

An-Nisa Society

An-Nisa Society is an organisation managed by women working for the welfare of Muslim families. Since 1985 the group has been at the forefront of dynamic and groundbreaking projects and initiatives from a faith-based perspective. These include the development of Islamic counselling, supplementary Muslim education, Islamophobia and religious discrimination, sexual health, gender, marital issues, parenting, and fatherhood.

The Society's other main streams of work are around raising awareness of the Muslim community and Muslim issues, supporting other Muslim groups and influencing policy development. Our work helps to inform decision makers and service providers in better understanding the Muslim community so that they can develop approaches that are faith sensitive.

You can contact the An-Nisa Society, which was co-founded in 1985 by the author of this report, Humera Khan, via email at an-nisa@btconnect.com

Fathers Direct

Fathers Direct is the national information centre on fatherhood. We help Government, employers, services for families and children, and families themselves to adapt to changing social roles of men and women. We help institutions to base their work on the evidence from research on the impact of fathers on child welfare.

Our vision is a society that:

- gives all children a strong and positive relationship with their fathers
- supports co-operative parenting
- provides greater support for mothers as carers and earners
- supports the role of men in caring for children.

You can contact Fathers Direct for further copies on 0845 634 1328 or via our website, www.fathersdirect.com

Working With Muslim Fathers: A Guide for Practitioners

produced by
An-Nisa Society and Fathers Direct

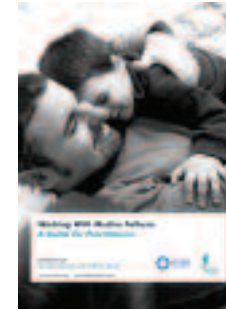
www.an-nisa.org www.fathersdirect.com



AN-NISA
SOCIETY



fathers
direct



Author: Humera Khan
Editor: Jeremy Davies
Series Editor: Jack O'Sullivan
Design: boilerhouse.co.uk
For further copies: 0845 634 1328
 © 2006 An-Nisa / Fathers Direct

For further information and contact details for both organisations, see inside back pages.

Acknowledgments from Humera Khan: Shaikha Halima Krausen, Yayha Birt, Taniya Hussain, Abdul Ghafoor, Surestart Lancs, Wahid Hussain, Barnardos Huddersfield, Kasim Aswat Leeds, Halima Chergui and Khalid Oumar at Muslim Welfare House, Qnews, Rakin Fetunga, Fahim Mazhary. In particular thanks to Fathers Direct who facilitated this work by allowing it to take its own shape and use its own language - very much appreciated. A special thanks to Kathy Jones, Jack O'Sullivan and Duncan Fisher. And all those people who helped reading the endless drafts and contributed their advice and support.

Working with Muslim fathers

How to use this guide

Before reading this guide it is important to understand some underlying tenets on which its contents are based:

- Muslims see their 'faith' as encompassing all aspects of their lives.
- The Muslim understanding of fatherhood is shaped by the Quran, the Sunnah and how these have been culturally interpreted over the centuries.
- When quoting from the Quran, the reference will be given in brackets thus: (Reference). The first reference is to the chapter, and the second to the specific verse.
- For Muslims the Quran is seen as a divine source book from which, amongst other things, general ethics and rules are obtained.
- The Sunnah, or practice, action and wisdom of Prophet Muhammed(s) is seen as complementary to the Quran, and the source through which Muslims obtain practical guidance.
- The guide will draw on both the Quran and the Sunnah to look at the issue of Muslim parenting and fatherhood.
- The guide provides a generic, faith based perspective on Muslim parenting and fatherhood, that will resonate with all Muslim culture as Muslims share the same terms of reference.
- The guide also recognises that Muslim cultural practices do vary from region to region, and can place varying emphasis on different aspects of the subject.
- The guide is primarily targeted at British Muslims, for whom English is increasingly becoming the main language of communication and whose families are trying to integrate their faith within the context of their lives in this country.
- When Muslims refer to the Prophet(s) as a mark of respect they say, "Sallallahu'alayahi wassalam." This has been abbreviated to (s) throughout this guide.

Working With Muslim Fathers: A guide for practitioners

produced by
An-Nisa Society and Fathers Direct

www.an-nisa.org
www.fathersdirect.com



What makes Muslim dads special?	What issues face today's Muslim fathers?	What makes a good Muslim father?	Learning from the Prophet (s)	How does it feel to be a Muslim dad?	Dads and lads: Working with the Pakistani community	Peace of mind: Working with Somali dads	Dear Agony Uncle...	Where to get more information
06	08	12	16	20	24	28	30	32

Why you need this guide

This guide offers an introduction to Muslim parenting, with a particular focus on fatherhood. It focuses on the challenges and strengths of Muslim fatherhood in the UK, placing these in the context of an Islamic faith-based perspective. It offers examples of pioneering work already happening in agencies working with families, and tips for agencies planning to develop work with fathers in Muslim communities. This guide will help agencies working with Muslim communities to develop father-friendly services in line with the criteria in the Fatherhood Quality Mark.

Literature on the role and importance of motherhood from an Islamic perspective is relatively easy to find, but there has been very little emphasis on research about the role of the father. We hope this guide will contribute to debate and help you encourage Muslim fathers and future fathers to be part of the parenting story, rather than existing somewhere outside it.

There is a general assumption that Muslim fathers are a 'hard to reach' group. What is already clear from some of the work being undertaken is that engaging them may not be as difficult as it first appears - and that it is the techniques used to reach Muslim fathers that need to be reassessed.

Many Muslim fathers may be willing to reconsider their parenting skills, what they can offer to their children, and related issues, but our attitudes, and those of wider society, can contribute towards them not doing so.

Widely held stereotypes about Muslim men can be extremely obstructive. It is almost impossible to find 'good news' stories about Muslim men, and even harder to find them about Muslim fathers - who are in the main reported or researched in mainstream society only in the context of issues like domestic violence, honour killings and forced marriages. More recently they have been viewed as the perpetrators of terror, wars and suicide bombings. Images of the compassionate and endearing Muslim father - or even of Muslim fathers who love their children - are hard to find.

Islam is also viewed as being chauvinistic and patriarchal. While there may be men who behave chauvinistically, and families that are patriarchal, such practices are cultural rather than being an Islamic 'norm'. Family structures vary within Muslim cultures, and in many cases are being continuously renegotiated. In Britain many Muslim families are readjusting to new forms of extended family life, for example, as well as living in increasingly nuclear families; many families are becoming increasingly dependent on two incomes, and gender relations are changing to accommodate this.

The reality is that fathers who behave irresponsibly towards their families make up only a small percentage of the population; the vast majority are conscientious and honourable men, who care deeply about their children. The key task of anyone wishing to engage with Muslim fathers is to build a partnership with them based on a shared commitment to the wellbeing of their children and families.

It could also be argued that for many families, traditional gender roles are not necessarily a bad thing, as long as family relationships are built on justice and shared responsibility. Muslim chauvinism may attract unfair attention, but it is important to remember that Muslim men as a group are no more or less diverse than men in any other culture or religion.

If you are working with Muslim fathers, you must be aware that bringing negative assumptions to the relationship can prevent you from developing a constructive and proactive engagement. If men feel they are going to be attacked and chastised they are not likely to consider for a moment the possibility that they might benefit from improving their parenting skills. This guide aims to show that if they are approached without prejudice then the potential of dynamic and creative work is phenomenal.

The Fatherhood Quality Mark



The Fatherhood Quality Mark (FQM) is a DfES-funded award for agencies demonstrating sustainable good practice in supporting fathers' relationships with their children.

It is designed to translate our growing knowledge about the important roles fathers play in children's lives into practical policies and services.

It is defined in relation to children's welfare, and takes fully into account issues of cultural diversity - services only attract the FQM if they take fully into account the impact of fathers on children's lives, and are firmly based on evidence about local needs. The FQM requires agencies to develop strategies to meet realistic, achievable goals in relation to supporting fathers' relationships with their children.

The importance of supporting fathers is now firmly established in Government policy, and well grounded in research on child outcomes. Policies such as the National Service Framework for Children and the Children's Centre Guidance, require all children's services to engage with both fathers and mothers of the children, and to consult with both parents over the design of services.

The Minister for Children wants good practice in engaging with fathers to be mainstreamed throughout publicly funded programmes. In a speech in October 2005, the minister stated: "To make further progress, we need to think distinctively about fathers. Thinking generically about 'parents' is not enough. The benefits to children - girls and boys - of directly experiencing day to day care from men as well as women is potentially so important to them in many ways."

Agencies which receive the FQM will have shown they have achieved high quality services which support positive father-child relationships; fulfilled key Government policy objectives about engaging with fathers, and met forthcoming statutory obligations about equal treatment of men and women in public service provision.

What form does the FQM take?

The FQM defines father-friendliness under 8 Principles, which assess an agency's Values Base (priorities and objectives); Evidence Base (about local fathers' needs); Workers and Volunteers (their ability to engage with and support local dads); Settings (are they welcoming for dads?); Recruiting Fathers (how to reach out to them and introduce them to your services); Services (which effectively support father-child relationships); Partnerships (with other agencies); Dissemination and Sustainability. Fulfilling the eight Principles involves meeting detailed criteria based on evidence emerging from research.

Working Towards the FQM

Fathers Direct offers hands-on support to agencies wanting to start working towards the FQM. To discuss how this can work for your agency, please email David Bartlett at d.bartlett@fathersdirect.com, or phone him on 01422 847825.



What makes Muslim dads special?

British fathers generally are taking an ever-growing interest in active parenting, so where do Muslim dads fit in?

Almost a quarter (23%) of British fathers spend more than 28 hours with their children per week, compared to 16% in Germany, 10% in France and 4% in both Greece and Denmark⁽¹⁾.

UK fathers do a third of parental childcare - an average of two hours a day⁽²⁾; they also earn, on average, two-thirds of family incomes⁽³⁾. They are the main carers for children while mothers are working, and in 36% of dual earner households it is the father, more than any other individual, who cares for children⁽⁴⁾.

Whilst there are big variations in what dads do in families - largely influenced by their own and their partners' employment patterns⁽⁵⁾ - most men say they enjoy having close relationships with their children. Indeed fathers from a diversity of social and ethnic backgrounds usually say that fathering is the most important part of their lives⁽⁶⁾.

In a 2005 study by the Equal Opportunities Commission, three quarters (77%) of mothers surveyed felt that their partner was as confident as they are at caring. More than three fifths (62%) of new mothers and 58% of new fathers reject the idea that a dad's main role is that of breadwinner⁽⁷⁾.

What research does not yet tell us is if and how the experiences of Muslim parents vary from those of the rest of the UK's parents. There is, though, some basic information that may help you get a better idea of the particular issues they face:

British Muslims are...

- The largest religious group after Christians, with a population of 1.6 million or 2.8% of the overall population.
- The only religious group where men outnumber women, the male population being 52% and the female population being 48%
- More likely to get married between 16 and 24 years than any other religious group; 22% of young Muslim adults were married in 2001.
- More likely to be self employed than the rest of the population. Muslim men are less likely to be working in managerial or professional occupations and more likely to be working in low-skilled jobs.
- Likely to work unsocial hours. In 2003-4 40% of Muslim men were working in the distribution, hotel and restaurant industries. They are six times more likely to be working as taxi drivers.
- More likely to have no qualifications than any other religious group - in 2003-4 31% of Muslims of working age had no qualification
- More likely to be unemployed. In 2003-4 Muslims male unemployment was at 14% - the highest rate of any other religious group. Muslims aged between 16-24 years were twice as likely to be unemployed at 22%.

British Muslims have...

- The youngest age profile out of all the religious groups, with 34% being under 16 years of age.
- The highest rates of reported ill health
- The largest families of any other religious group, with an average of 3.8 children.

British Muslims live...

- 38% of Muslims live in London, making up 8% of the city's population.
- 14% of Muslims live in the West Midlands
- 13% of Muslims live in the North East.
- 12% of Muslims live in Yorkshire and Humberside.
- 34% of Muslim households contain more than 5 people.
- 24% Muslim households live in social rented accommodation.
- 32% of Muslim households live in overcrowded accommodation.

Sources on fatherhood:

1: Smith, Alison J (2004), Who Cares? Fathers and the time they spend looking after children. University of Oxford Sociology Working Paper.

2: Equal Opportunities Commission, 2004, Fathers: balancing work and home.

3-7: Equal Opportunities Commission, various publications.

Sources on British Muslims: Census 2001; 2003-4

What issues face today's Muslim fathers?

When attempting to improve your engagement with fathers it is vital to understand the changes occurring within their family lives.

Changing parenting roles

Between the lifetime of the Prophet(s) and now, there have of course been many changes in how men and women share responsibility for family and social life – this shift usually depends on changing cultural and economic situations.

The principle is that men and women should share their responsibility in a just and meaningful way. Today, in an age when there are much better chances for children to survive and physical labour is often taken over by machines, the details of men's and women's roles must be renegotiated, including their roles as fathers and mothers.

While there are many advantages to modern lifestyles, there may also be downsides such as the break up of traditional family structures, increase in male unemployment and the increased pressure on women to work outside the home, whether or not they want to, resulting in a major shift in their traditional role as homemakers.

Muslim families today, like others in mainstream society, are also more likely to be living within a nuclear family set-up, without the support of other family members or without a wider community context. Muslim parents have responded to this shift in the best way they can, but many find reconciling new family lifestyles and trying to maintain religious practice difficult to do. National statistics highlight the difficulties faced by Muslim families and point to an alarming rise of divorce, single parent families headed by women, step families and non resident fathers.



Single parent families

Whilst marriage and the role of both birth parents is seen as an important pre-requisite for the nurturing of children, Islam also recognises that not all children will be brought up within this framework. The absence of one, and sometimes both, of the birth parents is not uncommon within most Muslim cultures and communities. There may be many reasons for this such as bereavement, divorce, long absences due to work commitments or social displacement due to war and conflict.

Being a single parent will inevitably increase the burden and emotional responsibility of parenting, but it does not by definition mean that children will be brought up badly. In fact, Prophet Muhammed(s) himself lost his father before he was born, and then his mother by the time he was six years old. He was eventually brought up by his grandfather and then his uncle whose efforts were embedded both in the sense of loyalty shared by other members of the extended family and by a beneficial attitude towards children in society as a whole.

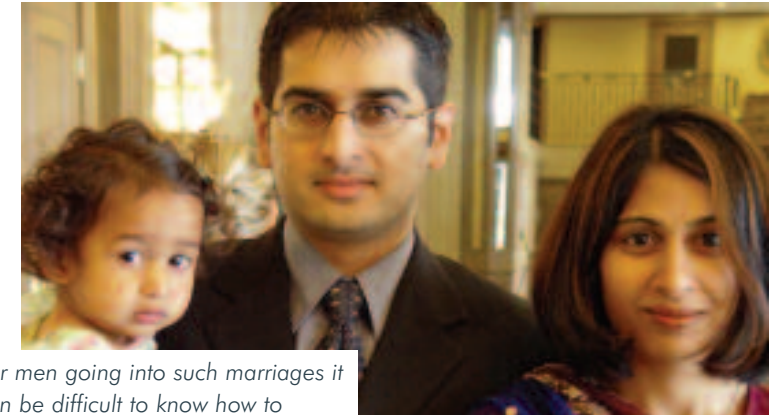
This unconventional upbringing did not make him dysfunctional. In fact, it could be said that it made him acutely aware of the needs of those who fell outside the conventions of what is considered to be a culturally 'normal' or 'ideal' family upbringing.

We should also remember that, even when children live only or mainly with their mothers, their fathers may be very supportive of the mother and the children. In the UK, only about 10% of children whose parents have separated have no contact with their fathers at all. About half have very substantial contact. In addition, contact levels between non resident fathers and their children are rising - as are the numbers of separated families where care is shared or the children live mainly or solely with their father. Research shows clearly that positive involvement from non-resident parents is very beneficial for children.

Step-families

Considering the dramatic increase in divorces within the Muslim community, there is likely to be an equally dramatic rise in stepfamilies. Although discouraged in traditional society, divorce does not involve social stigma in Islam and re-marriage is highly encouraged.

But stepfamilies where there are children from a previous marriage require special consideration. There is every chance that men and women going into new marriages with step children are fully conscious of the rights and responsibilities of this new situation. But equally there is a tendency to get married first and deal with things later.



For men going into such marriages it can be difficult to know how to develop a relationship with the children of their new wife, especially while the birth father is still around. An added dimension for some Muslim fathers (and stepfathers) is the possibility of their ex-wife re-marrying and the new husband bringing up their children.

These circumstances tend to be very emotionally charged. Although the marriage has broken down, feelings for children remain the same and being separated from them is very painful. Equally, learning how to be a successful stepdad requires courage and understanding. Issues of discipline in particular, need to be handled sensitively. If the stepfather tries to discipline the children too early, or without warmth and love, this can poison their relationship. Professional help can be useful here.

The success of stepfamilies will depend on the ability of adults to rise above their own personal grievances or feelings for the benefit of the children and to negotiate the best possible solution for all involved. This task is highly encouraged Islamically, as in the example of the Prophet(s): when he lost his first wife Khadija, Sauda (whom he later married) played a major role in looking after his growing daughters.

Absent fathers

The issue of absent fathers in the rearing of children is a crucial and often unrecognised factor in the increasing breakdown of Muslim families. When families have separated, some Muslim children will grow up without any input from their father – although it is important not to assume this is always the case (see previous section).

Deprivation of a father's warmth, support and wisdom creates sorrow in all children, and can damage their self-esteem. Such deprivation is not only caused when a father lives elsewhere and contact is minimal. A child can be deprived of their at-home father (or mother) when the parent has a personality that does not allow for tender display; or when he or she is mainly hostile or critical or depressed.

Many Muslim men are absent from fathering due to the nature of their employment. The 2001 Census has highlighted the over-representation of Muslim men in night-time industries like the restaurant/take-away trade and in mini-cabbing (see page 7), which means they are often absent in the evenings and asleep in the mornings before their children go to school. These patterns need to be taken carefully into account in planning the timing of services for families.

Some fathers in this situation literally have only a half day with their family once a week and this could be taken up with a trip to the supermarket. In such circumstances the situation becomes fraught both for the father who is not able to spend time with his children, as well as for the children, who miss out on their relationship with the father. In some situations other male family members can go some way to fill the vacuum but in the vast majority of cases a responsible alternative is not available.

A 'paternal vacuum', which is contrary to Islamic principle, has also in part evolved out of Muslim cultural practices that inhibit men from involvement in fathering especially in the early years.

Traditionally, men have been considered out of place in the nursery and their role is usually seen as a disciplinary figure whose function is to keep the children in check. The role of father is expected to re-emerge once the children are older. However, in practice, when 'distance' is created in childhood, this becomes difficult to shake off and the adolescent father-child relationship may be troubled, ineffectual and unrewarding for both.

Many of these cultural habits that are actually damaging to relationships are, in most cases, not really what Muslim fathers want. But the force of cultural patterns prevents both men and women from stepping outside this norm. This can have a lasting impact on both boys and girls and increase a deep feeling of emotional vulnerability and a sense of being ill equipped in adult life to offer anything different to their own children.

On a more positive note, many British Muslim men who have become more confident about expressing their feelings, anxieties and concerns are beginning to articulate their experiences and actively redress this deficiency. They are re-evaluating their own fathering experience and choosing to be more actively involved with their own children. The realisation that Islam supports them in their efforts may reduce conflicts that may arise from challenging deep-rooted cultural ideas.



“For Muslim families the responsibility of supporting their adolescent child has become for most parents a major crisis.”

Muslim male displacement

Changing social structures and economic factors are a major contributor to the increase in Muslim male displacement or feeling of not being part of family and social life.

Traditionally Muslim economies were either agricultural or independent businesses. Most Muslim countries still offer examples of an economic system where the market place is populated with small businesses that have spanned generations, and where fathers and sons inherit the secrets of their trade. New global economies have moved men into alien working environments, and self esteem and social relationships have suffered as a result.

In Britain the 2001 Census and other national research confirms that Muslim men suffer a higher than average level of unemployment – in some areas reaching more than 50% of the Muslim male population. Many others are employed in low paid work. The implication of this is dire. Many Muslim men are much less able to keep their families out of poverty, and the resulting financial burdens increase family breakdown. It also restricts the ability for young Muslim men to get married and take the responsibility of family life in the first place.

For Muslim men who consider financial responsibility for their families to be a religious duty, the prospect of not being able to be the 'provider' adds phenomenally to a sense of loss of manhood as they are not able to fulfil this Quranic requirement. This in some cases can lead to severe depression, which can cause them to withdraw emotionally from their children – as can a sense of shame about the nature or status of their employment. This is part of a more general tendency for fathers' roles as direct caregivers for children to be undervalued. It is crucial for service providers to understand the impact of this on fathers' roles, and to emphasise how important fathers are to their children.

Adolescence

Adolescence, the period in which children grow out of childhood and approach adulthood, is an emotional roller coaster within just about all cultures and religions. Even inside the closest of families, children can become self-conscious and embarrassed to discuss the physical and emotional changes that they are going through.

For Muslim families the responsibility of supporting their adolescent child has become for most parents a major crisis. The reason for this is that a significant number of parents come from traditions where cultural shyness when discussing issues related to sex and sexual development is very high. In some traditions it is considered a completely taboo subject.

Parents unused to the responsibility of imparting such knowledge, awareness and information find that they do not have the skills required to talk to their children on such matters. On top of that, Muslim parents are usually ill equipped with the Islamic or health perspective on sex education, as the public debate is limited and resources to support this discussion thin on the ground.

While Muslim girls still have their mothers to turn to, many Muslim boys are experiencing a phenomenal void in this natural rite of passage. Puberty becomes a lonely experience as Muslim boys growing into young men find that they are not able to express their evolving feelings with someone who they feel can empathise with them.

Mothers can contribute to this to some extent, it is the father, or other male figure, who holds a special place for growing young men when discussing things that they may consider 'only another man' can understand. Fathers also have an important role in providing positive messages to their daughters about relationships and sexuality.

“Cultural shyness when discussing issues related to sex is very high”



What are the characteristics of a good Muslim father?

Lack of clarity about their role is a problem that fathers from all backgrounds can struggle with; when working with Muslims it can be helpful to focus on the scriptures

In many Muslim cultures pregnant women are encouraged to keep happy and nurture themselves. Today, science has proved that the unborn child is sensitised to the outside environment. Therefore, both loving and conflicting episodes will have an effect on the child even while in the womb.

In the same way, from the moment a child is born it is aware of what is around him/her. While they may appear to be small and weak they are actually fully aware of what is around them and, like sponges, soak in everything they experience and feel. Though the Quran places special significance on the two-year weaning period of the child, usually seen as the period of time the mother may be breast feeding, it is also a time when both parents bond and build patterns for future relationships.

Recent US research showed that while mothers may play a significant role during this period, fathers that are equally engaged during early years contribute significantly to the stability and well being of the child which manifests itself more in later years.

Attitudes to children

Islam gives special recognition to the role mothers play in carrying the unborn child, childbirth and weaning. Having given due credit to this unique gift, it does not mean that the father's role is then by definition relegated to an inferior position.

The role of both father and mother has been explained in detail in earlier revealed scriptures. The Quran and the example of the Prophet(s) build on that and give unprecedented significance to the importance of 'parenting'.

'And we have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) goal.'" (31:14)

Though attitudes towards children were generally positive in pre-Islamic Arabia there were extreme cultural practices such as the killing of baby girls when they were considered to be a social burden. The Quran challenged this attitude and makes a clear prohibition.

'Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.' (17:31).

This not only refers to physical killing but to any kind of abuse or neglect. The Prophet Muhammad(s) promised God's reward to parents who invest their efforts in a good upbringing and education for their children, and many examples of his own behaviour with children have been transmitted.

While birth parents obviously play an essential role in parenting, Islam does not limit the nurturing role of the young solely to them. Children - in the physical sense or in the symbolic sense of being the future of the community - are to be considered a gift from God and a trust. Within this framework the extended family, close family friends and responsible community members also play an important role in providing the growing child with love, a sense of social context and connection to the world around them.

Marital relationships

The marital relationship is regarded as holding the key to good parenting. Islam emphasises the need for loving and respectful relationships with shared interests and goals.

'And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may live in peace and tranquillity with them and he has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.' (Quran 30:21)

The Quran uses language such as 'love', 'respect', 'mercy' and 'compassion' to describe the basic qualities of a good marriage. Other important qualities are also emphasised, such as secure and settled family life, harmonious community life and responsibility to the wider society.

Making a 'wish list' for a desirable marital relationship may be easy, but these qualities are not necessarily automatic. If the foundations of a balanced character are not nurtured in childhood then developing them later in life may be more challenging. Therefore, once in a marriage the husband and wife can often find that the desire for children and the skills necessary to bring them up can be two very different things. Like in all things in Islam, it is the effort to re-dress our limitations that is important.

A nurturing home life

Home life and relationships with close relatives play an important subliminal nurturing function to the growing child. Both the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad(s) repeatedly remind Muslims to speak kindly to each other, and every kind action is considered sadaqah (charity)...

'even the morsel of food a man puts into his wife's mouth'. (Hadith)

The Prophet's affection for his wives even shows when he talks about them in public, like when he said,

"Take two thirds of your religion from the little reddish one," meaning Aisha. (Hadith)

If parents have a harmonious relationship and show their affection for each other, children will immediately feel calm and secure. Where there are tensions, distress, emotional coldness and hostile behaviour the children will be affected and become restless and troublesome. Great effort should be made not to continue family conflicts in front of the children, as continued aggressive behaviour of parents can have long term emotional effects on the children.

Reducing and resolving conflicts quickly is the most obvious way to keep a harmonious atmosphere in the home. The Prophet(s) strongly advised not to continue disagreements and where differences could not be worked out immediately, that no more than 'three days' should pass with an unresolved conflict.

Establishing a calm and tranquil environment will contribute extensively to the overall well being of family life. For Muslims, establishing the five daily prayers is an ideal opportunity to individually and collectively connect to God and create a spiritual sanctuary in the home. The tranquillity of the prayer should not be limited to the minutes spent in prayer but also continue to benefit the whole family in other aspects of family life. Prayer is an opportunity to reflect, strengthen and repair.

Services have an important role to play in encouraging both fathers and mothers to treat each other respectfully and support each other as parents.

The importance of learning

Imam Al-Ghazali, a famous 10th century scholar quoting Prophet Muhammad(s) said: "For the first seven years, your children are your treasure, for the next seven years they are your trainees, and after that they are your friends or your enemies," depending on the trust and loving care invested in them.

The human baby is said to have an enormous intellectual capacity that can be limited but also stimulated by the environment it is born into. If the child is encouraged to develop their cognitive skills (process of getting knowledge, including perception, intuition and reasoning) early on their capacity will grow.

First impressions are absorbed by experiences such as physical nearness that influences their confidence later in life. At some stage, children learn by imitating their fathers and mothers. With the development of language and verbal communication, more conceptual and rational processes also begin to take place.

So, formal teaching does not begin with a pen, paper and exercise book – children learn from the second they are born. What children learn in the classroom complements what they learn from their every day experiences and observances.

"If parents have a harmonious relationship and show their affection for each other, children will immediately feel calm and secure."

An Islamic perspective on parenting

The Quran and the Sunnah do not give us a set template of what parenting should be but give us a broad guideline for what is considered to be the higher human potential. The Quran therefore provides us with general principles and for specific examples we look at the example of Prophet Muhammed(s).

In the Quran, we get a glimpse of God's potential that is described to us through His Ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names. These include names such as the Al-Rahman - Beneficent, Al-Muqsit - the Just, Al-Wakil - the Trustee, Al-Karim - the Generous, Al-Ghafur – the All-Forgiving, Al-Hakim - the Wise, Al-Alim - the All-Knowing, and so on. Though on a limited scale, we are encouraged as human beings to aspire to these divine attributes as we are told in a famous Prophetic saying:

"The more you know yourself, the more you know your Lord". (Hadith Qudsi)

The nurturing of children in the Quran is seen as an 'Amana' or sacred trust and we are told not to:

'misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you'. (8:27-8)

Children are not viewed as our property but both as a gift and a challenge. The primary function of parents is to unlock the hidden God-given potential of each child, to nurture loving relationships and bring up children to be responsible adults.

Islam views all children as being created in a natural divine condition, pure and innocent. It is the cultural and social conditions of the child that shapes their identity and sense of self:

"All children are born in a state of 'fitra' (nature). It is their parents who then make them a Muslim, a Jew, a Christian or a Magian." (Hadith)



Learning from the Prophet



'The best of you is the one who is best to his family and among you I am the best to my family.'

(From the Prophet's Farewell Sermon)

The character and practice of the Prophet(s) himself gives us a clear insight into the qualities of fatherhood and parenting.

The Prophet(s) had four daughters and no surviving sons. We know that his relationship with his daughters was very close and loving especially with his daughter Fatima. In reference to something that disturbed Fatima he is famously quoted as saying:

'My daughter is my flesh and blood. Anything that worries her will be a source of anxiety to me and any word which causes her pain will surely cause me agony.' (Bukhari)

Visual examples of how he was with children can be seen in the relationship he had with his grandchildren, whom he would allow the freedom to play around him even when he was praying. Incidents such as his remaining in prostration during prayer in order to allow his grandchildren to play on his back are well known.

Not only was he 'a hands on parent' and loved children generally, he actively challenged the harsh attitudes on parenting that existed in that society. On many occasions he emphasised the importance of caressing and kissing children. In one incident when he was seen to kiss his grandsons he was told by one of his companions 'I have ten children, and I have never kissed any of them.' At that the Prophet(s) looked at him and said:

'He who is not kind to others will not receive kindness.' (Muslim)

He also stood up against the deep-rooted chauvinism against female children and said:

'If anyone has a female child and does not bury her alive, or slight her, or prefer his (male) children to her, God will bring him to paradise.' (Abu Dawud)

Prophet Mohammed's (s) role in his public life was not diminished by his actions in his private life with his wives and children. His wife Aisha notably said when asked what the Prophet does in his home:

'He used to be in the service of his home people.' (Muslim)

So, from both the Quran and the Sunnah we see a complementary relationship between general principles and specific practices. As a man the Prophet(s) was no less involved with the upbringing of his children. As a father of four daughters he excelled even more in his ability to empathise and build a strong and intimate relationship with them. He is the best of examples. Some examples of the character and wisdom of the Prophet(s) are outlined here.

The Three Ts

'Consider the human self and how it is formed with what it is meant to be. And how it is imbued with moral failings as well as consciousness of God. He shall indeed attain to a happy state who causes the self to grow in purity. And truly lost is he who buries it (in darkness).' (91:7-10)

Broadly speaking The Three T's are the basis of Islamic parenting:

- **Taqwa:** which is to be conscious of and cultivate a strong spiritual connection to God
- **Tarbiyyah:** which is to nourish and cultivate good character and live by ethical principles
- **Taalim:** which is spiritual teaching, inspiration or instruction in order to nurture God given gifts/potential in order to be an asset to society.

While men and women play a specific biological function in producing children, they equally share the ability to be good parents. Fathers, no less than mothers, are able to respond to a child's emotional and physical needs. The best possible start parents could give their children is by showing, by example, a loving and responsible attitude towards parenting.

Words of Wisdom

Good Character

'Goodness of character is God's greatest creation.' (Tabarani)

'I was sent only to perfect the noble qualities of character.' (Muwatta)

'Verily, God has chosen this religion for Himself. Thus nothing is appropriate for your religion except generosity and good character. Ornament, therefore, your religion with them.' (Tabarani)

'A parent can give a child no greater gift than beautiful manners.' (Al-Hakim)

Mercy

'We have not sent you, but as a mercy for all creatures.' (21:107)

'Had you been hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you.' (3:159)

Gentleness, Kindness, Leniency and Love

'God is kind and He loves kindness in all affairs.' (Muslim)

'Gentleness never accompanies anything without enhancing it, nor is it removed from anything without demeaning it.' (Al-Bayhaqi)

'He who is deprived of leniency is deprived of goodness.' (Muslim)

'Hold to forgiveness, and join kindness, and turn aside from the ignorant ones.' (7:199)

'The most complete in faith are those best in character and kindest to their families.' (At-Tirmidhi)

Specific paternal duties

The role of the Muslim father does not stop at the conception of a child – it continues for life. In Islamic tradition, apart from the general approach to parenting and child rearing, fathers are considered to be responsible for some specific duties. Women can perform these functions in the absence of the father or an alternative male.

Adhan at birth

When a baby is born the adhan or call to prayer is recited into their right ear and the iqama into their left ear. Welcoming the new born baby into the Muslim community with a blessing is a highly recommended tradition

Khitan - Circumcision

Arrange for the circumcision of the male child. There are various traditions that dictate when this should be done - usually understood as being by the seventh day. This is an Abrahamic tradition continued in Islam. This is a highly recommended tradition.

Aqiqah

Shaving the baby's hair and giving the weight of the hair in gold as charity to the poor. This is a non-obligatory tradition.

Being an example

Very young children imitate their parents. Although the mother's role in this is very important, children of both sexes take strong note of both their parents. Therefore the example of both parents must not be underestimated as it will inform the adult that they become.

Training for work with Muslim dads

Fathers Direct's Working with Difference: engaging fathers in multi-cultural communities course is designed to help participants:

- develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to work effectively with fathers from 'different' communities
- explore and examine our own unique cultural heritage/s and the resources we have to support fathers
- explore the challenges of working with prejudice
- think about how to create organizations which respond flexibly to the needs of fathers from a range of cultures
- plan needs-led approaches to engaging with and supporting different fathers
- consider how to develop support networks for ourselves as workers.

The course explores:

- what all children need from their fathers
- how fathers and mothers have different – and similar - strengths and roles
- the personal and cultural issues which shape our perceptions of men/fathers
- effective recruitment strategies for different communities of fathers
- case material from successful projects.

It is aimed at all staff and volunteers in teams or settings that work, or plan to work directly with fathers from communities different from their own - for example Sure Starts, Home Starts, maternity services, young offenders institutes.

For more details visit www.fathersdirect.com or telephone 0845 634 1328



How does it feel to be a Muslim dad?

Listening to the experiences of the men your service works with - and wants to work with - can reveal a lot about the difficulties they face, and the strengths they possess. It is a crucial part of developing and maintaining inclusive, father-friendly services.

Here two Muslim fathers share their stories.

Jamal: 'Walking through a minefield'

My name is Jamal. I am a 35 year old religious education school teacher and in my spare time I am a nasheed artist. I have been married for 14 years and have two children.

Being a Muslim dad has changed me in so many ways. I matured straight away because, when you become a father, you are suddenly responsible for another human life. It also made me look at myself reflectively to see what kind of role model I was and how I could improve myself.

In Islam the role of the family is paramount and the role of the father is very important. You have to be the head of the house; you have to look after your wife and children and make sure that they are brought up as good Muslim children. But being head of the house does not mean that you are a dictator - it means that you become a fine role model for the family, which is not always easy and of course many mistakes are made down the road.

My role as a Muslim father has also made me crave for knowledge. I needed to make sure that I was doing it right, and of course we have the prophet Muhammad to look at for an example. I also had my Sheikh to ask for guidance on the matter.

I have found myself reflecting on my own upbringing. My father was very good at instilling confidence in his children, I have taken that and have tried my best to make my children confident human beings. My father also made many mistakes and I have meditated on these many times, and have made an effort not to fall into the same traps.

The real challenges of Muslim fatherhood have to be in bringing up children in the tradition of Islam in the west.

There are so many distractions for young Muslim children growing up here: internet, partying, drugs, alcohol, 'bling' culture, boyfriends and girlfriends. All of these are just waiting to get a hold of our children, so to steer our children through these is like walking through a minefield and is very scary.

You want your children to be better off than you in every way - spiritually, financially, academically and in their knowledge of Islam. There comes a time when you have to let your children go and fend for themselves and I hope that when that time comes for me my children will be good Muslims and good human beings.

I am motivated by always trying to better myself - I have so many goals that I hope to achieve in my life.

I have met so many of them already, but when I meet one I create another goal. I am very worried for the welfare of our children here in the west I have always thought that Muslims do not do enough to entertain our children. Young people like to have fun and sadly this is lost a lot in Islam.

There are certain corners of Islam that would have us believe that there is no fun in Islam, that it is all stern faces and tears. We know this is not true, but for too long we have allowed this view of Islam to be dominant. This has pushed a lot of our young people into jahelia. I am also motivated by seeking more knowledge - there is so much I would like to study, if I could find the time.

The biggest benefit of being a Muslim father is bringing up good citizens. Giving your children things that you did not have is also a great satisfaction. My family and I have travelled abroad quite a lot and I am so pleased that my children have been able to experience different cultures. I will try to keep this tradition up so that my children will be able to learn from different people and cultures.

Fahim: 'The greatest challenge of my life'

I am 52 years old, and married with five growing children - four boys aged, 17, 16, 14, 12 and a girl, aged 10.

I got married at the age of 33, which could be considered a little late in the context of my cultural background, which is that of a Muslim from the Indian sub-continent. Add to that the fact that I went all the way to the Middle East and married an Arab lady from Syria.

Right from the beginning it was going to be a challenge in terms of how we both thought of bringing up our children. My wife's idea of a family is mum and dad and the children as the 'centre of one's universe', with grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, though important, on the periphery.

On the other hand, my ideal family would be more based around a greater involvement of grandparents and other close relatives, all contributing to the children's healthy upbringing and development in all areas of life, not least their spiritual and psychological worldview.

Living in the West I find this all the more important, because here we are fed a steady propaganda of egoistic desires and people seem to have a never-quenching thirst for self-gratification.

I have always believed in giving my children an all-round education, including what they learn outside school, and observing the world around them. I want them to take an active role in the affairs of the greater family, the local community and the world at large. To some extent I have been influenced by my grandfather, who throughout his life travelled around the world in a small Bedford van.

My eldest son is 18 years old next month. He is at college doing his final year of A levels, and thinks that he is a complete man already with his own opinions about almost all things in life! I treat him more like a friend and try to share with him the knowledge and wisdom I have acquired - perhaps not all of it by being a good child to my own parents but through hard knocks of life. I am finding him to be more of a challenge than all my other four children put together.

My other three sons are all at high school at various levels in their education. They are all very active in sport and keeping up with everything that is happening around the world to do with football and cricket is part of their very existence. There are very often fights between them, including punches, and in our small flat of three bedrooms with hardly any space for their activities, it can be a monumental task.

The ability to achieve some of my ambitions as a father has been limited by the fact that we live in a very small flat in an estate without a garden. Also financial difficulties mean that it is not always possible to provide my children with all the latest gadgets that young people seem to need these days. This has both advantages and disadvantages - but I do feel scared that these difficulties will push them into bad company or spending more time outside of the house.

With our fifth child we were blessed with a girl. She is now 10 years old, very intelligent and very sensitive. She is very different from her four brothers in as much as she likes the indoors more and finds reading and concentrating on her studies a lot easier compared with her male siblings.

She takes great care of my wife and I and she is meticulous when it comes to detail, unlike her brothers. She knows where my things are kept and can normally find the smallest item without much struggle. For the same thing my sons would be screaming from the other end of the flat, 'I cannot find it, where is it Dad?'

With all their ups and downs and with all their aches and pains I cannot imagine myself without the greatest challenge of my life, my children! Who else will call me by this most affectionate term that God has blessed humanity with?!

DADS AND LADS: working with the Pakistani community

More than 100 Muslim dads have brushed up their parenting skills thanks to a pioneering project in Bradford - and had fun in the process

Geraldine Waugh, parenting project worker at Bradford YMCA, has experience of involving fathers successfully in courses for the parents of young offenders. But she also works regularly with Asian dads in schools and community settings.

To reach the Asian dads - many of whom had grown up 'without the love and affection of our fathers, who worked all the time' and were repeating the pattern - she developed the 'Dads and lads' scheme with them.

Geraldine worked closely with a community leader, asking if he knew suitable dads. He did. The men were mainly from one area in Pakistan, were all about the same age and worked together.

The scheme started small - just an hour's workshop and an activity, something the fathers 'would not normally feel comfortable with', like bowling, swimming or taking their kids to the cinema. And then Geraldine asked 'what else would you like included in the workshops?'

To develop ownership of the project she asked local dads to pilot the initiative. It took just one dad who became the 'Mr Motivator' to encourage others to get involved. As the project developed and fathers took ownership, the facilitators became the 'invited guests'.

Eight courses, reaching more than 100 fathers, have now been held. Had funding not been so scarce, there would have been more, as there is no shortage of interested fathers.

One father has trained as a 'Dads and lads' facilitator; others deliver some workshop elements - creating the beginnings of capacity building and community cohesion.

'If I had "real" money,' says Geraldine, 'I would develop the course for the dads to take forward themselves, and make it accredited.' In the autumn of 2005, fathers from one mosque, worried about local lads' progress, obtained their own funding - and approached YMCA Bradford to run a course for them.

Courses have included:

- Sporting activities (basketball, rounders, parachute games, 'kwik cricket', 'tag rugby' and many more)
- Visits to the museum (the fathers particularly enjoyed dressing up as Bradford historical figures!)
- Trips to McDonald's
- A day trip to Scarborough
- Peer massage ('very successful').

Issues the courses have addressed include:

- Communication
- Body language
- Boundaries
- Saying 'no' (and asking why are you are saying no)
- Enforcing 'no'
- Supporting children's literacy other than via the Quran
- Developing the father-son relationship
- Using similar techniques with colleagues and family
- Developing confidence in talking with children's teachers
- Understanding the school system, including the 'Key Stages'
- Challenging choice of school
- Becoming confident to use the library and other local services
- Having fun.



Geraldine's key messages

'Female facilitators need to feel and show the same level of confidence as within a mixed or female only group. It is important to have an understanding of Asian culture and not to feel threatened or devalued by Asian dads either not looking and maintaining eye contact or not shaking their hand for example'

'Asian communities aren't necessarily "hard to reach". There is growing awareness about the need to support young people - a lot of awareness that the boys are getting involved in crime or not doing well at school. One of the Imams is getting involved to support the dads to support their kids'.

Get in touch

Contact: Geraldine Waugh Tel: 01274 504555
Email: geraldine.waugh@bradford.ymca.org.uk

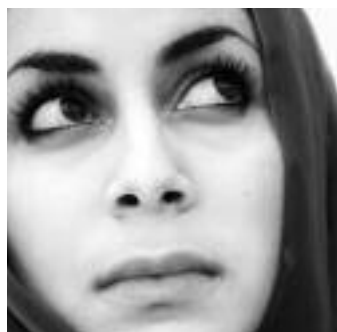
Training for work with Muslim dads: Fact file

- What?** YMCA (England)'s 'Dads & lads' parenting courses
- Where?** Youth/community centres and primary schools in Bradford/Bradford Moor
- Funding?** Children's Fund 'On Track' crime diversion (now filtered into the Children's Fund); YMCA England (Family Support Grant) Contact Dirk Uitterdijk, dirk@parenting.ymca.org.uk

Some tips for working with Muslim dads

- Word of mouth through well-known community workers and leaders is probably the best way to attract fathers to workshops and activities.
- Give Muslim fathers opportunities to come along to events and services which are just for men and their children - as well as events for the whole family.
- Not all Muslim fathers belong to close knit communities; the lives of many are isolated and without support.
- Not all Muslim dads are born Muslim or are experts in Islam, but they may still see Islam as playing a major role in their lives.
- Think twice before you organise an event and make sure that the venue, publicity and language used give the right messages - do not be exclusive or patronising.
- Don't suggest going to the pub afterwards.
- Have an awareness of the difference between cultural and religious values.
- Respect beliefs and values, and keep an open mind - consult with local Muslim men and women about how your services should be set up.
- Understand the nature of strong family ties and respect that exist in many Muslim families.
- Realise that many Muslim fathers are strong figures in their households and need to hold onto that respect - talk to them about how they can foster that respect within the family.
- Build on the role Muslim fathers take on concerning their children's education - but also encourage them to realize how important they are in their child's early life, and in supporting the mother.
- Take care to reach out and support non-resident Muslim fathers, eg by offering services at times they are likely to have contact with their children.
- Unless a child's safety is at risk, do not tell anyone directly what to do or how to look after their children, as this may seem insulting and is unlikely to achieve positive change.
- Discuss issues indirectly, for example instead of saying that what they are doing is wrong, ask 'if you tried to do this with your child do you think it might help?'
- Develop good links with local Muslim organisations and develop projects in partnership.
- Get Muslim women behind projects for Muslim dads.

These tips were supplied by workers experienced in supporting Muslim fathers.



- "Muslim men, like all men, may have preferences and assumptions about the workers they come across. As with all men, they will value workers who are respectful, reliable and positive - but they may be sceptical about non-Muslim workers, and it may feel awkward for them to spend time with women workers. These issues need to be discussed openly and responded to flexibly."
- Recognise that many Muslim communities are very close-knit, which can be a mixed blessing.

Make the dads you work with feel comfortable

- Engage them in informal, positive conversation, focused on their children
- Quickly learn their names and invite them and their children to join in
- Use accessible, non-patronising adult language
- Use friendly facial expressions and positive, non-threatening body language
- Watch your non-verbal cues, for example respect personal space and offer intermittent eye contact if the father is anxious or emotional
- Acknowledge, without being defensive, that many fathers will at first feel distrustful of you and your agency
- Be aware of the effect of your gender on individual fathers - for example if you are female, resist presenting yourself as the 'parenting expert'; if you are male, be aware that some fathers will not have had positive relationships with males they respect

Source: Burgess A and Bartlett D (2004), Working with fathers: a guide for everyone working with families. Fathers Direct

What good are dads?

Fathers and mothers are often unaware of just how important dads are to their children's wellbeing – it is important for services to reinforce these messages.

Around the time of birth...

- Many dads do DIY etc to help with 'nest building'
- Mothers say fathers are their main source of emotional support after the birth, and mothers' ability to cope with the new baby is related to the quality of their relationship with their baby's father

With babies and very young children...

- Men can be just as capable and responsive to a baby's needs as a woman
- The factors that most influence paternal involvement are the father's work hours, his relationship with his partner and his preparation for 'involved parenting'
- How fathers spend time with their children is more important than how often, in terms of the father-child bond
- Babies usually bond as easily with their fathers as with their mothers

With young children...

- Fathers can play a central role as playmate, and often have a particular role of organising outdoor activities
- Dads may be particularly useful in developing children's social skills, and in stretching their understanding of language

With older children...

- A high level of paternal involvement at ages 7 to 11 improves exam performance at age 16, and reduces the chances of criminality at age 21
- Fathers are often providers of fun as well as being breadwinners
- They often take on the role of career advisor

Source: Fathers Direct, 2001. What Good Are Dads?

Peace of mind: working with the Somali dads.

A London-based project highlighted the challenges fatherhood can pose for refugee dads.



The 'Peace of mind' project at north London's Tavistock Clinic was set up because of it was felt that Somali fathers in the UK are increasingly emotionally or physically absent from their families. The outbreak of the civil war in Somalia in 1988 had led to the settling of many refugees in Britain, and the community was found to be one of the most disadvantaged in health, education, employment and housing – and lacking in representation and deep awareness of the difficulties faced by many of its members.

Engaging Somali fathers in the project, funded through the Children's Fund, was not easy. Traditional publicity was supported by extensive personal engagement and outreach, with the project leader making personal contact with individual fathers in the places they were most likely to visit, including mosques, restaurants, coffee shops and halal butchers.

It was important to negotiate the most suitable time and place for meetings. Eventually a local community centre venue was chosen at the fathers' preferred time - Saturday mornings - with sixteen fathers, who were recruited to begin the parenting course as an all-male group.

The programme chosen was the Race Equality Unit's 13-week Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities parenting course, which is particularly relevant to work with ethnic minority families, and has the following five components:

- Cultural and spiritual
- Enhancing relationships
- Positive discipline
- Rites of passages
- Community involvement.

Each session lasts for three hours, and the programme consists of presentations, tasks and homework.

From the training three main themes emerged:

1. Parental relationships

The changing parental relationship was one of the key issues that concerned the fathers. Coming from traditional family structures where the father is head of the household they raised issues that were challenging them. These included: loss of control of the family and ability to economically provide for them; consequent loss of respect from both wife and children; disconnection emotionally from their children; and loss of identity resulting in hopelessness.

2. Communication with children

The impact of living within increasingly differing cultural norms between parents and children greatly impacted on the fathers. Being used to a cultural norm where obedience was expected from children they found communication with them was difficult, and often resulted in anger. Finding alternative methods of discipline apart from physical punishment was particularly challenging, and effort was put into encouraging other disciplining methods. Overall there was a sense of loss of control and concern over lifestyle choices.

3. Community identity

Fathers identified a strong sense of identity while they were in Somalia, through clans. Adjusting to different educational experiences and cultural lifestyles was disorientating and often meant that they were not able to support their children. Changing family structures were also difficult to come to terms with, so that the men often tried to recreate in Britain what they had left behind.

Of the 12 fathers who attended the group from the beginning, two were able actively to seek and find jobs; and seven received certificates of attendance, which it was hoped would increase their confidence in parenting their children

The course evaluation indicated that the fathers had felt the course had helped them in:

- raising an oriental child in western culture
- providing the opportunity to exchange views with other fathers
- developing more patience in listening to their children, and
- establishing community building tools and techniques.

What do we know about Somalis in the UK?

Not much. Estimates of the Somali population in the UK are notoriously variable, with different sources producing figures ranging from 25,000 to 250,000. The 2001 census estimate was just under 44,000, of whom nearly 34,000 were living in London.

Academic, Hermione Harris says this 'lack of numerical data hinders sound service delivery in all regions'.

Somalis are among the largest groups of unaccompanied children entering the UK, since families in Somalia can often only scrape together enough money to send one child for a 'better life' in the West.

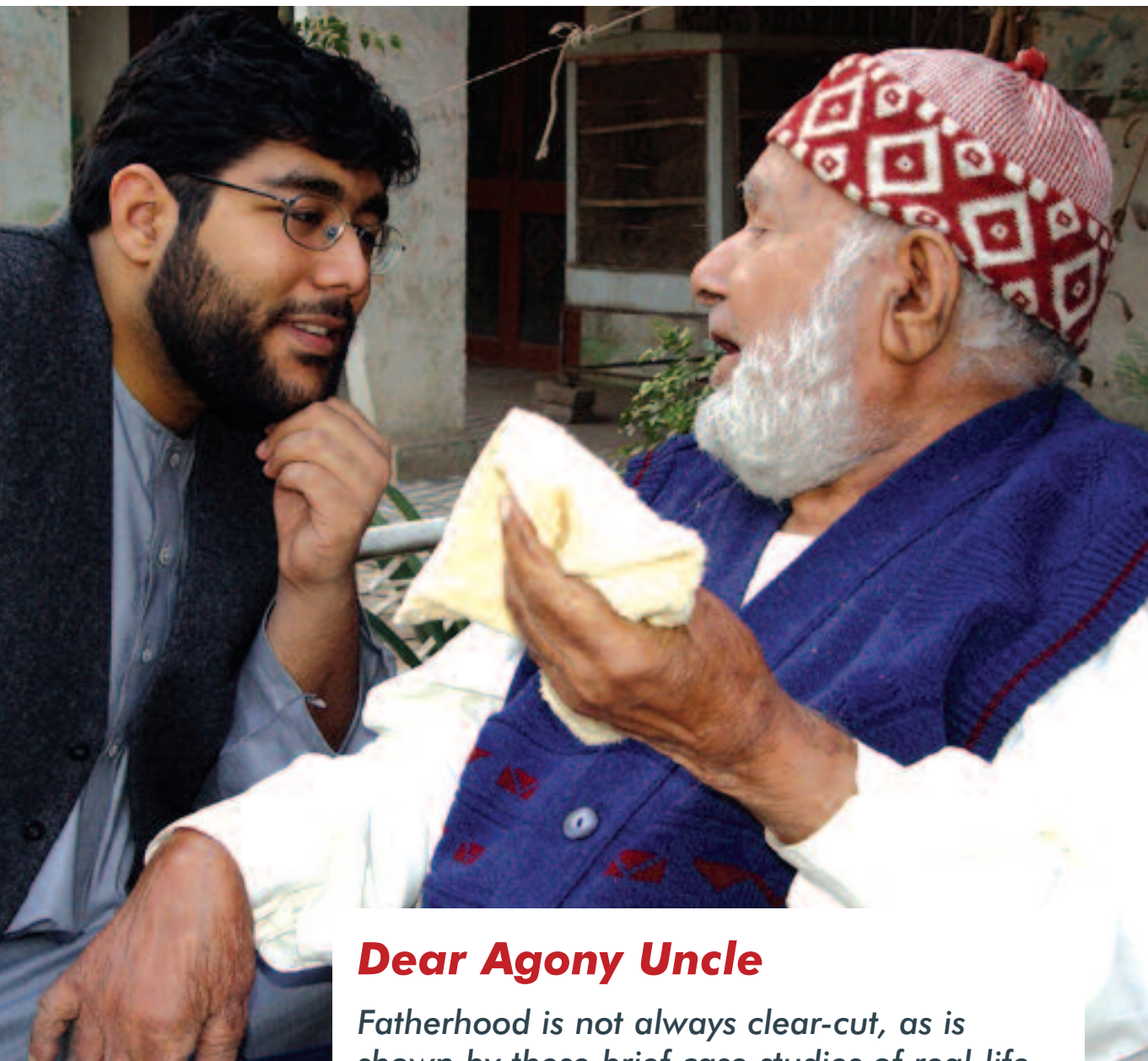
Unemployment rates among Somalis are extremely high - in some boroughs levels of more than 90% have been reported - this is despite the fact that a substantial number of Somali refugees have gone through higher education and/or have professional qualifications.

Evidence on the educational performance of Somali children in the UK is patchy, but it appears that many under-perform - particularly if they have come here at a relatively advanced age. Poor English is a major factor both for children and parents, and in many cases Somali children, who are likely to have better English if they have been in school for long enough, act as the 'bridge' between their parents and officialdom.

For more information see Harris H (2004), *The Somali community in the UK: What we know and how we know it*. The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, which you can download from www.icar.org.uk.

Get in touch

Contact: [Abdisamad Ghelle](mailto:Abdisamad.Ghelle@tavistock-clinic.nhs.uk)
Peace of Mind Project,
Tavistock Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London
NW3 5BA



Dear Agony Uncle

Fatherhood is not always clear-cut, as is shown by these brief case studies of real-life situations faced by Muslim fathers.

Why not take a few minutes to think about how you would deal with a dad who came to you with such problems?

Case 1: Children by two women

Father A was married young and had two children early into the marriage. The marriage did not last and some years after the divorce he remarried to a woman who had children from a previous marriage.

Things to consider in such a situation:

- What was the impact on the children of the first marriage to the divorce?
- How do they feel about only seeing their father at weekends?
- How do the children from the second wife view the involvement of a 'step dad'?
- How can past conflicts with the first children's mother be reconciled in order to develop constructive parenting arrangements?
- How to work towards creating a harmonious new relationship with all involved?

Case 2: Confused new dad

Father B is a new father and is keen to get as much information as possible on how to be a better father. His wife is pre-occupied with the new baby and he does not want to burden her with too many questions.

Things to consider in such a situation:

- It could be that his wife is not as pre-occupied as he thinks and may want to discuss similar concerns with him and is waiting to be asked.
- Though the mother may seem to have a clearer role, and usually manages to find a way to get on with it, it does not mean that she is sure of what she is doing. She may often still need reassurance, and might appreciate a breathing space. A father's reassurance, perspective and direct involvement in childcare can be very beneficial at such times.
- Sometimes new mothers may be feeling a mixture of emotions that they have to come to terms with following a birth. It could be that at such a time they may not be able to respond to their husband's needs and anxieties. The father may need to learn to not take this personally, and to find an appropriate time to share how he is feeling too.

Case 3: Yearning to be an active granddad

Father C was not very involved in his children's upbringing and found it difficult to break out of his cultural background. He now has several grandchildren with whom he wants to play a hands-on role but is afraid that his children may consider him to be interfering and fears rejection.

Things to consider in such a situation:

- It is not uncommon in Muslim families to find parents who were not good communicators with their own children wanting to make amends with their grandchildren.
- This may not be easy if there are lingering communication problems in the family.
- Often when children are born they can become an essential catalyst to improve relationships and this opportunity can either be seized or lost.

Case 4: Divorced from a non-Muslim

Father D married a woman who was not a Muslim and had three children with her. They divorced acrimoniously and the mother has residence of the children.

Things to consider in such a situation:

- That before they married the couple may not have negotiated well about how they would integrate their different cultures, beliefs into their married life.
- That the mother may or may no longer be sensitive of the father's faith and culture and visa versa. This can result in a phenomenal amount of anxiety and powerlessness for the father as he has less time with the children.
- That the children may be caught between conflicting values and life styles.

Where to get more information

Barnardos

Barnardo's work with children and young people, with families, in the community and run campaigns. In some regions they run fathers' groups.
www.barnardos.org.uk

Centre for Separated Families

New agency supporting both parents
Tel: 01904 610321
www.separatedfamilies.org.uk

Child Support Agency

General information and advice
08457 133133
Email: csa-nel@new100.dss.gsi.gov.uk

The Children's Society

The Children's Society focuses on four areas of work: children at risk on the streets, children in trouble with the law, disabled children and young refugees.
Tel: 020 7841 4400
www.the-childrens-society.org.uk

Citizens Advice

Great advice centres with constantly updated information. Website has good information and advice on family matters after separation and divorce.
020 7833 2181
www.nacab.org.uk

Daycare Trust

'Childcare hotline' providing information and advice for parents
020 7840 3350 (Mon-Fri 10am-5pm).
http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Families Need Fathers

Expert advice for separated fathers
Tel 08707 607496 (6pm-10pm)
www.fnf.org.uk

Fathers Direct

Fathers Direct is the UK's national information centre for fatherhood founded in 1999 by professionals with expertise in social work, family policy, business development and communications. It exists to support the welfare of children by the positive and active involvement of fathers and male carers in their lives. A section of the website is devoted to fatherhood in Islamic communities, and Muslim fatherhood. Here you will find news, research, and policy and practice articles of interest to those working within Muslim communities. Fathers Direct offers training and consultancy to promote services which are genuinely inclusive for all fathers.
Tel: 0845 634 1328
www.fathersdirect.com

Gingerbread

Offers lone parents and children support, including benefits, education and housing
0800 018 4318 (Mon-Fri 10am-4pm)
www.gingerbread.org.uk

National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI)

NFPI works to support parents in bringing up their children and to promote the wellbeing of families.
Tel: 020 7424 3460
www.nfpi.org.uk

One Parent Families

One Parent Families provides a platform for lone parents. It offers information and advice to lone parents by telephone, publications, website and special events.
Tel: 020 7428 5400
www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk

Parentline Plus

Support and information for fathers and mothers
0808 800 2222 (24 hr helpline) or textphone 0800 783 6783
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Raising Kids

Raising Kids offers information for parents on child nutrition, child development, parenting skills, education and more, plus a chance to talk to other parents about parenting issues.
www.raisingkids.co.uk

Relate

Information on couple relationships and counseling
01788 573241
www.relate.org.uk

Resolution (formerly Solicitors Family Law Association)

Provides details of local solicitors familiar with family law
01689 850227/ 0345 585671 (charged at local rate).
info@sfla.co.uk or search Yellow Pages under 'Solicitors'

Sure Start

Sure Start is a government programme which aims to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and communities.
Tel: 0870 0002288
www.surestart.gov.uk

Department for Works and Pensions

The Department is responsible for a range of benefits and services for families.
www.dwp.gov.uk

Websites

www.bbc.co.uk/parenting
www.practicalparent.org.uk
www.raisingkids.co.uk
www.tsa.uk.com (all about teenagers)

Muslim Organisations

Counselling, Health, Helplines

The Muslim Law (Shar'ia) Council

The main function is to resolve disputes between Muslims in Britain, give fatwas (religious opinions) in answer to questions submitted by organisations or individuals, resolve the conflicts of law between the civil and Shariah law with particular reference to family law.
Tel: 020 8992 6636

Islamic Shar'ia Council of UK and Eire

Undertakes several activities including family counselling, Islamic divorce proceedings and giving decisions on Sharia matters.
Tel: 020 8558 0581

The Mohsin Institute

The Mohsin Institute provide holistic consultation and treatment through their clinic, produce their own quality-assured herbal medicines and provide Islamic counselling.
www.themohsininstitute.com

An-Nisa Society

Community organisation working for the welfare of families. Runs a supplementary Muslim School, develops projects such as Islamic counselling and sexual health from an Islamic perspective.
Email: an-nisa@btconnect.com

NAFAS

Nafas is a multifaceted specialist resource established to meet the drug and drug related education, prevention and treatment needs of primarily the Bangladeshi community in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.
Tel: 020 7729 0044
www.nafas.org

Muslim Youth Helpline

The Muslim Youth Helpline is a confidential helpline for young Muslims.
Tel: 0808 808 2008
www.myh.org.uk

Muslimline

Have you suffered from Islamophobia? Have you suffered because of your race or religion? Register your incident with the Muslimline and find out what help is available.
Tel: 0845 22 50 50 2

Directories, Listings, Noticeboards, Media

Q-News

www.q-news.com

Muslim Directory

www.muslimdirectory.co.uk

UK Islamic Events

islamic_events-subscribe@yahoo.com

Salam

www.salaam.co.uk

IslamOnline

www.islamonline.net

Parenting, Children And Family Life On The Web

www.islamfortoday.com/schools:

child care articles, Islamic education, Muslim names, Muslim youth, family, gender.

www.islamic-knowledge.com/Children: covers a wide range of issues for children and their parents, including: 'Quality Time with Dad - Tips for Muslim fathers' by Ibrahim Bowers, which looks at the current relationship between father and child.

www.geocities.com/islam_ap:

provides information about 'attachment parenting', which is a style of parenting that affirms thousands of years of mothers' instincts all over the world, rather than the "research" of self-styled "experts."

Islamic Children's Books

Zarafa Books

www.zarafabooks.com

Taha Publishers

www.taha.co.uk

Islam4children

www.islam4children.com

Sound Vision

www.soundvision.com

Hud Hud Books

www.hoodhood.com

Islamic Foundations

www.islamic-foundation.org.uk

Other Islamic books

- Parenting in the West: An Islamic Perspective by Ekram Beshir MD & Mohamed Rida Beshir. A Guide to bringing up children. ISBN: 0-915957-87-6
- Islamic Parenting: The Natural Alternative by Silma Buckley B.A. Dip Ed. A guide to raising children ISBN: 981-00-2513-0
- Cycle of Life: Sex Education an Islamic Perspective by Humera Khan. A set of three sexual health booklets which include: Women, Marriage and Adolescence. (Contact an-nisa@btconnect.com for more information)
- The Miracle of Life by Fatima D'Oyen. A practical guide to sex education ISBN: 0-86037-262-6
- Children are from Heaven by Professor John Grey. A practical guide for parenting, addressing the unique bond that exists between parents and children. ISBN: 0-09-182616-0
- Father your Son by Dr Stephen B. Poulter. How to become the father you have always wanted to be. ISBN: 0-07-141713-3

Some children's fathers

Some children have fathers who live far away and send money or clothing

Some children have fathers who live nearby and visit regularly

Other children have fathers who raise them alone

Others have fathers who share home and caring duties with their mother

Others have fathers who look after them all the time,

So their mothers can work

Some children have fathers they stay with at weekends and in the holidays

Others have fathers who are in jail

Some children have fathers who live at home, but are rarely there

Others have foster fathers or step fathers

Some children have fathers who are too poor to provide for them

Some have an uncle or grandfather who fathers them

Some children have a father who is a child himself

And some children have no father figure

There are fathers who read bedtime stories to their children

And there are fathers who cannot read

There are fathers who love and care for their children

And there are fathers who neglect and abuse their children

Some fathers attend the birth and every milestone in their children's lives

Others have never even met their teacher

Some fathers are ill, some commit crimes and some beat their children's mothers

Others work long hours in hard jobs to provide for their children

Some are confident in their parenting role and take great pride in it

And others are frightened of these responsibilities

Some fathers run away from their children

Others, desperate to see them, are prevented from doing so

Fatherhood is different in so many ways for so many children

But one thing is universal

What fathers do ...

..... MATTERS TO CHILDREN

International Fatherhood Conference,
Oxford University, Spring 2003

