

# AUNTIE AISHA ANSWERS

A Way Forward For Islamically-Based, Comprehensive Life Skills Education

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# Background

Predominant method of contemporary religious/moral education is based on blind following. Critical thinking & asking questions is discouraged.

This method is unsuitable to contemporary social settings. Individuals are constantly bombarded through media with different information provided from various perspectives.

Much of the life skills education available through the formal education system & informal educational resources is removed from God. Lacking from an Islamic perspective.

Lack of focus on building mental health resiliency. Lack of affordable access to mental health treatment.

Parents as well as teachers are ill-equipped to provide multi-disciplinary life skills education or discipline. Lack of trust from parents to educators on reproductive health education. (Abdulghafoor, 2020).

# Objectives

Identify whether there is room for developing an Islamically-based comprehensive life skills education program that incorporates mental health and sexual and reproductive health within orthodox Islam.

Develop a theoretical framework for an Islamically-based comprehensive life skills education program.

Develop a an age-appropriate and accessible Islamically-based comprehensive life skills educational resource.

# Literature Review

Division of Mental Health and Prevention of Substance Abuse, WHO (1996). Life Skills Education – Planning for Research as an Integral Part of Life Skills Education Development, Implementation and Maintenance. Geneva: WHO.

Fields, J. (2013). From Intervention to Inquiry: A Review of Sex Ed for Caring Schools: Creating an Ethics-Based Curriculum. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 8(3): 185-190.

Todnem, S. (2019). *Growing Up Great! The Ultimate Puberty Book for Boys*. California: Rockridge Press.

Bialik, M. (2018). *Boying Up: How to Be Brave, Bold and Brilliant*. New York: Philomel Books.

Bialik, M. (2017). *Girling Up: How to Be Strong, Smart and Spectacular*. New York: Philomel Books.

# Literature Review

Nabil, N. (2018). *Muslim Girl Growing Up – A Guide to Puberty*. California: Prolance.

Khan, R. (2006). *A Muslim Girl's Guide to Life's Big Changes*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers.

Khan, S. (2006). *A Muslim Boy's Guide to Life's Big Changes*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers.

Tarsin, A. *Becoming a Man: The Young Muslim's Guide to Growing Up*, Ustadh Amjad Tarsin, Seekers Academy. Video

Classical Islamic books on law (*fiqh*), self-discipline (*tazkiyah al-nafs*).

Information for parents on how to educate children regarding reproductive health.

# Methodology

Islamic research method: an alternative research method that emphasizes revelation as a major source of study in the social sciences, and hierarchically analyses the sources of traditional Islamic knowledge (Safi, 2014).

Criticisms of contemporary Islamic research include:

- (1) Blind following of classical/pre-modern views especially within the context of religio-legal schools of thought; lack of contemporary applicability, understanding or relevance;
- (2) Complete disregard for the established jurisprudential rules in favour of contemporary research methods.

# Methodology

Ragab (1999) suggests a 3-step method for developing a unified, “integral” theoretical framework:

1. Critical review of relevant social sciences literature.

A systematic review of relevant literature including mainstream & dissenting views; rigorous critique of the literature from Islamic perspective; sifting material using neutral tools & formal constructs.

2. Critical review of relevant Islamic material.

Reference to the Qur’an alongside standard books of exegesis; reference to Hadith & Hadith commentaries; reference to works of Muslim scholars; development of a conceptual framework.

3. Development of a unified “integral” theoretical framework.



# Methodology

Critical review of relevant Islamic material:

In referring to books of exegesis, an effort was made to avoid reference to historical narrations with weak chains of narration or deeper more technical issues that affect the authenticity of the narration as well as anomalous legal and juristic views.

In referring to Hadith traditions, an effort was made to make reference only to the most authentic Hadith collections. Reference to collections that contain weaker narrations and biographies was made only in minor side issues.

Contemporary Islamic writing that do not deviate from orthodox Sunni juristic views were referred to.

# Results

The idea of providing age-appropriate, comprehensive life skills education from an early age is in line with classical Islamic education theory and pedagogy.

An Islamic life skills education is God-centric in every aspect, and every topic relates back to the idea of God-consciousness.

Some concepts within contemporary reproductive health education may be at odds with the Islamic value system and need to be reformulated in accordance with Islamic values.

Some of the cultural norms within Muslim communities may be at odds with the Islamic value system; the community needs to be re-educated on these issues using authentic Islamic sources.

# Results

## Auntie Aisha Answers: The Tween Muslim's Ultimate Guide to Growing Up

Approaches the general themes that are addressed in contemporary life skills guidance books for pre-teens from an Islamic lens. E.g.: self-image, disability, privacy, autonomy, physical, mental & spiritual well-being, inter-personal skills, online safety and etiquette, puberty, sexual development, gender roles, grief, etc.

Every topic is tied back to the concept of God-consciousness.

Introduces concepts of Islamic psychology, such as Islamic mindfulness, spiritual well-being, and ties them to practical aspects of Islamic values and practices like ritual purity, modesty, respect, kindness, etc. Also relates them to physical & mental wellbeing. Provides practical daily application.

# Results

Avoids providing information through the prescriptive approach in favour of a combination of a narrative style and self-discovery through story telling, thought experiments, exercises and other activities.

E.g.:

*“Imagine you live in a specific habitat.*

*Now pick a plant or animal in that habitat that you think may be a lot like you. What are its weaknesses? What are some challenges it faces because of them? What are its greatest strengths? How does it help keep its habitat a healthy one?*

*I’ll go first...”*

# Results

Avoids technical jargon and in-depth discussions of juristic differences of opinion between religio-legal schools of thought within Islam, while alluding to the possibility of diversity among Muslims in understanding and practice.

Provides references on Islamic information to encourage inquisitiveness and critical thinking with guidance on how to approach Islamic sources of information. Adopts a narrative style in providing references.

E.g.:

“For a more in-depth reading about the names and attributes of Allah, refer to the book: *Reflecting on the Names of Allah* by Ustadha Jinan Yousef. It was published by Tertib Publishing in 2021. I think you might enjoy reading it.”

# Conclusion

Auntie Aisha Answers currently addresses some of the life skills education needs of the pre-teen age category.

There is an urgent need and space to develop a detailed program for Muslim pre-teens and teenagers.

Such a program must be God-centered, Islamic value-based and multi-disciplinary, and should be developed through a collaborative effort of Islamic sciences scholars, Muslim mental health professionals, medical professionals & educators.

Such a program must encourage student-led learning with adult guidance. Must encourage inquisitiveness and critical thinking. It must be ever-evolving to be able to address the constant changes in modern world challenges.

# References

*The Holy Qur'an.*

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Ragab, I. A. (1999). On the Methodology of Islamizing the Social Sciences. *Intellectual Discourse*, 7(1): 27-52.

Safi, L. (2014). *The Foundation of Knowledge – A Comparative Study in Islamic and Western Methods of Inquiry.* Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought.

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*~ forming connections*

Thank you