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How to Talk to Your Muslim Kids about Bullying - Noor Kids

Amin Aaser : 9-11 minutes : 10/31/2017

“All that’s necessary for the triumph of evil, is for good men to do nothing,” says Superman.

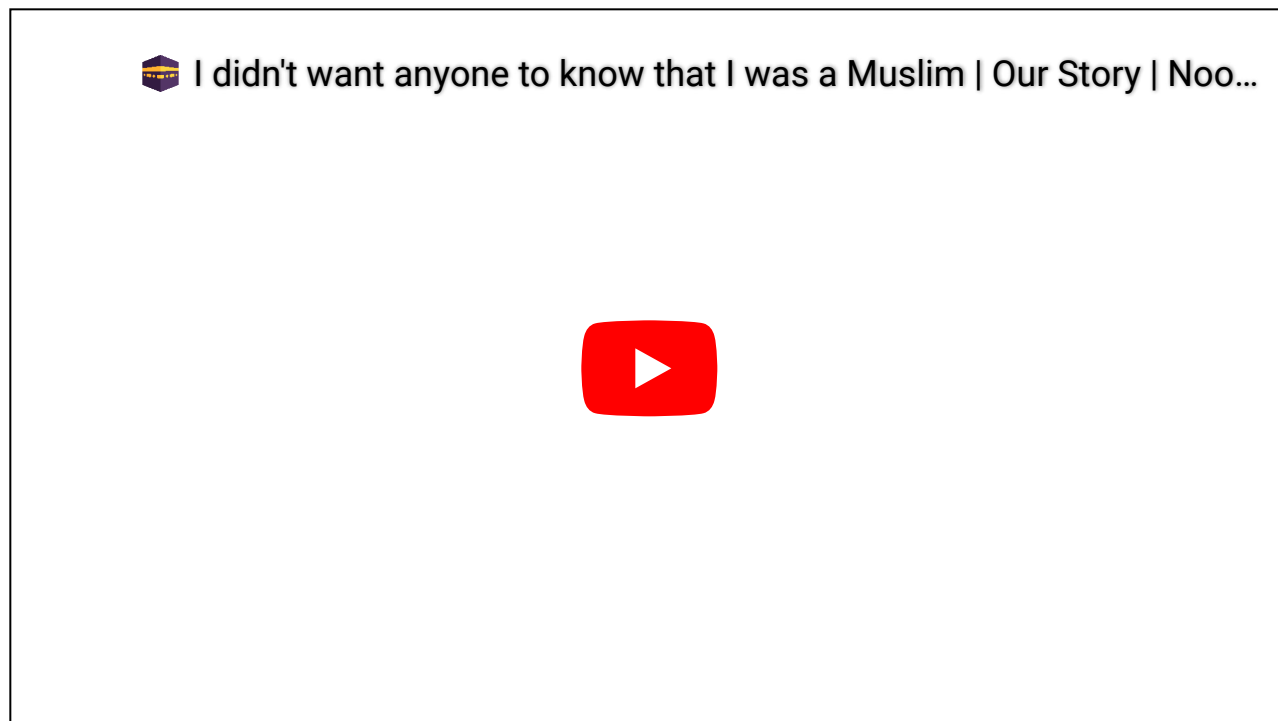
Upon reading such a bold statement, thoughts commonly go to infamous evildoers, such as Saddam or Stalin. However, oppression can occur closer to home. Ask any child who has been abused by a bully.

A [United States special task force](#) on bullying cites that 1-in-4 children experience verbal, physical, or cyber bullying during the average school year.

In the current climate of Islamophobia, Muslim children are experiencing faith-based bullying as well. In fact, a 2015 [CAIR-CA report](#) finds that 55% of Muslim students have been subject to at least one form of religion-based bullying.

Such events often lead to depressive tendencies, making a child less likely to succeed academically or socially. They may even end up not wanting to be seen as Muslim at all!

Amin Aaser, co-founder of Noor Kids explains:



So, how should a child stand up to a bully?

With help... from upstanders, adults, and Allah (SWT).

As society members, each of us has a responsibility to help the oppressed. In fact, Allah (SWT) promises to punish not only oppressors, but also those who have the ability to help out but do not (Hadith Qudsi).

What is bullying?

From the Islamic perspective, bullying is a form of oppression. Stopping it from occurring is a moral imperative. Thus justice, and helping to cultivate justice, is a central tenet of Islam.

This is evident in the Holy Qur'an in which Allah (SWT) says, "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do" (Quran, 5:8).

It is not only our cognitive belief that leads us to justice, but it is our souls that demand it from us as well.

As humans, our fitra, or natural inclination, is toward justice. [Research](#) shows that even babies root for justice; "Infants as young as six-months old grasp the complex interactions between a bully, a victim, and an intervening protector—and [they root for the brave protector.](#)"

One way to explore this concept further is through [other-focused empathy](#). Instead of putting yourself in someone else's shoes, which promotes an egocentric empathy, other-focused empathy involves observing and appreciating how the other is feeling.

How do you know your child is being bullied?

One of the most difficult aspects of bullying is that it often occurs at times when adults are not around. It also occurs in indirect ways that adults may unintentionally overlook.

The first step to solving the problem is understanding the different types of bullying and the common situations in which they surface.

By educating yourself and being aware of your child's social context, you are priming yourself for step two, recognizing the [warning signs](#).

When you are attuned to any indicators that your child is being bullied such as unexplained loss of possessions or fear of riding the school bus, you can be proactive in responding.

This may mean initiating a conversation about it.

Experts on bullying among children say that there are several reasons [why children might not ask for help](#). But this doesn't mean that you shouldn't talk about it.

Actually quite the opposite is true.

Having crucial conversations with kids shows them the importance of discussing difficult issues rather than avoiding them or denying that they exist. This also communicates that you're there to support them through it.

Questions you can ask are:

- I'm worried about you. Are there any kids at school who are teasing or picking on you?
- Are there any kids at school who leave you out on purpose?

- Who do you sit with at lunch and on the bus?
- Are there any kids at school who you really don't like? Why don't you like them?

How should my child deal with bullying?

There are different ways to respond to bullying depending on the situation. We have identified four strategies that can serve as a toolkit for children.

Ideally, you as a parent can equip your child to learn about the options. You can help them develop the ability to decide which is the best option in any given circumstance.

It is also important to remind your child that Allah (SWT) promises His own justice, stating that whoever performs an atom's weight of good or of evil will be compensated for it (Quran, 99:7-8).

Ignore it and walk away

This option only works in situations in which no one is being hurt.

For example, if someone is teasing another or repeating some annoying behavior, it is often better to ignore it and walk away than to give it more attention.

The story of [the old woman who threw garbage](#) at our Holy Prophet (SAW) demonstrates this strategy. It shows that responding with kindness and compassion can often soften the heart of a bully.

Stand up and speak up for yourself

It is imperative that children understand the notion of self-defense as it is prescribed to us in Islam.

At the level of bullying, it is one's right to defend oneself by asking for restraint. We are told in the Holy Qur'an to confront those who are hurting us, but, "do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits" (Quran, 2:190).

Ask friends for help

Many times, when bullying is occurring, the most powerful way to stop it is through the naysaying of peers.

The transformation of bystanders into upstanders is an empowering way to provide assistance to the bullied. This concept and the rationale for why it matters is discussed further below.

Ask adults for help

When all else fails, children must know that they can and should go to authority figures for help. These include parents, teachers, older siblings, and administrators.

These activities will also give your children the tools they need to respond to bullying they see and experience.

A special discussion on upstanders

I heard the Messenger of Allah (SAW) saying: "He who amongst you sees something abominable should modify it with the help of his hand; and if he has not strength enough to do that, then he should do it with his tongue; and if he has not strength enough to do even that, then he should (at least abhor it) from his heart; and that is the least of faith."

Why is it so important for people to stand up for others? What is achieved through this action?

When people who are witness to an act of injustice decide to stand up and speak out against it, several positive repercussions follow.

This response helps to create an environment in which hurtful words and behaviors are not tolerated. It allows upstanders to show solidarity with the bullied and demonstrate disapproval of the bully's actions. After all, it is a religious duty to do so.

Allah (SWT) says, "And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful" (Quran, 3:104).

Conversely, when people choose not to stand up and speak out, several negative consequences follow.

If oppression is not stopped, it can spread. Furthermore, if one does nothing to stop oppression, he or she is complicit in it. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in a period of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality. There comes a time when silence is betrayal."

From this, we learn that if we do not play an active role in battling injustice, we are also accountable for its existence.

Role of parents

Be connected

As a parent, it is vital for you to be connected to your child's social community. This means being in communication with the school and with other parents.

Ideally, your child's teacher should be a close point of contact. Through investing in relationships with educators, you have the potential to not only benefit your own child, but also the other students as well.

For example, sharing [this excellent resource](#) with teachers can strengthen the learning environment for all.

It is also important to know your child's friends. This network is a powerful safeguard against bullying because it creates allies for you and your child at various levels. Check out this [Bullying Prevention Guide](#) for more information.

Be a role model

When we stand up for fairness and justice in our own community, we are promoting good and condemning bad.

There are many ways to do this such as participating in local organizations or initiatives and voicing concerns openly.

Acting on your principles and standing firm in your beliefs is a strong way to not only embody what it means to be an upstander, but also role model confidence as an American Muslim. By taking action, we are able to set an example for our children.

Is there a unique challenge that your family is experiencing? Comment below and we will reply with feedback.