



Securing Healthy Attachment with God and Parents: First Step in Building Resilience in Children

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I. Case Study

Before they got married, Mona and Ibrahim grew up in traditional households that valued high achievement and reverence for those in authority. They looked forward to building a similar household together, one centered on a cohesive family unit committed to Islam and characterized by continuous spiritual growth. Mona and Ibrahim had three children, but they found parenting much more difficult than they had anticipated. Growing up, they felt that when their parents asked them to do something they almost always did it without hesitation, whereas their children were curious and had questions. They knew their children were not “bad,” but they couldn’t understand why they questioned so many of their orders and sometimes seemed lazy about important things like prayer. Most days were very difficult, overshadowed by a lot of yelling and power struggles. In their desperation, Mona and Ibrahim found themselves using threats of punishment to get their children to comply.

They didn’t want to be consistently negative and threatening, but they didn’t know what else to do. How could they help their children spiritually so they could grow up to be good Muslims? How could they teach their children the monumental importance of striving for paradise (*jannah*) and avoiding hellfire (*jahannam*) without threatening them? Mona and Ibrahim felt like they did a good job in teaching their children about key concepts and rulings in Islam, but couldn’t wrap their heads around why their children were not connecting with Allah. What could they do?

II. Introduction

For many, if not most, Muslim parents in the West, Mona’s and Ibrahim’s familial challenges are painfully familiar. This paper, the latest chapter in our ongoing parenting series, attempts to offer a solution to such parental challenges through the idea of attachment. Our Islamically Integrated Resiliency Model (IIRM) asserts that attachment is a foundational concept in parenting and in fostering both mental

and spiritual health in children. While some resilience theories address the importance of attachment to caregivers, there is strong evidence that attachment to Allah is essential as well. Our model incorporates research findings as well as Islamic principles like *tawḥīd* (belief in the oneness of God) that are necessary for Muslim parents trying to raise children who are intrinsically motivated to seek Allah. How can we set our children up for success in the hereafter (*ākhirah*) if we are only using parenting paradigms designed to ensure success in this world (*dunyā*)? Is any resiliency model holistic and complete if it does not address the hereafter?

In the introductory chapter of this parenting series, we discussed how our resiliency model is based on the *ayāt* in which Luqmān (peace be upon him) gives prudent advice to his son about navigating life, relating to others, and developing good character.¹ His God-given wisdom includes important and timeless concepts that are still useful for Muslim parents today. In this chapter, we discuss the crucial links between resilience in children and attachment to Allah, parents, and the righteous. We also hope to help equip parents with easy-to-use strategies and conversation starters (see appendix) to make the transition from theory to practice easy.

III. Chapter goals

- ☐ What is the importance of attachment in parenting and how can it affect spiritual and mental health?
- ☐ What do the Qur'an and Hadith teach us about attachment?
- ☐ How can parents foster their children's attachment to Allah?
- ☐ What are concrete everyday actions I can take to help increase my child(ren)'s attachment to Allah?
- ☐ What are some important considerations I should keep in mind as I'm trying to foster healthy attachment in my child(ren)?

¹ Sarah Sultan and Najwa Awad, "Building Resilience in Children: An Islamic Model of Parenting," *Yaqeen*, March 22, 2023, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/building-resilience-in-children-an-islamic-model-of-parenting>.

IV. Foundational concepts: The importance of attachment

Though the idea may seem basic, attachment is a layered concept in the field of psychology. In simple terms, attachment is a type of relational pattern one person has to another. Attachment between a primary caregiver and the child begins to form in infancy, establishing that child's relationship template; i.e., how that child relates to the world and those around them. The general types of attachment are secure, anxious-ambivalent, disorganized, and avoidant. The following points lay the groundwork for the next sections:

- Your attachment style predicts how you relate to your spouse, your children, and your overall parenting style.²
- Your attachment style shapes and affects how your child relates to others.³
- Having a healthy attachment style will set your child up for better mental health and healthier relationships in life.⁴
- Unhealthy attachment styles can negatively affect the quality of relationships and can be a major contributor to poor mental and physical health.⁵
- Positive relationships increase resilience by offsetting the harmful effects of difficult life experiences.⁶

² Linda C. Gallo and Timothy W. Smith, "Attachment Style in Marriage: Adjustment and Responses to Interaction," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 18, no. 2 (2001): 263–89.

³ Barbara H. Esbjørn, Signe H. Pedersen, Sarah I. F. Daniel, Helle H. Hald, Jon M. Holm, and Howard Steele, "Anxiety Levels in Clinically Referred Children and Their Parents: Examining the Unique Influence of Self-Reported Attachment Styles and Interview-Based Reflective Functioning in Mothers and Fathers," *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 52, no. 4 (2013): 394–407.

⁴ Jane Barlow, Anita Schrader-McMillan, Nick Axford, Zoe Wrigley, Shreya Sonthalia, Tom Wilkinson, Michaela Rawsthorn, Alex Toft, and Jane Coad, "Attachment and Attachment-Related Outcomes in Preschool Children: A Review of Recent Evidence," *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 21, no. 1 (2016): 11–20.

⁵ Darrin J. Knapp, Jonathan G. Sandberg, Josh Novak, and Jeffry H. Larson, "The Mediating Role of Attachment Behaviors on the Relationship between Family-of-Origin and Couple Communication: Implications for Couples Therapy," *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy* 14, no. 1 (2015): 17–38.

⁶ Shelia M. Kennison and Victoria H. Spooner, "Childhood Relationships with Parents and Attachment as Predictors of Resilience in Young Adults," *Journal of Family Studies* 29, no. 1 (2023): 15–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2020.1861968>.

Many parents focus on providing material and educational resources to their children, but overlook the importance of fostering relational and emotional resources. They prioritize providing food, housing, good schooling and extracurricular activities and teaching their children manners, right from wrong and religious teachings, but overlook the *quality* of their relationship with their children. Look at it this way—if you were taking a class online with excellent material, but the internet connection kept freezing, the content kept lagging, and sometimes the volume level fluctuated, would you be able to learn anything? Would you want to engage with the content or even deal with the instructor? Similarly, if you taught your children what they needed for developmental and spiritual growth but often yelled at them, demeaned them, or even just disengaged from them, do you think they would ultimately benefit much? Do you think they would retain anything, have the motivation to heed your advice, or even want to spend time with you?

In other words, the quality of your interactions with your child will almost certainly have a tremendous effect on your child’s wellbeing. If your child feels respected, secure, and supported in their relationship with you, they are much more likely to relate to their environment and others in a grounded and healthy way. If your relationship with your child is disorganized or inconsistent, your child is much more likely to interact with their environment and others in a frazzled, disruptive, or unhealthy way.

Attachment to Allah

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.”⁷

While most attachment theories focus on the relationship between a child and parent, it’s important to recognize that attachment can extend to others—and most importantly, to God. Understanding the importance of attachment to God, and how

⁷ Qur’an 31:13.

to foster it in children, is a necessary component in parenting and resiliency building.

Scientific research suggests that just as there are benefits of attachment to parents, there are also benefits of attachment to God. In fact, God can be a “substitute attachment figure,”⁸ which is very powerful, given the importance of attachment in resilience and our natural imperfection as human beings and parents.

Central to the application of attachment theory to religion is the idea that for many people God may function psychologically as an attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999). People perceive God to be a safe haven in times of crisis (cf. Collins and Feeney 2000; Kirkpatrick 1999) and a secure base from which to explore when out of harm’s way (cf. Ainsworth et al. 1978; Bowlby 1988; Kirkpatrick 1999).⁹

Attachment to God has been linked to increased life satisfaction,¹⁰ religiosity,¹¹ decreased psychopathology, and lower psychological distress.¹² Secure attachment has also been linked to a healthier perception of negative events and greater emotional resilience.¹³ Other benefits of attachment to Allah can be seen in the following hadith of Ibn ‘Abbās (ra):

One day I was riding [a horse/camel] behind the Prophet ﷺ when he said, “Young man, I will teach you some words. Be mindful of God, and He will take care of you. Be mindful of Him, and you shall find Him at your side. If you ask, ask of God. If you need help, seek it from God. Know that if the whole world were to gather together in order to help you, they would not be

⁸ Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, “Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 92–103.

⁹ Wade Rowatt and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, “Two Dimensions of Attachment to God and Their Relation to Affect, Religiosity, and Personality Constructs,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002): 637–51.

¹⁰ Rowatt and Kirkpatrick, “Two Dimensions of Attachment.”

¹¹ Hassan Elwan and Osman Umarji, “The Alchemy of Divine Love: How Our View of God Affects Our Faith and Happiness,” *Yaqeen*, December 29, 2022, updated June 9, 2023, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-alchemy-of-divine-love-how-our-view-of-god-affects-our-faith-and-happiness>.

¹² Julian Culver and Melinda Lundquist Denton, “Religious Attachment and the Sense of Life Purpose among Emerging Adults,” *Religions* 8, no. 12 (2017): 274, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8120274>.

¹³ Culver and Lundquist Denton, “Religious Attachment.”

able to help you except if God had written so. And if the whole world were to gather together in order to harm you, they would not harm you except if God had written so. The pens have been lifted, and the pages are dry.”¹⁴

This hadith beautifully articulates that primary attachment is to Allah. Here, the Prophet ﷺ shares his wisdom on several key points:

1. Mindfulness of Allah: Although we don’t see Allah directly with our eyes, can’t hear Him directly with our ears, or otherwise interact with Him the way we do with other humans, everyone can have a relationship with Allah. This relationship is a two-way street as pointed out, “Be mindful of God, and He will take care of you. Be mindful of Him, and you shall find Him at your side.” As one brings oneself closer to Allah, one will find that Allah comes closer to oneself as well.

Considering that today there’s so much talk about the benefits of mindfulness,¹⁵ it’s interesting that the concept was brought up almost 1400 years ago. But while contemporary discourses of mindfulness tend to emphasize being “present”—aware of how one’s body feels, living in the moment, and so on—the Islamic tradition presents an alternative understanding. *Murāqaba*¹⁶ is a different kind of mindfulness in which one is conscious of Allah’s presence. Being mindful of Allah means you feel He is with you, that He is watching over you, and that you are never truly alone. This presence can not only feel comforting, but can help build integrity; a person is less likely to fall into risky behaviors or situations if they have internalized a sense that Allah is always watching over them, even in the absence of a parent, teacher, or authority figure.

¹⁴ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2516.

¹⁵ Daphne M. Davis and Jeffrey A. Hayes, “What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness? A Practice Review of Psychotherapy-Related Research,” *Psychotherapy Theory Research Practice Training* 48, no. 2 (2011): 198–208.

¹⁶ Parrott, Justin. “How to Be a Mindful Muslim: An Exercise in Islamic Meditation,” *Yaqeen*, November 21, 2017, updated June 12, 2023, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/how-to-be-a-mindful-muslim-an-exercise-in-islamic-meditation>.

2. Prioritization of Connection with Allah: In most places around the world, it's not unusual for wise elders to speak with youth about listening to their parents and spending time with them before they pass, always spotlighting how parents know what is best. While these values are congruent with Islam and demonstrated in other Islamic texts, this particular hadith makes no mention of them. In this hadith, the Prophet ﷺ prioritizes Allah—a connection and relationship with Him is made superior to any other. This interaction is an excellent example of the Prophet ﷺ building attachment between a youth and Allah.

3. Finding Safety in Attachment to Allah: Many of the qualities that researchers identify as constitutive of a healthy attachment between a child and parent, such as security, responsiveness, and being a safe haven,¹⁷ are identified with Allah in this very hadith:

Security: “Be mindful of God, and He will take care of you.”

Responsiveness: “Be mindful of Him, and you shall find Him at your side.”

Strength/Safe Haven: “And if the whole world were to gather together in order to harm you, they would not harm you except if God had written so.”

Another noteworthy point about this specific hadith is that by teaching our children the superiority of attachment to Allah we are not only bolstering their belief (*īmān*), but their ability to bounce back from adversity. Here, the Prophet ﷺ doesn't try to shelter the young man by suggesting that adverse events will not happen; acknowledging adversity is an essential component in coping. Many times our first inclination as parents is to shelter our children from any pain or hardship. This hadith almost does the opposite. While maintaining a tone of empathy and kindness, the Prophet ﷺ strongly asserts that if anything negative were to

¹⁷ Beck and McDonald, “Attachment to God.”

happen it would be by the will of Allah, who knows best and is the Ultimate Protector:

If you ask, ask God. If you need help, seek it from God. Know that if the whole world were to gather together in order to help you, they would not be able to help you except if God had written so. And if the whole world were to gather together in order to harm you, they would not harm you except if God had written so. The pens have been lifted, and the pages are dry.

This last part of the hadith also highlights the importance of reliance on Allah for the believer. When raising children, we often emphasize their reliance on us as parents, which is certainly needed especially at an early age, but how often do we emphasize reliance on Allah? Children can feel further empowered knowing that they have dependable and reliable parents, and an even more dependable and reliable caretaker: Allah. This hadith makes that clear: even if the whole world came together, they would still not be able to change the will of Allah, so in times of desperation, or even separation from parents, the child will always have Allah. As Allah reminds us in the Qur'an,

And He will provide for them from sources they could never imagine. And whoever puts their trust in Allah, then He [alone] is sufficient for them. Certainly Allah achieves His Will. Allah has already set a destiny for everything.¹⁸

The specific role of *tawḥīd* in resilience

While feeling protected by Allah is important for both spiritual and mental health, there is a type of resilience that can only come from completely submitting to Allah alone. When a person truly submits to Allah and His Will, and has a firm belief that tribulations can be a means of nearness to Him, that everything good a Muslim does should be for Him, and that the purpose of life is to worship Him, it is extremely hard to shake that core. Major afflictions, stressors, and tragedies take on

¹⁸ Qur'an 65:3.

new meaning when one understands that life is short and temporary, and that the slightest bit of pain will be recompensed:

Narrated by ‘Abd-Allāh: I visited Allah’s Messenger ﷺ while he was suffering from a high fever. I said, “O Allah’s Messenger ﷺ! You have a high fever.” He said, “Yes, I have as much fever as two men.” I said, “Is it because you will have a double reward?” He said, “Yes, it is so. No Muslim is afflicted with any harm, even if it were the prick of a thorn, but that Allah expiates their sins because of that, as a tree sheds its leaves.”¹⁹

Zayd b. Arqam said: I had a pain in my eyes and the Prophet ﷺ visited me and said, “Zayd, if your eyes were to go blind because of their illness, what would you do?” I said, “I would be steadfast and reckon my reward to be with Allah.” He said, “If that happens to your eyes and you are steadfast and reckon your reward to be with Allah, then your reward will be the Garden.”²⁰

In a society as goal-oriented and accolade-driven as our own, it is easy for both children and adults to lose sight of what is important in life. For children, these instinctual and existential questions manifest in interests, fixations, and drives. A child may not verbally tell you that academic achievement or popularity are their goals in life, but their behavior will, especially when variations in these external factors cause tremendous amounts of anxiety, depression, or stress.

A firm sense of purpose helps protect children from unhealthy external validation. When a child can see the bigger picture, the inevitable disappointments of life—a bad grade, a hurtful interaction with a friend, a defeat in the school election—will still sting, but will not carry as much weight or have as much influence on self-esteem. Unsurprisingly, a sense of purpose is linked to better recovery skills and protection against trauma.²¹

¹⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5647.

²⁰ *Al-Bukhārī, al-Adab al-mufrad*, no. 532.

²¹ Stacey M. Schaefer, Jennifer Morozink Boylan, Carien M. van Reekum, Regina C. Lapate, Catherine J. Norris, Carol D. Ryff, and Richard J. Davidson, “Purpose in Life Predicts Better Emotional Recovery from Negative Stimuli,” *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 11 (2013): e80329, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0080329>.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of the oneness of Allah (*tawḥīd*) is what leads to a secure relationship with Allah, and is a great way to set up your child for resilience and success in this world (*dunyā*) and in the hereafter (*ākhirah*). All three branches of *tawḥīd* can provide us with a treasure trove of gems to share with our children to increase attachment and foster resilience.

i. **Oneness of Divine Nature (*tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*):** With a firm grounding in love of Allah, acknowledging and embracing our purpose to worship Allah alone, and how to worship Him. This foundation provides a sense of purpose and inner strength that helps transcend worldly difficulties. When we internalize that our ultimate goal is to please Allah and live in accordance with His teachings, we are more likely to develop a resilient mindset that helps us navigate hardships with patience and trust in His plan.

For more information on this topic, check out this Yaqeen article about [why God asks people to worship Him](#).

ii. **Oneness of Divine Lordship (*tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*):** Knowing Allah as our Creator, and acknowledging that He creates and provides and sustains everything. When we recognize Allah as our Maker and acknowledge His role as the Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of everything, we come to realize that our ultimate source of provision lies with Him. It's this awareness that nurtures a profound reliance (*tawakkul*) solely upon Him, rather than upon any being or thing within His creation.

For more information on this topic, check out this Yaqeen article about the [influence of parenting on our view of God, submission, and contentment](#).

iii. **Oneness of the Divine Names and Attributes (*tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*):** Getting to know Allah through His Names and Attributes. After all, how can a person love, trust, and build an attachment to someone they do not know? Contemplating on certain attributes and calling on Allah by those names in *du'ā*, such as *al-Qadīr* (the All-Capable, the All-Powerful), can be

both empowering and comforting during all times, but particularly when going through difficulty.

For more information on this topic, check out this Yaqeen series about the [names of Allah](#).

V. Conceptually fostering attachment and reliance on Allah

The same characteristics that facilitate attachment between a child and their caregiver can also facilitate attachment between that child and God. According to Mary Ainsworth, a major attachment theorist, characteristics that contribute to secure attachment include maintaining proximity, providing safety, and being a secure base.²²

Proximity, accessibility, and responsiveness

One of the key components of attachment is a sense that the caregiver is accessible. Within a parent-child relationship, this means that a child can find and access their parent when they need them. These days, an inaccessible parent is one who avoids being home, is always busy on the phone or computer, and doesn't show up physically when needed, at least not consistently.

A parent-child attachment forms the internal working model or default attachment style that a child will use to interact not just with other people, but with God as well. If a parent cultivates a relationship defined by proximity, accessibility, and responsiveness, then the child will be able to project this onto his or her relationship with others.²³ It's not *how much* time one spends with their child as the

²² Angie McDonald, Richard Beck, Steve Allison, and Larry Norsworthy, "Attachment to God and Parents: Testing Correspondence vs. Compensation Hypotheses," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24 (2005): 21–28.

²³ Elwan and Umarji, "Alchemy of Divine Love."

quality of that time that matters,²⁴ so parents should not mistake mere presence for responsiveness.

Responsiveness in day-to-day life might look like:

- Answering your child when they call you. If you are busy, be available when you say you will be available (“I’m in the middle of something, give me 10 minutes”).
- Showing undivided attention when your child is talking about something important.
- Following through with commitments and promises.
- Physical touch, like a pat on the back or a hug.

In order to build their children’s attachment to Allah, parents also need to demonstrate that Allah is close in proximity, is accessible, and is responsive. This proximity is demonstrated by the following verses and reports:

When My servants ask you [O Prophet] about Me: I am truly near. I respond to one’s prayer when they call upon Me. So let them respond [with obedience] to Me and believe in Me, perhaps they will be guided [to the Right Way].²⁵

Indeed, [it is] We who created humankind and [fully] know what their souls whisper to them, and We are closer to them than [their] jugular vein.²⁶

Abū Sa’d al-Khudrī reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, “No Muslim makes supplication—unless he is someone who has cut off his relatives—but that he is given one of three things: either his supplication is answered quickly, or it is stored up for him in the next world, or an evil equal to it is averted from him.” It was said, “Then many

²⁴ Stewart D. Friedman, “How Our Careers Affect Our Children,” Harvard Business Review, November 14, 2018, https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-our-careers-affect-our-children?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=hbr&utm_source=facebook&tpcc=orgsocial_edit&fbclid=IwAR3LripO4B5j9HjyMB-niPElOWP75361brbHAJCyjIF82oVBFzCIT9VedU0.

²⁵ Qur’an 2:186.

²⁶ Qur’an 50:16.

supplications will be made.” He صلى الله عليه وسلم replied, “Allah has more still to give.”²⁷

Besides being responsive themselves, parent can help demonstrate that Allah is responsive by:

- Discussing the above verses (*āyāt*) and hadith in an age-appropriate manner, emphasizing in a comforting way that Allah is always with your child.
- Exploring and talking about related names of Allah like: the All-Knowing (*al-‘Alīm*), the All-Hearing (*al-Samī‘*), the All-Seeing (*al-Baṣīr*), the Responder (*al-Mujīb*), and the Provider (*al-Razzāq*).
- Teaching your child the etiquette of supplicating (*du‘ā*), and emphasizing that Allah always hears their call.
- Teaching the practice of gratitude. Oftentimes, after a *du‘ā* has been answered, we forget how badly we wanted that coveted thing before we got it. If you observe one of your child’s *du‘ā*’s being answered, point it out to them and practice gratefulness with them.
- Share stories with your child about the beautiful ways Allah has responded to your *du‘ā* and guided you through different stages in your life. Children love to hear stories from their parents’ lives and in this way a connection and attachment to Allah is brought to life for them.
- Talk to your older children about how Allah responds to Muslims in formal prayer. The following hadith illustrates Allah’s responsiveness:

It was narrated that Abū Hurayra said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم say: Allah said: ‘I have divided the prayer between Myself and My slave into two halves, and My slave shall have what he has asked for.’ When the slave says: ‘*Al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabb al-‘ālamīn* (All praise is for Allah, the Lord of all that exists),’ Allah says: ‘My slave has praised Me, and My slave shall have what he has asked for.’ And when he says: ‘*Al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* (The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful),’ Allah says: ‘My slave has extolled Me, and My slave shall have what he has asked for.’ And when he says: ‘*Māliki yawm*

²⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-mufrad*, no. 710.

al-dīn (The Only Owner [and the Ruling Judge] of the Day of Recompense),’ Allah says: ‘My slave has Glorified Me. This is for Me, and this verse is between me and My slave in two halves.’ And when he says: *Iyyāka na‘budu wa iyyāka nasta‘īn* (You [Alone] we worship, and You [Alone] we ask for help),’ He says: ‘This is between Me and My slave, and My slave shall have what he has asked for. And the end of the Qur’anic chapter (*sūra*) is for My slave.’ And when he says: *Ihdirnā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, ṣirāṭ al-ladhīna an‘amta ‘alayhim ghayr-il-maghḍūbi ‘alayhim wa lā al-ḍāllīn* (Guide us to the Straight Way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not [the way] of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray),’ He says: ‘This is for My slave, and My slave shall have what he has asked for.’”²⁸

A Protector providing safety

Also necessary for the development of healthy child attachment is a caregiver who provides a safe haven and acts as a dependable protector. Children are vulnerable and they need financial, physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual help from consistent caregivers who have their best interests at heart. While this sounds like common sense, you may be surprised how often we as psychotherapists encounter parentified children—children who inappropriately had to take care of their parents due to their parents’ emotional immaturity or neglect.

As a parent, you can demonstrate that you are a safe haven or protector by:

- Believing your child when they come to you with concerns. Validate and take their concerns seriously.
- Valuing your child’s opinions and perspectives. Don’t automatically discredit your child if someone makes an accusation against them. Truth and justice are not based on age.
- Assuring your child that you always have their best interests in mind even if they might not like your rules (e.g., setting healthy limits).

²⁸ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3784.

- Comforting your child when they get hurt emotionally or physically.
- Keeping discussions about adult concerns (i.e., finances, health, marital issues, etc.) between adults and not involving your child in these matters.

To show that Allah is the ultimate Protector, *al-Walī*,²⁹ parents should talk through some of the following verses and hadith (an example of how you might share this with your children is provided at the end of this paper):

Allah is the Guardian of the believers—He brings them out of darkness and into light. As for the disbelievers, their guardians are false gods who lead them out of light and into darkness. It is they who will be the residents of the Fire. They will be there forever.”³⁰

But no! Allah is your Guardian, and He is the best Helper.³¹

Say, “Nothing will ever befall us except what Allah has destined for us. He is our Protector.” So in Allah let the believers put their trust.³²

Supplemental activities can also include:

- Discussing prophetic stories that demonstrate Allah’s protection against evil people and things, as well as narratives that show perseverance of Muslims in the face of powerful adversaries who plotted against them. A few stories that beautifully highlight Allah’s protection and guidance are the stories of the prophets Joseph (Yūsuf), Moses (Mūsa), and Abraham (Ibrāhīm) (peace be upon them).
- Helping children to understand that Allah as our *Walī* manifests in ways that are not always what we want. He aids us in accordance with the infinitely

²⁹ A resource to explain Allah being *al-Walī* in detail can be found here: Hassan Elwan and Osman Umarji, “Comic Cop of Loving Lord: The Influence of Parenting on Our View of God Submission and Contentment,” *Yaqeen*, June 20, 2023, updated August 9, 2023, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/cosmic-cop-or-loving-lord-the-influence-of-parenting-on-our-view-of-god-submission-and-contentment>.

³⁰ Qur’an 2:257.

³¹ Qur’an 3:150.

³² Qur’an 9:51.

wise perspective of the Divine and not from the limited perception of the human. Therefore, the presence of Allah's care is not synonymous with the fulfillment of our wants. Indeed, His aid and care will often manifest in worldly pain and loss. For example, the People of the Ditch mentioned in Surat al-Burūj³³ were all killed by a tyrant ruler despite their unshakeable belief in Allah. Although people might see this as a great loss rather than success, Allah declared their martyrdom and entrance to Paradise as the great victory.³⁴ Thus, His aid and support is not understood as making us outwardly victorious over our enemies, but rather making no enemy able to overpower our will to worship Allah.

- Reading age-appropriate versions of the prophetic biography (*sīra*). Discuss Allah's protection of Prophet Muhammed ﷺ throughout his life, from infancy through late adulthood.
- Exploring and talking about related names of Allah, like The Guardian (*al-Muḥaymin*), The Capable, The Powerful (*al-Qādir*), The Judge, Giver of Justice (*al-Ḥakam*), and The Helper, The Supporter (*al-Walī*). Examples are provided at the end of the paper.
- Teaching your child *du'ā*'s to help them seek Allah's protection and empowering them to call on Allah on their own. An excellent *du'ā* that is easy for children to remember is:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَضُرُّ مَعَ اسْمِهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

Bism-illāhi al-ladhī lā yaḍurru ma'a ismihi shay'un fī-l-arḍi wa lā fī-l-samā'i wa huwa al-Samī'u al-'Alīm.

Translation: In the Name of Allah, with Whose Name nothing is harmed on earth nor in heaven, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. (Repeat three times)

Abān ibn 'Uthmān said: I heard 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān [his father] say: I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: If anyone says three times: "In the name of Allah, when whose name is mentioned nothing on

³³ Qur'an 85.

³⁴ Qur'an 85:11.

Earth or in Heaven can cause harm, and He is the Hearer, the Knower,” he will not suffer sudden affliction till the morning, and if anyone says this in the morning, he will not suffer sudden affliction until the evening.³⁵

A secure base

Another aspect of attachment is that the caregiver provides a sense of comfort in the face of uncertainty. In the context of parent-child attachment, this means that even if the child has a desire to explore, they are able to return to the caregiver when they desire refuge from unfamiliarity. With secure attachment the child can also rely on their caregiver for solace and soothing when experiencing discomfort or pain.

Warmth in the parent-child relationship can be demonstrated through:

- Physical touch, such as hugging, high-fiving, or sitting close to each other.
- Genuine interest in helping your child when they are in distress—taking care of them when they are sick, wiping their tears when they are hurt, and empathic attunement when they are experiencing difficult feelings.
- Verbally assuring them of support when they are uncertain about what to do next: “You can do it,” “I’m here behind you,” “I’ve got your back if you fumble.”
- Telling your child that they can always turn to you no matter how advanced their age or how big their mistakes might be.

Sadly, in many places around the world, parents overlook the importance of fostering attachment to Allah through warmth and love. Many families solely focus on Allah’s punishment to dissuade their children from undesirable behavior. While there is a place for stressing the ramifications of deeds that are displeasing to

³⁵ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 5088.

Allah, it is essential to create a foundation of love and security by highlighting Allah's mercy:

Narrated by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: Some war prisoners were brought before the Prophet ﷺ and a woman amongst them was breastfeeding any child in need. Whenever she found a child amongst the captives, she took it to her chest and nursed it (she had lost her child but later she found him). The Prophet ﷺ said to us, "Do you think that this lady would throw her son in the fire?" We replied, "No, if she has the power not to throw him [in the fire]." The Prophet ﷺ then said, "Allah is more merciful to His slaves than this lady to her son."³⁶

Say, [O Prophet] "If you [sincerely] love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive your sins. For Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful."³⁷

Ask forgiveness from your Lord and repent to Him. Verily, my Lord is Merciful and Loving.³⁸

Remember Me; I will remember you. And thank Me, and never be ungrateful.³⁹

Abū Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Allah says: 'I am just as My slave thinks of Me when he remembers Me.' By Allah! Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His slave than one of you who unexpectedly finds in the desert his lost camel. 'He who comes closer to Me one span, I come closer to him a cubit; and he who comes closer to Me a cubit, I come closer to him a fathom; and if he comes to Me walking, I come to him running.'⁴⁰

Abū Hurayra narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "When Allah loves a slave He calls Gabriel [saying]: 'Indeed I love so-and-so, so love him.' He said: "So he calls out in the heavens. Then love for him descends among the people of the earth. That is as in the saying of Allah: Verily, those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, the Most Gracious will grant

³⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5999.

³⁷ Qur'an 3:31.

³⁸ Qur'an 11:90.

³⁹ Qur'an 2:152.

⁴⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7505; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2675.

love for them (19:96). And when Allah hates a slave, He calls out to Gabriel, [saying]: ‘Indeed I hate so-and-so.’ So he calls out in the heavens. Then hatred for him descends upon the earth.”⁴¹

Parents can help show that Allah is a source of both comfort and warmth by:

- Developing a sense that Allah wants best for His creation by illustrating how Allah provides for all of His creation, big and small.
- Exploring and discussing the names of Allah like *al-Laṭīf* (The Subtle, Most Gentle), *al-Raḥmān* (Most Gracious), *al-Raḥīm* (Most Merciful), *al-Wadūd* (Most Loving), *al-Ra’ūf* (Most Kind) and *al-Shakūr* (Most Appreciative).
- Explaining that during times of distress one can always call on Allah and seek comfort from Him. Children can always vent to Allah, seek His support, and ask for His help.
- Talking with children about how Allah is the Most Merciful and that while sins are to be avoided, Muslims should never despair of the mercy of Allah or think that their sins are too great for Allah to forgive.

Integral supplemental attachments

The foundational principle of our Islamically Integrated Resiliency Model (IIRM) is that secure attachment to Allah and primary caregivers is ideal for resilience and success in this world (*dunyā*) and the hereafter (*ākhirah*). As Muslims, however, our faith would not be complete without attachment to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Qur’an. Attachment to the community is also spiritually and psychologically important. Here we mean “attachment” in the colloquial sense of love and connection, rather than the specific and technical definition we invoked when discussing parental and Godly attachment. This is the type of attachment we will discuss in the following section, in the context of the Prophet ﷺ, the Qur’an, and the Muslim community. Each subsection will conclude with

⁴¹ *Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhī*, no. 3161.

recommendations on how parents can nurture all of these relationships with their children.

Attachment to the Qur'an

The Qur'an, as the word of Allah that was revealed to His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, illuminates our lives and heals our hearts. Allah describes it as, “Truly it is a mighty Book. It cannot be proven false from any angle. [It is] a revelation from the [One Who is] All-Wise, Praiseworthy.”⁴² Nurturing an attachment to the Qur'an further solidifies a strong relationship with Allah, and is a means toward righteousness in this life and the next. Allah describes the Qur'an saying,

This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah.⁴³

O mankind, there has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers.⁴⁴

As mentioned earlier, building a relationship with Allah bolsters our children's resilience. In order to develop a strong, healthy attachment to someone, you need to know them. Allah provides us the opportunity to know Him on a deeper level through His words in the Qur'an. Consider the feeling you get as you learn about Allah through His words in the greatest verse revealed,⁴⁵ the Verse of the Throne (*ayat al-kursī*):

Allah! There is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His Seat [of power] extends over the

⁴² Qur'an 41:41–42.

⁴³ Qur'an 2:2.

⁴⁴ Qur'an 10:57.

⁴⁵ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2878.

heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Most Great.⁴⁶

In this verse, Allah shares a beautiful description of His Names and Attributes, His knowledge and power. This strengthens our trust in and knowledge of Him, which in turn builds immunity to the difficulties of life.

Allah tells us, “O mankind, there has come to you a conclusive proof from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a clear light (i.e., the Qur’an). So those who believe in Allah and hold fast to Him—He will admit them to mercy from Himself and bounty and guide them to Himself on a straight path.”⁴⁷ Our children can develop a deeper relationship with Allah by truly understanding that His direct words are accessible to them. In this way, the wisdom, guidance, and reassurance provided in the Qur’an takes on a different depth of meaning for our children during moments of difficulty.

The Qur’an provides unwavering guidance in a world fraught with ever-changing standards and expectations. Indeed, the Qur’an and its exegesis (*tafsīr*) anchor us during the times we yearn for healing, peace, and tranquility. It is upon this stable foundation that fortresses of resiliency are built.⁴⁸ Ibn ‘Abbās, may Allah be pleased with him, said,

Allah has guaranteed for one who follows the Qur’an that he will not be led astray in the world, nor be damned in the hereafter. Then, he recited the verse, “Thus, whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in this life] nor suffer [in the next.]”^{49, 50}

Yet some people are unable to connect with the Qur’an and therefore unable to connect with Allah, hindered as they are by negative preconceptions of God’s Word. While we can acknowledge academically that an attachment to the Qur’an brings mental and emotional health benefits, *how* to build this attachment is just as

⁴⁶ Qur’an 2:255.

⁴⁷ Qur’an 4:175.

⁴⁸ Karen Caldwell and Carolyn Senter, “Strengthening Family Resilience through Spiritual and Religious Resources,” in *Handbook of Family Resilience*, ed. Dorothy S. Becvar (New York: Springer, 2012), 441–55.

⁴⁹ Qur’an 20:123.

⁵⁰ *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, no. 34781.

important. Looking back on your own upbringing, in what contexts were verses from the Qur'an cited? For some children, the Qur'an is used as a weapon wielded by adults to frighten rather than inspire, its warnings of otherworldly punishment extracting obedience from misbehaving children. Many have memories of struggling to memorize and dreading reciting in front of their Sunday school class. Many children are spanked, yelled at, and punished harshly for making mistakes in the process of learning to read and memorize the Qur'an. The painful memories during this process can make it hard to connect with the Qur'an later in life. Parents and community members often overemphasize Arabic reading and pronunciation and underemphasize understanding and personal connection, leading children to feel alienated from the words they are asked to read, recite, and recall. Building an attachment with the Qur'an, and thereby strengthening one's attachment to Allah, cannot be achieved through a pedagogy that stresses fear and punishment at the expense of love and reward. Ibn al-Qayyim expressed this beautifully, saying,

The heart on its journey towards Allah the Exalted is like that of a bird. Love is its head and fear and hope are its two wings. When the head is healthy, then the two wings will fly well. When the head is cut off, the bird will die. When either of its two wings is damaged, the bird becomes vulnerable to every hunter and predator.⁵¹

Furthermore, it's imperative for our children to gain an understanding of the Qur'an through translation and *tafsīr*. In the Qur'an, Allah describes the journeys of many of the righteous predecessors we seek to emulate. These Qur'anic stories of perseverance through hardship provide solace during life's difficulties. Helping our children to learn these stories facilitates a much stronger emotional connection with the Qur'an. (For some examples of easy-to-follow stories and lessons, please see the final section of the paper "Conversation Starters and Stories").

It can be an incredibly powerful experience to turn to the Qur'an during moments of hardship and suddenly find yourself reading a verse that resonates with you in a special way, gently applying a balm to your heart and motivating you to keep

⁵¹ Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-Sālikīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1996).

moving forward. Allah revealed chapters (sing. *sūra*) to the Prophet ﷺ explicitly for the purpose of building his resilience during times of great difficulty. The timing of the revelation was not random. For example, *Sūrat Yūsuf* came to him during the Year of Sadness to console him after the death of two people who were deeply beloved to him, and to show him that along with hardship comes victory. In connecting with Allah in this way, we give our children the opportunity to nurture a personal relationship with the Qur'an and experience its tranquility, allowing them to feel grounded in these unchanging words of eternal wisdom.

Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort.⁵²

No people gather to remember Allah Almighty but that the angels surround them, cover them with mercy, send tranquility upon them, and mention them to Allah among those near to Him.⁵³

Al-Barā' b. 'Āzib reported: A man was reciting *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in his barn was an animal which became unsettled. As he looked, there was a mist or a cloud overshadowing him. He mentioned that to the Prophet ﷺ and he said, "Continue reciting, for it was calm that descended with the Qur'an."⁵⁴

As parents, we can foster love and attachment for the Qur'an in our children by:

- Nurturing frequent family Qur'an time. Depending on the age of your child, this can include listening to *sūras* in the car, reading a few verses together each day, listening to a lecture on the *tafsīr* of a certain *sūra*, and learning the meaning of a few verses together.
- Engaging with the Qur'an as a source of stability. For example, listening to Qur'an during calm moments (i.e., before bed), allows children to unwind and provides a stable, consistent routine. The Qur'an should also be invoked during moments of emotional turmoil to provide a sense of connection with both Allah and you, as their parent (e.g., reciting *innā li-llāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn* when something difficult happens).⁵⁵

⁵² Qur'an 13:28.

⁵³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2700.

⁵⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3614; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 795.

⁵⁵ Qur'an 2:156.

- Discussing the way that certain verses resonate with you and apply to your daily life. For example, since gratitude plays a role in resilience-building,⁵⁶ when discussing the verse in Sūrat al-Fātiḥa, “All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds”⁵⁷ you may ask your children what they are grateful to Allah for and list some of your more cherished blessings.
- Exploring the Qur’anic stories of the Prophets, righteous individuals, and individuals who gained the love of Allah, as well as the lessons derived from them.
- Identifying positive traits exemplified in the Qur’an as the qualities of the people of *jannah* and how these traits might show up in daily life. Ask them if they’ve ever exemplified these traits, and to imagine when these traits would be helpful (e.g., waiting for their turn in line showing patience). For older children, also identify the traits of the people of the hellfire and discuss ways to protect ourselves from these qualities (i.e., arrogance).
- Going through verses describing *jannah* and having your child share what they visualize as they hear these verses. Ask them what they are praying for in *jannah*. For younger children, encourage them to draw a picture of their house in *jannah* and put it in a place they can see frequently. This is similar to a safe space exercise often used in therapy to manage anxiety, so it can help with emotional regulation and therefore resilience building.⁵⁸
- Asking your child if they have a favorite verse from the Qur’an. If they don’t, help them to choose one. Have them write or print this verse, decorate it, and place it somewhere visible in their room as a beneficial reminder and a way to personally connect with the Qur’an. Repeating this verse as a mantra can help promote emotional regulation and increased wellbeing.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Jane Taylor Wilson, “Brightening the Mind: The Impact of Practicing Gratitude on Focus and Resilience in Learning,” *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 16, no. 4 (2016): 1–13.

⁵⁷ Qur’an 1:2.

⁵⁸ Sophie A. Kay, “Emotion Regulation and Resilience: Overlooked Connections,” *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2016): 411–15.

⁵⁹ Julie Lynch, Lucia Prihodova, Pádraic J. Dunne, Caoimhe O’Leary, Rachel Breen, Áine Carroll, Cathal Walsh, Geraldine McMahon, and Barry White, “Mantra Meditation Programme for Emergency Department Staff: A Qualitative Study,” *BMJ Open* 8, no. 9 (2018): e020685.

Attachment to the Prophet ﷺ

One of the key ways we attach to Allah is through attachment to his Prophet ﷺ. This is based on several hadiths that indicate a Muslim does not have complete faith until they love the Prophet ﷺ more than anyone else, including themselves.

It was narrated that Anas ibn Mālik said: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “None of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his child, his father, and all the people.”⁶⁰

Narrated Anas: The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever possesses the following three qualities will have the sweetness of faith:

1. The one to whom Allah and His Apostle become dearer than anything else.
2. Who loves a person and he loves him only for Allah's sake.
3. Who hates to revert to disbelief as he hates to be thrown into the fire.”⁶¹

Narrated ‘Abd Allāh b. Hishām: We were with the Prophet ﷺ and he was holding the hand of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. ‘Umar said to him, “O Allah's Messenger! You are dearer to me than everything except my own self.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “No, by Him in Whose Hand my soul is, [you will not have complete faith] till I am dearer to you than your own self.” Then ‘Umar said to him, “However, now, by Allah, you are dearer to me than my own self.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Now, O ‘Umar, [now you are a believer].”⁶²

We are asked to love the Prophet ﷺ more than our parents, children, and even ourselves. This presents the Muslim with something of an emotional challenge: how do we achieve such a deep love for the Prophet ﷺ when he no longer lives among us? This is difficult for a full-grown adult to grasp and achieve, never mind a child. Yet the foundations can be laid early.

We develop an attachment to the Prophet ﷺ by attaching to his impeccable behavior, noble character, and inspirational perseverance. The Prophet ﷺ was a

⁶⁰ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 67.

⁶¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 16.

⁶² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6632.

model of resilience, as seen in his ability to always maintain a good attitude, excel in his interpersonal relationships, preserve his mental health, and diligently pursue his goals (spreading the message of Islam) in the face of staunch and often bloody resistance. His consultation of his Companions and unconditional trust in Allah, paired with frequent *du‘ā* and prayer, reminds us of how to engage in spiritually-based coping during times of distress.

Seeing a loved one overcome struggles can motivate us to overcome our own, especially when that person wants what is best for us. The Prophet ﷺ cared very deeply for his *ummah*, which includes us and our children.

There certainly has come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. He is concerned by your suffering, anxious for your well-being, and gracious and merciful to the believers.⁶³

Anas b. Mālik reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “I wish I could meet my brothers.” The Prophet’s companions said, “Are we not your brothers?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “You are my companions, but my brothers are those who have faith in me although they never saw me.”⁶⁴

‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (may Allah be pleased with them) reported: The Prophet ﷺ recited the Words of Allah, the Exalted, and the Glorious, about Ibrāhīm (as) who said: “O my Lord (*Rabb*)! They have led astray many among mankind. But whosoever follows me, he verily, is of me” (14:36) and those of Jesus (‘Īsā) who said: “If You punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily, You, only You, are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise” (5:118). Then he ﷺ raised up his hands and said, “O Allah! My *ummah*, my *ummah*,” and wept; Allah, the Exalted, said: “O Gabriel (Jibrīl)! Go to Muhammad and ask him: ‘What makes you weep?’” So Jibrīl came to him and asked him [the reason for his weeping] and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ informed him what he had said (though Allah knew it well). Upon this Allah said: “Jibrīl, go to Muhammad and say: ‘Verily, We will please you with regard to your *ummah* and will never displease you.’”⁶⁵

⁶³ Qur’an 9:128.

⁶⁴ *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, no. 12169.

⁶⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 202.

Abū Hurayra said: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Every Messenger is endowed with a prayer which is granted and by which he would (pray to his Lord) and it would be granted for him. I have, however, reserved my prayer for the intercession of my *ummah* on the Day of Resurrection.”⁶⁶

As parents, we can foster our children’s love for and attachment to the Prophet ﷺ by:

- Reading the Prophet’s biography (*sīra*) together, beginning with simple stories in early childhood and more in-depth biographies later.
- Discussing the adversities the Prophet ﷺ experienced in his lifetime (from the stress of first hearing the message of prophethood, to the death of Khadīja or Ibrāhīm, to remorseless persecution meted out by the Quraysh, etc.) and the ways he coped (praying, making *du‘ā* to Allah, seeking help from dependable people, etc.). For more details about the experiences of the Prophet ﷺ, consider some of the book recommendations listed at the end of this paper.
- Identifying and discussing some of the most admirable attributes of the Prophet ﷺ such as his perseverance, dedication, and integrity. Discuss why these qualities are desirable, and how they might look in your child or in people your child knows.
- Discussing the Prophet’s ﷺ love for the *ummah* and how that includes your child as well. Visualize with your child the happiness of meeting him in *jannah*.
- Describing the appearance of the Prophet ﷺ to your child so they can feel closer to him.

Community and group affiliation

⁶⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 199b.

Group and community affiliation, like religious institutions and schools,⁶⁷ can be instrumental sources of emotional support. When one is faced with hardship, they are limited in their resources, ability to problem solve, and ability to cope. Joining a group can make a person feel less alone, increase comradery, and tap into a network of physical resources, social connections, and intergenerational wisdom. Membership in a group has been found to enhance the ability to cope with stress, trauma, and anxiety.⁶⁸ Being part of a group has also been shown to help preempt depression, mitigate depressive episodes, and prevent relapse. In adolescents specifically, group support bolsters mental health, academic success, and self-esteem.

Highly recommended and mandatory communal activities in Islam, such as attending the Friday sermon and praying the funeral (*janāza*) prayers, offer not just a great source of good deeds, but a convenient way to reap the resiliency benefits of being part of a group:

Micro Scale: *Mentors, Muslim peers, Muslim Student Associations, study circle (ḥalaqa) groups, and close friends.* These relationships can provide close attachments outside of the primary-caregiver relationship, and can help your child feel guided and supported during times of need. A parent should never substitute these attachments for their own personal involvement, but in the absence of healthy parental figures, these relationships can be very powerful in building resilience.

Meso Scale: *Local mosque, Islamic school, and/or community organizations.* Relationships on this scale can help your child feel like they are a part of the local community and provide them with a sense of belonging. This may be especially important for Muslims growing up in a

⁶⁷ Clare Marriott, Catherine Hamilton-Giachritsis, and Chris Harrop, “Factors Promoting Resilience Following Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Structured, Narrative Review of the Literature,” *Child Abuse Review* 23 (2014): 17–34, <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2258>.

⁶⁸ Tegan Cruwys, Genevieve A. Dingle, Catherine Haslam, S. Alexander Haslam, Jolanda Jetten, and Thomas A. Morton, “Social Group Memberships Protect against Future Depression, Alleviate Depression Symptoms and Prevent Depression Relapse,” *Social Science and Medicine* 98 (2013): 179–86, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.09.013>.

place where they are a minority. These kinds of connections can help foster a more secure sense of identity and inclusion.

Macro Scale: The ummah. It is important for older children and emerging adolescents to know that they are part of a community that transcends space and time. Muslims are not just part of a global group that shares commonalities in thinking, behavior, and belief, but a transhistorical brotherhood and sisterhood that includes every Muslim in the *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammed ﷺ—now, before, and in the future. Every person in the *ummah* has a role to play based on the blessings Allah has given them. Encouraging your child to use their natural talents and interests to contribute to the *ummah* can give them a greater sense of purpose and belonging.

VI. Important considerations

There are some important considerations to keep in mind as you invest in the journey of building an attachment with your child.

The first is that while attachment can in theory be cultivated at any point in either the parent's or the child's lifetimes, early childhood attachment leaves the strongest impression on mental and spiritual health. Parents should not give up if their child is now a teenager, but they should know that the more time that elapses, the more challenging it will be to instill new thought patterns in their grown "child" (from an Islamic standpoint: young adult). It is best to start developing a robust attachment between you and your child from the day they are born, and between your child and Allah as soon as they are able to understand (around 3 years of age).

However, you are less likely to develop a healthy attachment with your child if your own attachment to your parents or to Allah is in any way compromised. When we have strained relationships with our own parents or with Allah, we can inadvertently model unhealthy behaviors to our children. Introspection is one of the best tools a parent has, so reflect on your own attachment style with Allah and

loved ones to determine if there is any healing needed on your end. This healing is important not just for the sake of your child, but for your own mental and spiritual health.

VII. Case study revisited

Mona and Ibrahim began to reflect on their relationship with their children and came to terms with the fact that their authoritarian style of parenting was not conducive to raising healthy children or fostering a nurturing home environment. Their children lived in a different world than the one they grew up in, and the way they were parented was not going to work for their children. Their children were struggling because they had no attachment to Allah or sense of *wanting* to be Muslim versus *having* to be Muslim. Mona and Ibrahim knew it would be easier to keep doing what they had already been doing, but decided to take the scarier but more rewarding path of trying something new.

Initially it felt strange to talk about loving Allah and explain the wisdom behind various Qur'anic and prophetic stories. But as Mona and Ibrahim became more open and flexible, their children began to very slowly soften. The harshness in their dealings with their children didn't disappear overnight and it took a lot of intentionality, persistence, and patience to mitigate slip-ups and bumps in the road, but Mona and Ibrahim knew this was par for the course. As time passed and they continued to have more conversations about Allah and engaged in more family activities and discussions, they began to notice a shift where their children began to engage in acts of worship on their own, without being told to do so.⁶⁹ In parallel, Mona and Ibrahim also made a conscious effort to build up attachment between their children and themselves. What were once transactional relationships were now growing into relationships that felt more loving, secure, and reciprocal.

⁶⁹ For more on motivation and inculcating intrinsic religious motivation: Jihad Saafir and Osman Umarji, "How to Raise Religious Teens: A Self-Determination Theory Approach," *Yaqeen*, October 24, 2022, updated March 30, 2023, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/how-to-raise-religious-teens-a-self-determination-theory-approach>.

VIII. Conversation starters

Sometimes putting theory into practice can feel like a daunting task. Please note that trying to implement everything in this article at once would be unnatural and overwhelming. Building a relationship with Allah is a long-term journey. It cannot be rushed. To help you on this journey we have made a list of *conversation starters*. These prompts can be a great supplement to family rituals you already have. For example, if like many families you watch a movie or hold a game night every Friday to help unwind and kick off the weekend, you can use one of these prompts for a mini-lesson beforehand. You can begin with a brief check-in on the past week and upcoming weekend, before discussing one weekly question as a family. These questions would ideally open the door to talking about important topics and bonding as a family.

We've included a list of sample conversation starters below, divided by theme. Before incorporating them into your routine, however, please note the following tips:

- Make the duration of any mini-lesson appropriate for its audience. If these conversations are too lengthy, neither you nor your children will look forward to them because they are draining. Around 15-20 minutes is usually a good length .
- Make mini-lessons appropriate for the audience in terms of content. Small children are naturally drawn to arts and crafts, so drawing pictures with markers, for instance, can be appealing to them. If your oldest and youngest are separated by a wide age gap, consider splitting responsibilities so that one parent works with the older children and the other parent works with the younger children.
- Do not make this activity/conversation too burdensome in terms of preparation because you most likely will not follow through. Prepare for 5-10 minutes by pulling relevant *āyāt*, hadiths, or even material from this article.

- If you ever get stuck with a tough question from your child, don't fret. Tell your child that you will look into it further and get back to them. This can be a learning moment for you both.

Building proximity

- What does physical, spiritual, and emotional closeness (proximity) mean to you?
- How do we know that Allah is close to us and can hear us?
- What are examples of times your *du'ā'* was answered? (topic: responsiveness)
- Why might it appear that a *du'ā'* is unanswered? What are the different ways *du'ā'* can be answered?
- What acts of worship make you feel closer to Allah?
- What are acts of worship that make you feel closer to us (family, parents, siblings)?
- What are acts of worship that make you feel closer to the community?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, how close do you feel we are as a family? What things can be done to increase that closeness?
- Is there anything you are going through right now that would be helpful to talk about?
- If there ever is something that might be tough to talk about, how would you envision talking to us about it? What steps would you take?
- What are ways that we can show each other that we care and are close through our words and actions?
- What are ways that we can show Allah that we love Him and are grateful for Him?

Safety

- What do physical, spiritual, and emotional safety mean to you?
- What are tools Allah has blessed us with to protect our sense of safety?

- Let's look through the names of Allah together. Which ones related to safety jump out at you? Pick one name that you can start using in your *du'ā's* or when you are feeling scared.
- Can you think of examples in which Allah protected the prophets?
- Can you think of examples in which Allah kept you safe or protected you from harm?
- What are precautions we take as a family to promote physical and emotional safety?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, how safe do you feel in this family? What are things we can do to increase your sense of safety?
- When you are outside of the home or away from the family, what things can you use to feel safe?
- What are tools you can use to feel emotionally safe in general (*du'ā'*, deep breathing, grounding, etc.)?

A secure base

- What is a secure base? Is it like a baby bird that can come back to its nest anytime he or she wants? Is it like a safe tree when you are playing tag, or perhaps home base out on the baseball field? Let's draw a picture of what a secure base means to you.
- How is our relationship with Allah like a secure base?
- Can you think of any examples in which the prophets or other people in the Qur'an used Allah as a secure base during a difficult time?
- Is it possible that a Muslim can ever mess up so badly that Allah can no longer be their safe base?
- Is it possible that you can ever mess up so badly that we, your parents, can no longer be your safe base?
- If you don't know how to get back to your safe base with Allah, what *dhikr* or *du'ā'* can you recite? (I seek Allah's forgiveness (*astaghfiru-llāh*), there is no power nor might except with Allah (*lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-llāh*), etc.)

- What might be a code word for when you want to talk to us about something but feel shy or scared?
- If anyone ever says something that doesn't sound right (maybe it breaks a rule or goes against something that was taught to you), what should you do? Is it better to figure it out on your own or can you talk to adults you trust like us (your safe base)?
- If something bad happens to you, should you tell your parents only, talk to Allah about it only, or do both?
- If something really difficult happens to you, how would you feel about talking to us (parents) about it? If you are in trouble, is it better to come straight away to us and risk punishment, or is it better to wait it out?

IX. Conversation starters and stories

Storytelling is a powerful way to illustrate concepts for people of all ages, but especially for children. Below you will find stories that bring to life different attributes of Allah needed to foster healthy attachment: responsiveness, protection, and a secure base.

Lesson 1

i. Allah as Our Protector

This first story from the life of the Prophet ﷺ emphasizes Allah as our Guardian and a description of the Name of Allah, *al-Muhaymin* (the Guardian, the Ever-Watchful Protector), as well as follow-up questions to promote discussion and reflection as a family.

A lesson in the Ultimate Protection of Allah

Say, “Nothing will ever befall us except what Allah has destined for us. He is our Protector.” So in Allah let the believers put their trust.⁷⁰

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ always knew the path of prophethood would be hard, but now things had gotten out of hand. His life and the life of his followers, the Muslims, were being threatened. He had made a lot of enemies in Mecca since he began teaching people to worship Allah alone. People in Mecca had worshiped idols for a long time, and they were furious when the Prophet ﷺ encouraged change.

Now, some of them were plotting to kill the Prophet ﷺ. He knew this was happening because Allah told him about these plans. The big question was, when were they going to strike? The Prophet ﷺ wasn’t going to wait around for this to happen. He needed a plan.

On the night of the attack, his cousin, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ra) volunteered to hide in the Prophet’s ﷺ bed. This way the assassins, thinking the Prophet was still fast asleep in his home, wouldn’t notice when the Prophet ﷺ and his close friend Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (ra) slipped away quietly in the night. When the assassins entered the house of the Prophet ﷺ in the morning, they were disappointed and angry to find young Ali in his place and, in their surprise, allowed him to walk out of the house.

Meanwhile, the Prophet ﷺ and Abū Bakr (ra) were long gone from Mecca and on the road to a place where Muslims were welcome and wouldn’t face persecution: Medina. Tired from their long journey on foot, the Prophet ﷺ and Abū Bakr (ra) suddenly heard the sound of hooves. Their enemies had caught up with them!

They darted into the nearest cave, but could hear the footsteps of their pursuers close behind. They came closer and closer, until the would-be assassins were standing right outside of the cave their prey was hiding in. Abū Bakr (ra) was

⁷⁰ Qur’an 9:51.

worried and said, “If any of them should look under his feet, he would see us.” The Prophet ﷺ, however, was the image of calm. “O Abū Bakr!” he exclaimed. “What do you think of two [persons] the third of whom is Allah?”⁷¹

As the assassins approached the entrance of the cave, what do you think they saw? They saw that the entrance was covered in a spider’s web! They said to one another, “Look at this web. If anyone had just entered here, the spider would not have spun a web over the entrance.”⁷² Convinced that the cave was empty, the assassins turned around and left, not knowing that they were mere feet from capturing their targets. Once the Prophet ﷺ and Abū Bakr (ra) were certain the enemy was gone, they left the cave and descended the mountain, continuing their journey safely to Medina where they were warmly welcomed and embraced.

Al-Muhaymin (The Guardian, The Watchful Protector)⁷³

Al-Muhaymin is a special and beautiful Name of Allah. It means the Guardian, the Protector. *Al-Muhaymin* is the One who safeguards us from all types of danger. He is the One who watches us, guards us, and gives us peace and security.

Picture yourself wrapped in a warm blanket as a chilly wind blows in. Similarly, Allah embraces us with His protection. Can you think of a time when you were protected? Have you ever had a moment when you realized that something bad could have happened, but didn’t? Maybe you wanted to go somewhere but couldn’t, and all of your friends who did go ended up getting sick. Maybe you remember a severe fall that only resulted in a minor scrape and not a broken bone. Or have you ever wanted something so badly and didn’t get it only to get something better?

Allah’s protection of us is constant so it’s easy to take it for granted. It’s an invisible force always present in our daily lives, protecting our bodies, our hearts,

⁷¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3653.

⁷² *Musnad al-Imām Ahmad*, no. 3241; authentication grade is fair (*ḥasan*).

⁷³ https://wahiduddin.net/words/99_pages/muhaymin_7.htm.

and our loved ones. Take a moment and think of all of the parts of your life that have been guarded for you today—your parents, your home, your health, your faith, even your favorite toys. There are too many to count, right?

Whenever you feel afraid or helpless, remember that Allah is *al-Muhaymin*, your Guardian and Protector. Remember that He is always watching over you, and that His protection surrounds you in too many ways to count.

Questions for discussion

- How do we see the protection of Allah in the story of the spider and the cave?
- Can you name five things *al-Muhaymin* has kept safe and protected for you today?
- Can you remember a time when something bad could have happened but it didn't? What happened? How did Allah protect you?
- Visualize: Does an image come up when you picture the protection of Allah? (e.g., being surrounded by beautiful light; being wrapped in a protective blanket; Allah sending an angel to protect you, etc.). Describe it and think about how it makes you feel when you picture yourself surrounded by His protection.

Lesson 2

ii. Allah is always near

The story below beautifully demonstrates that no matter how dark your surroundings or how difficult your circumstances, Allah is always near and will always respond to you when you call upon Him. This is a story of hopefulness that provides us with reassurance and support even in the darkest of times, illustrating that Allah is *al-Qarīb*, the Near.

The companion of the whale

Prophet Jonah (Yūnus as) was sent to the people of Nineveh (Naynawa) to help them become Muslim. As you can imagine, prophethood is not an easy task. Sometimes communities are accepting of Islam, whereas other times it's much more difficult to get people to believe. When Prophet Yūnus found out that his people rejected the message of Islam, he decided to leave. He got on a ship and left the town. While at sea, the waves began to toss the ship around violently. The tossing became so bad that the ship's crew decided someone would need to be thrown overboard. They cast lots three times, and every single time the results chose Yūnus. He would be the one who would have to jump overboard. Imagine how this must have felt! Imagine looking out over the side of a ship and seeing huge waves, stormy weather, and a seemingly endless sea, knowing you would soon be within it. How terrifying!

Prophet Yūnus knew this was it. This was his destiny. He had been chosen all three times; there was no escape. He leapt from the ship. Now stranded in the middle of a stormy sea, Prophet Yūnus saw something that must have made his blood run cold: the looming shape of a massive beast cutting through the waves. It was a whale! There was no way to swim faster than something created for speed and agility in the water. Within moments, Prophet Yūnus found himself swallowed by the whale. It was over! But then, somehow, miraculously, it wasn't. This whale was inspired by Allah to keep Yūnus safely within him rather than eat him. Imagine this experience—to be in a place no human being has ever witnessed and lived; to be in the darkest depths of the ocean within the belly of a huge whale. It was during this time that Yūnus called out to Allah and said: “There is no god worthy of worship except You), exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.”⁷⁴

It has been narrated that:

When it occurred to the Prophet Yūnus, upon him be peace, to call upon Allah in these words when he was in the belly of the great fish, he said,

⁷⁴ Qur'an 21:87.

“There is no god worthy of worship except You, exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.” This call went and hovered around the (mighty) Throne, and the angels said, “O Lord, this is the voice of one who is weak but known, in a faraway strange land.” Allah, may He be exalted, said, “How do you know this?” They said, “O Lord, who is he?” Allah, may He be exalted, said, “My servant Yūnus.” They said, “Your servant Yūnus, from whom there kept coming acceptable deeds and supplications which were answered!” They said, “O Lord, will You not have mercy on him for what he did during his time of ease, and save him from this trial and tribulation?” He said, “Of course.” So, He commanded the great fish, and it cast him forth on the naked shore.⁷⁵

And so, even beneath layer upon layer of darkness, Allah responded to Prophet Yūnus’s prayer and freed him from the depths, returning him to safety.

Al-Qarīb (The Near)

The name of Allah, *al-Qarīb*, means the Near One. Allah is close to us by His knowledge and ability to respond to us, not just when we say words out loud, but when the thoughts and feelings are hidden inside us as well:

Indeed, it is We who created humankind and fully know what their souls whisper to them, and We are closer to them than their jugular vein.⁷⁶

There are many lessons that can be derived from the story of Yūnus, but we’ll share just a couple:

1. Allah is always with you through His knowledge. Unlike anyone else—even your loved ones—He knows when you are sad, need Him, or want to be closer to Him. The Heavens might feel far away, but Allah is not.
2. Any time you make a mistake you can turn back to Allah through the power of *du‘ā’*. Allah is not like a friend or family member, where when you mess up the relationship could be over or beyond repair. Allah always wants you to come back to Him.

⁷⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salām, 2000), 37:142.

⁷⁶ Qur’an 50:16.

Exercise

Imagine what a tiny speck you must look like on Earth from space. Or go out even further—what about all the way from the Heavens?! Imagine zooming into the Earth until you start to see continents more clearly, and then countries, and then cities, and then homes. Imagine looking at the vast ocean, past the crest of the waves, deep into the water and all the way to the bottom where you can see the fish. Zoom in further with your imagination... Can you imagine Prophet Yūnus (as) in the bottom of the ocean in the belly of the whale? Despite all that distance Allah heard him in the heavens, and despite his mistake Allah forgave him.

Whenever you feel all alone, or lonely, or don't have someone to talk to—know Allah is there. Or when it feels like everyone has turned their back on you, know that Allah is with you by His knowledge and is ready to hear your *du‘ā*. You can turn to Allah for help, comfort, and safety.

Write down some of these *āyāt* in a safe place to remind you of the special connection you have with Allah:

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me – indeed I am near (*qarīb*).⁷⁷

Indeed, He is Hearing and near.⁷⁸

Indeed, my Lord is near and responsive.⁷⁹

X. Suggested books and resources

⁷⁷ Qur'an 2:186.

⁷⁸ Qur'an 34:50.

⁷⁹ Qur'an 11:61.

*Please note all these books have been read, reviewed, and vetted according to Islamic guidelines by Shifa Saltagi Safadi (@muslimmommyblog www.muslimmommyblog.com)

Ages 0-3 (Board Books):

1. [Allah Knows All About Me](#) by Yasmin Mussa
2. [The ABCs of Allah Loves Me](#) by Learning Roots

Ages 4-8 (Picture Books):

1. [How Much Does Allah Love Me](#) by Heba Subeh-Hyder
2. [Basirah the Basketballer Says InshaAllah](#) by Hafsa Dabiri
3. [In My Mosque](#) by Mindy Yuksel and Hatem Aly
4. [Yan's Hajj](#) by Fawzia Gilani
5. [Zak and His Good Intentions](#) by J. Samia Mair

Ages 9-12 (Chapter Books):

1. [Turning Back to Allah](#) by Aliya Vaughn
2. [Salaam Mindfulness Journal](#)

Ages 12-15 (Middle School Books):

1. [Sophia's Journal](#) by Najiyah Maxfield
2. [Allah Loves](#) by Omar Suleiman

Ages 16 and up (Young Adult/Teen Books):

1. [A Place of Refuge](#)
2. [She Wore Red Trainers](#)

To help children build a positive relationship with the Qur'an, which is key in strengthening their connection to Allah, consider making use of Learning Root's [Kitab](#). It is an excellent resource which allows for interactive games to encourage a positive experience as children learn to read, understand, and memorize the Qur'an.

For stories to listen to with your child that are filled with wonderful lessons and values to help them to build a stronger connection to Allah, take a look at [Once Upon a Crescent](#), a podcast geared toward Muslim children.