride. But underneath the celebration, Islam is making a claim that cuts against the grain of how most of us are raised to think about children in Nigerian or otherwise. That baby does not belong, in any final sense, to the father who named her, the mother who carried her, or the extended family now taking turns holding her. She belongs to Allah. What every person in that compound has just been handed, on that naming day, is not a possession. It is an amānah, a trust, on loan, for a set number of years, that will eventually be returned to the One who gave it.

This is the idea the whole book is built on. It's worth sitting with it slowly, because it's the kind of idea everyone nods along to in the moment and almost nobody actually lives by three years later, once the newness of a baby has worn into the ordinary exhaustion of raising one.

What "Trust" Actually Means Here

Allah describes something called *amānah* as so weighty that when it was offered to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, they refused to carry it, out of fear of what it demanded of them. Only the human being accepted it, described in the same verse as prone to wrong and heedless (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:72). Classical scholars have understood this trust to include the full weight of human

responsibility like belief, worship, moral choice, and everything a person is given charge over. A child, placed directly into a parent's hands at the most defenceless point of their existence, sits at the very centre of what that trust looks like in daily life.

A trust, in the plain sense the word carries in figh, is something you did not create, do not ultimately own, and will eventually have to account for how you kept. This is a very different starting point from the language most of us grew up with, where a child is spoken of the way property is spoken of. You see words like *my son, my daughter, my investment in old age*. None of that language is forbidden. But if it's the only lens a parent carries, it quietly reshapes decisions in ways that serve the

parent's comfort, reputation, or old-age security more than the actual wellbeing of the child Allah placed in their hands.

The One Command the Qur'an Gives Parents Directly

If you look for a single verse that most directly addresses parents about their children, not worship in general, not family life broadly, but the specific responsibility of raising the people under your roof, one verse stands out clearly. Allah commands the believers to protect themselves and their families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones (Sūrah al-Taḥrīm, 66:6).

Early commentators were direct about what this means in practice. Qatādah explained it as a father commanding his household to obey

Allah, forbidding them from disobedience, and correcting them the moment he sees them straying. Others among the early scholars explained it as teaching one's family knowledge and taqwā, so that Allah protects them through it. What's striking about this verse, read as a parent rather than studied as a student of tafsīr, is what it does *not* say. It doesn't say "provide for your family." It doesn't say "give your children the best school you can afford." Allah could have commanded any number of things here. What He commanded was protection from the Fire, meaning the one responsibility named explicitly, above every other parenting duty, is the spiritual outcome of the people in your care.

This doesn't diminish school fees, food, clothing, or a good education; all of these matter, and neglecting them is its own failure of amānah. But it reorders what sits at the centre. A parent can provide every material advantage a child could want like the best secondary school in the state, a wedding the whole town remembers, a business handed down debt-free and still fail the one responsibility the Qur'an names directly, if that child grows up without knowledge of Allah, without taqwā, and without a home that pointed them toward the Fire's opposite.

The Shepherd Who Answers for the Flock

The Prophet ﷺ gave this same idea a shape that's easier to hold onto day to day. He said that every one of you is a shepherd, and every

one of you is responsible for what is under your care, naming the man as a shepherd over his household, and the woman as a shepherd over her husband's house and children, each of them answerable for their flock (agreed upon, Bukhārī and Muslim).

A shepherd doesn't own the flock. A shepherd is *entrusted* with the flock, by someone who will ask, eventually, how it was kept whether it was fed well, guarded from danger, and returned intact. This is the exact posture this book is asking you to hold toward your children: not ownership, but stewardship, with a clear understanding that the One who gave you this flock will ask about it in detail, regardless of how many relatives also claimed a share of pride in raising it.

What Is Actually Being Entrusted?

It's worth breaking down what the amānah of a child actually includes, with enough detail that it stops being an abstraction. Scholars who have written on the rights of children in Islam typically describe several layers, each of which this book will return to in far more depth across the chapters ahead.

Their fiṭrah: This is the natural, unspoiled disposition every child is born with inclined toward Allah before anyone has taught them a single ruling. Chapter 2 is dedicated entirely to this, but it's worth naming here as the first thing entrusted to you: a heart that arrived already leaning the right way, which you are

now responsible for either protecting or distorting.

Their body: This is the health, safety, and basic physical needs met without neglect, not just food and shelter, but freedom from harm, including harm a parent might unknowingly cause through anger, exhaustion, or the ordinary carelessness of a difficult day.

Their mind: This is what they're taught, what they're allowed to believe, what habits and ideas are permitted to take root before they're old enough to evaluate any of it critically. A child raised in front of a television all day, or raised memorising Qur'an with understanding, has had two entirely different amānāt handled with them, same category of trust, very different stewardship.

Their character: The akhlāq they develop is largely inherited not from what they're told but from what they watch modelled in front of them. A subject Chapter 14 of this book takes on directly, because no amount of correct instruction survives daily contradiction by example.

Their relationship with Allah: Whether they come to know Him as loving, near, and merciful, or as distant and only associated with punishment, threats, and rules recited without warmth. This is arguably the layer most at stake in the Nigerian Muslim home, where religious instruction can sometimes arrive as obligation before it arrives as love. Chapters 9 through 11 return to this at length.

Every chapter that follows in this book is really an elaboration on one or more of these five. None of them are optional extras to "real" parenting. Together, they are what the amānah actually consists of.

The Nigerian Home: A Trust Shared, But Not Transferred

There's a tension worth naming plainly, because it shapes how this trust is actually carried in most Nigerian Muslim households. Children here are rarely raised by two parents alone. A grandmother down the corridor, an aunty who visits every weekend, older siblings pressed into caregiving, house-help who spend more waking hours with a child than the parents do. The raising of a child is communal

in a way that's genuinely beautiful, and genuinely different from how this subject is usually written about in Western or Gulf Islamic parenting material.

That communal structure is a real strength and a child raised inside a wide net of caring adults has resources many children elsewhere lack. But it also creates a specific danger worth naming honestly: it becomes easy for a parent to quietly assume the amānah is being carried collectively, when Allah's question on the Day of Judgment will not be addressed to the household in general. It will be addressed to *you*, the shepherd of your specific flock. A grandmother's involvement doesn't reduce a parent's accountability. A house-help's daily presence doesn't transfer it. This book will

return to this exact dynamic later, particularly when discussing correction and the words children hear from people other than their parents. For now, it's enough to hold both truths at once: raise your children inside the fullness of your family and community, and never let that fullness become an excuse for not knowing, precisely, what is happening to the amānah in your own hands.

The Stakes, and the Reward

It would be incomplete to describe this responsibility only in terms of weight and accountability, without also naming what's on offer for the parent who carries it well.

The Prophet ﷺ said that when a person dies, their deeds come to an end except for three

things: ongoing charity, knowledge that continues to benefit others, or a righteous child who prays for them (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). Read that carefully: of the three things named as surviving a person's death, one of them is a child. Not a child who simply exists, or who achieved worldly success, but a righteous child; the direct result of a trust that was carried well during the years it was in your hands.

This means the amānah of a child is not only a burden to be managed carefully. It is also one of the few genuine opportunities a person has to keep earning reward long after their own life has ended, a door that stays open for as long as that child continues to live, pray, and do good, tracing back in some part to the home they were raised in.

What This Book Is Not Asking of You

Before moving further, it's worth being honest about what a book like this can and cannot reasonably ask of a parent. This is not a call to raise a perfect child, and it is not a claim that any parent, however devoted, controls the outcome entirely. Children are given their own will, their own tests, and their own relationship with Allah to work out for themselves nor is this a book that will treat every ordinary parenting mistake as a catastrophic breach of trust; the chapters ahead on correction, discipline, and repair exist precisely because no parent carries this amānah without error.

What this book does ask is narrower and more honest: that you understand what you were actually given the day your child was born, and

that you approach the years you have with them as someone managing a trust rather than someone simply raising "their own."

This Week

Before moving to the next chapter, sit with one question honestly, ideally away from the noise of the house: if Allah asked you today, specifically, what you have done with the amānah of this particular child, not the family's collective effort, not what the Madrasah is teaching them, just *your* hand in it, what would your honest answer be?

You don't need to answer it perfectly. You only need to answer it truthfully. That honesty is where every chapter after this one begins.

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

"My Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous." (Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt, 37:100 — the du'ā of Ibrāhīm صلى الله عليه وسلم)

What Comes Next

The next chapter goes to the foundation beneath all of this: the fiṭrah your child was born with, what Islam actually teaches about a child's natural starting point, and why understanding this changes how you think about everything from discipline to the fears many parents carry about their child's future.

Chapter 2

What Every Child Is Born With

A Two-Year-Old Who Has Never Been Taught to Pray

There's a moment many Nigerian Muslim parents have watched happen and never quite known what to make of it. A toddler, barely walking properly, sees an older sibling or a parent go into *sujūd*, and without any instruction, without anyone showing them how, drops to the floor and presses their small forehead against the mat too. No one taught them the word *sujūd*. No one explained what prayer is, or who Allah is, or why anyone would

bow down in the middle of a sitting room. And yet something in that child recognised the posture as right, worth imitating, worth doing with their whole small body.

Or picture a different, equally ordinary moment: two children sharing a plate of rice, and the younger one, without being told, pushes a piece of meat toward their sibling because the sibling clearly wants it more. No lecture on generosity preceded that gesture. No one had yet taught the child the word *sadaqah*. Something in the child simply knew, before language could explain it, that sharing what you have with someone who needs it is good.

Chapter 1 established that your child is an *amānah*, a trust placed in your hands. This chapter goes to what, exactly, was placed in

your hands. Because the honest answer is not a blank slate waiting to be filled with whatever you choose to write on it, and it is not a broken, sinful creature waiting to be corrected into goodness. Islam teaches something different from both of those pictures, and understanding it properly will change how you think about nearly everything else in this book.

What the Word "Fiṭrah" Actually Means

The Prophet ﷺ said it plainly: every child is born upon the fiṭrah, then it is his parents who make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian, just as an animal produces its young whole and complete; do you see any part of it born deficient? (Bukhārī and Muslim). After saying this, he instructed those listening to recite a verse of the Qur'an: *set your face toward the*

religion, inclining to truth, the fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has created all people; there is no changing the creation of Allah (Sūrah al-Rūm, 30:30).

Notice the pairing the Prophet ﷺ made himself, between the hadith and this specific verse. He wasn't simply describing an interesting fact about babies. He was pointing to something built into the very fabric of how Allah creates human beings which is an original setting, present in every single child regardless of which household, which country, or which religion they happen to be born into. The animal analogy is deliberate and worth sitting with. When an animal gives birth, its young arrives whole, no one expects to find a newborn lamb missing a leg and assume it was

"made that way" by nature. Anything missing is understood as damage done afterward. The Prophet ﷺ is telling us to think about a child's *fiṭrah* the same way. What a child arrives with is complete. Whatever is missing later, whatever hardness, whatever distance from Allah, whatever confusion about right and wrong was not there at the start. It was done to the *fiṭrah*, not born into it.

A Covenant Older Than Birth

This isn't a standalone idea. The Qur'an describes something that happened before any of us were born, a moment when Allah drew out the descendants of Ādam and had them testify against themselves: *"Am I not your Lord?"* And they said: *"Yes, we testify"* (Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:172). Scholars have understood this as

a primordial covenant. Every human soul, at some point before entering this world, already acknowledged Allah as Lord.

This is why the fiṭrah is not simply a Muslim child's fiṭrah, or a fiṭrah your child needs you to install. It is the shared starting point of every child ever born, Muslim household or otherwise. What differs afterward is not the starting point, but what is done with it which is precisely what the hadith names next: *then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian*. The shaping happens after birth, and the primary shapers named explicitly in the hadith are not schools, not society in the abstract, not fate. They are parents.

Not a Blank Slate, and Not Broken

It's worth being direct about why this matters, because it puts Islam in a genuinely different position from two other common ways of thinking about children that most of us absorb without realising it.

One view, common in modern secular parenting philosophy, treats a child as something close to a blank slate like a mind with no inherent direction, shaped entirely by environment and conditioning, with no natural inclination toward good or bad built in at all. Islam does not teach this. Your child was not born neutral. They were born leaning toward Allah.

A different view, inherited in various forms through other religious traditions, treats a child as born carrying some form of inherited fault

or sinfulness, needing to be corrected out of a flawed starting condition. Islam does not teach this either. The Prophet ﷺ's own analogy makes the opposite point explicitly, a child arrives *whole*, not deficient.

What Islam actually teaches sits between both of these, and it is, properly understood, a deeply hopeful starting point for parenting. You are not building faith and goodness in your child out of nothing. You are not correcting something broken. You are protecting and cultivating something that is already there, already inclined the right way, already recognising truth when it sees it the way that toddler recognised *sujūd* as worth imitating before anyone had explained a single ruling to them.

The Three Forces That Shape What's Already There

The hadith names parents specifically, but scholars who have written on tarbiyah have generally understood the shaping forces on a child's fiṭrah as falling into three overlapping categories, all of which this book will return to across later chapters.

The home: What a child watches modelled daily how their parents speak, how disagreements are handled, whether Allah is mentioned with warmth or only with threat shapes the fiṭrah more than any deliberate lesson does. Chapter 14, on the power of example over instruction, deals with this directly.

The company they keep: As children grow beyond the home, friends, classmates, and the wider environment they're allowed to move through begin exerting real pressure on the *fiṭrah*, sometimes reinforcing it, sometimes pulling hard against it. Chapter 20 addresses this specifically.

What they're taught, and how: The content of a child's religious education matters, but so does its delivery. Chapter 10 makes the case in detail that *how* the Qur'an and *dīn* are taught can either work with a child's *fiṭrah* or, handled harshly, work directly against it, teaching a child to associate Allah with fear rather than the natural love the *fiṭrah* already carries.

None of these forces are exotic or rare. They are the ordinary substance of a child's daily life

which is exactly why this chapter matters. Most damage done to a fiṭrah is not done through one dramatic event. It's done gradually, through years of ordinary days, by people who never intended any harm at all.

What This Looks Like in an Ordinary Nigerian Household

The fiṭrah shows up constantly in daily Nigerian Muslim life, often unremarked. A child who has never been formally taught tawḥīd will still ask, unprompted, "who made the sky?" This is a question the fiṭrah asks before any Madrasah lesson gets to it. A child raised in a home where du'ā is made openly, out loud, at ordinary moments before a journey, during illness, at the sight of good news tends to reach for du'ā themselves

without being told to, because the fiṭrah recognised something true in what it watched.

The same principle explains why so many Nigerian Muslim adults can trace a specific memory of their own fiṭrah being handled roughly, a Qur'anic school teacher whose corrections were purely physical and never explained, an elder who taught fear of Allah's punishment without ever mentioning His mercy, a household where religion arrived only as a list of prohibitions with no warmth attached. None of these people set out to damage a child's fiṭrah. Most loved the children in their care sincerely. But the fiṭrah was still shaped, gradually, by what it was exposed to, which is the entire reason this book exists, and the entire reason Chapter 1 insisted that good

intentions alone don't guarantee a trust is being kept well.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

It would be easy to take this chapter too far in the other direction, so it's worth being precise. Believing your child's fiṭrah is intact and inclined toward good is not the same as believing a child needs no real teaching, no correction, and no discipline. The fiṭrah is a starting inclination, not a finished education. A child still needs to be taught how to pray correctly, still needs the Qur'an taught to them properly, still needs boundaries, consequences, and guidance, all of which later chapters in this book cover in real depth. A seed planted in good soil still needs water, sunlight, and protection from whatever would choke it. The

fiṭrah being sound doesn't make the gardener unnecessary. It changes what the gardener is actually doing like cultivating something already alive, rather than manufacturing life from nothing.

This Week

Watch your child this week, really watch them for a moment where the fiṭrah shows itself without any instruction behind it. A question about Allah you never taught them to ask. An instinct toward fairness, kindness, or honesty that came from nowhere you can point to. When you catch it, name it to yourself for what it is: not luck, not coincidence, but evidence of what Allah already placed there before you ever said a word to them.

اللَّهُمَّ اَلْهَمْنِي رُشْدِي وَاَعِزَّنِي مِنْ شَرِّ نَفْسِي

"O Allah, inspire me with guidance, and protect me from the evil of my own soul." (Tirmidhī)

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves from what a child is born with to what parents are actually meant to do with it. What "tarbiyah" means in Islam, how it differs from mere discipline or control, and why the distinction between the two shapes every practical decision the rest of this book will ask you to make.

Chapter 3

What "Tarbiyah" Actually Means

A Home Where the Children Behave And a Home Where They Don't Need To

Picture two households, both known in their community as raising "well-behaved" children. In the first, the children are quiet the moment their father walks in. They sit properly for guests, greet elders correctly, and never raise their voice in front of company. Everyone who visits comments on how disciplined the children are. What almost no one outside the house sees is what happens the moment supervision lifts at school, away on a trip, once

they're old enough to leave for university. The obedience, it turns out, was never really theirs. It belonged to the fear of being caught.

In the second household, the children are just as respectful, just as well-mannered in front of guests but something is different, and it takes longer to notice what. These children behave the same way whether or not a parent is in the room. They pray when no one is checking. They tell the truth when a lie would be easier and safer. Something has actually taken root in them, rather than simply being enforced on them.

Both households would describe themselves, honestly, as having "trained" their children. Only one of them has actually done what Islam means by tarbiyah.

What the Word Itself Is Telling You

Arabic often reveals theology through its grammar, and tarbiyah (تربية) is one of the clearest examples of this in the entire language of the dīn. The word comes from the same root as one of Allah's own names *ar-Rabb*, usually translated as "the Lord," but carrying a much fuller meaning than that English word suggests. Ar-Rabb is the One who nurtures, sustains, and brings every created thing toward its completion, not simply the One who owns or rules over creation, but the One who actively cultivates it toward what it's meant to become.

Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn explained this connection directly. Tarbiyah means taking care of everything necessary for the development of the one being nurtured, and the very name Ar-Rabb is derived from this same root. Allah is called Rabb precisely because He nurtures His creation with His favour and care. When a Muslim child is taught to say, in du'ā for their parents, "*Rabbi irḥamhumā kamā rabbayānī ṣaghīrā*", "My Lord, have mercy on them as they raised me when I was small." The word for "raised" in that du'ā is built from the exact same root as the name of Allah being addressed.

This is not a coincidence of language. It's a statement about what parenting actually is. When you raise a child, you are not simply

managing behaviour, extracting obedience, or producing a presentable result for the neighbours to admire. You are participating in a small, human, deeply limited way in something that echoes Allah's own relationship with His creation: nurturing something toward what it's meant to become, not merely controlling what it does in front of you.

Luqmān's Curriculum

The Qur'an gives us an extended, detailed picture of exactly what this looks like in practice, through the advice of a father to his son, a passage so complete that it functions almost like a syllabus for tarbiyah and worth walking through slowly (Sūrah Luqmān, 31:12–19).

He begins not with behaviour, but with belief:

"O my son, do not associate partners with Allah.

Indeed, association [with Him] is a great

injustice" (31:13). Before manners, before prayer,

before anything else, the foundation is tawḥīd.

A correct relationship with Allah is established

first because everything that follows depends

on it.

He moves next to gratitude and family,

instructing his son to honour his parents,

acknowledging the hardship his mother bore in

raising him, while drawing a firm line: if

parents ever pressure a child toward shirk, they

are not to be obeyed in that specific matter,

even while continuing to be treated with

kindness and good companionship (31:14–15).

Notice the balance here. Obedience to parents

is real and commanded, but it is not unconditional; it sits beneath obedience to Allah, not above it.

He then teaches accountability. That even a deed the weight of a mustard seed, hidden inside a rock or anywhere in the heavens or the earth, will be brought forth by Allah, who is aware of the finest details of everything (31:16) before moving to worship and character together in a single breath: *"O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] resolve"* (31:17).

And finally, social conduct, the part of this passage most often skipped over, though it may be the most practically useful for daily life:

don't turn your cheek from people in contempt, and don't walk through the earth exultantly, for Allah does not love the boastful; be moderate in your pace, and lower your voice, for the ugliest of sounds is the braying of donkeys (31:18–19).

Read in full, this is not a list of rules. It's a complete curriculum. Aqīdah first, then family loyalty properly bounded, then accountability before Allah, then worship and moral courage together, then the everyday texture of how a person carries themselves with others. Nothing in it is about controlling outward behaviour for appearance's sake. Every single instruction is aimed at the son's internal formation; what kind of person he is becoming, not merely what he can be made to do in front of his father.

Tarbiyah, Ta'dīb, and Simple Control

Islamic scholarship distinguishes tarbiyah from several related but narrower concepts, and the distinctions matter for how this book will use these words going forward.

Ta'dīb refers specifically to discipline and correction. This means the moment-to-moment work of addressing a specific wrong, teaching adab in a specific situation. It's a real and necessary part of raising a child, and Chapter 15 of this book deals with it directly. But ta'dīb is a tool used *within* tarbiyah. It is not tarbiyah itself. A parent who only ever corrects, and never cultivates who is present exclusively to catch mistakes rather than to nurture growth has

reduced tarbiyah down to its smallest, narrowest piece.

Ta'līm refers to instruction and the transmission of knowledge. Teaching a child to read Qur'an, teaching them the rulings of ṣalāh, teaching them history and language fall here . This too sits inside tarbiyah, and later chapters on teaching the Qur'an and ṣalāh will return to it. But knowledge transferred without character formed around it produces a child who knows the rules without loving the One who gave them which is precisely the gap between reciting Qur'an correctly and actually being shaped by it.

Control is not a classical Islamic term at all, but it deserves naming plainly, because it's what many well-intentioned households

actually practise while believing they're doing tarbiyah. Control aims at compliance. It looks like this; a child who does what's asked, when watched, because the cost of not complying is high enough. It can look identical to tarbiyah from the outside, especially to visiting relatives. The difference only becomes visible later, exactly the way it did in the two households at the start of this chapter. One produces a child who has internalised something real, and the other produces a child who has simply learned to perform obedience under observation, with nothing underneath it once the observation stops.

Tarbiyah is the whole of what Luqmān modelled belief, worship, character, and conduct, nurtured together over years, aimed at

what the child actually becomes, not merely what they can be made to display.

Why This Distinction Matters More in a Nigerian Household Than It First Appears

Nigerian Muslim households often carry a strong cultural inheritance around respect and obedience. Children are expected to greet properly, sit properly, never talk back, never question an elder. Much of this is genuinely good, rooted in real Islamic values around respecting parents and elders. But it also creates a specific risk worth naming honestly: a household can become extremely good at producing outward compliance while never quite reaching the deeper work tarbiyah actually requires.

A child who greets every uncle correctly but has never had tawḥīd explained to them in a way that made sense has received adab without tarbiyah. A child who never raises their voice at home, out of fear rather than internalised respect, has received control without tarbiyah. The test Luqmān's example sets is a demanding one: *not does my child comply, but is my child actually becoming someone who believes, worships, and carries themselves the way Luqmān described whether or not I am in the room to see it.*

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

None of this is an argument against discipline, structure, or firm boundaries. Later chapters will make clear that tarbiyah without any ta'dīb inside it produces its own serious problems nor

is it a claim that a child's outward good behaviour is worthless or suspect by default; many children who behave well in front of others have, in fact, had that behaviour genuinely nurtured, not merely controlled. The point of this chapter is not to make you suspicious of every well-mannered child you see. It's to give you a clearer standard to hold your own parenting against one that asks about the child's heart and belief, not only their conduct in front of you.

This Week

Choose one thing you currently ask of your child. It may be a rule, a habit, an expectation and ask yourself honestly which category it falls into. Have you explained the *why* behind it in a way that could take root as belief, the way

Luqmān explained *why* before instructing *what*? Or is it, if you're honest, something you've only ever enforced?

رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي

"My Lord, expand for me my chest, and ease for me my task." (Sūrah Ṭāhā, 20:25–26)

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves from the foundation of tarbiyah into the actual stages of a child's upbringing; beginning before birth, with the choices that shape a home long before a child ever arrives in it.

Chapter 4

Before Birth (Choosing a Righteous Spouse and Home)

A Question Asked Too Late

There's a conversation that happens often in Nigerian Muslim families, and it usually happens at the wrong time. A young man's family is impressed by a prospective bride's education, her family's standing, how well she'll be received at gatherings. A young woman's family weighs a suitor's income, his prospects, whether he can provide the kind of home that will make her comfortable. Religion gets mentioned, of course he prays, of course she's modest, but it's rarely the filter everything else

passes through. It's one line item among several, and often not the deciding one.

Then, years later, once children have arrived, a different conversation starts. Why does discipline feel like a constant negotiation between two people who were never fully aligned on what matters? Why does the home feel tense in ways that seem to reach the children even when no one has said anything to them directly? Why does raising these children in dīn feel like an uphill effort inside this particular marriage, in a way it doesn't seem to for other households?

This chapter exists because tarbiyah does not begin the day a child is born. It begins with the choices that shape the home a child is born

into, choices most people make years before they're thinking about parenting at all.

What the Prophet ﷺ Actually Prioritised

The Prophet ﷺ was direct about what should weigh most heavily in choosing a spouse. He said a woman may be sought in marriage for four things; her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, or her religious commitment and then instructed plainly: *"choose the one who is religiously committed, may your hands be rubbed with dust"* (Bukhārī and Muslim), an old Arabic expression used to press the point home rather than a literal curse.

Scholars commenting on this hadith have been careful to note what it is *not* saying. It isn't forbidding consideration of wealth, family

standing, or beauty. These are natural things people look for, and there's nothing wrong with hoping for them. What the hadith establishes is priority, not exclusivity: when these qualities come into tension, when a family must choose between a wealthier or better-connected match and a more religiously committed one, the Prophet ﷺ is telling us plainly which one actually determines whether the marriage and everything that grows out of it succeeds by the only measure that ultimately matters.

The same principle runs in both directions, even though this particular hadith addresses a man weighing a bride. A family choosing a husband for their daughter is asked to apply an identical standard, a man's religious character weighed above his wealth or family name and

the wisdom is the same either way: character and dīn are what a person actually brings into the home they build together, long after wealth has been spent and family reputation has stopped mattering in the day-to-day reality of raising children under one roof.

Why This Determines the Home Before Any Child Exists

The reason this belongs in a book about raising children, rather than a book about marriage, is that a child's earliest and most formative environment isn't something a parent constructs consciously. It's the atmosphere of the marriage they were born into, already established, already setting the emotional temperature of the home before the child could form a single memory of their own.

The Qur'an describes what a marriage is meant to provide, and the language is worth sitting with directly: Allah created spouses for each other so that they might find tranquility in one another, placing between them love and mercy (Sūrah al-Rūm, 30:21). *Sakinah*, tranquility, rest, a settling of the heart is named as the actual purpose, with love and mercy as what makes that tranquility possible. A home without this isn't simply a home where the parents are unhappy. It's a home without the very atmosphere Chapter 2 described the *fiṭrah* as needing in order to be nurtured well because a child raised inside constant tension, however well-fed and well-schooled, is absorbing that tension into their own sense of what love, marriage, and Allah's mercy actually look like in practice.

This is why the choice of spouse matters so much for tarbiyah specifically, and not only for the couple's own happiness. A marriage built primarily on wealth or status, without real religious alignment, can function. Many do, but it rarely produces the *sakinah* the Qur'an describes as the actual point of marriage. And a home without that tranquility is a harder home to raise a child in well, regardless of how much money or how many advantages that household can otherwise provide.

When the Choice Has Already Been Made

Most people reading this chapter are not choosing a spouse right now. You're already married, already raising children, and the choices this chapter describes were made years ago, for better or worse, with whatever

understanding you had at the time. It would be neither honest nor useful for this chapter to leave you simply regretting a decision that can't be unmade.

What this chapter offers someone already married is not a verdict on a decision already taken, but a diagnostic tool for what might be happening in your home right now. If tarbiyah feels harder in your household than it should, if there's a persistent lack of alignment between you and your spouse on matters of dīn, if the home lacks the *sakinah* the Qur'an describes, that recognition itself is useful, because it points toward where the actual work needs to happen and not regret over the past, but deliberate effort now, between the two of you, to build the religious alignment and tranquility

that may not have been prioritised at the start. Marriages, like children, are not static. A home that didn't begin with religious alignment as its foundation can still build toward it through shared learning, shared worship, and honest conversation about what you both actually want your children raised inside.

For those reading this chapter who are not yet married, or who are helping guide a son, daughter, niece, or nephew toward marriage, the lesson is more direct: let the questions your family asks about a prospective spouse actually reflect what the Prophet ﷺ told us to prioritise not as the only question about wealth, character, temperament, and compatibility all matter but as the one question

that outweighs the others when they come into conflict.

The Nigerian Layer: Extended Family and the Home a Child Is Actually Born Into

There's a dimension to this chapter that Islamic parenting literature written for other contexts often misses, and it's worth naming directly for a Nigerian audience. The "home" a child is born into here is rarely just the nuclear unit of two parents. It often includes a mother-in-law's opinions on how the household should run, a compound shared with siblings and their families, financial obligations to extended relatives that shape the emotional climate of the marriage itself. Choosing a spouse well doesn't insulate a family from these realities

but it does determine how well-equipped the marriage is to navigate them together, with the same religious understanding, rather than pulling in different directions while extended family adds pressure from outside.

A couple genuinely aligned in dīn tends to weather these pressures as a united front. A couple that never had that alignment as its foundation often finds extended family tension exploiting a gap that was already there which the children in that home absorb just as certainly as they absorb anything else in their environment.

This Week

If you're married, take one honest look at the *sakinah* this chapter describes not whether your marriage is perfect, but whether there's real tranquility, love, and religious alignment between you and your spouse, and one concrete step you could take this week to strengthen whichever of these three is weakest. If you're not yet married, or guiding someone who is, write down literally, on paper what your family's actual priorities are in a prospective match, and be honest about whether dīn sits where the Prophet ﷺ told us to place it.

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا

لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

"Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes, and make us

leaders for the righteous." (Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:74)

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves from the home a child is born into the child's actual first seven years of life. What those years are for, why Islam treats early childhood so differently from what comes after, and what "just play" is actually accomplishing during this stage.

Chapter 5

The First Seven Years (Play, Attachment, and Foundation)

The Bedouin Who Didn't Understand Mercy

A man once came to the Prophet ﷺ and watched him kiss a child. He was confused genuinely, not sarcastically. "You kiss children?" he asked. "We don't kiss them." This wasn't cruelty on his part; it reflected an entire culture's assumption that affection toward small children was somehow beneath a man's dignity, a softness to be avoided. The Prophet ﷺ's reply is one of the more quietly devastating lines in the entire hadith corpus:

"What can I do if Allah has removed mercy from your heart?" (Bukhārī and Muslim).

That exchange is worth holding onto as this chapter opens, because the same assumption the Bedouin carried is alive and well in many Nigerian households today, dressed in more modern clothing. Affection is for infancy, the thinking goes, and by the time a child can talk and walk, it's time to get serious and time for structure, correction, expectations, the business of "raising" them properly. Play is what happens before real parenting begins. This chapter exists to correct that assumption directly, because Islam treats the first seven years of a child's life as far more deliberately shaped than most parents realise, and play sits at the very centre of it not despite being

childish, but because of what it's actually building.

A Saying Worth Knowing, and Worth Being Honest About

There's a well-known saying repeated constantly in Islamic parenting circles, often presented as a hadith: *"Play with your child for seven years, discipline him for seven years, and be his companion for seven years."* It's a genuinely useful framework, and it's attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib but it's worth being honest, the way this book has tried to be honest throughout, that this is not an authentic hadith of the Prophet ﷺ. It appears in later adab literature as wisdom attributed to 'Alī, not as a prophetic narration with a verified chain, and scholars who cite it are typically citing it as

ḥikmah, practical wisdom worth heeding not as revelation.

That distinction matters, but it doesn't make the framework useless. It roughly matches what the authentic Sunnah does establish about the stages of childhood. The hadith instructing parents to begin teaching prayer at seven, and only introducing firmer correction around it at ten (Abū Dāwūd and Tirmidhī, graded ḥasan), tells us plainly that Islam does not expect the same thing from a four-year-old that it expects from a ten-year-old. The saying attributed to 'Alī captures something true about that staged approach, even if it isn't itself a hadith, which is exactly why this chapter treats the first seven years as a distinct season with its own purpose,

rather than simply "early parenting" before the real work starts.

What Play Is Actually Doing?

It would be easy to think of play as time a child spends while waiting to become old enough for real instruction, perhaps even necessary for a child's mood, but not doing anything of substance. This chapter is making a different claim: play during these years is not a break from tarbiyah. It is tarbiyah, operating through the only mechanism a young child's mind is actually equipped to learn through.

A three-year-old does not yet reason abstractly. They cannot sit through an explanation of why honesty matters and internalise it the way a twelve-year-old might. What they can do is imitate, explore, and absorb through play,

repetition, the emotional tone of the adults around them long before they can process a single explicit lesson. This is exactly what Chapter 2 described happening with the toddler who dropped into sujūd without being taught to. That wasn't instruction. It was a child's natural mode of learning at that age. What they have at that age is imitation, driven by attachment to the people they watch doing exactly what it's designed to do.

This means the parent who dismisses these years as "not yet time for real tarbiyah" is making a serious miscalculation. The foundation is being laid constantly during this period through what a child watches, what they're allowed to explore safely, and above all, through how securely attached they feel to the

adults raising them. Whether that foundation is being laid well or poorly is happening regardless of whether a parent is deliberately teaching anything at all.

The Prophet ﷺ at Play

The record of how the Prophet ﷺ actually spent time with young children is worth knowing in some detail, because it directly contradicts the instinct many parents have to treat affection and playfulness as somehow beneath the seriousness of raising a child correctly.

Anas ibn Mālik, who observed the Prophet ﷺ closely for years, said he never saw anyone more compassionate toward children. He would visit his infant son Ibrāhīm at the home of his wet-nurse, pick him up, and kiss him. He

carried his grandsons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn on his shoulders, played with them openly in front of his companions, and once, prostrating in prayer, allowed one of them to climb onto his back rather than cut the moment short, he prolonged his sujūd as not to disturb the child. When a companion named al-Aqra' boasted that he had ten children and had never once kissed any of them, the Prophet ﷺ looked at him and said plainly that whoever shows no mercy will be shown none (Bukhārī).

None of this was incidental to his character. It was central to it. A man widely regarded, even by his enemies, as the most serious and consequential figure of his era spent real, unhurried time at play with small children,

without any sense that doing so diminished his authority or his mission.

What Attachment Actually Builds

The reason this matters so much for tarbiyah specifically not just for a child's happiness in the moment is that the security a child feels in these early years becomes the foundation everything else in this book is built on top of. A child who experiences their parents as a source of warmth, safety, and delight during these years enters the later stages of childhood. The teaching, the correction, the discipline is what Chapters 6 and 7 will cover from a position of trust. Correction from a parent who has been a consistent source of warmth lands very differently than correction from a parent experienced mainly as an enforcer of rules.

This is, in effect, the practical foundation beneath everything the earlier chapters of this book have argued. Chapter 1 established that a child is an amānah. Chapter 3 established that tarbiyah aims at the heart, not merely behaviour. This chapter is where that aim actually begins to take shape not through lessons, but through years of a child feeling safe enough, loved enough, and delighted in enough that everything taught to them afterward has somewhere secure to land.

The Nigerian Household: Warmth Amid Busyness

It's worth naming a real pressure many Nigerian parents face during these years honestly. Between work, business, extended family obligations, and the sheer busyness of running a household, unhurried playtime with

a small child can feel like a luxury rather than a priority. This is something to get to once the more urgent demands of the day are handled. Add to this a cultural inheritance, in some homes, that treats overt affection and play as somewhat indulgent, more the domain of mothers and grandmothers than something a father invests time in directly, and you have real structural pressure against exactly what this chapter is arguing for.

The Prophet ﷺ's own example pushes directly against this. He was, by any measure, an extraordinarily busy man carrying the responsibility of an entire emerging nation, a military campaign, a growing community's disputes and needs and he still made time to kiss his grandchildren, carry them on his

shoulders, and prolong his own prayer rather than disturb a child playing on his back. If the busiest man in Madinah found the time, busyness alone is rarely the real obstacle. It's usually a question of what's been prioritised.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing for permissiveness, and it isn't suggesting boundaries or gentle correction have no place before age seven. Young children still need safety, structure, and clear limits, appropriate to their age. What it is arguing against is the idea that these years are a kind of holding pattern before real parenting begins, and that warmth and play are indulgences rather than the actual mechanism through which a young child's fiṭrah is being nurtured or neglected.

This Week

Spend unhurried time like fifteen minutes, uninterrupted, phone away, playing with your youngest child this week, on their terms rather than yours. If it's been a while since you did this without also trying to teach, correct, or manage them during it, notice what that tells you about where play currently sits in your own priorities.

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي رَحِيمًا بِمَنْ حَوْلِي كَمَا كَانَ نَبِيُّكَ رَحِيمًا

بِالصِّبْيَانِ

"O Allah, make me merciful toward those around me, as Your Prophet was merciful toward children."

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves into the years that follow; seven to ten when a child begins to be taught ṣalāh directly and given real responsibility for the first time, and what changes about a parent's role once "just play" is no longer the whole picture.

Chapter 6: Seven to Ten (Teaching Ṣalāh and Responsibility)

The Morning Everything Changes

There's a specific morning in many Nigerian Muslim households that parents remember more clearly than almost any other in their child's early years. That is the first morning a seven-year-old is woken for Fajr not as an observer, standing beside a parent out of curiosity, but as someone now expected to actually pray. Small hands fumbling through wuḍū' they've only half-mastered. A qiyām that wobbles. A recitation still being learned by ear rather than fully understood. It's clumsy, it's

slow, and it is, in Islamic terms, the beginning of something entirely new in that child's life.

Chapter 5 described the first seven years as a season of play, attachment, and foundation years where a young child learns almost entirely through imitation and emotional security, not instruction. This chapter is about what changes once that foundation is in place. Seven marks a genuine shift in Islamic parenting, not an arbitrary number but a recognised threshold at which a child is understood to have developed enough comprehension to begin real religious instruction and real responsibility not yet as a fully accountable adult, but as someone actively being prepared to become one.

The Hadith That Shapes This Entire Stage

The Prophet ﷺ gave parents a specific, staged instruction that has shaped Islamic parenting practice for over a thousand years: *"Order your children to pray at seven, discipline them for it at ten, and separate them in their beds"* (Abū Dāwūd, and widely graded ḥasan by major scholars of ḥadīth). Three distinct instructions, given together, each worth taking seriously on its own terms.

Order them to pray at seven: Scholars have been clear that "ordering" here means far more than issuing an instruction and walking away. It means actively teaching, showing a child how to make wuḍū' correctly, teaching them the movements of ṣalāh, teaching them what's being recited and why, and beginning the

practice of praying together as a family, so the child learns primarily by doing it alongside you, not by being lectured about it in the abstract.

Discipline them for it at ten: This is the part of the hadith most often quoted out of context, and worth being precise about. Scholars across the centuries have placed real qualifications around this instruction: any physical correction must be light, must never strike the face, must come only after every other form of teaching, encouragement, and reminder has already been tried consistently for three full years, and exists as a narrow, last-resort measure not a first response to a child forgetting to pray. Some contemporary scholars have noted disagreement over the specific chain of narration for this hadith, though the

underlying principle that a ten-year-old's continued neglect of ṣalāh warrants firmer correction than a seven-year-old's is not seriously disputed. Chapter 15 of this book returns to the full question of correction and discipline in far more depth; what matters here is the sequencing the hadith establishes: years of teaching first, correction only as a last resort, and even then, bounded tightly by mercy rather than severity.

Separate them in their beds: By age ten, children begin developing an awareness of their own bodies and privacy that younger children don't yet have. This instruction reflects Islam's broader teaching on modesty being introduced gradually, at an age-appropriate pace, rather than left unaddressed until puberty arrives and

the conversation becomes urgent rather than gradual.

Why the Sequencing Matters More Than the Individual Instructions

Read in isolation, the "discipline at ten" portion of this hadith can sound harsher than the hadith as a whole actually is. Read together, as a sequence, what the Prophet ﷺ is describing is a three-year runway. Teach consistently from seven, so that by ten, a child has had genuine, sustained instruction, not a single conversation followed by years of silence and then sudden correction. A parent who has taught ṣalāh faithfully, prayed alongside their child regularly, and modelled its importance through their own consistent practice across those three years will very rarely need to reach the third stage of this hadith at all. The instruction to discipline at

ten is not really the point of the hadith. It's a backstop for the rare case where genuine, patient teaching over three years still hasn't taken root not a substitute for that teaching.

This is worth sitting with directly, because some parents skip straight to correction without ever doing the work of years one through three. A child who is scolded for not praying correctly at age nine, having never actually been taught properly at seven or eight, is being failed by the sequence this hadith establishes not protected by it.

Responsibility Beyond Ṣalāh

While the hadith centres specifically on prayer, the broader principle of this age range. A child now capable of real understanding and real responsibility extends naturally into other areas

of a child's life. This is typically the age at which Nigerian Muslim children begin attending Qur'anic school with real regularity, when household chores start being assigned in earnest rather than treated as play, when a child is trusted with small errands, small sums of money, small tasks that matter.

The underlying wisdom is the same one running through the ṣalāh instruction: a seven-to-ten-year-old is being treated neither as a toddler who understands nothing, nor as an adult who understands everything but as someone actively being built up toward accountability, given real trust in proportion to their growing capacity, and taught through doing rather than only being told. A young companion like 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, still a boy

during much of his time with the Prophet ﷺ, was trusted with real closeness to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who made du'ā for him directly, *"O Allah, grant him deep understanding of the religion"* (Bukhārī) and Ibn 'Abbās grew into one of the greatest scholars of the entire Ummah, in no small part because he was taken seriously as a young learner during exactly this stage of his life, not dismissed as too young to matter yet.

What This Looks Like in a Nigerian Household

This is often the age at which formal Qur'anic instruction begins in earnest, whether at home, in a Madrasah, or with a visiting mu'allim and it's worth connecting this chapter directly to the caution raised in Chapter 2 about how a fiṭrah gets shaped. A child taught ṣalāh and

Qur'an during these years by someone patient, someone who explains rather than only corrects, someone who treats mistakes as normal steps in learning rather than failures to be punished, tends to associate this entire stage of life with warmth and growing capability. A child taught the same material harshly through fear, through physical correction disproportionate to what this hadith actually describes, through teachers or parents who treat every mistake as defiance often associates these same years with dread, an association that can outlast the years themselves by decades.

This is also frequently the age at which children in Nigerian households are given real chores like fetching water, running errands to a

neighbour's shop, helping mind younger siblings. Handled well, in the spirit of this chapter, these responsibilities build genuine competence and self-respect. Handled as pure labour, disconnected from any sense of trust or growing capability being recognised, they can become simply burdens rather than the kind of purposeful responsibility this stage of childhood is meant to cultivate.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not encouraging parents to reach for physical correction as a standard tool of this age range. The hadith itself places that option last, after years of teaching, and bounded tightly by the limits scholars have consistently placed around it nor is this chapter suggesting a seven-year-old should be treated

with the same expectations as a ten-year-old, or a ten-year-old with the expectations due an adolescent. Each age within this range still calls for real patience and real allowance for a child's still-developing understanding. What this chapter is arguing is narrower: that seven to ten is a real, distinct season with its own purpose, one where teaching and not correction is the actual work required of a parent, and where a child's growing capacity for understanding and responsibility deserves to be met with real investment, not postponed until it becomes urgent.

This Week

If you have a child in this age range, ask yourself honestly: in the last month, how much of your engagement with their ṣalāh has been

teaching, sitting with them, correcting gently, explaining versus simply checking whether it happened and reacting if it didn't? If the answer leans heavily toward the second, this week is a good week to shift it back toward the first.

رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِي مُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةِ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي

"My Lord, make me an establiher of prayer, and from my descendants [as well]." (Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:40)

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves into the years many parents find hardest to navigate. That is age ten to puberty. This is when the boundaries introduced in this chapter need to hold firmer, when real discipline becomes a live question

rather than a distant hadith, and when the difference between correction and control, first raised in Chapter 3, gets tested in earnest.

Chapter 7

Ten to Puberty (Boundaries, Discipline, and the Hadith on Correction)

The Years Nobody Warns You About

Ask Nigerian Muslim parents which years of raising a child felt hardest, and a surprising number won't say the teenage years. They'll point to this stretch of ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen ages. These are the years just before puberty, when a child is no longer small and compliant, but not yet old enough for the more adult conversations adolescence eventually allows. They talk back more. They test rules they used to accept without question. They notice unfairness and say so. A parent who

managed the earlier years with relative ease can suddenly find themselves at a loss, wondering whether the child in front of them is becoming defiant, or simply becoming a person.

Chapter 6 ended with the hadith instructing correction to begin, in a very narrow and bounded sense, around age ten. This chapter widens that lens not just the specific question of ṣalāh, but boundaries and discipline more broadly, during a stretch of childhood that Islam treats with real precision, and that many parents navigate almost entirely on instinct.

Still Not Accountable But No Longer a Small Child

Before going further, it's worth returning to a hadith that reframes this entire stage correctly. The Prophet ﷺ said that the pen is lifted

from three people, a sleeping person until they wake, a child until they reach puberty, and a person of unsound mind until they recover (Abū Dāwūd, graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī). A child in this age range, however capable and however much they resemble a young adult in size and vocabulary, is still not yet morally accountable before Allah in the full legal sense. Their good deeds are recorded and rewarded, but their errors are not yet weighed against them the way an adult's would be.

This matters enormously for how a parent should approach discipline during these years. A ten-to-twelve-year-old who lies, who neglects a chore, who speaks disrespectfully, is doing something genuinely wrong that needs correction but they are not sinning in the way

an adult would be, and they should not be corrected as though they were. The purpose of discipline at this stage is formation, not punishment for its own sake shaping a person who is actively becoming accountable, not yet holding them to the standard of someone who already is.

What Changes at This Age, and Why Boundaries Matter More Than Ever

Cognitively and socially, a great deal shifts during this stretch. A child begins reasoning more independently, questioning explanations that satisfied them at seven, noticing inconsistency between what parents say and what parents do far more sharply than before. Peer relationships start to carry real weight; friendships, classroom dynamics, the opinions of other children beginning to compete with

parental authority for the first time. This is often the age where Qur'anic school attendance becomes more serious, where academic pressure intensifies, and where a child starts to have a genuine social world outside the direct reach of their parents.

This is exactly why boundaries like clear, consistent, explained matter more during this stage than at almost any other point in childhood. Chapter 3 drew the distinction between tarbiyah and mere control. Tarbiyah aims at what a child actually becomes, while control aims only at compliance in the moment. That distinction gets tested directly during these years, because a child who has only ever experienced control enforced without explanation, obedience demanded without

reasoning, now has both the capacity and the growing independence to notice the gap, and often responds to it with exactly the resistance a parent least expects.

A boundary rooted in tarbiyah looks different from a boundary rooted in control, even when the rule itself is identical. "You may not go to your friend's house unsupervised" delivered with an explanation the child can actually understand to mean safety, trust being built gradually, the reasoning behind it lands as structure. The same rule delivered only as "because I said so" lands, to a child at this age, as arbitrary control, and children at this age are increasingly equipped to notice, resent, and eventually resist that difference.

What Discipline Should Actually Look Like Here

Classical scholarship on tarbiyah has consistently emphasised graduated correction, beginning always with the gentlest effective measure and escalating only when genuinely necessary, never starting at the harshest available option. This could be a look of disapproval, a calm word, a brief withdrawal of a privilege connected logically to the misbehaviour. Only after these measures have been tried, and only for matters that genuinely warrant it, does firmer correction belong in the picture at all and even then, bounded by everything the previous chapter already established: never in anger, never disproportionate, never aimed at humiliating a child in front of others.

This is deliberately not the chapter that goes deep into the specifics of how to correct a child without damaging their sense of self, That discussion belongs properly to Chapter 15, later in this book, where the full weight of what correction should and shouldn't sound like is addressed directly. What matters here is the broader principle. This age range is precisely where a parent's approach to discipline either builds a child's respect for boundaries as something reasonable and rooted in care, or teaches them that boundaries are simply obstacles to be resented and, eventually, evaded the moment supervision lifts.

Consistency Between Parents

One practical failure point deserves direct attention here, because it shows up constantly

in this age range specifically: inconsistency between mother and father, or between a parent and the wider household. A child at ten or eleven is fully capable of noticing when one parent enforces a rule and the other quietly overlooks it, and fully capable of exploiting that gap, not out of malice, but because it's exactly what any person, child or adult, does when a boundary turns out to be negotiable depending on who's enforcing it. Chapter 4's discussion of marital alignment in *dīn* becomes concretely practical here. A household where both parents have genuinely discussed and agreed on boundaries, rather than improvising differently in the moment, gives a child something far more stable to grow against than a household where the rules shift depending on who's home.

The Nigerian Layer: School, Peer Pressure, and the First Real Tests

This age range often coincides with a child's first serious exposure to influences a parent can no longer fully supervise, secondary school beginning or approaching, friendships formed away from the family's direct view, the first real taste of peer opinion mattering as much as parental opinion once did. Chapter 2 named "the company they keep" as one of the three forces shaping a child's *fiṭrah*, and this is the age where that force starts exerting real, daily pressure for the first time.

Parents often respond to this shift in one of two ways, both of which tend to backfire. Some tighten control sharply, restricting a child's world in an attempt to eliminate outside influence entirely which, absent the

explanation and trust-building this chapter has emphasised, often produces exactly the resentment and eventual rebellion a parent was trying to prevent. Others, overwhelmed by a child who suddenly talks back and tests limits, simply disengage, treating the friction as a phase to be endured rather than a stage requiring real, patient investment. Neither response reflects the model this chapter has described like boundaries held firmly, explained honestly, enforced consistently, and paired with the ongoing relational warmth Chapter 5 established as the foundation everything else depends on.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that boundaries should loosen simply because a child is capable

of resisting them, nor is it suggesting that firmness itself is somehow at odds with tarbiyah. The opposite is closer to the truth, since a child without real boundaries during this age range is left without the very structure Islam is asking parents to provide. What this chapter is arguing against is boundary-setting divorced from explanation, consistency, and the underlying relationship of trust. So boundaries should be seen as bare control rather than boundaries as an expression of care a child can, even while resisting them in the moment, eventually come to understand.

This Week

Pick one rule currently enforced in your household for a child in this age range, and ask honestly: does my child actually understand

why this rule exists, in language that makes sense to them or have they only ever been told *that* it exists? If it's the latter, this week is the week to have that conversation properly.

رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

"My Lord, increase me in knowledge." (Sūrah Ṭāhā, 20:114)

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves into adolescence itself, the years when a child begins questioning openly, when control becomes actively counterproductive if it hasn't already, and when a parent's task shifts from building boundaries to learning how to guide a young person who is beginning, in every sense, to think for themselves.

Chapter 8

Adolescence (Guiding a Child Who's Starting to Question)

The Pen Is No Longer Lifted

Chapter 7 rested on a hadith that gave parents real breathing room, the pen lifted from a child until puberty, their errors not yet weighed against them the way an adult's would be (Abū Dāwūd). This chapter opens with the flip side of that same hadith. Puberty is not simply another birthday. It is the specific, named threshold at which the pen begins recording again. It is the moment a young person becomes, in the fullest Islamic sense, accountable before Allah for their own choices.

This is worth sitting with, because it reframes everything that follows in this chapter. Adolescence is often treated, in both Nigerian culture and modern parenting literature generally, primarily as a problem to be managed because of hormones, rebellion, moodiness, a difficult stretch to survive until the child comes out the other side more reasonable. Islam frames it differently. This is the stage at which a person begins actually owning their relationship with Allah for the first time. They are no longer simply inheriting their parents' faith by default, but becoming the one who will answer for their own prayer, their own choices, their own heart. A parent's task shifts accordingly: from building the structure a child lives inside, toward helping a young person who is now genuinely responsible

for themselves choose that structure freely, and mean it.

Questioning Is Not the Enemy

Many parents experience their adolescent's first real questions about faith; *why do we have to pray this many times, why can't I do this, does Allah really see everything I do* as a crisis, something to be shut down quickly before it spreads. It's worth pausing here on a story the Qur'an itself tells about exactly this kind of questioning, and who was doing it.

Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, as a young man surrounded by star-worship and idolatry, is described searching for truth in real time. Seeing a star at

night, he said, *"This is my Lord,"* then watched it set, and said, *"I do not love things that disappear."* He tried the same with the moon, and then the sun, following the same pattern, before finally declaring plainly that he turns his face toward the One who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward truth, refusing to associate partners with Him (Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:75–79). This is one of the great prophets of Islam, shown to us in the Qur'an in the middle of an honest, searching process, testing, discarding, searching again before arriving at certainty.

This matters enormously for how a parent should receive an adolescent's questions. A teenager asking hard questions about faith is not necessarily losing it. They may be doing, in

miniature, exactly what Ibrāhīm did. That is, moving from an inherited belief toward an owned one, through honest searching rather than passive acceptance. A parent who responds to this process with alarm, defensiveness, or blunt insistence on obedience without explanation risks shutting down exactly the process that would have led to real, durable conviction. The kind Chapter 3 described tarbiyah as aiming for in the first place, as opposed to mere control.

What Faces a Young Person During This Stage

It's worth being honest about what adolescence actually asks of a young Muslim, because the difficulty is real, not imagined. This is the age at which the pull toward sin becomes strongest because of the desire, peer pressure, the pull of

an identity separate from one's parents at precisely the moment a person becomes fully accountable for how they respond to it. The Prophet ﷺ named this directly: among seven people Allah will shade on a day with no other shade, he named specifically *a youth who grew up in the worship of Allah* (Bukhārī and Muslim). He is singled out, among adults of every other description, precisely because choosing devotion during these years, against real and specific temptation, is recognised as a genuinely difficult achievement, not an easy default.

This is also the age the Qur'an honours through the story of the Companions of the Cave. The young men who held firmly to tawḥīd against the full weight of their society's

disbelief, fleeing rather than compromise, described by Allah as youths who believed in their Lord, whom He increased in guidance (Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:13). The Qur'an's own template for admirable adolescent faith is not passive inheritance, it's young people actively choosing conviction against real social pressure, exactly the pressure a Nigerian Muslim teenager faces today in a secondary school classroom, a university hostel, or a group chat full of peers with very different values.

The Prophet ﷺ and the Young Man Who Asked for Permission to Sin

Perhaps no single narration illustrates how to guide a struggling adolescent better than this one. A young man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, plainly, in front of the gathered

companions: *"O Messenger of Allah, permit me to commit zinā."* The companions were furious, moving to rebuke and silence him. The Prophet ﷺ did the opposite. He told them to leave him be, and called the young man closer.

What followed was not a lecture. It was a series of questions. *"Would you like it for your mother?"* the Prophet ﷺ asked. "No," the young man said. "People don't like it for their mothers either," the Prophet ﷺ replied and continued the same way through the young man's daughter, sister, and aunt, each time the young man answering that he wouldn't want it for them, each time the Prophet ﷺ pointing out that no one wants it for theirs. Then the Prophet ﷺ placed his hand on the young man and made du'ā for him for his heart to be

purified, his chastity protected, his sins forgiven. The narrator, Abū Umāmah, reports that afterward, the young man never again inclined toward that sin (authenticated by al-Albānī).

Notice everything the Prophet ﷺ did *not* do. He didn't shame him publicly. He didn't allow the companions to humiliate him into silence. He didn't simply forbid and dismiss. He engaged the young man's own reasoning, brought him to see the truth through his own conscience rather than through bare command, and then closed with mercy and du'ā rather than condemnation. This is the model this entire chapter is built around and it is, not coincidentally, the same behaviour-not-identity distinction Chapter 3 introduced and this

book's companion volume treats in far greater depth. Address the specific struggle honestly, engage the reasoning behind it, and never let a young person's real temptation become a verdict on who they are.

From Directive to Consultative

Practically, this means a real shift in how a parent communicates with a child during this stage away from bare instruction, toward the kind of reasoning Luqmān modelled in Chapter 3, and the kind the Prophet ﷺ modelled with the young man above. An adolescent told simply *"because I said so"* has every reason, given their newly independent capacity for reasoning, to quietly discount the instruction the moment it's inconvenient. An adolescent walked through the actual reasoning even

reasoning they initially resist is being treated the way Islam treats a person who has become accountable: capable of understanding, worth persuading, not merely worth controlling.

This doesn't mean permissiveness, or treating every boundary as up for negotiation. It means the *how* of enforcing boundaries shifts. There should be dialogue first, explanation offered honestly, real listening extended to a young person's actual struggles rather than dismissal of them while the boundaries themselves, rooted in what Islam actually asks, remain firm.

The Nigerian Layer: Exams, Phones, and Two Worlds at Once

Nigerian Muslim adolescents typically face this stage while juggling intense academic pressure like WAEC, JAMB, the weight of family

expectation around results alongside their first real access to phones, social media, and a digital world almost entirely outside parental view. They are frequently moving daily between two worlds with very different values: a home and Madrasah environment rooted in dīn, and a secondary school or university environment shaped by very different assumptions about dating, dress, ambition, and success. Girls often face specific pressure around modesty and marriage expectations arriving earlier and more intensely than for their brothers; boys often face pressure to perform as future providers before they're remotely ready for that weight.

None of this is a reason for despair, but it is a reason for parents to stay genuinely present during these years rather than assuming the

foundational work of earlier chapters means adolescence will simply take care of itself. The Companions of the Cave held their conviction because it was genuinely theirs, tested against real pressure and not because their environment was easy.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that boundaries should dissolve during adolescence, or that questioning faith is always healthy searching rather than sometimes genuine drift that needs real intervention. A parent still has real responsibility during these years, and real concern is warranted when a young person's choices become genuinely harmful. What it is arguing against is the reflex to treat every question as rebellion and every

boundary-testing as defiance requiring control rather than engagement. The posture the Prophet ﷺ modelled with the young man who came asking for permission to sin, when anger and dismissal would have been so much easier, and would very likely have sent that young man away unchanged.

This Week

If you have a teenager in your home, find one question they've asked recently about faith, about a rule, about something they've resisted that you answered with a bare instruction rather than real engagement. Revisit it this week, and try the Prophet ﷺ's approach: questions before verdicts.

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ

"Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes." (Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:74, partial)

What Comes Nex

This closes Part 2 of this book. The stages of a child's upbringing, from before birth through adolescence. Part 3 turns to the actual content of tarbiyah. What a parent is meant to instill during all of these years, beginning with the foundation beneath everything else like tawḥīd, and love of Allah before rules.

Chapter 9

Tawḥīd and Love of Allah Before Rules

The Question Nobody Asks a Child Directly

Ask most Nigerian Muslim children what Allah does, and a common early answer, learned before almost anything else, is some version of: *He punishes people who do bad things.* Ask an adult raised in a household where religion arrived mainly through warnings, don't do this or you'll be punished, fear the Fire, Allah is watching to catch you and you'll often find someone who technically believes correctly, who can recite the shahādah and name the pillars of īmān without hesitation, and who

still, somewhere underneath, relates to Allah the way one relates to a strict examiner rather than a Beloved.

This chapter is about the order in which a child learns who Allah is, and why that order matters as much as the content itself. Chapter 1 established that a child's relationship with Allah is one of the five things entrusted to a parent. This chapter takes on that specific piece directly, not tawḥīd as a set of correct propositions to be memorised, but tawḥīd as a relationship, built the way every lasting relationship is built: through love, before the rules that love makes sense of.

Mercy Written Before Anything Else

There is a hadith that describes something Allah did before creation itself finished

unfolding; that when Allah decreed the creation, He wrote in a Book kept with Him above the Throne: *"My mercy prevails over My wrath"* (Bukhārī and Muslim). This is not an incidental detail. It is Allah telling us, in His own words, which of His attributes takes precedence not as a technicality for scholars to debate, but as the starting point every Muslim, and every Muslim child, should be taught to understand Him from.

The Prophet ﷺ made this same point unforgettably concrete. Prisoners were once brought before him, among them a woman frantically searching through the captives for her own child. When she found him, she pulled him to her chest and began nursing him immediately, right there. The Prophet ﷺ

turned to his companions and asked: "*Do you think this woman would throw her child into the fire?*" They answered, of course not, not if she had any power to prevent it. He said: "*Allah is more merciful to His slaves than this woman is to her child*" (Bukhārī and Muslim).

This is the image a child should be given first, before the rules, before the warnings, before the details of what is ḥalāl and what is ḥarām. Not because those details don't matter. They matter enormously, and this book will return to them but because a child who understands Allah's mercy as the foundation will receive everything that follows from a position of love and trust, while a child taught fear first, and mercy only as an afterthought if at all, will often experience the entire dīn as a system of

threats to be managed rather than a relationship to be treasured.

Why the Order Matters So Much

Scholars of tazkiyah, the purification and development of the soul have long described worship as resting on three foundations working together: love of Allah, hope in His mercy, and fear of His displeasure. The relationship between them is often illustrated as a bird in flight: love as the head, directing where the bird goes, with hope and fear as the two wings that keep it balanced and airborne. A bird with only wings and no head has no direction. A bird with a head but no wings cannot fly at all. But scholars have been consistently clear about which of the three is

the head, the thing giving the other two their meaning and direction, and it is love, not fear.

A child raised with fear alone which could be seen as the wings without the head tends to develop one of two outcomes as they grow older and gain the independence Chapter 8 described. Either the fear holds only as long as external enforcement does, collapsing the moment supervision lifts, the way Chapter 3 described control-based obedience collapsing without the parent present to enforce it or the fear calcifies into something closer to dread than reverence, a relationship with Allah experienced as one long low-grade anxiety rather than the *sakinah*, the tranquility, Chapter 4 described marriage as being built

toward, and which a person's relationship with their Creator is meant to offer even more fully.

A child raised with love as the foundation, with fear and hope introduced afterward as the wings that give that love direction and accountability, tends to carry a very different relationship with Allah into adulthood, one where obedience flows from wanting to please Someone genuinely loved, not merely from wanting to avoid punishment from Someone genuinely feared.

What This Looks Like in Practice

Teaching tawḥīd love-first doesn't mean avoiding the difficult parts of the dīn, the reality of accountability, the seriousness of sin, the genuine existence of Paradise and the Fire.

Chapter 8 already showed the Prophet ﷺ

addressing a young man's real temptation toward a real sin, honestly and directly. What changes is sequencing and emphasis, not content.

In practice, this looks like introducing Allah to a small child primarily through gratitude and wonder before introducing Him through prohibition and pointing out the specific mercy in a meal, in rain, in a recovered illness, and naming Allah as the source of that specific good thing, the way Chapter 2 described the natural questions a young child's *fiṭrah* already asks about who made the sky. It looks like teaching *du'ā* as an intimate conversation with Someone who loves the child asking, not merely a memorised formula recited out of obligation. It looks like a parent's own visible

relationship with Allah, turning to Him in both gratitude and difficulty, speaking of Him with warmth rather than only invoking Him as a threat during moments of misbehaviour being modelled consistently, in line with what Chapter 14 will establish about the power of example over instruction.

It also means being honest, as the child grows older, about accountability and the reality of the Fire, not concealing these realities, but introducing them only after love has been firmly established as the foundation they sit on top of, the way the wings of Ibn al-Qayyim's bird only function properly once the head is already leading.

The Nigerian Pattern Worth Naming Directly

Chapter 2 already named a specific danger in Nigerian Muslim households: religious instruction arriving as obligation before it arrives as love. This chapter is where that danger becomes most consequential, because tawḥīd is the foundation everything else in this book rests on. A household where Allah is invoked mainly in the imperative. Expressions like *pray or you'll be punished, behave or Allah will be angry with you* is teaching a technically correct theology through an emotionally damaging delivery, and children, as established throughout this book, absorb delivery as much as content.

This isn't a call to abandon seriousness about accountability, sin, or the reality of Judgment.

It's a call to check the order. A parent who has only ever invoked Allah as an enforcer during moments of correction, and rarely or never spoken of Him with visible love, gratitude, and warmth during ordinary moments, has inadvertently taught a child that Allah is primarily associated with trouble, precisely the opposite of what the mother-and-captive hadith was given to us to correct.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that fear of Allah is inappropriate or should be minimised. The Qur'an and Sunnah are full of serious warning, and a healthy fear of displeasing Allah is a real and necessary part of īmān, one of the two wings the bird genuinely needs to fly nor is it

suggesting children should be shielded from the more difficult realities of the dīn indefinitely. What it is arguing is narrower and more precise. That love should come first, chronologically and emphatically, so that everything taught afterward including the genuinely difficult parts is received by a heart that already trusts the One asking it of them.

This Week

Notice, honestly, the last three times you mentioned Allah to your child. Were they moments of correction and warning, or moments of gratitude and wonder? If the balance has tipped heavily toward the first, this week is the week to deliberately restore it.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ حُبَّكَ وَحُبَّ مَنْ يُحِبُّكَ

"O Allah, I ask You for Your love, and the love of those who love You." (Tirmidhī)

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves from the foundation of love to the practical work built on top of it: teaching the Qur'an itself. The methods that actually work, and how the same love-before-rules principle applies to how a child comes to know Allah's own words.

Chapter 10 Teaching the Qur'an: Practical Methods That Actually Work

The Room Every Nigerian Muslim Remembers

Ask a room full of Nigerian Muslim adults about their memories of learning Qur'an as children, and you'll get two very different kinds of stories in the same room. Some will describe a teacher's patience, the pride of completing a sūrah, the particular comfort of a verse learned young that still surfaces unprompted decades later during difficulty. Others will describe a cane kept beside the mat, the dread of a Friday recitation test, the specific fear of stumbling over a word and knowing what would follow. Both groups memorised the same Book. Only

one of them, generally, still opens it with anything resembling joy.

Chapter 9 established the principle this chapter now makes practical: love of Allah before rules, love before fear. Nowhere does that principle get tested more directly than in how a child is taught the Qur'an itself because the Qur'an is meant to be a source of guidance, comfort, and closeness to Allah, and a child taught it harshly can end up fluent in its recitation while quietly resentful of the entire experience of learning it.

The Weight of What's Actually Being Taught

The Prophet ﷺ said plainly: *"The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it"* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī). This is about as high a status as Islam confers on any single activity,

not simply reciting correctly, but learning it and passing it on, positioned as among the very best a person can do with their life. Teaching a child the Qur'an is not a chore to be delegated and forgotten. It is, by the Prophet's ﷺ own description, one of the noblest things a parent will ever do for their child.

But the Qur'an itself warns that this same Book can function two ways. The Prophet ﷺ said the Qur'an will either be evidence *for* a person or evidence *against* them (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). Meaning, the outcome depends entirely on what's actually done with it, not merely on whether it was memorised. A child who can recite flawlessly but associates the Qur'an with fear, humiliation, and dread has technically "learned" it in one narrow sense, while missing

almost everything the Prophet's ﷺ praise was actually describing.

Understanding, Not Only Repetition

There's a report about Ibn Mas'ūd, one of the Prophet's ﷺ closest companions in learning the Qur'an, describing how the earliest generation approached memorisation. When, they learned ten verses, they would not move past them until they understood their meanings and had begun acting on what those verses contained. This is a genuinely different model from pure rote repetition and memorisation paired tightly with comprehension, verse by verse, rather than racing toward volume and leaving meaning for later.

This matters enormously for how Qur'an is taught to children today, particularly in a context where a great deal of traditional Qur'anic education, valuable as it is, has historically emphasised correct pronunciation and volume memorised over understanding what's actually being recited. A child who memorises Sūrah al-Fātiḥah perfectly but has no idea what any of its words mean has learned something real like tajwīd, discipline, the sound of the Arabic language but has missed the far greater benefit of a sūrah recited seventeen times a day actually shaping how they understand their relationship with Allah. Wherever possible, pairing memorisation with simple, age-appropriate meaning even just a sentence or two explaining what a short sūrah is actually saying turns rote recitation into

something closer to what the earliest generation of Muslims actually practised.

Beautifying, Not Merely Enduring

The Prophet ﷺ instructed believers directly to beautify the Qur'an with their voices (Abū Dāwūd, graded ḥasan). Recitation is intended to be something aesthetically engaged with, not simply endured as a technical exercise. 'Ā'ishah described the Prophet's ﷺ own recitation as measured and unhurried, pausing at each verse rather than rushing through (Abū Dāwūd). This is a model of terteel, careful and deliberate pace, that stands in real contrast to the speed-focused drilling some memorisation environments emphasise, particularly once a child is being pushed toward completing a certain number of pages by a certain deadline.

Practically, this means recitation sessions with a young child benefit from being unhurried rather than rushed, from genuine attention paid to how the words sound rather than only whether they were technically correct, and from treating a beautiful, unhurried recitation of even a short passage as more valuable than a fast, anxious recitation of a long one.

A Warning From Outside the Tradition That Confirms What's Inside It

Ibn Khaldūn, writing centuries after the earliest Qur'anic teachers, devoted real attention in his *Muqaddimah* to exactly this question; how children should be taught. His conclusion, drawn from extensive observation of teaching practice across the Muslim world of his time, was direct: harshness in teaching damages a child's development and character, and a

teacher or parent should approach a student the way a caring parent approaches a child, not through cruelty or intimidation. He observed specifically that students raised under harsh instruction tend to develop diminished, servile character, timid rather than genuinely capable which is the opposite of what real education is meant to produce.

This is not a modern import into Islamic pedagogy. It is a centuries-old Islamic scholarly critique of exactly the culture some Qur'anic school traditions have, in practice, drifted toward and it lines up precisely with everything Chapter 9 already established about love preceding fear, and everything Chapter 6 established about the "beat them for it" instruction being a narrow last resort within

years of patient teaching, not a routine tool of instruction.

It is Never as a Punishment

One specific practice deserves direct naming, because it happens often enough in Nigerian households and Qur'anic schools to warrant it: using additional Qur'an recitation or memorisation as a punishment for unrelated misbehaviour. "Go and recite ten more pages" as a consequence for a child's disobedience or poor school report. However well-intentioned, this practice directly inverts everything this chapter has argued. It teaches a child, through repeated experience, to associate the words of Allah with unpleasantness and consequence training an aversion to the very Book meant to bring them closer to Him. Whatever

consequence a specific misbehaviour warrants, the Qur'an itself should never be that consequence.

What This Looks Like at Home

Practically, several things follow from everything above. Short, consistent daily sessions tend to build stronger retention and a better relationship with the Qur'an than long, infrequent, high-pressure ones. This is a model close to the traditional sabaq (new lesson), dawr (review), and manzil (long-term retention) structure used in classical hifz methodology, adapted to whatever pace suits a particular child rather than a rigid, anxiety-inducing schedule. Where possible, a parent reciting alongside a child, not merely delegating the task entirely to an outside

teacher turns Qur'an time into the kind of relational, attachment-building activity Chapter 5 described play as being. And choosing a Qur'anic teacher, whether at home or at Madrasah, with real attention to how that teacher actually treats children, not only their qualification in tajwīd is as important a decision as any this book has discussed, because that teacher will shape a child's felt relationship with the Qur'an as much as, sometimes more than, their technical recitation ability.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing against rigour, discipline, or high expectations in Qur'anic education. Memorising the Book of Allah is genuinely demanding work, and real structure,

consistency, and accountability are part of doing it well, not obstacles to be removed nor is it suggesting every traditional Qur'anic school is harmful, or that firm correction from a teacher is never appropriate. What it is arguing is that the manner of teaching matters as much as the content taught, exactly as Ibn Khaldūn observed centuries ago, and that a child who finishes their Qur'anic education able to recite perfectly but afraid of the Book itself has been failed by the method, whatever their certificate says.

This Week

If your child is currently learning Qur'an, ask them one question this week: what does the sūrah or passage they're currently memorising actually mean? If they can recite it but can't

answer, that's this week's starting point. There should be no more repetition, but a short conversation about meaning.

رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا وَاجْعَلِ الْقُرْآنَ رِبْعَ قَلْبِي

"My Lord, increase me in knowledge, and make the Qur'an the spring of my heart."

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves from the Qur'an to ṣalāh specifically. How a child moves from simply imitating the movements of prayer to genuinely understanding and connecting with what they're doing, five times a day, for the rest of their life.

Chapter 11

Ṣalāh, From Imitation to Understanding

A Burda Too Short, and an Eight-Year-Old Imam

There's a story about a boy named 'Amr ibn Salamah that deserves to be far better known among Nigerian Muslim parents than it currently is. His tribe had just accepted Islam, and the Prophet ﷺ instructed them that whoever among them knew the most Qur'an should lead their prayers. They searched, and found no one, not a single adult who had memorised more than a boy of six or seven, who had picked up verses from passing travellers even before his tribe's conversion. So

they made him their imām. He led grown men in prayer wearing a garment so short it left him partly exposed, until a woman in the tribe insisted they buy him proper clothing and 'Amr later said he had never been as happy with anything as he was with that new garment (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī).

This story is worth opening with because it says something Chapter 6 already began to establish and this chapter takes further: Islam does not treat a child's worship as a lesser, practice-round version of the real thing, to be tolerated until adulthood makes it count. A six-year-old boy's Qur'an and his prayer were taken seriously enough that grown men prayed behind him. The question this chapter asks is how a child moves from simply copying the

shapes of Ṣalāh like the standing, the bowing, the prostration toward the kind of prayer 'Amr's tribe trusted enough to follow.

Why Ṣalāh Carries This Much Weight

The Prophet ﷺ said the first matter a person will be held to account for on the Day of Judgment is their Ṣalāh. If it is sound, the rest of their deeds follow in good standing; if it is deficient, the rest of their reckoning suffers accordingly (Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd, graded ḥasan). Nothing else named by the Prophet ﷺ occupies this specific position. It is first in the reckoning and also setting the tone for everything that follows it. This is why Chapter 6 placed such weight on beginning ṣalāh instruction at seven, and it's why this chapter treats moving a child beyond mere imitation as

one of the most consequential things a parent will do across their entire upbringing.

The Two Layers of Ṣalāh

Scholars have long distinguished between the outward form of prayer and its inner reality. the correct movements and recitation on one hand, and khushū', the presence of heart, the genuine humility and attentiveness a worshipper brings to it, on the other. Allah describes successful believers as those who pray with khushū' (Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:1–2), and while scholars differ on whether khushū' is strictly required for a prayer's validity or a strongly emphasised sunnah alongside it, there is no real disagreement that it is the entire point. The outward form exists to carry the inner reality, not to replace it.

A young child, when first taught ṣalāh, can only reasonably be expected to manage the outward form like the movements, the basic recitation, the sequence. This is not a failure. It's the necessary starting point, the same way 'Amr ibn Salamah began by memorising sounds from passing travellers before he understood the fuller meaning of what he had learned. What matters is that imitation is treated as the beginning of a journey, not its destination and that a parent stays actively involved in moving a child from one to the other, year over year, rather than considering the job finished once the movements are memorised correctly.

What Moves a Child From Form to Meaning

Chapter 10 already established the principle that Qur'an should be taught with

understanding alongside memorisation, not rote alone and nowhere does that principle matter more than in ṣalāh itself, since a child recites al-Fātiḥah and other short sūrahs multiple times daily for the rest of their life. A child who understands, even in simple terms, that al-Fātiḥah is a conversation that they are praising Allah, asking Him directly for guidance, and that classical scholarship describes Allah as responding to each line as it's recited is reciting something entirely different from a child who has simply memorised sounds in the correct order.

This means explaining meaning matters as much as correcting form. When a young child asks what a word in their prayer means, that question deserves real engagement, not

deferral. When a parent prays alongside a child rather than only supervising from a distance, the child watches an adult's own khushū' modelled directly. The stillness, the unhurried pace, the sense that something real is happening which teaches far more than any explanation could on its own, in keeping with what Chapter 14 will establish more fully about the power of example.

Patience With an Imperfect Prayer

It's worth naming directly what many parents get wrong here, because it connects straight back to the discipline principles Chapters 6 and 7 already established. A young child's ṣalāh will be imperfect for years because he is struggling with a wandering mind, a rushed recitation, restlessness during longer prayers. This is

developmentally normal, not defiance, and correcting it harshly risks exactly what Chapter 9 warned against: teaching a child to associate worship with anxiety and failure rather than connection and comfort. The goal during these years is gentle, consistent redirection not punishing imperfect *khushū'* as though it were a moral failing a young child is capable of correcting through sheer will.

This patience should not be confused with indifference to the outward correctness of the prayer itself like *wuḍū'* done properly, movements performed correctly, recitation gradually improved which does need real, ongoing teaching, exactly as Chapter 6 described. The distinction is between correcting technical error patiently over time,

and expecting adult-level presence of heart from a child who has not yet had years to develop it.

Praying Together as a Family

Chapter 5 established that a young child's earliest learning happens through attachment and imitation rather than instruction, and ṣalāh offers one of the richest opportunities in daily Muslim life to put that principle into practice. A household where family members regularly pray together, not only supervised individual prayer, but a father, mother, and children genuinely praying in jamā'ah at home when possible gives a child a lived experience of ṣalāh as something communal and central to family life, rather than a private obligation checked off alone. This is also, practically, one

of the most reliable ways a parent can model the unhurried, attentive prayer Chapter 9's love-before-rules principle depends on. A child watching a parent's own genuine *khushū'* internalises far more than any lecture about the importance of prayer ever could.

The Nigerian Layer: Beyond Correct Recitation

In many Nigerian households and Qur'anic schools, enormous and valuable emphasis is placed on correct *tajwīd* and precise movement and this attention to detail matters, since a technically correct prayer is the necessary foundation everything else builds on. But this chapter's argument is that correctness alone is an incomplete goal. A child who can be tested and pass on the technical accuracy of their *ṣalāh*, while never once being asked what they

understand or feel during it, has received exactly the "form without meaning" education Chapter 10 already cautioned against, applied here specifically to the five daily prayers that will structure the rest of their life.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not suggesting that correcting a child's ṣalāh technically is unimportant, or that outward form doesn't matter. A prayer performed incorrectly is genuinely deficient, and Chapter 6 already established that real, patient teaching of correct practice is a parent's direct responsibility nor is it claiming a young child should be expected to achieve adult khushū' before they're developmentally capable of it. What it is arguing is that correctness of form is the floor, not the ceiling. The necessary

starting point 'Amr ibn Salamah's tribe recognised in him, on top of which years of patient, understanding-centred teaching are meant to build something closer to what 23:1-2 actually describes.

This Week

Pray alongside your child at least once this week without correcting anything during the prayer itself. Afterward, ask them gently what one part of the prayer means to them, not to test them, but to find out honestly where their understanding currently sits, so you know what to build on next.

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي مِنَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ

"O Allah, make me among those whose hearts tremble when Allah is mentioned." (drawing on the description in Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:2)

What Comes Next

The next chapter moves from worship to character, akhlāq, and specifically honesty, kindness, and respect for elders. The everyday conduct through which a child's tawḥīd and ṣalāh either become visible in how they treat other people, or remain, as Chapter 9 warned against, correct belief with no real fruit.

Chapter 12

Akhlāq (Honesty, Kindness, and Respect for Elders)

A Boy Called In From Play

'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir was a young boy, still small enough to be out playing when his mother called him in from the street. "Come here," she said, "I'll give you something." At that exact moment, the Prophet ﷺ happened to be sitting in their home. He turned to her and asked what she had intended to give the boy. "Dates," she said. The Prophet ﷺ replied: *"If you had not given him anything, a lie would have been recorded against you"* (Abū Dāwūd) — and 'Abdullāh, the very boy called in from play that day, is the one who narrated this story for the

rest of his life, remembering it well enough to pass it down to us more than fourteen centuries later.

What is striking about this hadith is what small, ordinary thing it addresses not a business contract, not a legal testimony. A mother calling her child in from playing outside, using the kind of small incentive parents everywhere have always used and the Prophet ﷺ treating even that as a real matter of honesty, worth correcting in the moment. Chapter 9 established that Allah should be introduced to a child through love before rules. This chapter turns to what those rules actually consist of once introduced beginning, fittingly, with honesty, because it is in exactly these

small, unremarkable moments that a child's character is actually being formed.

Why Character Is the Point of the Whole Mission

The Prophet ﷺ said of his own mission: *"I was only sent to perfect good character"* (Muwatta' Mālik, and Musnad Ahmad, graded saḥīḥ). Not one purpose among several, but the description he gave of the entire point of his prophethood. He also said that nothing will be heavier on a believer's scale on the Day of Judgment than good character (Abū Dāwūd and Tirmidhī), and when asked what causes most people to enter Paradise, he answered plainly: consciousness of Allah, and good character.

This reframes akhlāq, character, conduct, the way a person actually treats others as not a secondary concern beneath belief and worship, but as close to the centre of the entire mission as anything else Islam asks of a person. A child raised with correct 'aqīdah and consistent salāh, who then grows into an adult who lies casually, treats others unkindly, and shows no particular respect toward elders, has not fully received what this book has been describing across every chapter so far. Belief and worship are meant to produce visible fruit in how a person actually lives and that fruit is akhlāq.

Honesty, Even in the Smallest Things

The 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir hadith establishes something worth sitting with directly: honesty toward children specifically, not just honesty in

general, matters to Allah enough to be corrected on the spot. This is a real and common failure point in many households, including Nigerian ones. We would see a parent promising a treat to secure quick compliance, with no real intention of following through, or using an empty threat to end an argument quickly. Each instance may seem trivial on its own. The hadith suggests Allah does not treat it as trivial, and neither should a parent who wants their child to grow up genuinely honest rather than simply taught the theory of honesty while watching it broken casually at home.

This connects directly to Chapter 14's coming argument about example over instruction. A child lied to casually by their own parents even in small, seemingly harmless ways is being

taught, through direct daily experience, that honesty is negotiable when convenient. No amount of separate instruction about the importance of truthfulness will fully undo what that daily example teaches.

Kindness, Extended Even to What Doesn't Talk Back

The Prophet ﷺ gave two stories about kindness that Islamic tradition has preserved specifically, it seems, because of how ordinary and unglamorous their subjects were. A man, thirsty on a journey, found a well, drank, and climbed out then saw a dog licking wet earth out of desperate thirst. He climbed back down, filled his shoe with water, held it in his teeth, and gave the dog to drink. Allah forgave his sins for that act alone (Bukhārī and Muslim). Separately, a woman was forgiven for the same

kindness shown to a different thirsty dog near a different well (Bukhārī and Muslim). And in stark contrast, another woman was described as having entered the Fire because she kept a cat locked away, neither feeding it nor releasing it to find food for itself, until it died (Bukhārī and Muslim).

These stories are worth teaching children directly and often, because they establish something many households never quite get around to naming explicitly. Kindness in Islam is not reserved only for people who can reciprocate, notice, or thank you for it. A child taught to be kind to an animal that cannot repay that kindness in any way is being taught something about the nature of kindness itself, that it is owed because of what it says about the

one showing it, not because of what's received in return.

Respect for Elders, Rightly Understood

The Prophet ﷺ said plainly: *"Whoever does not show mercy to our young, and does not respect our elders, is not one of us"* (Tirmidhī).

Notice that this hadith names both directions in the same breath; mercy toward the young, and respect toward elders, refusing to treat either as optional or as more important than the other. A household that demands strict respect for elders from its children while showing little mercy toward the children themselves has only half-implemented this hadith, and arguably the easier half.

Chapter 3 already raised a caution worth repeating directly here. Nigerian households

are often very effective at instilling outward respect for elders, correct greetings, deference in speech, never talking back without always reaching the deeper internalisation this hadith actually describes. Respect taught as mere compliance, enforced through fear of consequence, is not quite what the Prophet ﷺ was describing. Respect taught alongside genuine mercy shown to the child doing the respecting modelled, not merely demanded tends to produce the real thing. An adult who continues honouring elders long after any parent is present to enforce it, because the respect was genuinely internalised rather than merely complied with.

What This Looks Like in a Nigerian Household

Character formation happens constantly in the ordinary texture of daily life, far more than in any deliberate lesson. It happens when a child watches how a parent speaks about a neighbour behind their back, whether promises made to house-help or younger siblings are kept as carefully as promises made to guests, whether an elder relative is genuinely listened to or merely tolerated with performed politeness. It happens in how a family treats the mai-guard, the driver, the person selling akara by the roadside, situations where no one of higher status is watching to judge whether the family "did the right thing."

Children notice all of this far more acutely than most parents realise, and the gap between a household's stated values and its actual daily

conduct toward people who cannot reciprocate or complain is exactly where a child's real akhlāq gets formed often more powerfully than in any formal lesson about honesty or kindness delivered separately from ordinary life.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not suggesting every white lie or broken minor promise condemns a parent, nor is it arguing that firm correction of a child's own dishonesty or unkindness is somehow at odds with mercy, accountability for a child's own character lapses remains part of tarbiyah, as earlier chapters on discipline established. What it is arguing is that character is formed cumulatively, through consistent daily example far more than through occasional lessons, and that the standard a household actually lives by

not the one it states, is what children absorb most deeply.

This Week

Notice one small promise you make to your child this week, the kind so minor you might normally let it slide if circumstances changed. Keep it deliberately, and notice what that costs you, as a reminder of what the hadith of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir was actually asking of his mother that day.

اللَّهُمَّ كَمَا حَسَّنْتَ خُلُقِي فَحَسِّنْ خُلُقِي

"O Allah, just as You have made my outer form good, make my character good as well."
(Aḥmad)

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns to a more immediately practical question many parents face daily without much guidance. What is actually *halāl* and *harām* in a child's everyday life like food, dress, and the friendships they're allowed to form and how to teach these boundaries in a way that builds conviction rather than mere compliance.

Chapter 13

Halal and Haram in Everyday Life (Food, Dress, Friendships)

A Traveller Whose Du'ā Went Nowhere

The Prophet ﷺ described a scene worth picturing clearly: a man on a long, exhausting journey, dust in his hair, clothes worn from travel, lifting both hands to the sky in the most physically earnest posture of supplication, crying out, over and over, "Yā Rabb! Yā Rabb!" "O Lord! O Lord!" Every outward sign suggests a man desperate for his prayer to be answered. And then the Prophet ﷺ delivered the line that makes this hadith unforgettable: *his food was ḥarām, his drink was ḥarām, his clothing*

was ḥarām, and he had been nourished by ḥarām his entire life, so how could his supplication possibly be accepted? (Sahīh Muslim).

This hadith is worth opening this chapter with because it makes a claim many parents never quite communicate to their children. Ḥalāl and ḥarām are not a separate category of rules sitting beside worship, disconnected from whether du'ā actually works or whether a person's relationship with Allah actually bears fruit. They are directly, causally connected. A child who grows up understanding this, not as an arbitrary list of forbidden things, but as something that shapes whether their own future du'ā reaches anywhere is being given something far more durable than a list of prohibitions to memorise.

Teaching the Why, Not Just the What

Chapter 3 established, through Luqmān's example, that Islam's own model of parenting explains reasoning before issuing instruction. This principle applies nowhere more directly than to ḥalāl and ḥarām, an area where many households, understandably pressed for time, tend to default to bare declaration. This is *ḥarām, don't ask why*, rather than the explanation that actually builds lasting conviction.

A child told simply "pork is ḥarām" has learned a rule. A child told that Allah asks us to eat only what is ṭayyib, good, pure, wholesome because what enters our bodies is connected to the state of our hearts and even to whether Allah answers what we ask of Him, as the

traveller's story illustrates, has learned something they can actually carry into adulthood and apply to situations no one specifically warned them about. Chapter 9 already established this same principle for tawḥīd, that love and understanding outlast bare rule-following once a child gains independence. Ḥalāl and ḥarām deserve exactly the same treatment.

Food: Building the Habit Before the Temptation Arrives

Practically, this means talking to children from a young age long before they are old enough to be tempted by anything ḥarām on their own about what makes food ḥalāl, why it matters, and what the alternative actually costs, using the traveller's story as a vivid, memorable illustration a child can actually picture. It

means involving children in the practice itself where possible: checking labels together, understanding why a particular restaurant or product is avoided, treating the choice of what enters the home's kitchen as something worth explaining rather than simply enforcing silently.

This matters increasingly as children grow older and begin eating outside the home more often in school, friends' houses, university eventually. A child who understands *why*, deeply enough that the reasoning is genuinely theirs, carries that conviction into situations where a parent is no longer present to enforce anything. A child who only ever understood "because it's ḥarām, don't ask" often finds that instruction has little grip once the household's

direct supervision is no longer there to back it up precisely the same control-versus-tarbiyah distinction Chapter 3 raised, applied here to a very concrete daily choice.

Modesty: It Should be Gradual And Not Sudden

Chapter 6 already introduced one specific step in this direction, the Prophet ﷺ's instruction to separate children's beds around age ten, a gradual, age-appropriate introduction to bodily awareness and privacy, rather than a subject left entirely unaddressed until puberty forces an urgent conversation. The same principle of gradualism applies to modesty and dress more broadly.

Children raised with a gradual, unhurried introduction to modesty appropriate covering

modelled at home from early on, explained simply as they grow, adjusted appropriately as they mature tend to arrive at puberty already comfortable with what's being asked of them, experiencing it as a natural continuation rather than a sudden imposition. Children who reach puberty with no prior groundwork, and are then abruptly handed a long list of new requirements around dress and interaction with the opposite sex, often experience the change as a rupture and something imposed rather than something they were already, gradually, growing into. The difference in outcome tends to track closely with the difference in approach: gradual cultivation, in keeping with everything this book has argued tarbiyah actually is, versus sudden control.

Friendships: An Example Of The Musk Seller and the Blacksmith

The Prophet ﷺ gave one of the most vivid and memorable analogies in the entire hadith corpus on the subject of companionship. A good companion is like someone who sells musk sit with them, and you'll either be given some, buy some, or at the very least come away carrying a pleasant fragrance. A bad companion is like someone working a blacksmith's bellows, sit with them, and at best you'll come away smelling of smoke, at worst your clothes will be burned entirely (Bukhārī and Muslim).

This connects directly to warnings raised earlier in this book. Chapter 2 named "the company a child keeps" as one of the three forces shaping the *fiṭrah*. Chapter 7 described peer influence intensifying sharply between ten

and puberty. Chapter 8 described the real pressure adolescents face from their social environment, and praised the young people in Sūrat al-Kahf specifically for holding firm against theirs. This chapter's contribution is the practical question underneath all of that. How does a parent actually help a child choose musk sellers over blacksmiths, especially once that child is old enough that friendships are chosen independently rather than arranged?

The answer is not primarily control, and forbidding specific friendships outright rarely survives adolescence's growing independence, as Chapter 8 already established. It's cultivating a child's own discernment early enough that by the time friendship choices genuinely matter, the child has internalised what to actually look

for: does this person's company leave me closer to Allah or further from Him, better at ṣalāh or more careless about it, more honest or more willing to cut corners. A child taught to ask these questions themselves, rather than simply told who they may or may not befriend, carries that discernment into rooms a parent will never see inside.

The Nigerian Layer: Navigating Genuinely Mixed Environments

Nigerian Muslim children rarely grow up in an entirely Muslim social world. School, extended family, neighbourhood friendships, and later university all place children in regular, sustained contact with peers whose households operate under very different standards around food, dress, and companionship. This is simply the reality of the environment, and Chapter 7

already cautioned against the instinct to respond with total restriction isolating a child so completely from this reality tends to backfire once independence arrives.

The more durable approach is the one this chapter has been building toward throughout: real understanding of *why*, modelled consistently at home, explained honestly as a child grows, so that a child moving daily between a Muslim household and a mixed environment carries their own internal compass rather than depending entirely on external walls a parent cannot maintain forever.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that clear boundaries around food, dress, and

companionship are unnecessary, or that a parent should simply hope a child arrives at the right conclusions unguided, real boundaries, clearly held, remain essential, exactly as earlier chapters on discipline established. What it is arguing is that boundaries explained and understood outlast boundaries merely imposed, and that a child equipped with the *why* behind ḥalāl and ḥarām carries that understanding into rooms, and years, a parent will not always be present to supervise.

This Week

Choose one ḥalāl or ḥarām boundary currently enforced in your household, and check honestly whether your child could explain, in their own words, why it exists, not just that it

exists. If they can't, this week is the week to have that conversation.

اللَّهُمَّ ارْزُقْنَا الرِّزْقَ الطَّيِّبَ وَجَنِّبْنَا الْحَرَامَ

"O Allah, provide us with wholesome sustenance, and keep us far from what is unlawful."

What Comes Next

This closes Part 3 of this book what to actually instill in a child across the years of their upbringing. Part 4 turns to how parents actually carry this out day to day, beginning with the single most powerful teaching tool available to any parent: their own example.

Chapter 14

The Power of Example Over Instruction

"His Character Was the Qur'an"

A man once asked 'Ā'ishah, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ who knew him more intimately than almost anyone else alive, to describe his character. She could have listed virtues like his honesty, his generosity, his patience, his mercy. Instead she gave an answer that has echoed through Islamic scholarship for fourteen centuries: *"His character was the Qur'an"* (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim) not that he recited it beautifully, or understood it deeply, or taught it faithfully though he did all three. She meant that if you wanted to see the Qur'an in motion, you didn't

need to open the book. You could simply watch him.

This is the highest possible description of what this chapter is about. Allah Himself describes the Prophet ﷺ as an excellent example, *uswatun ḥasanah* for anyone who hopes in Allah and the Last Day (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:21) not primarily a lecturer an example. Every chapter in this book so far has pointed toward this one, because every single principle covered love before rules, honesty in small things, gentleness in correction, patience with imperfect prayer is transmitted to a child far more powerfully through what they watch than through what they're told.

Why Watching Teaches More Than Telling

Chapter 5 already established the underlying mechanism. A young child learns primarily through imitation, long before they can process abstract instruction. That mechanism doesn't disappear once a child grows Olde, it simply becomes less obvious, operating quietly alongside whatever formal instruction a parent also provides. A ten-year-old, a teenager, even a young adult still absorbs far more from what a parent actually does than from what a parent says should be done, precisely because actions carry information words cannot fake: genuine priority, genuine belief, genuine consistency between stated value and lived practice.

Ibn Khaldūn's observation from Chapter 10 applies with equal force here. He warned that

harsh teaching damages a child's development, but the deeper principle underneath that warning was about the relationship between teacher and student generally. A child forms their understanding of what's actually true and important by watching the adult in front of them, not merely by processing that adult's words. A parent who lectures about honesty while lying casually, who teaches gentleness while correcting harshly, who speaks of Allah's mercy while modelling none themselves, is not really teaching two different lessons. The child learns the one that's actually lived, and quietly discounts the one that's only spoken.

Ten Years And No Complaint

There's a report from Anas ibn Mālik, who served the Prophet ﷺ as a young boy for a full decade, that captures what consistent example actually looks like sustained over years rather than isolated moments. Anas said that in ten years of service, a decade during which any child inevitably makes mistakes, forgets tasks, does things imperfectly, the Prophet ﷺ never once said "uff" to him in exasperation, and never once demanded to know why he had done something, or why he hadn't (Bukhārī and Muslim).

What makes this remarkable isn't a single moment of patience. It's the *consistency* across ten uninterrupted years, patience that held not because it was performed for an audience on

any particular day, but because it was simply, genuinely, who the Prophet ﷺ was. A child watching an adult's patience for a single afternoon learns something. A child watching that same patience hold steady across a decade learns something entirely different, that this is not a performance, but a character to actually aspire toward.

Every Chapter of This Book, Traced Back to This One

It's worth walking back through what earlier chapters already flagged, because doing so shows how central this principle actually is to everything this book has argued.

Chapter 2 described a toddler dropping into sujūd without being taught to, purely from watching. Chapter 9 argued that a parent's own

visible relationship with Allah turning to Him in gratitude and difficulty, speaking of Him with warmth teaches a child's heart more than any lecture about tawḥīd. Chapter 11 described a parent's own khushū' in prayer as more instructive than any explanation of what khushū' means. Chapter 12 traced honesty and kindness back to what a child watches modelled in the smallest, most unremarkable daily moments and a promise kept or broken, how a house-help or a neighbour is spoken about when they're not present. Each of these chapters was pointing at the same underlying truth from a different angle. Instruction sets the direction, but example determines whether a child actually travels in it.

The Gap Children Notice

Children are, in practice, remarkably attuned to the gap between what a parent says and what a parent does, often long before they have the vocabulary to name what they're noticing. A child told to speak gently who watches a parent lose their temper regularly is absorbing a second, contradictory curriculum running alongside the first. A child taught that Qur'an should be beautified and unhurried, per Chapter 10, who watches a parent recite quickly and mechanically out of habit, learns that the stated value and the lived one are not actually the same thing.

This gap matters more, not less, as a child grows older and gains the independent reasoning capacity Chapter 8 described

adolescence bringing. A young child may accept the contradiction without much comment. An adolescent, capable of noticing inconsistency and drawing conclusions from it, often uses exactly that gap as grounds to discount parental instruction altogether not because the instruction was wrong, but because it was never demonstrated to be genuinely held.

What This Actually Asks of a Parent

None of this means a parent must achieve moral perfection before they're qualified to teach anything. No such parent exists, and a child who never sees a parent make a mistake or fall short is, in a strange way, deprived of an equally important lesson: what genuine repentance and correction look like when a

person of real character does fall short. What this principle actually asks is narrower and more honest: that a parent's own visible effort matches the standard being taught, even imperfectly, even with real struggle showing through rather than a household where the standard is only ever spoken about, never genuinely lived by the person doing the speaking.

A parent who prays imperfectly but visibly, who loses patience sometimes but apologises honestly afterward, who struggles with a particular sin but visibly struggles against it rather than indulging it openly, teaches a child something true and useful. That this dīn is meant to be lived by real, imperfect people making genuine effort not only by some

idealised figure the child will never actually become. This, in fact, is closer to what 'Ā'ishah's description of the Prophet ﷺ was actually pointing toward not flawlessness, but a character so consistently, visibly aligned with what he taught that there was no meaningful gap between the two.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that instruction, explanation, and direct teaching are unnecessary. Every chapter in Part 3 of this book depended on real, deliberate teaching, and a parent who never explains anything, relying purely on unspoken example, leaves a child to guess at reasoning they could have simply been told nor is it claiming a single parental failure undoes years of consistent

example, Chapter 8's account of the Prophet ﷺ engaging a struggling young man with patience rather than condemnation applies equally to a parent's own moments of falling short. What this chapter is arguing is that example sets the ceiling for what instruction can actually achieve, a household can teach the right words indefinitely, but a child ultimately becomes who they watched, not merely who they were told to become.

This Week

Choose one value you've explicitly taught your child like honesty, patience, gentleness, consistency in prayer and watch yourself honestly for a week. Where does your own visible practice match what you've taught, and where, if you're honest, does it fall short? That

gap, wherever it exists, is this week's real work more than any further explanation would be.

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي كَمَا يَظُنُّ بِي وَلَدِي وَخَيْرًا مِمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ

"O Allah, make me as my children believe me to be, and better than what they know of me."

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns to a subject this book has referred forward to many times without yet addressing in full: correction without condemnation and how a parent disciplines a child firmly, in line with everything Part 2 established about boundaries and consequences, without the correction itself becoming the kind of wound the example set in this chapter would never actually model.

Chapter 15

Correction Without Condemnation

Two Words, and Everything Between Them

A father's child spills water across a freshly mopped floor for the second time in a week. In one household, the father's voice rises immediately: *"You're so careless, you never think before you act, this is exactly your problem."* In another household, the same spill produces a different response: *"You need to be more careful carrying that. Let's clean it up together, and next time hold it with both hands."*

Both fathers are correcting the same behaviour. Only one of them is correcting the behaviour.

The other has, without quite meaning to, corrected the child's entire character in the space of a single sentence. This chapter is about the space between those two responses. Though it is narrow in the moment, it is enormous in what it produces over years of repetition.

What Allah's Own Character Teaches About Correction

'Ā'ishah once responded sharply to a group of Jews who had greeted the Prophet ﷺ with a veiled curse, wishing him death rather than peace. The Prophet ﷺ had responded to them calmly. 'Ā'ishah had not. She answered them with a curse of her own. He turned to her and said: *"Gently, O 'Ā'ishah. Allah loves gentleness in all matters"* (Bukhārī and Muslim). On a separate occasion, watching her

strike a stubborn camel out of frustration, he told her plainly: *"You must be gentle, for gentleness is not found in anything except that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything except that it disgraces it"* (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim).

Notice what he did in both moments. He corrected her clearly, without hesitation, without pretending the behaviour was acceptable. And he did it without a single word aimed at who she was. He didn't say "you're a harsh person," or "you always overreact." He did it with gentleness, named directly, and applied to the specific moment in front of them. If this is how the Prophet ﷺ corrected an adult he deeply loved, it sets the standard for how a parent might reasonably aim to correct a child they love even more helplessly.

The Distinction This Chapter Is Actually About

Everything in this chapter turns on a single distinction, simple to state and difficult to practise consistently: the difference between correcting what a child *did* and pronouncing what a child *is*.

"You left your homework undone" describes an event. It's specific. It's about a choice made in a moment, and crucially, it leaves the door open for tomorrow to look different. "You're so lazy" describes, or claims to describe, the child's fundamental nature. It isn't really about the homework anymore. It's a verdict, and a child who hears a verdict repeated enough times tends to stop hearing it as an opinion and start accepting it as a fact about who they are. They carry that fact forward into how they see

themselves at school, in friendships, eventually in their own relationship with Allah.

This is worth naming plainly, because it's one of the most common ways well-intentioned tarbiyah goes wrong. A parent correcting the *action* is doing exactly what Chapter 6 and 7 already established discipline is meant to do which is shaping behaviour, teaching consequence, building responsibility. A parent who slides from correcting the action into pronouncing on the child's character has moved into something else entirely, and the child on the receiving end rarely notices the difference in real time. They simply absorb the verdict.

What the Prophet ﷺ Actually Did With Children's Mistakes

Chapter 6 already touched on the young boy 'Umar ibn Abī Salamah, whose hand wandered across a shared plate as he ate. The Prophet ﷺ didn't tell him he had bad manners or was a greedy child. He gave him four specific instructions which are say Bismillāh, eat with your right hand, eat from what's nearest to you. This is addressed to him warmly as "young boy," and the correction ended the moment the lesson was delivered (Bukhārī and Muslim). There was no character judgment comparison to another child or conclusion drawn about who the boy was fundamentally. It was just the specific behaviour, corrected specifically and followed by trust that the correction had landed.

This is the pattern worth extracting and applying deliberately. Name the moment, not the person. Correct the plate, not the child's worth.

Timing, Tone, and What Happens After

Beyond the words themselves, several practical elements shape whether a correction lands as tarbiyah or as something closer to condemnation.

Timing matters: A correction delivered in the heat of a parent's own frustration tends to reach for the harshest available language, precisely because frustration narrows a person's vocabulary to whatever wounds fastest. Where the situation allows it and not every situation does, a brief pause before correcting produces

language far closer to 'Umar ibn Abī Salamah's specific, calm instruction than to an outburst.

Privacy matters: A correction delivered in front of guests, siblings, or extended family carries an extra weight of humiliation that has nothing to do with the actual lesson being taught, and often teaches a child to fear public exposure more than they learn the substance of the correction itself.

What happens afterward matters most of all: A correction followed by lingering coldness, silence, distance, a withdrawal of warmth that persists well past the moment itself, teaches a child that their relationship with the parent is conditional on perfect behaviour. A correction followed by a return to normal warmth, once the lesson has been delivered, teaches

something closer to the truth of tarbiyah as this book has described it throughout: that the child's standing in the relationship was never actually in question, only the specific behaviour needed adjusting.

A Note on Physical Discipline

Chapters 6 and 7 already addressed this directly, and this chapter doesn't repeat that ground in full, only to reaffirm the principle sitting underneath it. Wherever physical correction has any legitimate place at all, the hadith itself frames it as a narrow, last-resort measure, reached only after years of patient teaching, bounded tightly by mercy, and never delivered in anger or aimed at humiliation. Everything this chapter has argued about correcting the act rather than the person

applies with even greater force here. A physical correction accompanied by identity-based language ("you'll never learn," "you're useless") compounds harm rather than teaching the lesson it was meant to deliver.

The Nigerian Layer: Correction as Inherited Habit

Many Nigerian parents correct their children today the way they themselves were corrected. This is not out of malice, but because it's the only model of discipline they were ever shown and passed down largely unexamined from one generation's household to the next. Chapter 14 already established that a parent's own visible example teaches more than any instruction; this includes the example of how correction itself is delivered. A parent who was labelled harshly as a child, and never had reason to

examine that pattern, will very often repeat it unconsciously not because they want to, but because it's the only script available in the moment frustration hits.

Recognising this pattern in your own upbringing, honestly and without excessive guilt, is often the first real step toward interrupting it before it reaches the next generation.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing against firm correction, consequences, or real accountability. Everything Part 2 of this book established about boundaries and discipline remains fully intact. A parent who never corrects firmly isn't practising gentleness; they're neglecting the amānah Chapter 1

described. What this chapter is arguing is narrower: that correction and condemnation are not the same act, however similar they can look in a heated moment, and that the words chosen in that moment determine which one a child actually receives.

Going Deeper

This distinction between correcting a child's behaviour and quietly labelling their identity is large enough, and consequential enough, that it deserves a book of its own rather than a single chapter. *The Weight of Your Words*, a companion guide in this same series, is built entirely around this one subject: the specific words Nigerian Muslim households fall into using, what the Qur'an, Sunnah, and all four madhabs actually say about them, and a

practical path for repairing the damage where it's already been done. If this chapter struck something close to home, that book goes considerably further than this one has room to.

This Week

The next time you correct your child for something specific, listen to your own words afterward, as though someone else had said them. Did they name the moment, or did they, even briefly, name the child?

رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِي رَفِيقًا بِأَهْلِي كَمَا كَانَ نَبِيُّكَ رَفِيقًا

"My Lord, make me gentle with my family, as Your Prophet was gentle."

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns to du'ā not as a formal ritual recited at fixed times, but as a daily

parenting tool in its own right, and why some of the most powerful shaping of a child's heart happens in words said to Allah about them, not to them directly.

Chapter 16

Du'ā as a Parenting Tool

A Sentence Said to Allah And Not to the Child

There's a form of parenting that happens entirely out of a child's hearing in sujūd, in the last third of the night, in the quiet space between the adhān and the iqāmah and this book has not yet addressed it directly, despite quoting it at the close of nearly every chapter so far. Every du'ā this book has offered you across fifteen chapters was not incidental decoration. Each one was a small demonstration of what this chapter now makes explicit: that the words a parent says *to Allah* about their child shape that child's life as

powerfully as anything said *to* the child directly and, in one specific way the Prophet ﷺ warned us about, even more dangerously.

A Supplication Allah Answers Without Doubt

The Prophet ﷺ named three supplications that are answered without doubt: the du'ā of someone who has been wronged, the du'ā of a traveller, and in the exact wording of the hadith "*da'watu al-wālidi 'alā waladihi*", the supplication of a parent *concerning* their child (Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd, graded ḥasan). The Arabic preposition used here, '*alā*', carries a genuine double edge in the original hadith. It can mean a du'ā made *for* a child's benefit, or a du'ā made *against* them, and the hadith does not specify which. Both, the Prophet ﷺ is telling us, tend to be answered.

This is worth sitting with slowly, because most parents have only ever heard the encouraging half of this hadith, that a parent's du'ā for their child carries special weight with Allah without hearing the warning built into the very same words. A parent's relationship with Allah, when it comes to their own child, is uniquely, dangerously powerful. What a parent asks of Allah concerning their child tends to land.

The Warning Woven Into This Book's Entire Argument

The Prophet ﷺ made the danger side of this explicit elsewhere: *"Do not invoke curses upon yourselves, do not invoke curses upon your children, and do not invoke curses upon your wealth, lest you happen to do so in a moment when Allah is asked for something and grants it"* (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). Read this alongside the

parent-child hadith above, and something clicks into place that has been circling underneath several earlier chapters without being named directly. A frustrated parent who says, in the heat of a difficult moment, *"this child will be the death of me"* or *"Allah, what did I do to deserve this child"* is not simply venting. According to these two hadith read together, they may be doing something considerably more serious and that is placing exactly the kind of request before Allah that this hadith says tends to be granted, concerning the one person whose wellbeing they care about most in the world.

This gives an entirely new, sharper edge to the concern Chapter 12 raised about honesty in small things, and to everything Chapter 15

argued about correction never sliding into condemnation. A harsh label said directly to a child is damaging for the reasons those chapters already explained. A harsh word said *about* a child, even muttered under one's breath, even framed as a complaint to Allah rather than an insult to the child's face, carries this additional, specific spiritual weight. A request placed before the One whose acceptance of a parent's du'ā concerning their own child is, according to the Prophet ﷺ, not in doubt.

The Model: Ibrāhīm's Lifelong Practice

The Qur'an preserves an extended record of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام making du'ā for his children, not once, in a moment

of crisis, but as an ongoing practice woven through his life. He asked Allah to grant him a child among the righteous (Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt, 37:100). He asked that his descendants establish prayer, and that Allah accept his supplication (Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:40). He prayed for the safety and provision of his offspring even while settling them in a barren valley, trusting Allah's care over his own ability to provide (Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:37). Zakariyyā عليه

السلام made a similar sustained practice of it, asking Allah specifically for a righteous heir even in old age, when every natural indicator suggested it was no longer possible (Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:38; Sūrah Maryam, 19:4–6).

What both prophets model is not a single desperate prayer offered in crisis, but a lifelong, ongoing practice, du'ā for one's children treated as a standing part of a parent's relationship with Allah, not a last resort reached for only when something has already gone wrong.

What This Looks Like in Practice

Practically, this means making du'ā for a child by name, specifically, rather than only in the vague collective language many of us default to. It means treating sujūd, a position in which du'ā is especially encouraged as a regular place to remember a specific child's specific needs, not only during examinations or illness. It means using the times of greatest acceptance the Sunnah identifies, the last third of the night, the time between adhān and iqāmah, moments of fasting deliberately, for this purpose among others.

It also means the reverse direction deserves cultivation just as much. Children taught from a young age to make du'ā for their own parents, the specific words "*Rabbi irhamhumā kamā rabbayānī ṣaghīrā,*" "My Lord, have mercy on

them as they raised me when I was small" (Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:24) are being given a lifelong practice that, per the same logic explored in this chapter, becomes one of the most powerful things a child can do for a parent long after that parent's ability to care for themselves has faded, or after they've passed away entirely. This is echoing the three things Chapter 1 described as continuing to benefit a person after death.

The Nigerian Layer: A Real Strength, and a Real Danger, in the Same Household

Du'ā for children is already a strong, visible practice in most Nigerian Muslim households. Parents openly asking Allah for their children's success, safety, and righteousness is culturally normal and genuinely beautiful, and arguably closer to Ibrāhīm's model than many other

contexts manage. This is worth naming and building on deliberately, not taking for granted.

But the same household culture that makes open du'ā normal also, often, makes the *other* half of this hadith dangerously normal. Frustrated words that function as curses, said in the heat of an argument and dressed up as complaint rather than recognised for what the hadith suggests they may actually be. "*Na so you go be*" (this is how you'll always be) carries more spiritual weight in a Nigerian household already comfortable with open du'ā than it might elsewhere, precisely because that household already has genuine, practised belief that words directed at Allah concerning a child land. The same sincerity that makes the

blessing so powerful makes the curse dangerous too.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not suggesting that a moment of frustration accidentally spoken becomes an irreversible spiritual sentence on a child. Allah's mercy, established across this entire book, remains greater than a parent's worst moment, and Chapter 10's discussion of tawbah applies here as everywhere else. What it is arguing is that a parent's words about their child, spoken to the child, spoken about the child, or spoken to Allah concerning the child deserve the same seriousness this book has asked of every other kind of parental speech, and that du'ā, properly understood, is not a separate ritual activity but one more expression

of the amānah Chapter 1 opened this entire book with.

This Week

Make one specific, deliberate du'ā for your child by name this week, ideally in sujūd, not a general request for their success, but something particular to who they actually are and what they specifically need right now.

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

"My Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous." (Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt, 37:100)

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns to a challenge nearly every Nigerian Muslim household faces without much guidance: staying consistent between

mother and father on matters of tarbiyah, and why the alignment Chapter 4 described at the level of marriage choice must be actively maintained, year after year, once children are actually in the picture.

Chapter 17

Staying Consistent Between Mother and Father

"Ask Your Father." "Ask Your Mother."

Every household has watched this play out at least once. A child asks for permission to do something. One parent says no. The child, without missing a beat, goes to find the other parent and asks the exact same question, phrased slightly differently, hoping for a different answer. Sometimes it works. And once it has worked even a single time, a child has learned something that will shape the household for years afterward: that the actual rules of this house are negotiable, depending entirely on who happens to be asked.

Chapter 7 already flagged this briefly, in the context of boundaries during the ten-to-puberty years specifically. This chapter widens the lens across the whole of childhood, because inconsistency between parents doesn't only undermine a specific rule about bedtime or screen time. It undermines the entire coherence of the tarbiyah Chapter 3 described as the actual goal of parenting a child cannot be nurtured consistently toward a clear standard if the two people raising them are, in practice, working from two different standards.

Two Shepherds And One Flock

Chapter 1 already gave us the hadith worth returning to here directly. The Prophet ﷺ described the man as a shepherd over his household, and the woman as a shepherd over

her husband's house and children, each of them individually responsible before Allah for what they were entrusted with (Bukhārī and Muslim). It's worth noticing something easy to miss on a first reading. This hadith describes two distinct shepherds, with genuinely different domains of responsibility but one flock. The household these two shepherds are tending is not divided into "father's children" and "mother's children." It is the same children, the same amānah, held jointly even while the specific responsibilities differ.

This distinction matters practically. Consistency between parents does not mean mother and father must play identical roles, or that their individual approaches to any given moment must be indistinguishable. Chapter 5

already noted how differently fathers and mothers are often culturally expected to engage in play and affection, without either being wrong. What it means is that the underlying *standard* like what's actually expected, what's actually acceptable and what actually happens when a boundary is crossed needs to be shared, even when the two shepherds express it differently.

Consultation, Even Under Difficulty

The Qur'an gives real weight to consultation between parents over a child's affairs, in a context that's worth noting precisely because of how difficult it is. Sūrah al-Ṭalāq addresses divorced parents negotiating the practical arrangements of nursing a shared child, instructing them directly to "*consult between*

yourselves in a fair manner" (*wa'tamirū baynakum bima'rūf*) (65:6). Commentators explain this as calling both parties to genuine mutual understanding and tolerance in working out what's best for the child, rather than either party simply imposing their preference unilaterally.

If Allah asks this level of good-faith consultation of parents who are no longer married to each other often under real strain, sometimes genuine conflict, the standard for a married couple, still sharing a home and a daily life together, is clearly not lower. A household where major decisions about a child's discipline, education, or upbringing are made unilaterally by one parent, without genuine consultation with the other, is falling short of a

standard the Qur'an holds even divorced parents to.

Disagree in Privat But Present Unity in Front of the Child

One practical distinction deserves direct attention, because getting it wrong is one of the most common ways households undermine their own consistency without realising it. Genuine disagreement between parents about how to handle a specific situation is normal, healthy, and inevitable. Two people raising children together will not always see eye to eye on every judgment call. The problem is not the disagreement itself. It's where that disagreement is allowed to surface.

A child who witnesses one parent openly overrule or contradict the other in the moment

"don't listen to your father, that's not fair" said in front of the child rather than discussed privately afterward learns two damaging lessons simultaneously: that the rules of the house are unstable and dependent on which parent currently has the upper hand, and that one parent's authority can be undermined by the other without consequence. Both lessons work directly against everything Chapter 3 described tarbiyah as trying to build. The healthier pattern is disagreement worked through privately, a unified decision presented to the child regardless of which parent's initial instinct prevailed. This protects the child from exactly the instability that makes them start testing which parent to ask.

When the Household Is More Than Two

Chapter 4 already named a reality specific to many Nigerian Muslim households. The "home" a child grows up in often extends well beyond two parents, into grandparents, co-wives, and extended family with real daily influence over how a child is raised. This complicates the picture this chapter is describing, and deserves honest acknowledgment rather than a simple assumption that every household maps neatly onto a two-shepherd model.

In polygamous households specifically, consistency has an added layer of complexity. Half-siblings are raised partly under different mothers, each with her own instincts and standards, under one father's overall

responsibility. The principle this chapter has been building doesn't change in this context, but its application requires more deliberate effort: a father genuinely engaged with each mother's approach, working toward shared standards across the household rather than allowing each branch of the family to operate by entirely separate rules, remains the goal, difficult as it may be to achieve fully in practice. Where full uniformity isn't realistic, honesty with children about differences between households, rather than pretending inconsistency doesn't exist, tends to produce less confusion than silence.

Extended family involvement like a grandmother whose instincts differ sharply from a mother's, an uncle who undermines

agreed household rules during a visit raises the same core issue Chapter 8 addressed regarding labels from relatives: quiet, respectful advocacy for the household's actual standards, rather than either silent tolerance of the inconsistency or open conflict in front of the children.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that parents must agree on every parenting decision, or that healthy debate between spouses over how to raise their children is somehow improper. Chapter 4 already established that genuine religious and practical alignment matters far more than surface-level agreement on every particular nor is it suggesting that differing parental roles or personalities should be flattened into sameness. What it is arguing is

that children should rarely, if ever, be the ones discovering that disagreement exists and that the actual mechanics of working through differing views belong between the two parents, privately, with a coherent standard emerging on the other side of that conversation for the child to actually rely on.

This Week

Identify one area where you and your spouse have never explicitly discussed your shared standard. It might be a rule enforced inconsistently, or differently, without either of you quite noticing the gap. Have that conversation privately this week, away from the children, before the next moment it matters.

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ

"Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes." (Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:74, partial)

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns outward, to a dynamic Chapter 4 and Chapter 8 have already gestured toward but not yet addressed directly and they are the grandparents and extended family, and how a parent involves them fully in a child's life without losing control of the message that life is actually built around.

Chapter 18

Grandparents and Extended Family — Involving Them Without Losing the Message

The Compound Where Everyone Has an Opinion

In a typical Nigerian Muslim compound, a child is rarely raised by two people alone. A grandmother down the corridor has her own settled views on how a crying baby should be handled. An aunty visiting for the weekend has strong feelings about how much a nine-year-old should be allowed to talk back. An uncle, home from Lagos for Eid, slips a child money and permission for something the parents had specifically said no to, undoing a

boundary in the space of a single afternoon.

None of these relatives mean any harm. Most of them love the child fiercely, arguably as much as the parents do. And yet a household that isn't deliberate about this dynamic can find its own tarbiyah carefully built across the chapters of this book quietly diluted by a dozen well-meaning hands pulling in slightly different directions.

This chapter takes on directly what Chapters 4, 8, and 17 have each touched without fully addressing, how a parent involves grandparents and extended family in a child's life genuinely, warmly, in keeping with real Islamic obligation without losing control of the actual message that life is being built around.

The Real Weight of Honouring Elders

Before addressing any friction, it's worth being unambiguous about the obligation underneath this entire chapter. A man once asked the Prophet ﷺ who most deserved his good companionship. "*Your mother*," the Prophet ﷺ answered. He asked again "*then who?*" and received the same answer three times before the Prophet ﷺ finally said, "*your father*" (Bukhārī and Muslim). This is not a minor point of etiquette. Honouring parents sits among the most heavily emphasised obligations in the entire dīn, and by extension, the respect owed to grandparents and elders more broadly is not optional or merely cultural. It is something Islam itself demands.

This matters because everything else in this chapter has to be read against that foundation. Nothing here is licence to distance a child from grandparents, to treat extended family involvement as a problem to be minimised, or to justify coldness toward elders in the name of "protecting the message." Silat al-rahim which is maintaining ties of kinship is one of the most consistently emphasised values across the Qur'an and Sunnah, and a household that achieves consistency in tarbiyah by cutting a child off from grandparents and extended family has solved one problem by creating a far larger one.

What Extended Family Genuinely Offers

It is worth naming clearly what's actually gained through the kind of extended,

communal upbringing common in Nigerian Muslim households, because this chapter's later cautions shouldn't obscure real strengths. Chapter 5 established that a young child's security grows through multiple sources of consistent warmth and attachment and grandparents, aunties, and older siblings, when genuinely warm and present, add real depth to that foundation rather than diluting it. Grandparents often carry knowledge, stories, and lived religious practice a busy young parent hasn't yet accumulated, the specific du'ā a great-grandmother always recited, the family's own history of faith across generations, a patience and presence that comes with age and no longer having to juggle the demands of raising young children directly. Extended family support also, practically, frees parents to fulfil

other obligations work, further religious learning, rest that a completely isolated nuclear household often cannot manage alone.

None of this should be taken for granted, and a parent genuinely grateful for it, rather than merely tolerating it, tends to navigate the friction points ahead with far more grace.

Where the Friction Actually Lives

The difficulty is rarely about extended family involvement itself. It's about specific moments where an elder's approach conflicts with a standard the parents have deliberately set, the indulgence that undermines a boundary Chapter 7 described as needing real consistency to work, correction delivered in a manner Chapter 15 already cautioned against, or advice given with full confidence that simply

contradicts what the parents, after real thought, have decided is right for their own child.

Luqmān's advice to his son, examined closely in Chapter 3, offers a principle worth extending carefully into this exact tension. Allah instructs that if one's own parents strive to draw a person toward shirk, they are not to be obeyed in that specific matter, while still being treated with companionship and kindness in this world (Sūrah Luqmān, 31:15). The specific context there is the gravest matter imaginable, associating partners with Allah, and this chapter is not suggesting ordinary parenting disagreements carry that same weight. But the underlying structure of the principle, that obedience to elders has real limits, while

kindness toward them does not, offers a genuinely useful frame for smaller-scale tensions too. A parent is not obligated to override their own considered judgment about their child simply because a respected elder disagrees, even while that same parent remains obligated to disagree with warmth, respect, and genuine gratitude rather than coldness or confrontation.

How This Actually Gets Handled

The principle Chapter 17 established for disagreement between spouses worked through privately, presented with unity in front of the child extends naturally to this relationship as well, with an added layer of the respect elders are specifically owed. A quiet, private word with a grandparent after a gathering, rather

than a correction delivered in front of the child or the wider family, protects the elder's dignity while still allowing the parent to hold their own standard. Framing these conversations around gratitude rather than complaint. Expressions like *"I know you love him dearly, and I need your help with something specific"* tends to land far better than a framing that reads as criticism of how the elder themselves once parented.

Where a specific, serious concern exists, the kind Chapter 8 flagged around harmful labels repeated by relatives, this book's companion volume, *The Weight of Your Words*, works through that particular conversation in real depth, including adaptable scripts for exactly this situation. This chapter's contribution is the broader posture underneath those specific

conversations: genuine respect for elders held together with genuine responsibility for the amānah Chapter 1 established as belonging, ultimately, to the parent, not diffused across the whole extended household, however loving that household is.

The Nigerian Layer: Compounds, Co-Wives, and House-Help

Chapter 17 already touched on the added complexity of polygamous households and extended compound living. It's worth adding one more layer here. House-help and nannies, which are extremely common in some Nigerian Muslim homes, function as a further extension of a child's daily caregiving environment because they often spend more waking hours with a young child than the parents themselves manage to. The same principle applies here as

with grandparents as genuine appreciation for the real support provided, paired with deliberate, ongoing communication about the household's actual standards, rather than assuming alignment will happen automatically. A child correcting themselves one way with their parents and an entirely different way with the person who spends most of the day with them is absorbing exactly the same inconsistency Chapter 17 warned against between mother and father, just through a different relationship.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing for distance from extended family, reduced respect for elders, or treating grandparents primarily as a risk to be managed. The obligation to honour parents

and maintain kinship ties, established at the start of this chapter, remains a serious and non-negotiable part of the dīn regardless of any parenting disagreement nor is it suggesting a parent should simply defer to every elder's preference in the name of avoiding friction, since Chapter 1 already established that the amānah of a specific child belongs specifically to that child's parent, not to the household collectively. What it is arguing is that both obligations are real and must be held together like deep respect for elders, and clear, calm ownership of the specific tarbiyah a parent has decided, after real thought, that their own child needs.

This Week

Think of one recurring point of friction between your household's standards and an elder relative's approach. Rather than continuing to simply absorb it silently or resent it privately, plan one specific, warm, private conversation this week that is framed around gratitude and a specific request for help, not criticism.

رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

"My Lord, have mercy upon them as they raised me when I was small." (Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:24)

What Comes Next

This closes Part 4 of this book, how parents actually carry out tarbiyah day to day, through example, correction, du'ā, and the wider

household around them. Part 5 turns outward again, to the modern challenges a child increasingly faces beyond the home itself beginning with the screens now present in nearly every Nigerian Muslim household, and what they're actually doing to a child's fiṭrah.

Chapter 19

Raising Children Around Screens and Technology

A Phone Handed Over to Children To Buy Silence

It happens in nearly every Nigerian Muslim household with young children now, often without much thought behind it. A toddler grows restless during a long wait, a difficult meal, a moment when a parent genuinely needs five minutes of quiet and a phone appears, unlocked, loaded with videos, handed over almost automatically. It works instantly and completely. The child goes still. The moment of difficulty passes.

Nothing in this book has argued against practical solutions to real parenting pressure. Chapter 5 acknowledged directly how genuinely difficult it is to find unhurried time amid the demands of running a household. But this particular solution deserves closer attention than most parents give it, because what's actually happening in that moment of borrowed quiet is a young, still-forming fitrah being handed over, unsupervised, to whatever algorithm happens to be running on the other side of that screen.

What the Prophet ﷺ Asked About Time

The Prophet ﷺ described a very specific accounting every person will face, that no one's feet will move from before their Lord on the Day of Judgment until they have answered for

their life, and what they did with it; their knowledge, and what they did with it; their wealth, how they earned it and where they spent it; and their body, and what they wore it out in (Tirmidhī, graded ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ via the narration of Abū Barzah al-Aslamī). Time itself likewise a life, a body, the years given to a person is treated here as something that will be specifically accounted for, not simply spent however circumstance happens to direct it.

This matters directly for how a parent thinks about screen time, because a young child has no independent capacity to weigh how their own hours are being spent. That accounting, for now, in these early years sits with the parent handing over the device. Chapter 2 already named "what a child is exposed to" as one of

the primary forces shaping the fitrah, alongside the home and the company a child keeps. Screens have become, in the space of little more than a decade, one of the most powerful and least examined of these three forces in nearly every household, Nigerian or otherwise.

The Modern Shape of an Old Warning

Allah describes successful believers, in the same passage on *khushū'* already discussed in Chapter 11, as those who turn away from *laghw* (idle, vain, purposeless talk and activity) (Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:1–3). *Laghw* is an old concept, but it describes something startlingly close to the specific danger of unstructured screen consumption as content with no purpose, no benefit, consumed not because it nourishes anything but because it's endlessly, deliberately

available, engineered in ways the earliest Muslims could not have imagined but the underlying warning still names precisely to hold attention regardless of whether that attention produces anything of value.

A young child has essentially no defence against content designed this way. The rapid cuts, the endless scroll, the algorithmic feed built by teams of adults specifically to maximise time spent rather than benefit gained, are not neutral entertainment competing on equal footing with a book or a conversation. They are built, deliberately, to be more compelling than either which is precisely why unsupervised, unlimited access poses a genuinely different order of risk than earlier

generations' concerns about, say, too much television.

It Is Not About Prohibition But Structure

Chapter 7 already cautioned against the instinct to respond to outside influence with blanket restriction, noting that this approach tends to backfire once a child gains real independence. The same caution applies here. Total prohibition of technology is neither realistic in the world a Nigerian Muslim child is actually growing up in, nor necessarily wise. Technology genuinely offers real benefit, from Qur'an memorisation apps to educational content to maintaining connection with family abroad, and a child raised in complete unfamiliarity with it is often simply less

prepared, not more protected, once they inevitably encounter it unsupervised.

What this chapter argues for instead is deliberate structure, built on the same principles Chapter 7 already established for boundaries generally: delayed introduction where genuinely possible, rather than handing a smartphone to a child as early as convenience suggests;

Co-viewing and shared use for younger children, so a parent knows firsthand what's actually being consumed rather than trusting it blindly;

Real limits on unsupervised time, explained honestly rather than imposed as bare rule; and, as children grow older, the same gradual shift

Chapter 8 described toward dialogue and reasoning rather than pure control helps a teenager understand *why* unrestricted use is a genuine risk to their own heart, rather than simply restricting access and hoping the restriction holds once they are old enough to circumvent it.

The Example Problem

Chapter 14 established that a parent's own example teaches more powerfully than any instruction, and nowhere does that principle create more quiet hypocrisy than around screens specifically. A household that restricts a child's phone use while both parents remain visibly absorbed in their own devices throughout the day, present physically, absent attentionally is teaching a lesson entirely

disconnected from the stated rule. Children notice this gap acutely, the same way Chapter 14 described them noticing any gap between what's taught and what's actually lived, and a rule about screens carries little real weight in a household where the adults themselves have not seriously examined their own relationship with the same devices.

The Nigerian Layer: Access, Cost, and Peer Pressure

Several features of the Nigerian context shape this challenge distinctly. Smartphone access often arrives earlier than parents intend, driven by school WhatsApp groups a child genuinely needs for classwork, or by peer pressure that makes a child without a phone feel conspicuously excluded among classmates who all have one. The cost of data in many

households means less parental oversight software or premium filtering tools are realistically available compared to wealthier contexts, placing more weight on direct parental attention and household rules than on technical solutions. And Chapter 18's discussion of extended family involvement applies here directly too. A grandparent or uncle gifting a child a phone, or data, without consulting the parents' actual standards, can undo a carefully maintained boundary in a single visit, exactly the dynamic that chapter already addressed.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that technology itself is harmful, or that a Muslim household should aim for minimal engagement with it.

Real benefit exists in education, in Qur'an access, in maintaining family bonds across distance, and a household that treats every screen as inherently corrupting misses genuine good available through deliberate, wise use. What it is arguing is that unstructured, unsupervised access, particularly for young children whose fitrah is still being actively shaped, as Chapter 2 described carries real risk that deserves the same deliberate attention this book has asked parents to bring to every other force shaping their child's character.

This Week

Track, honestly, how much unsupervised screen time your youngest child has had this week, and compare it against how much of your own screen use has happened in front of them,

unexamined. Adjust whichever gap surprises you more.

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ لَنَا فِي أَوْقَاتِنَا وَأَعْمَارِنَا

"O Allah, bless us in our time and in our lives."

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns to a related but distinct challenge; the company a child keeps beyond the home, and how a parent protects a child from bad influence without the isolation Chapter 7 already warned tends to backfire once independence arrives.

Chapter 20

Protecting Children From Bad Company

Every Household Recognises This Fear

There's a particular kind of dread every Nigerian Muslim parent eventually faces, usually without warning. A child who has been diligent about salāh starts skipping it, and the change traces back to a new group of friends. A daughter who used to dress modestly without complaint starts pushing back, echoing language that sounds nothing like anything said at home. A son's vocabulary shifts, his attitude toward elders shifts, his interest in things that used to matter to him quietly fades and a parent, looking for the cause, finds it isn't

one dramatic event. It's a friendship, or a group of them, absorbed gradually over months.

Chapter 13 already gave the foundational hadith for this subject in the good companion as a seller of musk, the bad companion as a blacksmith's bellows, leaving you either fragrant or singed depending on who you sit beside (Bukhārī and Muslim). This chapter goes further, into the practical question every parent eventually has to face directly: how do you actually protect a child from corrosive company, in a world where you cannot supervise every hour of their day, without the kind of total restriction Chapter 7 already warned tends to backfire the moment real independence arrives?

This Is Not Just Influence But Also Identity

The Prophet ﷺ gave a second hadith on this subject that is worth placing beside the musk-seller analogy, because it makes a sharper claim. He said: *"A man is upon the religion of his close friend, so let one of you look carefully at whom he befriends"* (Abū Dāwūd and Tirmidhī, graded ḥasan). Scholars explain this is not suggesting a person's actual creed shifts to match their friend's. A Muslim with a non-Muslim friend does not leave Islam through friendship alone. What it describes is something subtler and, in some ways, more pervasive. A person's *dīn* in the broader sense, their habits, their values, their sense of what's normal and acceptable gradually reshapes itself around whoever they spend the most time with. This is not through any single dramatic

moment of persuasion, but through the slow, cumulative pressure of wanting to belong.

This is precisely why bad company is so much harder to identify and address than more obvious dangers. A friend who directly encourages a specific sin is relatively easy to notice and name. A friend group that simply, gradually, makes certain values feel old-fashioned, certain boundaries feel unnecessary, certain forms of dress or speech feel embarrassing, that kind of influence rarely produces a single moment a parent can point to. It accumulates the way the *fiṭrah* itself, described back in Chapter 2, is shaped, not through one event, but through years of exposure.

When Migration Is the Right Answer

Islamic history offers a genuinely powerful precedent for a strategy many parents hesitate to consider: physically changing environment when a corrupting environment cannot be fixed from within it. The earliest Muslims in Makkah, facing an environment that made practising their faith increasingly untenable, did not simply try harder to resist the surrounding pressure in place. Some migrated to Abyssinia. Eventually, the entire Muslim community migrated to Madinah. Hijrah which is leaving a harmful environment for a better one is not framed anywhere in the Islamic tradition as weakness or retreat. It is framed as wisdom, sometimes as the very thing that made the survival and growth of the early Muslim community possible at all.

This precedent matters practically for a parent facing a genuinely corrosive social environment around their child which could be a particular school, a particular friend group, sometimes a particular neighbourhood. Changing that environment, difficult and costly as it often is, is not an overreaction or an admission of parental failure. It is, at times, the same wisdom Islam's earliest community itself relied on, applied to a much smaller and more personal scale.

Building Discernment, Not Only Enforcing Distance

Chapter 13 already established that the more durable long-term answer isn't primarily control or forbidding specific friendships rarely survives the growing independence Chapter 8 described adolescence bringing. What actually

protects a child once they're old enough to choose their own company independently is the discernment Chapter 13 described cultivating early. A child who has genuinely internalised the question *does this person's company bring me closer to Allah or further from Him* is equipped to make that judgment in rooms a parent will never see inside.

This doesn't mean a parent has no active role beyond hoping that discernment holds. Chapter 18 already described the value of genuinely knowing a child's world extends naturally here into knowing a child's friends directly, not merely by name but by real acquaintance: inviting them to the house, meeting their parents where possible, paying attention to how a child behaves differently

around certain friends versus others. This kind of active, warm involvement gives a parent real information without requiring the kind of surveillance or blanket restriction that tends to push a child's social life underground rather than eliminating the risk.

Keeping the Door Open

Perhaps the single most important practical factor in this entire chapter is one already established in Chapter 8: whether a child feels safe telling a parent honestly about pressure they're facing from friends, rather than hiding it out of fear of an explosive reaction. A child who has watched previous honesty about a struggle met with the Prophet ﷺ's model from Chapter 8 engagement, reasoning, mercy is far more likely to come to a parent the

moment a friendship starts pulling them somewhere uncomfortable. A child who has only ever watched honesty met with anger and punishment learns, quickly and rationally, to conceal rather than disclose which leaves a parent discovering the problem only once it has already progressed far further than it needed to.

Facilitating Good Company, Not Only Blocking Bad

It's worth naming directly what many households under-invest in relative to how much energy goes into forbidding bad influence. And that is actively building good company for a child, rather than only reacting to bad company once it's noticed. A Madrasah community, a mosque youth circle, family friendships deliberately cultivated with

households that share real values, these don't happen automatically. They require the same deliberate effort a parent puts into everything else this book has described. A child whose social world already includes genuine musk-sellers, cultivated early and maintained deliberately, has far less need to seek belonging from a blacksmith's bellows later on.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that every non-Muslim friendship, or every friendship with someone less religiously observant, is inherently dangerous and must be avoided. The earlier citation on this hadith noted directly that many people have been guided toward Islam through the beautiful character of a Muslim friend, and a Muslim child capable of

being that kind of positive influence, rather than only being influenced, is itself a worthy goal nor is this chapter suggesting total control or isolation is ever truly protective. Chapter 7 already established why that approach tends to fail once independence arrives. What it is arguing is that companionship shapes a child as powerfully as the hadith describes, and that a parent's task is building the discernment, the honest relationship, and where genuinely necessary, the willingness to change environment, that actually protects a child rather than merely hoping proximity to danger produces no effect.

This Week

Name, honestly, one friendship in your child's life you know little about beyond a first name.

Take one concrete step this week toward actually knowing that friend. It could be an invitation to your home, a conversation or anything that moves you from guessing to genuinely knowing.

اللَّهُمَّ قَيِّضْ لَهُ رِفْقَةً صَالِحَةً تُعِينُهُ عَلَى طَاعَتِكَ

"O Allah, provide for him righteous companionship that helps him toward Your obedience."

What Comes Next

The next chapter widens this same concern to the full environment a Nigerian Muslim child moves through daily like school, wider society, and a world shaped by influences very different from the home and how a parent raises a child to remain firmly Muslim while genuinely

present in a mixed environment, rather than isolated from it entirely.

Chapter 21

Raising Muslim Children in a Mixed-Influence Environment

Two Uniforms, Two Worlds

A child leaves the house most mornings in a school uniform, having just finished a Qur'an lesson at home or at Madrasah the evening before. By mid-morning, they're sitting in a classroom where the assumptions about dress, dating, ambition, and even the existence of Allah may differ sharply from what's practised at home. By afternoon, they're back in a compound where those earlier assumptions are expected to reassert themselves completely. This isn't a rare or unusual arrangement. It is

simply what growing up Muslim in Nigeria typically looks like, moving daily between environments that don't always agree with each other.

Chapter 20 addressed the specific danger of individual friendships that pull a child away from their dīn. This chapter addresses something broader and, in some ways, harder to manage: an entire surrounding environment like school in wider Nigerian society, sometimes even extended family that operates by different rules than the home does, every single day, with no possibility of hijrah away from it the way Chapter 20 described as sometimes necessary for a specific friendship.

The Qur'an's Own Model: In the World, Not Of It

The Companions of the Cave, already introduced in Chapter 8, offer the clearest template available for exactly this situation. These were young men living inside a society that had no room for their belief. They didn't have the option of a fully Islamic environment surrounding them at every turn. Their response, as the Qur'an describes it, wasn't to pretend the surrounding pressure didn't exist, nor was it total, permanent withdrawal from society. When the pressure became severe enough, they retreated temporarily to the cave itself, while Allah describes increasing them in guidance throughout that period (Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:13).

The broader principle the Qur'an models across many contexts, not only this one, is a Muslim identity robust enough to remain firmly itself while genuinely present within a mixed environment, not requiring total isolation to survive contact with difference, but also not dissolving into whatever surrounds it. This is the standard worth aiming for with a child navigating a Nigerian school system, rather than either extreme. Neither complete withdrawal into an exclusively Muslim bubble, which Chapter 20 already noted tends to leave a child unprepared once independence removes that bubble, nor uncritical immersion that lets the surrounding environment simply overwrite what's being taught at home.

What Actually Builds That Kind of Firmness

Every chapter in Part 3 of this book like tawḥīd taught with love, the Qur'an taught with understanding, ṣalāh moved from imitation to genuine connection, akhlāq built through consistent example was, in a real sense, preparation for exactly this challenge. A child whose Islamic identity was built through genuine understanding, the way Chapter 9 described love-before-rules producing durable conviction rather than fragile compliance, carries something into a mixed classroom that a child taught only through bare rule-following often doesn't: an internal anchor that doesn't require external enforcement to hold.

This is why this chapter sits so late in the book rather than earlier. Navigating a mixed

environment well is not a separate skill to be taught on top of everything else. It's the practical test of whether everything else actually took root. A child who understands *why* they pray, not merely *that* they must, tends to keep praying even when surrounded by classmates who don't. A child who has internalised modesty as something meaningful, per Chapter 13's gradual approach, tends to hold that standard even when peers openly mock it.

Where Parents Can Still Actively Help

None of this means a parent's job is simply to build strong foundations early and then hope they hold unassisted. Several things remain genuinely within a parent's ongoing influence

even once a child spends most of their day in a mixed environment.

Regular, honest conversation about what a child is actually encountering which should not be an interrogation, but the same open dialogue Chapter 8 established as essential during adolescence lets a parent know what pressures are live right now, rather than discovering them only once a real problem has developed. Actively maintaining the Islamic environment available within the home and immediate community like consistent Qur'an learning, a Madrasah or mosque circle, the good companionship Chapter 20 described deliberately cultivating gives a child a genuine counterweight to the hours spent elsewhere, rather than leaving the mixed environment as

the only consistent influence in their life. And modelling, per Chapter 14, a Muslim identity that is genuinely comfortable and unapologetic rather than defensive or embarrassed teaches a child that being visibly, confidently Muslim in a mixed setting is entirely possible. Something they are far more likely to internalise from watching a parent live it than from being told to do it themselves.

The Question of School Choice

Many Nigerian Muslim families face a genuine, difficult decision around school choice between choosing a fully Islamic school environment, a mixed but reputable school, or in some cases limited options that leave little real choice at all. This chapter isn't the place for a firm verdict on that decision, since real

circumstances like cost, availability, academic quality, a specific child's own temperament and resilience vary too widely for one answer to fit every household. What's worth naming is the trade-off itself, honestly. A more insulated environment offers more protection but less practice at the kind of firm presence-within-difference the Companions of the Cave modelled. A more mixed environment offers more of that practice but demands a stronger foundation already in place before it's tested daily. Whichever a family chooses, given real constraints, the responsibility to build that foundation deliberately, rather than assuming either environment will do the work on its own remains squarely on the home.

The Nigerian Layer: A Society Still Largely Respectful of Religion

It's worth naming one genuine advantage Nigerian Muslim children often have that children in some other mixed environments don't: wider Nigerian society, whatever its specific pressures, remains broadly religious and generally respectful of visible faith, Muslim or Christian. A child praying, fasting, or dressing modestly in a Nigerian school is far less likely to face the kind of blanket secular hostility toward religious practice found in some other contexts. The mixed-influence challenge here is usually less about outright hostility to faith itself, and more about specific values like dating culture, materialism, particular social expectations drifting from Islamic norms even within a generally religious

wider society. Naming this accurately matters, because it changes what a parent is actually preparing a child for: not defending the existence of faith itself, generally, but holding specific standards firm within an environment that broadly respects faith while not always sharing its particulars.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that a fully Islamic environment is unnecessary or that exposure to a mixed environment is automatically beneficial. Real risk exists, as Chapter 20 already established, and a parent should never treat exposure as costless simply because some good can come from it nor is it suggesting every family should choose a mixed environment over an Islamic one, or vice versa.

That decision depends on real, specific circumstances this chapter cannot resolve in the abstract. What it is arguing is that whichever environment a child moves through, the deciding factor in how well they hold their footing is the foundation built at home across every earlier chapter of this book and that foundation remains a parent's responsibility regardless of which environment surrounds it.

This Week

Ask your child directly, with real curiosity rather than suspicion, what about their school day feels hardest to reconcile with what's practised at home. Listen fully before responding. This conversation, more than any rule you could set, tells you where the real foundation-testing is actually happening.

Raising Children the Prophetic Way
رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا

"Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us." (Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:8)

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns to the moment many parents dread most and that is when a teenager doesn't merely question, as Chapter 8 described, but actively begins pulling away from the dīn itself, and what a parent's role becomes when guidance alone no longer seems to be reaching them.

Chapter 22

When a Teenager Starts Pulling Away

The Moment a Parent Fears Most

Chapter 8 described the ordinary, often healthy questioning of adolescence which was a young person testing inherited belief the way Ibrāhīm عليه السلام tested his own understanding before arriving at certainty. This chapter is about something harder: a teenager who has

moved beyond questioning into actual withdrawal. He has abandoned salāh rather than merely resisted. He rejected values openly rather than merely tested it. This young person seems, by every visible sign, to be walking away from the dīn their parents spent years building a home around.

Every chapter in this book so far has assumed effort produces results, more or less, over time. This chapter has to be honest about something harder to sit with: sometimes it doesn't, at least

not in any timeline or shape a parent can see or control. The Qur'an itself does not hide this reality. It gives us the account of a Prophet whose own child made exactly this choice.

An Example in Nūḥ's Son

Nūḥ عليه السلام, having spent nearly a thousand years calling his people to Allah, watched the flood rise around his own family with the ark finally ready. He called out to his son, visible at a distance, refusing to board: "*O my son, come aboard with us, and do not be with the disbelievers.*" His son answered that he

would climb a mountain instead, certain it would save him. Nūḥ told him nothing could save anyone that day except by Allah's mercy. A wave came between them, and his son was among those who drowned (Sūrah Hūd, 11:42-43).

What follows is worth reading slowly, because it addresses the exact grief this chapter is written for. Nūḥ, in evident anguish, called out to Allah: *"My Lord, my son is of my family, and Your promise is true, and You are the most just of judges."* Allah's answer was direct: *"O Nūḥ, he is not of your family. His conduct was other than righteous, so do not ask Me for what you have no knowledge of. I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant"* (Sūrah Hūd, 11:45-46). Commentators have explained this response

carefully because it was not a denial that the boy was Nūḥ's biological son, but a correction of what "family" ultimately means in the sight of Allah and not lineage alone, but also shared righteousness.

This account exists in the Qur'an, in part, precisely for parents facing something similar. If a Prophet of Allah, someone who cannot be accused of failing in dīn, failing in patience, or failing in sincere effort could not secure his own son's guidance, then a parent's own failure to secure their teenager's continued practice of Islam is not automatic proof of some personal failure in tarbiyah. Guidance, in the end, belongs to Allah, not to even the most devoted parent's effort.

Abū Ṭālib, and What the Prophet ﷺ Himself Could Not Do

A second account makes the same point from a different angle. The Prophet ﷺ's own uncle, Abū Ṭālib, who had raised him, protected him, sacrificed his own standing to shield him from persecution for years refused, even on his deathbed, to say the words of the shahādah, despite the Prophet ﷺ pleading with him directly, repeatedly, in his final moments. Allah then revealed: *"Indeed, you do not guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills"* (Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, 28:56).

If the Prophet ﷺ himself who is the single most beloved, most persuasive, most sincerely concerned guide any person could have could not guide the uncle who raised him, no parent reading this book should carry the crushing

weight of believing their own teenager's choices are proof of their personal failure. Effort, sincerity, and consistent tarbiyah are the parent's responsibility. The outcome, in the final account, is Allah's.

What This Does Not Mean

It would be a serious misreading of both of these accounts to conclude that effort therefore doesn't matter, or that a parent should simply accept a teenager's withdrawal from dīn as inevitable and stop working against it. Nūh never stopped calling his son, up to the very last moment the water separated them. The Prophet ﷺ never stopped pleading with Abū Ṭālib, right up until death made further effort impossible. Neither account describes a parent or a Prophet giving up. Both describe

continued, sincere, active effort, held together with an honest acceptance that the final outcome was never fully within their control to begin with.

This is the balance this chapter is asking a parent to hold. Neither the despair of believing a teenager's withdrawal is a permanent verdict on your entire tarbiyah, nor the passivity of assuming nothing more can be done because guidance ultimately belongs to Allah. Both accounts model continued, active love and effort, precisely alongside real acceptance of what cannot be controlled.

What Continued Effort Actually Looks Like

Chapter 20 established that a child who has watched honesty met with mercy, per the

Prophet ﷺ's approach with the struggling young man in Chapter 8, remains more likely to stay in real conversation with a parent than one who fears an explosive reaction. This matters most precisely during the stage this chapter addresses. A teenager who has pulled away from practice needs, more than ever, to know the relationship itself is not conditional on that practice returning immediately and that they remain loved, welcomed at the table, spoken to with warmth, even while a parent continues, patiently and without giving up, to model and invite rather than force.

Chapter 16's argument about du'ā becomes especially crucial here precisely because direct instruction has, for the moment, lost much of its purchase, and du'ā remains something a

parent can continue doing faithfully regardless of whether the teenager in front of them seems to be listening to anything else. Ibrāhīm's lifelong pattern of praying for his descendants, examined in that chapter, was not a one-time request answered instantly. It was sustained practice, held over years, without guarantee of a particular timeline.

What this chapter asks a parent explicitly to avoid is the temptation toward harsh rejection, expelling a struggling teenager emotionally or literally from the warmth of the family in response to their withdrawal, which tends to sever the very relationship that remains a young person's best path back. It equally asks a parent to avoid the opposite failure: quietly abandoning any effort at all, treating the

withdrawal as final and beyond further engagement, when neither Nūḥ nor the Prophet ﷺ modelled giving up while any door remained open.

This Week

If you are living through this chapter right now, rather than reading it in preparation, do one thing this week that keeps a door open rather than closing it further. Have a warm conversation with no agenda attached, a shared meal without lecture, a single sincere du'ā made specifically and by name. Let effort and acceptance sit together, the way both accounts in this chapter modelled.

رَبِّ إِنَّ ابْنِي مِنْ أَهْلِي وَإِنَّ وَعْدَكَ الْحَقُّ

"My Lord, indeed my son is of my family, and indeed Your promise is true" held alongside the surrender that followed it, and the trust in Allah's justice that Nūḥ's own response ultimately modelled.

What Comes Next

The next chapter addresses a struggle nearly every household faces on ordinary days, not only in moments of crisis; what to actually do when your child simply isn't listening, and why raising your voice tends to make it worse, not better.

Chapter 23

When Your Child Doesn't Listen (And Why Shouting Isn't the Answer)

Five Times, and Still Nothing

You've asked once, calmly. You've asked a second time, a little less calmly. By the third time, your voice has an edge to it. By the fourth, you're not really asking anymore. By the fifth, you're shouting; genuinely shouting, the kind that echoes through the house and draws a look from whoever else is home over something that, looked at honestly afterward, was never really worth this much noise because the cause could be shoes left by the door, a

phone put down five minutes late, a room still not swept.

This is one of the most common frustrations in parenting, in any household, in any era and it's worth addressing directly and practically, because Chapters 6, 7, and 15 of this book have already established the *why* behind gentler correction without fully answering the question every tired parent eventually asks: what do I actually do in the moment my child isn't listening and my patience is already gone?

What's Actually Happening When You Shout

It's worth being honest about something before going further. Shouting is very often less about the child's specific disobedience and more about the parent's own depleted capacity in

that particular moment. The same instruction, ignored on a well-rested Saturday morning, rarely produces the same explosive response it produces at the end of an exhausting day. This doesn't excuse the shouting, but it does relocate where the real work needs to happen, not only in managing the child's behaviour, but in managing your own state before you respond to it.

The Prophet ﷺ addressed this directly, more than once. A man once asked him for advice, and he answered simply: *"Do not become angry."* The man asked again, hoping for something more elaborate, and received the same answer each time (Bukhārī). On another occasion, he gave practical, physical guidance for the moment anger actually arrives: *"If one of*

you becomes angry while standing, let him sit down; if the anger leaves him, well and good, otherwise let him lie down" (Abū Dāwūd and Aḥmad). And he named the actual measure of strength worth striving for: *"The strong one is not the one who overcomes people through his strength, but the one who controls himself in anger"* (Bukhārī and Muslim).

None of these instructions were given specifically about parenting, but all three apply to it directly. A parent who changes their physical position like sitting down, stepping into another room for thirty seconds, even performing wuḍū', which the Prophet ﷺ also recommended as a way of interrupting anger is not being weak or indecisive. They are following a specific, practical Prophetic method

for the exact moment this chapter is describing.

Is It Defiance, or Is It Developmentally Normal?

Chapter 7 already established that the pen is lifted from a child until puberty. At that stage I their errors are not yet weighed against them the way an adult's would be. This matters enormously for how "not listening" should actually be interpreted. A four-year-old who doesn't follow a two-step instruction is very often not defying you; their working memory and attention simply aren't developed enough yet to reliably hold and execute what was asked, especially amid the distraction of play. A ten-year-old who "forgets" the same chore repeatedly may genuinely be forgetting, or may be testing a boundary deliberately and treating

both the same way, with the same intensity of response, tends to escalate the first case unnecessarily while under-correcting the second.

Distinguishing between the two doesn't require guesswork. A child who forgets inconsistently, across many different tasks, without any pattern of testing you specifically, is very likely dealing with ordinary childhood forgetfulness. A child who remembers perfectly well when it benefits them, and "forgets" specifically the instructions they would rather not follow, is testing a boundary which calls for the firm, calm correction Chapter 15 already described, not escalating volume.

A Practical Sequence

Rather than moving straight from a calm request to a shout, a deliberate sequence tends to produce far better results, and interrupts the escalation pattern most households fall into without meaning to.

State it once, clearly, at eye level: In this instance, do not shout from another room. It should be a specific instruction, given directly, with your child's attention actually on you and not a general announcement into the house that's easy to half-hear and genuinely forget.

Give a real, brief window, rather than expecting instant compliance the moment the words leave your mouth. A child mid-task finishing a sentence, completing a level of a game genuinely needs a moment to disengage,

the same courtesy most adults would want extended to them.

If it still hasn't happened, get close and repeat it calmly, naming the consequence plainly not as a threat delivered in anger, but as a simple statement of what happens next, matching Chapter 15's principle of correcting the specific act rather than escalating into character judgment.

Follow through consistently. Much of what looks like "not listening" is, over time, a child who has learned that a parent's fifth repetition is the one that actually matters, because the first four were never followed through on. Chapter 7's discussion of consistency applies directly here because a boundary enforced

unpredictably teaches a child to wait you out, not to comply promptly.

Why Shouting Specifically Backfires

Beyond the general case Chapter 15 already made against harsh correction, shouting carries a specific, practical cost worth naming directly. It teaches a child to wait for volume before taking an instruction seriously. A household where calm requests are routinely ignored until shouting begins is training a child, through repeated experience, that the calm version doesn't actually need to be obeyed, only the loud one does. This produces exactly the cycle most exhausted parents find themselves stuck in, where the shouting seems to be the only thing that "works," without ever noticing that it only works because the earlier, calmer stages

were allowed to be ignored consistently enough to teach that pattern in the first place.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that a parent must never raise their voice, or that a single frustrated outburst undoes everything else in a child's upbringing. Chapter 14 already acknowledged that no parent achieves the Prophet ﷺ's ten years of unbroken patience with Anas ibn Mālik, and a household that demands that standard of itself is setting up its own failure. What it is arguing is that shouting as a *routine first response*, rather than a rare lapse, teaches a child something specific and counterproductive about which of your words actually carry weight and that a deliberate

sequence, practised consistently, tends to reduce how often you reach that point at all.

This Week

The next time you feel your voice rising, try the Prophet ﷺ's specific instruction before responding. Change your physical position. Sit if you're standing, step away briefly if you can and notice whether the instruction that follows sounds different than it would have in the heat of the moment.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْغَضَبِ وَسُوءِ الْقَضَاءِ

"O Allah, I seek refuge in You from anger and from making poor decisions."

What Comes Next

The next chapter turns to a specific, common source of exactly this kind of friction in the

home like sibling rivalry, and how a household raises children who don't feel they're competing for their parents' love.

Chapter 24

Sibling Rivalry (Raising Children Who Don't Compete for Your Love)

One Gift Taken Back

Bashīr ibn Sa'd wanted to give his son Nu'mān a gift which is a servant and, at his wife's insistence, brought the matter to the Prophet ﷺ so he could witness it. The Prophet ﷺ asked a simple question first: had he given the same to all his children? Bashīr answered no. The Prophet ﷺ told him plainly to take the gift back, and gave the instruction that has echoed through Muslim households ever since: *fear Allah, and be just among your children* (Bukhārī and Muslim).

What's striking about this hadith, read again as a parent rather than memorised as a student, is how small the original imbalance was; one gift to one child, while the others received nothing that particular day. The Prophet ﷺ didn't ask whether it was a big gift or a small one, or whether Nu'mān deserved it more. The imbalance itself was the problem, however minor it looked from the outside.

Why Rivalry Isn't Simply "Children Being Children"

It's tempting to write off sibling conflict as an inevitable, low-stakes feature of having more than one child or normal noise that resolves itself with age. Some of it genuinely is. But scholars who have written on this hadith have been explicit that its scope reaches beyond material gifts into attention, affection, and the

way children are spoken about relative to each other and a great deal of what looks like ordinary sibling friction is, underneath, children responding rationally to a real or perceived imbalance in how they're being treated, competing for something that feels scarce: a parent's approval.

This connects directly to a caution the companion volume to this book, *The Weight of Your Words*, addresses in far more depth: children don't just hear their own description in a household. They hear their sibling's description too, and compare. "He's the smart one" is not received by the brother standing next to him as a neutral compliment about someone else. It is received as information about himself, specifically that whatever he is, he is

not that. Much of what looks like sibling rivalry is this comparison, quietly at work, long before it ever surfaces as an argument over a toy or a chore.

What Fairness Actually Requires

The Prophet ﷺ's instruction to Bashīr wasn't simply "give both children something," which any token gesture could have satisfied. It was to be *just* a standard closer to equal regard than mere equal quantity. Applied practically, this doesn't mean treating every child identically, which would be both impossible and, given how different children genuinely are, somewhat dishonest. It means noticing when praise, attention, or opportunity given to one child is quietly functioning as a deficit for another, and refusing to let that pattern go unexamined.

In practice, this looks like protecting individual time with each child even fifteen minutes, consistently, where one child has a parent's full and undivided attention without a sibling present to compete for it. It looks like noticing your own instinctive favouritism honestly; classical scholarship on this hadith acknowledges directly that a parent's heart may naturally incline more toward one child, and this inward feeling is not itself sinful or fully within a person's control. What matters is that the inward inclination never becomes outward injustice in gifts, in praise, in the tone used with one child versus another.

Teaching Cooperation Over Comparison

Beyond fairness in treatment, a household can actively cultivate the opposite of rivalry and

genuine care between siblings rather than simply managing conflict as it arises. The Prophet ﷺ described the believers as a single body, where if one part suffers, the rest of the body responds with fever and sleeplessness (Bukhārī and Muslim); while spoken about the wider Ummah, the principle applies with particular force inside a single household, where siblings are meant to be one another's closest allies rather than rivals for a parent's limited attention.

Practically, this means involving older children in genuinely positive roles toward younger ones. It could be mentoring, teaching rather than only as enforcers or informants reporting misbehaviour, a role that breeds resentment on both sides. It means correcting comparative

language the moment it surfaces, even when well-intentioned. Expression "why can't you be like your sister" gets no easier to hear for being said with affection rather than anger. And it means deliberately naming, out loud, moments of siblings supporting each other catching and reinforcing the cooperation you want to see, not only the conflict you're trying to reduce.

The Nigerian Layer: Birth Order, Gender Roles, and Blended Households

Nigerian households often carry strong, culturally inherited expectations around birth order and gender that can quietly entrench rivalry if left unexamined. It could be an eldest child burdened with responsibility disproportionate to their years, a firstborn son given deference a firstborn daughter isn't, younger children perpetually compared to an

older sibling's academic or religious achievement. None of these patterns are automatically wrong; real distinctions in age and role are a normal part of family life. But where they slide into the kind of injustice the Bashīr hadith addresses directly is when one child's effort is consistently praised while another's identical effort goes unnoticed. The rivalry that follows is not a mystery. It's a rational response to an actual imbalance.

Chapter 17's discussion of polygamous households applies here too, with added weight: half-siblings raised partly under different mothers carry an extra layer of comparison risk, and the same principle. A father genuinely working toward shared, fair standards across the whole household, rather

than allowing rivalry to calcify along maternal lines remains the goal even where full uniformity is difficult to achieve in practice.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that children must be treated identically in every respect, or that ordinary disagreement between siblings signals a parenting failure. Real personality differences, real developmental gaps between ages, and the ordinary friction of sharing a home are normal and don't require alarm. What it is arguing is that persistent, entrenched rivalry is worth investigating honestly for the kind of imbalance the Bashīr hadith addresses directly, rather than dismissed as simply "how children are."

This Week

Notice, honestly, whether one of your children currently receives more of your unprompted praise, attention, or patience than another. If a gap exists, take one deliberate step this week to close it, starting with protected, individual time with whichever child currently receives the least.

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ

"Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes." (Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:74, partial)

What Comes Next

The next chapter addresses a reality many Nigerian Muslim families navigate directly, boarding schools and extended time away from

home and how the foundation this book has described can travel with a child even when a parent's daily presence cannot.

Chapter 25

Boarding Schools and Time Away From Home

A Trunk Packed, and a Parent's Real Fear

For a great many Nigerian Muslim families, a child's upbringing includes a season, sometimes beginning as early as age ten or eleven, more commonly at secondary level spent largely away from home, in a boarding school environment where a parent's daily presence simply isn't possible. A trunk gets packed. A child who has, until now, been shaped daily through everything this book has described, a parent's example from Chapter 14, du'ā made over them in Chapter 16, corrections delivered gently per Chapter 15 is handed over

to an institution for weeks or months at a time, largely out of direct reach.

This is a genuine source of anxiety for many parents, and it deserves direct treatment, because so much of this book has assumed daily proximity as the mechanism through which tarbiyah actually happens. This chapter addresses what changes, and what doesn't, when that daily proximity is no longer available.

A Long Precedent for Learning Away From Home

Islamic tradition offers real precedent for young people thriving religiously while away from their immediate family, worth holding onto directly. Chapter 6 already introduced 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, still a boy during much of

his closeness to the Prophet ﷺ, who spent enormous time learning directly from him and other senior Companions, becoming one of the greatest scholars the Ummah has ever produced. The broader tradition of *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-'ilm* travelling in pursuit of knowledge, often for years, often far from one's family and hometown is one of the oldest and most celebrated practices in Islamic scholarship, with countless young students of knowledge across history sent to study under distant teachers precisely because the benefit of that specific teacher's presence outweighed the cost of physical distance from home.

None of this means distance is costless, or that every environment a child is sent to is automatically good for them. The quality and

character of wherever a child is sent matters enormously, exactly the way Chapter 20 already established about the company a child keeps. What this precedent does establish is that physical distance from a parent, on its own, is not automatically harmful to a child's dīn, provided the right foundation has already been laid and the environment they're entering is genuinely sound.

The Foundation Has to Come First

This is the single most important practical point in this chapter. Boarding school works well religiously for a child who already has the internalised foundation Chapters 9 through 13 describe which is love of Allah understood, not merely instructed; ṣalāh genuinely connected to, not merely performed under supervision;

the discernment Chapter 13 described for navigating company and choices independently. A child sent away before that foundation is genuinely in place is far more exposed to whatever environment they land in, good or bad, with far less internal anchor to hold onto.

This means the timing and preparation matter as much as the decision itself. Wherever possible, the years immediately before a child leaves for boarding school are worth treating as a deliberate final stretch of concentrated foundation-building not panic, but real intentionality, checking honestly whether the principles this book has described have actually taken root, rather than assuming they have simply because years have passed.

Choosing the Environment, Where Choice Exists

Chapter 21 already addressed the general question of navigating a mixed environment; boarding school intensifies that question because the environment becomes nearly total for weeks at a time. Where genuine choice exists between schools, the same discernment Chapter 20 described applies directly to institutions, not only individual friendships, what values the school's actual daily culture reflects, not merely its brochure; whether facilities for prayer and Islamic practice are genuinely respected and supported; what the school's disciplinary culture actually looks like in practice, given everything Chapter 15 established about correction without condemnation.

Where genuine choice is limited as it often is, given cost, availability, and academic considerations, the responsibility shifts toward what a parent can still influence: preparing a child honestly for what they'll encounter, maintaining the strongest possible connection during the term itself, and paying close attention during every return home.

Staying Connected Across Distance

Chapter 17 established that consistency between parents requires deliberate, ongoing effort even under one roof; boarding school demands the same deliberateness across physical distance. Regular calls, not only when a specific problem arises, keep a child's daily reality visible to a parent rather than only surfacing during a crisis. Letters or messages

that include genuine warmth and specific interest and not only reminders to pray and study maintain the relational foundation Chapter 5 established as the base everything else depends on, reminding a child during a genuinely difficult adjustment that home remains a place of warmth, not only expectation.

Where possible, maintaining some version of the du'ā practice Chapter 16 described like praying for a specific child by name, even from a distance remains fully available regardless of physical separation; nothing about that chapter's argument depended on proximity.

What to Watch for at Home

The periods a child returns home like term breaks, holidays carry particular importance,

worth treating as more than simply rest time. This is the natural opportunity to notice, gently and without interrogation, what's actually been happening. Has ṣalāh continued consistently without supervision, or quietly lapsed? What has their circle of friends become? Does their language or attitude toward dīn sound different than it did before they left? Chapter 8's model of engaged, patient questioning rather than suspicious interrogation applies directly here. A child who feels genuinely welcomed home, rather than immediately audited, is far more likely to be honest about what's actually been difficult.

The Nigerian Layer: A Wide Range of Environments

It's worth naming directly that "boarding school" covers an enormously wide range of

actual environments in the Nigerian context from well-resourced, values-aligned Islamic secondary schools with genuine religious infrastructure, to government boarding schools with minimal attention to Islamic practice, to informal Qur'anic boarding arrangements that vary enormously in quality and care from one to the next. This chapter is not making a blanket claim about boarding education generally; the specific environment a child is sent into matters enormously, and a parent's due diligence in choosing and monitoring that environment where any choice exists at all is itself a real part of the amānah Chapter 1 opened this book with.

What This Chapter Is Not Saying

This chapter is not arguing that boarding school is either uniformly good or uniformly harmful. The outcome depends heavily on the specific environment, the foundation already built before a child leaves, and the quality of connection maintained throughout nor is it suggesting a parent who has no real choice in the matter, due to cost or availability, has failed their child by that constraint alone. What it is arguing is that distance changes the *mechanism* of tarbiyah without eliminating the responsibility for it. A parent's influence during these years becomes less constant but no less real, exercised through preparation beforehand, connection during, and genuine attention upon return.

This Week

If you have a child currently away at school, reach out this week with a conversation that isn't primarily about academics or religious obligations but genuine interest in how they're actually doing. If your child is still at home and boarding school is a future consideration, begin treating the years remaining before that transition as the deliberate foundation-building season this chapter has described.

اللَّهُمَّ احْفَظْهُ حَيْثُ كَانَ وَاجْعَلْ قَلْبَهُ مُتَعَلِّقًا بِكَ أَيْنَمَا

حَلَّ

"O Allah, protect him wherever he is, and keep his heart attached to You wherever he settles."

What Comes Next

This closes the practical struggles addressed directly in this section. What remains is the closing of this book itself beginning with the du'ās of the prophets for righteous offspring, gathered together in one place as a resource to return to across every stage this book has covered.

Chapter 26

The Du'ās of the Prophets for Righteous Offspring

A Chapter to Return To

Every chapter in this book has closed with a du'ā, and by now you may have noticed a pattern. Nearly all of them trace back to the same handful of prophets, calling on Allah for the same handful of things concerning their children. This chapter gathers those du'ās together in one place, deliberately, so this book leaves you with something more than argument and explanation which is a set of words, already spoken by the best of Allah's creation on behalf of their own children, ready for you to make your own.

Ibn Kathīr, commenting on one of these very verses, made an observation worth carrying into how you use this chapter. Whoever supplicates to Allah should ask for the benefit of their parents and their offspring, not only themselves. These du'ās are not decoration at the end of a chapter. They are one of the most practical tools this entire book has to offer.

For Righteous Character

Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, having been given the great trial of near-sacrifice and having proven his submission to Allah, made a simple, direct request:

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

"My Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous." (Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt, 37:100)

Notice what he did not ask for. He did not ask for wealth, status, and worldly success for his offspring but righteousness alone which is the single quality this entire book has argued matters more than any other outcome a parent could want for their child.

For Establishing Prayer

Chapter 11 already introduced this one in the context of salāh specifically.

Ibrāhīm عليه السلام prayed:

رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِي مُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةِ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ

دُعَائِي

"My Lord, make me an establiher of prayer, and from my descendants. Our Lord, and accept my supplication." (Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:40)

For Protection From Shirk

Settling his family near the sacred House in Makkah, Ibrāhīm عليه السلام asked for something worth sitting with directly, given everything Chapter 20 and Chapter 21 established about the pull of a corrupting environment:

رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ

الْأَصْنَامَ

"My Lord, make this city secure, and keep me and my sons away from worshipping idols."

(Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:35)

A prophet, given direct revelation, still asked Allah to protect his own household from the surrounding environment's pull toward false worship not assuming his own righteousness made his children's protection automatic. Every parent navigating the mixed-influence world Chapter 21 described can make this same request, with today's idols taking whatever modern shape they do.

For Submission and a Righteous Nation to Follow

While raising the walls of the Ka'bah
itself alongside his son Ismā'īl عليه

السلام, Ibrāhīm made a du'ā that reaches beyond his immediate children to every generation that would come after them:

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ

"Our Lord, make us both submit to You, and from our descendants a nation submitting to You." (Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:128)

For a Good Offspring

Zakariyyā عليه السلام, already introduced in Chapter 16, made his request in old

age, when every natural indicator suggested it was no longer possible:

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً

"My Lord, grant me from Yourself a good offspring." (Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:38)

He asked, elsewhere, more specifically still for an heir who would inherit from him and from the family of Ya'qūb, asking Allah to make that child pleasing to Him (Sūrah Maryam, 19:5–6). This is a du'ā made not in a moment of ease, but against every apparent circumstance worth remembering for any parent who feels their own situation makes a righteous outcome for their child feel distant or unlikely.

For Comfort of the Eyes

The closing du'ā this book has returned to more than any other, describing what Allah calls the righteous servants of the Most Merciful, those who say:

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا

لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

"Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes, and make us leaders for the righteous." (Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:74)

This du'ā asks for two things worth noticing together. It is not asking simply for children who bring comfort but children who bring comfort *because* they are righteous, and a

family whose example is strong enough to lead others toward the same.

How to Actually Use This Chapter

Chapter 16 already established the practice this chapter now equips you to carry out: du'ā for your child, by name, in sujūd, in the last third of the night, in the moments the Sunnah identifies as times of acceptance. These seven du'ās, drawn from the lives of Ibrāhīm and Zakariyyā across multiple sūrahs, are not the only acceptable words. Sincere du'ā in your own language, in your own words, carries the same weight before Allah. But there is a particular power in repeating the exact words a Prophet once used for his own child, standing in a long, unbroken line of parents who asked Allah for the same thing you are asking for now.

Keep this chapter within reach. Memorise what you can of it, return to it during sujūd, teach the shorter du'ās to your children so they learn to ask Allah for these same things on their own behalf, and on behalf of their own children one day.

What Comes Next

The final chapter of this book closes with something practical rather than another du'ā and it is a set of concrete habits to begin building this month, drawn from every chapter that came before it, so that what you've read doesn't simply end here, on this page, unused.

Chapter 27

A Practical Appendix (Habits to Build This Month)

Why This Book Ends With a Plan And Not a Summary

Twenty-six chapters is a great deal to carry away and actually use. If this book ends simply by reviewing what's already been said, most of it will fade within a month the way most good intentions do. And it won't be from lack of sincerity, but from lack of structure to hold it in place. This final chapter exists to give what you've read somewhere concrete to land, the same way Chapter 9 of *The Weight of Your Words* ends with a Word Log rather than another argument. Understanding this book's ideas was never the actual goal. Living differently because of them is.

A Simple Monthly Rhythm

Rather than attempting every principle in this book at once — an approach that collapses under its own weight within a week. Work through it one focus at a time, roughly matching the order the book itself followed. Spend a week with each of the following, returning to the relevant chapter for a fuller reminder whenever needed:

Week 1 — Foundation

Revisit Chapter 1's question honestly. What have you actually done with the amānah of this specific child this month, not the household's collective effort? Notice one moment of your child's fitrah showing itself unprompted, per Chapter 2.

Week 2 — Instilling

Choose one thing you ask of your child and check, per Chapter 3, whether you've explained the *why* behind it or only ever enforced it. Notice, per Chapter 9, whether your recent mentions of Allah have leaned toward warning or toward gratitude.

Week 3 — How You Actually Parent

Listen to your own words after correcting your child this week, per Chapter 15; did they name the moment, or did they, even briefly, name the child. Make one specific, deliberate du'ā for your child by name, in sujūd, per Chapter 16.

Week 4 — The Wider World

Have one honest conversation with your child about what's actually pulling at them right now. Is it a friendship, a screen or a pressure at

school per Chapters 19 through 21, and simply listen before responding.

Repeat this cycle monthly. You will not do all of it perfectly, in any given month. No chapter in this book asked you to. What matters is that the cycle keeps turning, gently, consistently, rather than being attempted once in a burst of motivation and abandoned by the second week.

A Tracker Worth Keeping

Keep a simple record which could be a notebook, a note on your phone with four columns, reviewed weekly rather than daily, since a tool too demanding to maintain gets abandoned within a fortnight:

This week's focus	What I noticed	One thing I did differently	What I'll carry into next week
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The value of this isn't the record itself. It's the five minutes of honest reflection required to fill it in and the same discipline this book has asked of a parent throughout, applied here across the whole of tarbiyah.

The Amānah Returned To

This book opened in a compound in Osogbo, on a naming day, with a question rarely asked out loud amid the joy of a new child's arrival: who does this child actually belong to. Twenty-six chapters later, the answer hasn't changed, but it should, by now, feel less like a theological abstraction and more like the practical frame you've been asked to hold across every stage from the marriage that preceded a child's birth, through the years of

play, teaching, correction, and companionship, into the adolescence that tests whether any of it took root, and even into the hardest chapter this book had to write, when a child's own choices move beyond what any parent can fully control.

Nūḥ عليه السلام carried this amānah as faithfully as any human being ever has, and still faced an outcome beyond his control. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself modelled a lifetime of gentleness, patience, and consistent example with the children in his care, and Allah still reminds us plainly that

guidance belongs to Him alone. This is not a discouraging note to end on. It is, in fact, the most freeing thing this book can leave you with: your responsibility was never to guarantee an outcome. It was to carry the trust well with love before rules, with correction that never slides into condemnation, with your own example matching what you teach, with consistent du'ā, and with the humility to know that the rest belongs to Allah.

What to Do When You Fall Short

You will fall short of this book in specific, real ways every parent does, including the most sincere ones, including the one writing this. When that happens, this book's discussion of tawbah applies here as it does everywhere else in a Muslim's life: acknowledge honestly, correct where correction is owed to your child directly, and return to the effort without collapsing into either denial or despair. A parent who tries again after failing has not failed this book. They have understood it.

A Final Du'ā

This book has offered you a du'ā at the close of every chapter, drawn from the prophets and the Sunnah, meant to become as familiar to you as any of the arguments surrounding them. It

closes, fittingly, with the same one it has returned to more than any other, the description Allah gives of the righteous servants of the Most Merciful:

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا

لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

"Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes, and make us leaders for the righteous." (Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:74)

May Allah make every child entrusted to the reader of this book a comfort to their eyes in this life, a source of ongoing reward after it, and among those who stand, one day, as evidence of

Raising Children the Prophetic Way

an amānah carried faithfully by Allah's mercy,
and never by a parent's effort alone.

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