
Morality and Social Media: A Word of Caution for Parents

FRIDAY JUMU'AH MESSAGE

*This is a message prepared by the **Jamiatul Ulama South Africa** for delivery in mosques. It highlights the pervasive nature of social media in modern life, especially among the youth and how parents can responsibly deal with its inevitable challenges.*



يَا بَنِي آدَمَ لَا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُم مِّنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنزِعُ عَنْهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوْآتِهِمَا إِنَّهُ يَرَاكُمْ هُوَ وَقَبِيلُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا تَرَوْنَهُمْ ۗ
*O Children of Adam! Do not let Satan tempt you, like he expelled your parents from paradise, stripping them of their garments to expose to them their nakedness.
Indeed he sees you—he and his hosts—whence you do not see them. (Qur'an 7:27)*

Children are a great joy and blessings from Allah ﷻ. This joy and blessings is coupled with a responsibility and *amaanah* we have to them. The Hadith informs us that a child is born in a state of natural perfection (*fitra*) and instinct.

كل مولود يولد على الفطرة فأبواه يهودانه أو ينصرانه

No child is born but that he is upon natural instinct.

His parents, through training make, make him a Jew, or a Christian, or Magian. (Hadith)

The responsibility of correctly upbringing the children increases when we live in a time overrun by the very perils we want to protect our children against. Drugs, teen-pregnancy, suicide and other social challenges are everywhere. The parenting style and method we adopt have an impact on our children's development and future.

Aspects we need to take into account when parenting include:

- The crucial role of communication with our children.
- How to deal with uncomfortable conversations, with our children.
- Modelling a parenting style on Ibrahim's ﷺ example. The communication between father and son equated the sacrifices between father and son.
- Hadrat Luqman's advice to his son is mentioned in the Qur'an. It has been chronicled that his son had been a disobedient offspring. With the constant advice of his father, he later changed his life.

Amongst the qualities greatly emphasized in our Deen, one of the most distinctive is Haya. Nabī ﷺ has said:

إِنَّ لِكُلِّ دِينٍ خُلُقًا وَخُلُقُ الْإِسْلَامِ الْحَيَاءُ

Every religion has a special and distinctive quality (moral call) and the distinctive quality (moral call) of our religion is modesty. (Ibn Majah)

Haya is translated as modesty, bashfulness or inhibition. This translation which may also suggest elements of being shy does not do justice towards the concept. *Haya* refers to that extremely desirable quality that protects us from all evil. It is a natural feeling that brings discomfort at the very idea of committing a wrong.

Haya is one of the branches of faith. Nabī ﷺ has said:

لِإِيمَانٍ بِضْعٌ وَسَبْعُونَ شُعْبَةً، وَالْحَيَاءُ شُعْبَةٌ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ

Faith has more than 70 branches and Haya is a branch of faith.

A key feature of the era we live in is the rapid development of technology and the continuous impact this has on our lives, both in terms of the way we live and how we spend our time. As Muslims we understand that the purpose of our life is to attain the Pleasure of Allāh ﷻ, by spending each moment of our life in accordance with His Commands. As Allāh ﷻ is the All Knowing, He was completely aware of all material and technological developments that His servants would witness when He revealed the Glorious Qur'ān and showed us its practical application through the blessed life of Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

A significant phenomenon of our time is the emergence and widespread use of the internet and smartphones which has led to the proliferation of thousands of platforms and new ways of communication via social media. Whilst social media and email has led to a revival of reading and writing, often the content and quality is highly questionable. Therefore, one must be mindful not to fall prey to the harmful aspects of these media, for example using them to engage in, or even publicise, acts of disobedience to Allāh ﷻ.

The objective is to bring about an awareness and outline some guidance for those who use the internet and smartphones, specifically in relation to messaging, email and using social media platforms. The content on these platforms is Islamically inappropriate in several ways that affect us by:

- Through subliminal messaging.
- Subtly influencing manners such as dress code, language use, what to eat or drink, and behaviour.
- Explicit messaging – grooming society and children into: haraam relationships (including homosexuality and gender confusion).
- Perverting sexuality through pornography and violent sexual practices and deviant relationships.
- Exposure to vulgarity often delivered through inappropriate music and musical lyrics.

The effects of consuming this kind of content are multiple. Some of the outcomes include:

- Imitation of haraam behaviour by following unworthy role models.
- Addiction to devices, diminishing in-person social skills for connecting with families and friends.
- Addiction to pornography (children as young as 7 and 8 years are being exposed to pornography)
- Violent sexual behaviour and sexual abuse.
- Anti-social tendencies such as bullying.
- Social media sets unrealistic notions of beauty, especially for females. Self-hate and loss of self-esteem (and body dysmorphic disorder).
- Increase in psycho-social disorders that lead to high incidence of suicidal teens.
- Violent video games and graphic content lead towards anti-social behaviour.

Some Platforms and the issues with them:

Tiktok

- #Kinktok: glorifies sexual violence inspired by pornography
- Choking/strangling during sex (#chokeme)
- Knife play
- Men spitting on their sexual partners
- Consensual non-consent (CNC) (“rape play”)
- In a 2019 Study in the USA – 25% of women feel scared during sex. 7% because their partner attempted to strangle them. 13% of sexually active girls 14-17yrs have reported being strangled]
- In a 2019 Study in the UK – a third of women under 40 have experienced unwanted slapping, choking, gagging or spitting during consensual sex.
- Young children performing dances accompanied with erotic lyrics and sexually suggestive routines.
- Allows for direct messaging from strangers (which opens children up to sexual abuse)

Instagram

- Duplicates much of TikTok content
- Images of scantily dressed people on the explore pages
- Videos of children with sexualised imagery
- When you search for popular games like “fortnite” sexually suggestive usernames comes up (“fortnite sexy”)
- Searching for generic child interests like “videogames” brings up sexually suggestive usernames (“sexy_videogames”)
- Searching for “13yearold” brings up sexually suggestive usernames (“13-year-old virgin”)
- Allows for direct messaging from strangers (Opening children up to grooming and sexual abuse)

SnapChat

- An app platform that allows disappearing pictures.
- Has a history of publishing content promoting pornography, abortion and sexual perversion.
- It automatically shares a user’s location and this feature cannot be turned off
- Various image filters include “change your gender.”
- The image filters feature advertising for liquor.
- During June 2019, (although now removed) SnapChat ran a tagline promoting not only homosexuality but also paedophilia: “Love has No [gender, race, religion, age].”

Twitter

- Links/videos can be shared on twitter.
- Allows graphic sexual content as long as it is between two consenting people.
- Allows graphic violence as long as the material is marked “sensitive” (a child can still access it)
- Content with supposedly “adult-only” themes, incest.

General issues with phones, devices and tech across the board:

- Most social media sites are supposedly rated for 13 years and up but there is no control regarding this. Age restrictions are easily bypassed by simply entering a different birth date.
- They are gateways to pornography (phones can be described as “little porn boxes”) – and it isn’t just boys who are viewing pornography, girls are also becoming addicted to pornography.
- Image sharing capabilities allow for children to share explicit photos of themselves (nudes).
- Social media promotes insecurity, is addictive, allows for bullying
- Most of these platforms allow strangers to contact you, and paedophiles use this to their advantage. They often pretend to be a child and will groom other children.
- Video games can become addictive, some promote violent behaviour, online games allow for chatting amongst participants where children can be exposed to profanity, adult conversations and be victims of paedophile’s who groom children for sexual abuse.

Social Media:

- The aim is to keep a person using the chosen platform
- Algorithms track what you watch and for how long you watch it.
- Algorithms are designed to show you content that will keep you using the platform; that means it will show you content that it predicts you like to watch according to your profile (and not necessarily content that you have chosen to follow)
- Once you start watching a particular type of content, the social media apps will continue to show you more of that content so that you will continue to use the platform. You can “train” the apps over time, so potentially you can use it to view positive content, but if you fall into watching explicit content, pornography/kinktok, your app will spiral into showing you that kind of content.

- A Facebook whistle-blower exposed that Facebook knows the harms of social media, especially related to teenage girls yet does nothing to mitigate the effects.
- You can never turn off the possibility/potential of accessing pornographic and explicit content.
- Evading the age control limits only requires entering a false birth date.
- Predators can message/groom people that they target

How parents deal with these realities?

- Supplicate to Allah for the protection and guidance of your children. Prayer is your weapon; use it.
- Educate yourself. Even if you are not tech-savvy, be aware of what is out there.
- You are your child's filter. If you allowing access to social media educate yourself on privacy settings, filters, etc.
- Delay access to devices; delay access to social media.
- Prepare your child. It is not if your child is exposed, it is when your child is exposed.
- Preparation is not a once-off exercise. It is a continuous effort that should evolve with trends.
- Speak to like-minded parents so that children have friends who are also device-free.
- Have discussions with children from a young age about what pornography is and what to do if they stumble across it.
- Establish a good relationship of trust with child so that they can come to you with what they find online and in peer groups.
- Do not freak out if a child tells you they have been exposed to indecent graphic content. Express appreciation for talking to you; have discussions with them. Immediately seek professional help, if children are traumatised or addicted.