



Building Resilience in Children: An Islamic Model of Parenting

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This article is the introductory publication to a multi-part series on the topic.

An uphill battle

If you speak with adults today, most will likely tell you that one of the biggest causes of stress in their lives is parenting: Am I doing the best job I can? Is our family too strict? Perhaps too soft? Are we preparing our children to be successful, independent, and well-rounded adults? For Muslim parents, the uncertainty of parenting can be amplified by fears of failing to raise a child with Islamic values in a global culture of growing atheism, narcissism, and fragile family systems. Will my child continue to choose Islam into adulthood? How much will they adhere to the Qur'an and Sunnah? Will they love Allah and strive to seek out His Countenance, or will they just *act* "Muslim" around family?

There are so many stories we hear within our communities, sometimes whispered in hushed voices and sometimes vocalized through tearful cries for help from devastated families:

The teenager who got involved with the "wrong crowd," began to engage in risky behavior, and is now struggling with addiction to hard drugs.

The 8-year-old who comes home saying, "What if Allah doesn't really exist? My friend said there's no such thing as God."

The straight-A daughter who got into an unhealthy relationship with a boy at school, and then watched her self-esteem, spirituality, and grades plummet.

The child who wonders what he did wrong and doesn't understand why Allah would allow his parents to divorce.

A son who always had a tumultuous relationship with his parents but is now more definitively refusing to pray or engage in any religious activities that his family is involved in.

The 12-year-old, bullied at school, who is extremely depressed and questions why Allah hasn't protected him or if He exists.

Sometimes these might not be stories from those we know in our community, but rather our own children or loved ones. Life feels relatively fine until it hits close to home, doesn't it? There is no pain like discovering that it's your daughter who has abandoned prayer, your son who has stopped believing, or your child who is now just a spiritual shell of who they used to be. For many Muslim families, parenting these days can feel like standing on a metaphorical cliff, always one step from falling into the abyss.

But what if parenting didn't have to feel so anxiety-provoking? What if you could lean into an Islamic model of parenting that helps you feel like you are building a spiritual foundation from the inside out rather than assembling a hodgepodge collection of quick-fix tools? What if you could be an empowered parent and help your child through prevention instead of being reactive and constantly putting out fires? What if, instead of striving to evade the worst case scenario, things actually work out—and in a much better way than you had hoped for?

Our goal with this parenting series is to focus on prevention, through the means of building resilience, rather than intervention. If the [trauma series](#) of articles was to help pull adults out of a metaphorical river, this series of parenting articles is to help parents keep children and teens from falling into it in the first place. By working from the ground up and teaching families to develop the tools needed to promote resilience in childhood, our hope is that children will be able to deal with life's inevitable struggles without suffering unnecessary mental, emotional, and spiritual ramifications.

Goals of an Islamically integrated resilience model

Resilience in everyday contexts

One of the biggest misconceptions about parenting today is that if we create the perfect life for our children, they will grow into ideal adults. If we live in the best neighborhoods, put our children into the best schools, give them the best nutrition and surround them with the best friends, they will turn out to be the best. Over the past few decades, this mentality has manifested in our children as entitlement. Children now expect the best of everything. They expect the latest gadgets, over-the-top gifts and parties, the absolute best quality of life. They expect the path to everything to be smooth—and, well, why wouldn't they? Shouldn't we give our kids the best possible life they can have?

Due to the nature of *bulldozer parenting*, in which parents attempt to remove all obstacles in their children's lives, and *helicopter parenting*, in which parents micromanage their children, there is a huge chasm between the dream we as parents hoped for in raising our children and the reality. Unfortunately, children who are given everything develop little training for overcoming adversity, persevering through hardship or tolerating difficulty. A life of ease typically doesn't prepare children for the unavoidable struggles of life. Research suggests that helicopter parenting often backfires, producing adolescents with psychological maladjustment and decreased self-efficacy.¹

As you can imagine this causes quite the conundrum for parents. How do parents meet their children's needs, be empathetic and nurturing, and facilitate environments for success while also teaching distress tolerance, hard work, and perseverance? How do parents foster mental health and increase protective factors for trauma while not causing harm themselves? A big missing piece in the parenting puzzle and the answer many parents are looking for is this: fostering resilience.

Resilience in the context of theory and practice

¹ Charles Ganaprasam, Kavitha Davaidass, and Sivan Muniandy, "Helicopter Parenting and Psychological Consequences Among Adolescent," *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 8, no. 6 (2018).

When we began writing [*Your Lord Has Not Forsaken You: The Impact of Trauma on Faith*](#) in 2018, our goal as mental health therapists was to develop an Islamic framework for trauma healing that had never been broached before—one from a psychospiritual perspective. We wanted to create a safe space for healing, destigmatize mental illness, and create an Islamically-based mental health approach that incorporates healing through the mind, body, and soul.

As therapists who have worked with hundreds of individuals and families, we have seen the pervasive effects of trauma on people’s mental, physical and spiritual health.² Trauma can enfeeble one’s spirituality, while the compounded loss of faith after adverse experiences can also hinder trauma recovery.³ Researchers have gone as far as to say that childhood trauma can lead to spiritual crisis:⁴

The experience of childhood traumatization functions as a kind of ‘reverse religious experience,’ a process combining overwhelming arousal and overwhelming cognitions that threatens core ‘meaningfulness’ for the child.⁵

We strongly believe that resilience and trauma mitigation are protective factors in helping to preserve both one’s mental and spiritual health, as well as imperative components to integrate in parenting Muslim children. Through fostering resilience and alleviating traumatic responses, long-term trauma and some types of spiritual crises can, by the will of Allah, be prevented⁶ in many cases. As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”⁷

² Najwa Awad and Sarah Sultan, “Your Lord Has Not Forsaken You: Addressing the Impact of Trauma on Faith,” *Yaqeen*, January 10, 2019, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/amp/sarah-sultan/your-lord-has-not-forsaken-you-addressing-the-impact-of-trauma-on-faith>.

³ David W. Foy, Kent D. Drescher, and Patricia J. Watson, “Religious and Spiritual Factors in Resilience,” *Resilience and Mental Health*, 2011, 90–102, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511994791.008>.

⁴ Donald F. Walker, Henri Webb Reid, Tiffany O’Neill, and Lindsay Brown, “Changes in Personal Religion/Spirituality during and after Childhood Abuse: A Review and Synthesis,” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 1, no. 2 (2009): 130–45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511994791.008>.

⁵ James Garbarino and Claire Bedard, “Spiritual Challenges to Children Facing Violent Trauma,” *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research* 3, 1996, 467–78, 467.

⁶ David W. Foy, Kent D. Drescher, and Patricia J. Watson, “Religious and Spiritual Factors in Resilience,” in *Resilience and Mental Health: Challenges Across the Lifespan*, ed. Steven M. Southwick, Brett T. Litz, Dennis Charney, and Matthew J. Friedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90–102.

⁷ “Ounce of Prevention, Pound of Cure,” University of Cambridge, October 9, 2012, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/ounce-of-prevention-pound-of-cure>.

Definitions of resilience

What is resilience, exactly? Resilience is “the capacity we all possess to rebound from stress and feelings of fear, helplessness and overwhelm.”⁸ It allows us to cope when faced with significant changes, struggles, and risks. Resilience is often compared to a slinky; no matter how far you stretch it, the metal coil naturally rebounds to its original shape. Like a slinky, the goal for ourselves and our children is to nurture the ability to bounce back from stressful and difficult situations.

Resilience, or the ability to function and adapt despite adversity, is arguably one of the most important skills parents can teach their children. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ expressed this quality beautifully when he said,

The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whatever direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allah removes his difficulties). And an impious wicked person is like a cedar tree that stays hard and straight till Allah cuts (breaks) it down when He wishes.⁹

In this hadith, we see that resilience can enable us to maintain and enhance our connection to Allah during trying times, and that the lack of it can impede that process.

The importance of resilience: The inevitability of struggles

Trials and tribulations are an inescapable reality of our time on this earth. Although as parents we hope to protect our children from hardship, we really have no power to do so and sometimes forget that Allah in His infinite wisdom created struggle for a purpose. Consider the following Qur’anic verses and hadiths:

⁸ Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline, *Trauma-Proofing Your Kids: A Parents' Guide for Instilling Confidence, Joy and Resilience* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2014), 1.

⁹ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 5644; *Sahih Muslim*, no. 2809.

Do people think once they say, ‘We believe,’ that they will be left without being put to the test? We certainly tested those before them. And (in this way) Allah will clearly distinguish between those who are truthful and those who are liars.¹⁰

And surely We shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the patient, who say, when afflicted with calamity: ‘To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return.’ They are those on whom (descend) Blessings from Allah, and Mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance.¹¹

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “Paradise is surrounded by adversity, and Hellfire is surrounded by lusts.”¹²

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “A Muslim, male or female, continues to remain under trial in respect of his life, property, and offspring until he faces Allah, the Exalted, with no sin recorded.”¹³

Resilience is the quality that allows us to face these struggles while maintaining a stable connection to Allah; resilience also involves understanding that struggles are not inherently bad and that they are needed for growth and development. While typically viewed as something to simply endure, struggles are actually opportunities that can allow us to thrive in powerful ways. Have you ever heard the proverb, “Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly”? Difficult situations can be fuel for growth when we understand them in terms of Allah’s wisdom as the best of planners.

Often assumed to be more of an inherent trait, resilience is actually something that can be fostered over time. We see this in the example of Prophet Yusuf (as), who faced trial after trial from childhood through adulthood. We witness his incredible growth through each struggle he encountered, finally culminating with a beautiful expression of resilience in which he proclaimed, “Indeed my Lord is subtle in

¹⁰ Qur’an 29:2–3.

¹¹ Qur’an 2:155–157.

¹² *Sahih Muslim*, no. 2823.

¹³ *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, no. 2399.

fulfilling what He wills. Surely He [alone] is the All-Knowing, All-Wise.”¹⁴ With rates of suicide increasing exponentially in the last decade, such that it is now the second leading cause of death among 10-24 year-olds in America,¹⁵ and 23% of people raised Muslim leaving the faith,¹⁶ it is more important than ever that we collectively nurture the skills our children need to face the inevitable struggles of life. Resilience is crucial not just for good mental health, but also for spiritual health and strengthening Muslim identity.

Paradigms

The importance of an Islamic framework

We are well aware of the dozens of parenting theories out there and don’t believe that there is a cookie cutter approach superior to all others. Parenting involves a lot of trial and error—figuring out what works for you, your individual children, and your family as a whole. Sometimes two loving parents have different parenting styles that work, and sometimes one parent may use different strategies with different children. If you ask many mental health therapists and parenting experts they will tell you that what’s most important is not the theory itself, but the firmness and consistency of a loving and supportive parent-child relationship.

We believe that our proposed parenting theory, unlike numerous others, is backed by both psychosocial research and Islamic texts. It is not within a human being’s capacity to guarantee success; we know that because even our father Adam¹⁷ and Prophets Nūḥ¹⁸ and Ya‘qūb¹⁹ had parenting challenges despite divine guidance. We also are not just psychotherapists, but parents of six children between us and know

¹⁴ Qur’an 12:100.

¹⁵ Sally C. Curtin and Melonie Heron, “Death Rates Due to Suicide and Homicide Among Persons Aged 10–24: United States, 2000–2017,” NCHS Data Brief, no. 352, CDC, October 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db352-h.pdf>.

¹⁶ Besheer Mohamed and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac, “The Share of Americans Who Leave Islam Is Offset by Those Who Become Muslim,” Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/26/the-share-of-americans-who-leave-islam-is-offset-by-those-who-become-muslim/>.

¹⁷ Qur’an 5:27.

¹⁸ Qur’an 11:43.

¹⁹ Qur’an 12:18.

the trials and tribulations of parenting from firsthand experience. We will not pretend to have all the answers—because we don't, and nobody today does. However, we are optimistic, *in shā' Allāh*, that Muslim parents will find our approach from our decades of psychotherapy experience and humble parenting adventures balanced, flexible, and practical.

There are several resilience theory models, some of which incorporate faith-based principles, but none that integrate Islam. While these resilience models are useful and address general concepts beneficial to anyone regardless of faith, they lack an essential component for Muslim parents who want to derive faith-based wisdom from Qur'anic stories and hadith, and for whom religious identity is an important factor in raising children. In line with previous assertions, it is more efficient and prudent to strengthen children with Islamic resilience than it is to introduce Islamic concepts after tragedy. Parents can not expect their children to turn towards Islam during or after a devastating event if it was not introduced or modeled before. That is not to say that therapy from an Islamic perspective will not be useful after adversity, but that it will feel more natural and may resonate more deeply for children who have been raised with an Islamic resilience model from a young age.

Islamically Integrated Resilience Model (IIRM)

When considering what a holistic, balanced approach to building resilience in our children would look like, we wanted to ensure that every component was rooted in worshipping and connecting with Allah. As we discussed in our [Trauma series](#), a relationship with Allah is key to the healing process. It is naturally a core component in developing the resilience needed to prevent trauma from the start. Ibn al-Qayyim beautifully expressed the role a relationship with Allah plays in a person's spiritual, mental, and emotional wellbeing when he said,

In the heart are disorders that cannot be remedied except by responding to Allah. In it is a desolate feeling that cannot be removed except by intimacy with Him in solitude. In it is sadness which will not leave except by happiness with knowing Him and truthfulness in his dealings. In it is anxiety that is not made tranquil except by gathering for His sake and fleeing to Him from His punishment. In it is a fire of regret that cannot be extinguished

except by satisfaction with His commands, prohibitions, and decrees, and embracing patience with that until the time he meets Him. In it is a strong desire that will not cease until He is the only one who is sought. In it is a void that cannot be filled except by His love, turning to Him, always remembering Him, and being sincere to Him. Were a person to be given the entire world and everything in it, that would never fill the void.²⁰

We spent almost two years, albeit with breaks, researching and developing our parenting paradigm. Ultimately, our Islamically Integrated Resilience Model (IIRM) was inspired by the verses of Sūrah Luqmān in which Allah says,²¹

And remember when Luqmān said to his son, while advising him, “O my dear son! Never associate anything with Allah in worship, for associating others with Him is truly the worst of all wrongs.”

And We have commanded people to honor their parents. Their mothers bore them through hardship upon hardship, and their weaning takes two years. So be grateful to Me and your parents. To Me is the final return.

But if they pressure you to associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them. Still keep their company in this world courteously, and follow the way of those who turn to Me in devotion. Then to Me you will [all] return, and then I will inform you of what you used to do.

Luqmān added, “O my dear son! Even if a deed were the weight of a mustard seed—be it hidden in a rock or in the heavens or the earth—Allah will bring it forth. Surely Allah is Most Subtle, All-Aware.

“O my dear son! Establish prayer, encourage what is good and forbid what is evil, and endure patiently whatever befalls you. Surely this is a resolve to aspire to.

“And do not turn your nose up to people, nor walk pridefully upon the earth. Surely Allah does not like whoever is arrogant, boastful.

²⁰ *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, 3:156.

²¹ Qur'an 31:13–19.

Be moderate in your pace. And lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is certainly the braying of donkeys.”

In these verses Luqmān al-Hakeem bestows invaluable words of wisdom on his son that are essential for success in this world and the next. He succinctly speaks to his son about key concepts in Islam including the importance of *tawhīd*, enjoining good, exercising patience, and having good character. What struck us most about these verses, within the context of our parenting research, is that they speak to the biggest components of resiliency-building in research today. These verses not only model *how* we should teach our children, and *what* to teach our children, but outline a solid conceptualization in building resilience. Our Islamically Integrated Resilience Model (IIRM) is based on this paradigm. In the next section, we will look deeper into how these *āyāt* promote resilience in children.

Components of the model

Layer 1: Attachment

A. Attachment to Allah

O my dear son! Never associate anything with Allah in worship, for associating others with Him is truly the worst of all wrongs.

The advice of Luqmān al-Hakeem starts with *tawhīd*, the most important concept in Islam, and what we feel is the cornerstone to resilience both short-term in this *dunyā* and long-term in the *ākhirah*. The research is clear that secure attachment to God and secure attachment to a primary caregiver are pivotal to resilience and mental health.²² As Muslims we know that adversity comes from Allah and that nobody can remove it except Allah, so developing an inclination to rely on Him and beseech Him during struggles is crucial for resilience.

²² Blake Victor Kent, Matt Bradshaw, and Jeremy E. Uecker, “Forgiveness, Attachment to God, and Mental Health Outcomes in Older U.S. Adults: A Longitudinal Study,” *Research on Aging* 40, no. 5 (2018): 456–79, www.doi.org/10.1177/0164027517706984; Pernille Darling Rasmussen, Ole Jakob Storebø, Trine Løkkeholt, Line Gaunø Voss, Yael Shmueli-Goetz, Anders Bo Bojesen, Erik Simonsen, and Niels Bilenberg, “Attachment as a Core Feature of Resilience: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Reports* 122, no. 4 (2019): 1259–96, www.doi.org/10.1177/0033294118785577.

General attachment is the foundation of our triangular model because it plays a critical role in our ability to bounce back during adversity, and in the next few sections we will explore the various components of attachment within the model. Our IIRM asserts that while healthy attachment to a primary caregiver is invaluable, attachment to Allah comes first and foremost. This premise is based on these key factors:

- a. **Stability:** Ideally relationships with primary caregivers are stable, consistent and unwavering, but often they are not. Resilience research shows a strong connection between healthy, secure attachment and higher levels of resilience.²³ The opposite is true as well: In relationships in which there is attachment anxiety, resilience levels are diminished.²⁴
- b. **Control:** An attachment to Allah is something internal, whereas relationships with others are external. An internal locus of control can lead a person to feel a higher sense of control in moments of adversity instead of solely relying on external supports.²⁵ A person's relationship with Allah can be a source of security due to His everlasting presence and stability. It does not involve the fluctuations that naturally occur in relationships with human beings, thereby allowing one's internal locus of control to thrive.
- c. **Continuity:** As a child approaches adolescence their attachment to their primary caregivers generally shifts and more weight is given to friends' opinions and values. By establishing a solid relationship with Allah from childhood, there is a continuity that is maintained throughout.

B. Attachment to parents

²³ Rasmussen et al., "Attachment as a Core Feature of Resilience."

²⁴ Jennika J. Jenkins, "The Relationship Between Resilience, Attachment, and Emotional Coping Styles," (master's thesis, Old Dominion University, 2016), www.doi.org/10.25777/0wcx-gr47, https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/psychology_etds/28.

²⁵ Hielke Buddelmeyera and Nattavudh Powdthaveeba, "Can Having Internal Locus of Control Insure against Negative Shocks? Psychological Evidence from Panel Data," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 122, 88–109, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2015.11.014>.

And We have commanded people to honor their parents. Their mothers bore them through hardship upon hardship, and their weaning takes two years. So be grateful to Me and your parents. To Me is the final return.

But if they pressure you to associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them. Still keep their company in this world courteously...

Healthy attachment to a parent plays an integral role in stress management,²⁶ recovering from adversity,²⁷ and relationships with others. So important is the parent-child bond that in these *āyāt* it appears immediately after the command of *tawhīd*. We also see that the parenting relationship is a two-way street, and that both parties have a commitment to each other that is not necessarily easy. Although the attachment to Allah cannot be matched, the research is very clear on how influential parental attachment can be.

We as parents can be instrumental in building resilience in our children through modeling (demonstrating our own resilience), the dynamics of our relationship with our children (attachment) and teaching resiliency skills. Oftentimes parents just focus on teaching skills, which is important, but not nearly as important as the attachment between the parent and the child. This is the difference between reading a manual to fix something and having an experienced professional stand at your shoulder gently directing you every step of the way. It's not simply about directing our children to learn how to navigate the world, but building a relationship filled with warmth and security that will give them the skills, support, and confidence to navigate it themselves. Attachment between a parent and a child sets the framework for how children view themselves²⁸ and how they view themselves in relation to others in the world,²⁹ which are both crucial components of resiliency.

²⁶ Kathleen Anne Moore, Patricia Marriner, and Jon-Paul Cacioli, "The Relationship of Attachment to Resilience and Their Impact on Stress," in *Stress and Anxiety: Applications to Social and Environmental Threats, Psychological Wellbeing, Occupational Challenges and Developmental Psychology*, ed. Kathleen A. Moore, Krzysztof Kaniasty, Petra Buchwald, and Siobhan Howard (Berlin: Logos, 2014), 73–82, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275833354_The_relationship_of_attachment_to_resilience_and_their_impact_on_stress.

²⁷ Rasmussen et al., "Attachment as a Core Feature of Resilience."

²⁸ Adabel Lee and Benjamin L. Hankin, "Insecure Attachment, Dysfunctional Attitudes, and Low Self-Esteem Predicting Prospective Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety during Adolescence," *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* 38, no. 2 (2009): 219–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374410802698396>.

²⁹ Oladiti Olawale, "The Impact of Secure Attachment on Interpersonal Relationship: A Review," *International Journal of Indian Psychology* 4, no. 4 (2017), www.doi.org/10.25215/0404.079.

C. Attachment to the prophets and the rightly guided

...and follow the way of those who turn to Me in devotion...

In our model, following the way of those who turn to Allah in devotion, namely the prophets, is useful in building resilience. These examples provide the best role models for ourselves and our children to emulate and provide reassurance that amazing people have endured hardship as well. There is something powerful about knowing you are not alone in your struggle and can look back at the best of humankind for inspiration on how to navigate it. Research shows that community support is a valuable part of bouncing back from adversity.³⁰ Our model incorporates these *āyāt* in our attachment foundation as it is very difficult to follow a community without love and attachment to them. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

There has come to you the disease of the nations before you, jealousy and hatred. Hatred is the [shaver] (destroyer) that shaves (destroys) religious commitment; it does not shave hair. By the One in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I not tell you something which, if you do it, you will love one another? Spread (the greeting of) *salam* amongst yourselves.³¹

Today, attachment to those who follow the way of Allah extends to attachment of the *ummah* and our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Muslims do not discriminate between the prophets but we know that there is emphasis in loving Prophet Muhammed ﷺ in a way that is superior to all others:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “None of you will have faith till he loves me more than his father, his children and all mankind.”³²

Outside it being a spiritual necessity, there are many resilience-related benefits to cultivating an attachment to the prophets of Allah. When we look at the lives of the

³⁰ Fatih Ozbay, Douglas C. Johnson, Eleni Dimoulas, C. A. Morgan, III, Dennis Charney, and Steven Southwick, “Social Support and Resilience to Stress: From Neurobiology to Clinical Practice,” *Psychiatry* 4, no. 5 (2007): 35–40.

³¹ *Musnad Ahmad*, no. 1412.

³² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 15; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 44.

prophets, we see that they were not strangers to adversity. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ experienced many difficult circumstances including orphanhood, poverty, personal loss, and physical assault. He was not only resilient but was able to maintain his good character. Seeing his perseverance can inspire us to overcome difficulty with both purpose and grace.

Layer 2: Connection to self: Identity and self-esteem

But if they pressure you to associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them. Still keep their company in this world courteously, and follow the way of those who turn to Me in devotion.

This *āyah* doesn't just support one aspect of attachment in the first layer of our model, but also supports the importance of developing an Islamic identity. This verse emphasizes the importance of staying true to one's purpose of worshiping Allah, even under immense pressure, as the worship of Allah is central to Muslim identity. A strong identity is a necessary component in building resilience, not just for all children but especially for Muslim children living in the West. Allah tells us, "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me."³³ Helping our children to live authentically in accordance with their purpose to worship Allah allows them to face struggles with the resilience that stems from a solid Muslim identity.

In an incredibly profound verse of the Qur'an, Allah says, "And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget themselves."³⁴ In this verse, "forgetting oneself" is a punishment, which indicates that knowing oneself is truly a blessing. When we remember Allah we are blessed to identify as His worshippers and thus to know ourselves. When we forget Him, we forget what is best for us in this life and the next, and thus we forget ourselves. Therefore, building a healthy sense of identity is directly tied to building a healthy connection with Allah. Research has found that religiosity in Muslim teens is associated with positive feelings of well-being, high levels of self-esteem, and low levels of anxiety.³⁵ Research also

³³ Qur'an 51:56.

³⁴ Qur'an 59:19.

³⁵ Ahmed M. Abdel-Khalek, "Religiosity, Subjective Well-Being, Self-Esteem, and Anxiety among Kuwaiti Muslim Adolescents," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 14, no. 2 (2011): 129–40.

shows that parents can play a big role in fashioning their children's religious identities.³⁶

Building a solid sense of identity is, across the board, one of the most common themes in resilience research.³⁷ For children growing up as minorities, as Muslim children in the West do, solidifying a robust sense of Islamic identity in the midst of peer and societal pressures is essential for spiritual health.³⁸ Even for children growing up in Muslim-majority countries, developing a sense of self based on Islamic values can be a challenge. Shaping a sense of self-worth based on the core of who your child is—a worshipper of Allah, a beloved creation of the Almighty—sets the stage for a strong identity as they face the challenges inherent in daily life.

Layer 3: Emphasis of purpose and faith through action

Then to Me you will all return, and then I will inform you of what you used to do.

Luqmān added, “O my dear son! Even if a deed were the weight of a mustard seed—be it hidden in a rock or in the heavens or the earth—Allah will bring it forth. Surely Allah is Most Subtle, All-Aware.

“O my dear son! Establish prayer, encourage what is good and forbid what is evil...”

Just as belief in Allah is essential for success and building resilience, the manifestation of that belief through action is also necessary. Allah links actions

³⁶ Osman Umarji, “Will My Children Be Muslim? The Development of Religious Identity in Young People,” *Yaqeen*, January 16, 2020, updated October 17, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/will-my-children-be-muslim-the-development-of-religious-identity-in-young-people>.

³⁷ S. Alexander Haslam, Jolanda Jetten, Tom Postmes, and Catherine Haslam, “Social Identity, Health and Well-Being: An Emerging Agenda for Applied Psychology,” *Applied Psychology*, 58 (2009): 1–23, [www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00379](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00379); Jolanda Jetten, Catherine Haslam, and S. Alexander Haslam, eds., *The Social Cure: Identity, Health and Well-Being* (New York: Psychology Press, 2012).

³⁸ Gloria T. DiFulvio, “Sexual Minority Youth, Social Connection and Resilience: From Personal Struggle to Collective Identity,” *Social Science and Medicine* 72 (2011): 1611–17, [www.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.02.045](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.02.045); Anisa N. Goforth, Evelyn R. Oka, Frederick T. L. Leong, and Daniel J. Denis, “Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, Religiosity and Psychological Adjustment among Muslim Arab American Adolescents,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 8, no. 2 (2014).

that are pleasing to Him with emotional health and good in both this life and the next,

Whoever submits his face [i.e., self] in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.³⁹

Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give *zakat* will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.⁴⁰

Whoever does good, whether male or female, while he is a believer, We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.⁴¹

We often discuss faith and spirituality solely through the lens of mental and emotional applications. However, connection to Allah and to our identity as Muslims does not *solely* reside in the heart. Many of us mistakenly believe that *feeling* a connection to our faith is enough to maintain it. However, action plays a decisive role in actualizing every component of the IIRM. This includes both encouraging action in our children and modeling it for them through our conduct. We see the importance of good deeds, and not merely good beliefs, in the following verses from the Qur'an:

O you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do?⁴²

Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds [that] for them there is forgiveness and great reward.⁴³

Research indicates that active religious practice can diminish the detrimental impact of acculturative stress on Muslims living as minorities in a post-9/11 world.⁴⁴ A research study involving Iranian Muslim students identified a significant association between positive religious coping, including religious

³⁹ Qur'an 2:112.

⁴⁰ Qur'an 2:277.

⁴¹ Qur'an 16:97.

⁴² Qur'an 61:2.

⁴³ Qur'an 5:9.

⁴⁴ Zeenah Adam and Colleen Ward, "Stress, Religious Coping and Wellbeing in Acculturating Muslims," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 10, no. 2 (2016).

practice, and psychological well-being.⁴⁵ In a powerful study of 200 adolescent Muslim students,⁴⁶ researchers found that the highly resilient teens were distinguished from their peers on the basis of religious practice. Participants found to be highly resilient engaged in more religious practice and ritual Islamic behaviors motivated by their religious worldview.⁴⁷ Those who engaged in good deeds, described as those whose behaviors towards “family, fellow human beings and the rest of creation including animals and the natural environment” were religiously guided, were also more resilient.⁴⁸

The findings of these studies demonstrate that cognitive and emotional factors are not enough to forge a relationship between religion and resilience. Rather, they indicate the importance of manifesting these beliefs through action.

Layer 4: Coping: Patience, distress tolerance, and adaptability

“...and endure patiently whatever befalls you. Surely this is a resolve to aspire to.”

Patience is the attribute that allows us to tolerate distress and manage struggles in healthy ways. The capacity of an individual to cope during difficulty is an integral part of resilience.⁴⁹ Any skill that helps a person undergo stressful life experiences unscathed is a part of coping. Allah reminds us of the importance of patience when faced with struggles,

We will surely test you until We make evident those who strive among you and are patient, and We will test your affairs.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Abdulaziz Aflakseir and P. G. Coleman, “Initial Development of the Iranian Religious Coping Scale,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 6, no. 1 (2011).

⁴⁶ Narayanan Annalakshmi and Mohammed Abeer, “Islamic Worldview, Religious Personality and Resilience among Muslim Adolescent Students in India,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology* 7, no. 4 (2011): 716–38.

⁴⁷ Annalakshmi and Abeer, “Islamic Worldview, Religious Personality and Resilience.”

⁴⁸ Annalakshmi and Abeer, “Islamic Worldview, Religious Personality and Resilience.”

⁴⁹ Adrian D. Van Breda, “Resilience Theory: A Literature Review,” South African Military Health Service, 2001.

⁵⁰ Qur’an 47:31.

Verily, only the patient will receive their reward without reckoning.⁵¹

The ability to choose long-term benefit over instant gratification is needed to maintain consistency in worship of Allah, stay away from what He has forbidden, choose the right course of action even when difficult and bounce back from trials. IIRM emphasizes how healthy coping strengthens spirituality and connection to Allah, while deriving research-supported coping skills from the examples of our Prophets and those around them—all of whom succeeded in balancing the *dunyā* and *ākhirah*. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ tied patience to attachment to Allah, indicating the necessity of both for building resilience:

Be mindful of Allah and be patient.⁵²

As parents, we all try to protect our children from pain, both physical and emotional. However, one of the greatest gifts we can give our children is allowing them to struggle (to a certain extent). An abundance of research suggests that experiencing some degree of adversity and stress during childhood and adolescence has a protective effect.⁵³ Studies have found that when an individual is faced with difficult experiences, they have the opportunity to learn how to navigate them, thereby allowing them to become psychologically stronger and resilient in the face of future stressors.⁵⁴ This is called *stress inoculation*.⁵⁵ Just as vaccinations often involve exposure to weaker strains of disease in order to protect an individual from contracting something detrimental to their health, experiencing stress in manageable doses can increase a person's capacity for managing exposure to larger doses.

⁵¹ Qur'an 39:10

⁵² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1223.

⁵³ Damian Scarf, John Hunter, Jill Hayhurst, Ted Ruffman, Saleh Moradi, and Mike Boyes, "Somewhere I Belong: Long-Term Increases in Adolescents' Resilience Are Predicted by Perceived Belonging to the In-Group," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 55, no. 3 (2016): 588–99; Megan R. Gunnar, Kristin Frenn, Sandi S. Wewerka, and Mark J. Van Ryzin, "Moderate versus Severe Early Life Stress: Associations with Stress Reactivity and Regulation in 10–12-Year-Old Children," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 34 no. 1 (2009): 62–75; Benjamin G. Shapero, Jessica L. Hamilton, Jonathan P. Stange, Richard T. Liu, Lyn Y. Abramson, and Lauren B. Alloy, "Moderate Childhood Stress Buffers against Depressive Response to Proximal Stressors: A Multi-Wave Prospective Study of Early Adolescents," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 43, no. 8 (2015): 1403–13.

⁵⁴ Richard A. Dienstbier, "Arousal and Physiological Toughness: Implications for Mental and Physical Health," *Psychological Review* 96, no. 1 (1989): 84.

⁵⁵ Donald Meichenbaum and Deborah Fitzpatrick, "A Constructivist Narrative Perspective on Stress and Coping: Stress Inoculation Applications," in *Handbook of Stress: Theoretical and Clinical Aspects* (N.p.: Free Press, 1993), 706–23.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said,

Whoever strives to be patient, then Allah will make him patient. There is no gift that is better and more comprehensive than patience.⁵⁶

Distress tolerance is the ability to experience stress without succumbing to it. By allowing our children to foster their ability to tolerate distress, we give them a tremendous gift: the ability to face difficulties and come back stronger. The only way to gain this skill is through practice. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said,

Verily, knowledge only comes by learning and forbearance only comes by cultivating forbearance. Whoever aims for good will receive goodness and whoever seeks to evade evil will be protected from it.⁵⁷

Non-faith based models of resilience focus on bouncing back from adversity in the context of the *dunyā*, while IIRM emphasizes the importance of effective coping as necessary for both short-term (*dunyā*) and long-term (*ākhirah*) gain. What purpose would effective coping serve for a Muslim if it did not have any benefit for their Hereafter? What merit would there be in coping with this world only to suffer in the next?

Layer 5: Character

“And do not turn your nose up to people, nor walk pridefully upon the earth. Surely Allah does not like whoever is arrogant, boastful.

Be moderate in your pace. And lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is certainly the braying of donkeys.”

⁵⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6470; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1053.

⁵⁷ Collected by at-Tabarani in *al-Mu'jam al-awsat*, 3:118 and graded *hasan* by al-Albani in *as-Silsilah as-sahihah*, no. 342.

Character strengths have been explained as “naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied”⁵⁸ and have been connected to positive mental health outcomes. In these *āyāt*, Luqmān al-Hakeem does not outline all of the desirable character traits a Muslim should have, but lists some of the most important including humility, dignity, and sincerity. These traits are especially important today as social media, used by about 30% of 7-9 year-olds and 50% of 10-12 year-olds,⁵⁹ simultaneously breeds narcissism, on the one hand,⁶⁰ and degraded self-esteem, on the other.⁶¹ Both effects are equally detrimental to resilience.

Character development is essential to cultivating resilience because it is an external manifestation of all the other layers: understanding one’s purpose, remaining good-natured and patient when faced with difficulty, and persevering in maintaining one’s identity despite environmental circumstances. Character strengths help to mitigate trauma, and are positively linked to adjustment, mental health, and well-being.⁶² Character is also essential to doing well in the *ākhirah* as Prophet Muhammed ﷺ said, “Nothing is heavier on the scale of a believer on the Day of Resurrection than good character.”⁶³ Good character is undoubtedly a protective force for us and our children in this world and the next.

Pyramid of the Islamically Integrated Resilience Model

⁵⁸ Timothy D. Hodges and Donald O. Clifton, “Strengths-Based Development in Practice,” in *Handbook of Positive Psychology in Practice*, ed. A. Linley and S. Joseph (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), 256–68, 257.

⁵⁹ Linda Searing, “One-Third of Children Ages 7 to 9 Use Social Media Apps, Study Says,” *Washington Post*, November 21, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/social-media-young-kids/2021/11/19/3130ce5a-488a-11ec-95dc-5f2a96e00fa3_story.html.

⁶⁰ Mihriban Akkoz and Oytun Erbas, “The Relationship between Social Media Use and Narcissism,” *Demiroglu Science University Florence Nightingale Transplantation Journal* 5, no. 1–2 (2020): 32–38, www.doi.org/10.5606/dsufnjt.2020.014.

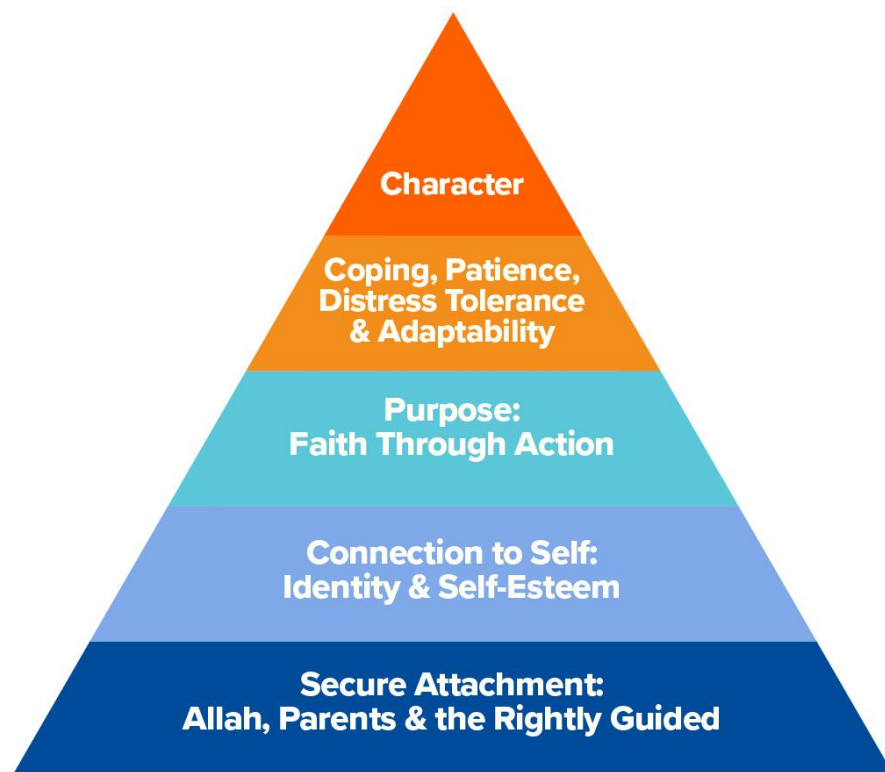
⁶¹ Betul Keles, Niall McCrae, and Annmarie Grealish, “A Systematic Review: The Influence of Social Media on Depression, Anxiety and Psychological Distress in Adolescents,” *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 25, no. 1 (2020): 79–93.

⁶² Anat Shoshan and Michelle Slone, “The Resilience Function of Character Strengths in the Face of War and Protracted Conflict,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, January 12, 2016, www.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.02006.

⁶³ *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, no. 2002.

Our model of Islamic resilience is based on the shape of a pyramid, with the base being the most important and foundational—all layers, though, are essential to building resilience from a psychospiritual perspective. Allah connects belief in Him to attaining success, and therefore in IIRM, the base of the pyramid is ***attachment to Allah first and foremost***, followed by attachment to parents, the prophets ﷺ and the *ummah* at large. The next layer in the pyramid is ***connection to one's self***, which encompasses protective factors related to identity and self-esteem. Layer three elaborates on the importance of ***purpose in faith through action***, and layer four explores the value of ***coping***, primarily through distress tolerance and adaptability. The pyramid culminates in ***character***, which brings to life all of the previous layers and highlights the importance of putting faith into practice.

Islamically Integrated Resiliency Model



Series format

The remaining papers in this series will each explain the five sections of the Islamically Integrated Resiliency Model (IIRM). Each paper will elaborate on one layer of the pyramid above, highlighting one essential factor through the Qur'an and Sunnah, psychological research, and practical techniques to illustrate how to foster resilience in our children.

To bring each concept to life we will include a real-life case study (with names and details changed for confidentiality) and break down implementation from a biopsychosocial-spiritual perspective. Just as we did in our [Trauma series](#), we will emphasize the mind, body, and soul in each section to provide a holistic approach to building resilience in our children and giving them the best tools possible to benefit their life in this world and the next.

Opening *du 'ā'*

O Allah, please bless and reward me and my children as we embark on this journey of getting closer to You. You are *al-Mujīb*, the One who responds to prayers and the One who fulfills them. Accept my efforts and my prayers for the best for my children.

You are *al-Hādī*, the One who is the source of guidance. Please guide me to the approaches that are best for my child and the words and actions that will be a means of bringing them closer to You. Guide my children to the straight path; allow them to love what You love and guide them to the actions that are most pleasing to You.

You are *al-Muḥaymin*, the Protector, the Bestower of security, the Guardian, the Safeguarder. Protect my children from every evil and grant them the best of this life and the next. Grant them security and protect them from trauma. Guard them and grant them the strength and ability to face the tests of this life in the best of ways.

You are *as-Salām*, the Source of peace, wholeness, and well-being. Heal my relationship with my children and fill it with peace. Allow my words and actions to fill our relationship with safety and stability and support me in my efforts to parent them in the way that is most pleasing to You. Heal my children from anything that may be an obstacle in their ability to connect with You and fill their relationship with You with peace, tranquility, and strength.

~ ~ ~

As you embark on this journey to parent with purpose and to build resilience in your children, we ask Allah to reward you for your efforts and every single moment of struggle that comes with being a caregiver to a child. Parenthood is incredibly hard so remember this during moments of hardship: Allah has chosen you for this child. He is telling you that you're the most capable person for this job and that you're strong enough to deal with the ups and downs inherent in this rollercoaster ride. You're not the perfect parent—no one is. But you're the parent who is most worthy to care for and raise your child because Allah, in His infinite wisdom, decreed this relationship; otherwise He wouldn't have chosen you.

We sincerely hope you and your child will benefit from this series of articles and that your relationship will flourish in the best of ways. May Allah bless your journey.