**Sex Education For Muslim Youths And Their Parents**

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**Abstract**

Sex Education of children and youth is a sensitive but important aspect of their learning. At present Muslim children are getting secular sex education at schools and getting, the wrong messages from the media. In this article pro and con of American sex education and Islamic concept of sexuality and marriage are discussed. Finally a curriculum is proposed for Islamic sex education to be given at home or Sunday Islamic school.

**Key Words**: Sex Education, Teenage Pregnancy, Sex in Islam and Marriage.

***In The Name of Allah, Most Kind, Most Merciful***

Allah says in Quran:

"Say: Are they equal to those who know, and those who do not know?"

Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) has said:

"Blessed are the women of the Ansar (citizens of Medina). Shyness did not stand in their way seeking knowledge about their religion"

Although Quran has given so much emphasis on acquiring, knowledge, and in the days of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) Muslim men, and women were never too shy to ask him questions including those relating to private affairs such as sexual life, for Muslim parents of today sex is a dirty word, they feel uncomfortable in discussing sex education with their children, but do not mind the same being taught at their school, by secular or non-Muslim teachers (of even opposite sex), by their peers of either sex, and by the media and television, (an average child is exposed to 9,000 sexual scenes per year). These parents should know that sex is not always a dirty word. It is an important aspect of our life. Allah who cares for all the aspects of our life, and not just the way of worshipping Him, discusses in Quran, reproduction, creation, family life, menstruation and even ejaculation. And Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) who was sent to us as an example, discussed with his companions many aspects of their sexual life including sexual positions. The main reason Muslim parents do not or cannot discuss sex education with their children is because the way they have ben brought up, ignorant and maybe they are not comfortable with their own sexuality or its expression. They leave Islamic Education to the Sunday school, and sex education to the American schools and the media.

**What Is Sex Education And Who Should Give It?**

Is sex education about knowing the anatomy and physiology of human body, or about the act of sex, or about reproduction and family life, or about prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy? Is giving sex education equal to giving permission of engaging in sex? One sex educator at my son's school told the parents "I am not planning to tell your children whether or not they should not engage in sex, or how to do it but in case they decide to do it they should know how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy". At present the sex education is incomplete as it does not cover the morality associated with sex, sexual dysfunctions and deviations and the institution of marriage.

One of the basic questions is , do children need sex education? Do you teach a duck how to swim or just put it in water and let it swim. After all, for thousands of years men and women are having sex without any formal education. In may traditional civilizations, sex education starts after the marriage with trial and error. Some couples learn it faster than others and do it better than others, due to difference in sexual perception and expression of one partner. In my opinion having dozen children is not necessarily a proof of love. An appropriate and healthy sex education is crucial to the fulfillment of a happy marriage.

With regards to the questions who should impart sex education, I believe everyone has to play his or her role. The parent as a whole have to assume a more responsible role; especially the father has a duty to be able to answer his son's questions and the mother to her daughter's. We can hardly influence the sex education at school or by the media which I call "VD- AIDS And Teenage Pregnancy Education", but we can supplement that with some ethical and moral dimension and add family love and responsibility. Apart from these sources, some role can be played by Sunday school teachers, the family physician, the pediatrician and the clergy. Within a family the elder sister has a duty towards the younger one and the elder brother has for the younger one.

**Sex Education In American Schools**

In every American school, public or private, sex education is being given from grade 2 to 12. The projected 1990 cost to the nation will be $2 Billion per year. Teachers are told to give the technical aspects of sex education without telling the students about moral values or how to make the right decisions. After describing the male and female anatomy, and reproduction, the main emphasis is on the prevention of venereal diseases and teenage pregnancy. With the rise of AIDS, the focus is on "Safe Sex" which means having condoms available each time you decide to have sex with someone you don't know. With the help of our tax dollars, about 76 schools in the country have started dispensing free condoms and contraceptives to those who go to school health clinics. Very soon, I can foresee there will be vending machine in the school hallways and "children" could get one condom each time they need to engage in sex. The role of parents is minimized by American sex educators and sometimes ridiculed. In one of the sex education movies I was made to watch as a parent at my son's school "Am I Normal?", the young boy whenever he asks a question about sex to his father, the father (is shown as a bum and a slob) shuns him away and diverts the topic. Finally the boy learns it from a stranger, and then is shown going into a movie theater with his girlfriend.

The secular sex education devoid of morality promoted by educators like Dr. Sol Gordon is in many ways unacceptable to our value system. The examples of Dr. Gordon's beliefs are:

a. Nudity in homes (in shower or bedroom) is good and a healthy way to introduce sexuality to smaller (under 5) children, giving them opportunity to ask questions. In the same book he also states that 75% of all child molestations and incests (500,000 per year) occur by a close relative (parent, step parent or another family member) in a familiar surrounding.

b. A child's playing with genitals of another child is a "naive exploration", is permissible and not a reason for scolding or punishment. *He is also aware that boys as young as 12 have raped girls as young as 8. He does not tell us when this "naive exploration" becomes a sex act.*

c. "Children caught reading 'dirty' magazines should not be made to feel quilty, but parents should use it as a chance to get some useful points across him or her about sexual attitudes, values and sex exploitation." *Like charity, pornography, should start at home !!*

d. " If your daughter or son is already sexually active, instead of telling them to stop it, the parents moral duty is to protect their health and career by providing them information and means for contraception and avoiding VD". Educators like Dr. Gordon do not believe that giving sexual information means giving the go ahead signal for sex. I just wonder as to why some folks after being, told the shape, color, smell and taste of a new fruit, and pleasure derived form eating it, would not like to try it? These educators say that even if your child does not ask any questions about sex, parents should initiate the discussion using i.e. a neighbor's pregnancy, a pet's behavior, advertisements, popular music or a TV show. I wonder why these educators are obsessed with loading children with sexual information whether they want it or not.

**The More They Know It - The More They Do It**

The sex education in American schools has not helped decrease in the teenager the incidence of VD or teenage pregnancy. This is because it has not changed their sex habits. According to Marion Wright Elderman President of Childrens Defense Fund in a recent report, "out of every 20 teens, 10 are sexually active but only 4 use contraception, 2 get pregnant and one gives birth. In 1982, John Hokins study found one out of every five 15 year olds, and three 16 year olds are sexually active . The incidence increased to 43% in 17 year olds, 46% of 16 year olds, 29% of 15 year olds were sexually active . Now it is estimated that about 80% girls entering college had sexual intercourse at least once. Going to church does not help either. Some 1400 teenagers, mostly white, attending conservative Evangelical Church were sent questions about their sex life. 26% of 16 year olds, 35% of 17 year olds, and 43% of 18 year olds said they had sexual intercourse at least once. 33% that responded also said sex outside of marriage was morally acceptable.

**Hazards of Early Sex**

The health hazards of early sex include sexual trauma, increase in incidence of cervical cancer, sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy.

A variety of injuries are possible and do happen when sex organs are not ready for sex in terms of full maturation. Some of these injuries have a long lasting effect." Cervical cancer has been thought to be related to sex at an early age and with multiple partners. Dr. Nelson and his associates in his article of epidemiology of cervical cancer calls it a sexual transmitted disease."

**Teenage Pregnancy**

About one million or more teenage girls become pregnant every year, 80% of them are unmarried. Out of this I million, about 500,000 decide to keep their baby, and 450,000 are aborted (or ? murdered), 100,000 decide to deliver and give the baby for adoption. In 1950 the incidence of birth from unmarried teenagers was only 13.98%, but in 1985 it increased to 59%. It is a myth that teenage pregnancy is a problem of black and poor. To the contrary 2 out of 3 teens getting pregnant now are white, suburban and above the poverty income level. The pregnancy rate (without marriage) in 54,000 listed Navy women is 40% compared to 17% to general population. What is the life of those who have teenage pregnancy? Only 50% complete high school, more than 50% of them are on welfare. They themselves become child abusers, and their children when grown up have 82% incidence of teenage pregnancy. 8.6 billion dollars are spent every year for the financial support and health care of teenage mothers.

The sexual revolution of 60's has affected another dimension of health care. In 1985 alone , 10 million cases of chlamydia, 2 million gonorrhea, 1 million venereal warts, 0.5 million genital herpes and 90,000 syphilis cases were diagnosed." The plague of AIDS" is adding a new twist to our fears. About 52,000 cases have been diagnosed in the USA alone and 50% of them have already died. The disease is growing at a rate of one case every 14 minutes," and so far there is no good treatment. Father Bruce Ritter of New York, who operates shelters for runaway children, says the biggest threat to the Nation's 1 million runaway is the threat of AIDS now.

There are many reasons children get involved in sex". Most common being the peer pressure. Their common response is "since everybody is doing it". One of the reasons is their desire for sexual competence with adults and a way to get ahead. Another common reason is their lack of self esteem which they want to acquire and improve by becoming a father or mother. Sometimes it is due to lack of other alternatives to divert their sexual energies. It could also be due to lack of love and appreciation at home. Detacthment from home can lead to attachment elsewhere. The sexual pressure on them is everywhere, at school from their peers, from the TV where about 20,000 sexual scenes are broadcasted annually in advertisement, soap operas, prime time shows and MTV. The hard core rock music nowadays fanned the flames of sexual desires. Most of the parents do not know what kind of music their children are listening. If they care, and listen to hard rock songs, they will know what they are singing some of these songs that have pornographic words and sentences which made Kandy Stroud, a former rock fan, beg parents to stop their children from listening to what she calls "Pornographic Rock". Music affects our mood by activating Melantonin, the hormone from the pineal gland in the brain which is turned on by darkness, turned off by flashing light. It is the same gland which has been thought to trigger puberty, and affects reproductive cycle, and sex mood.

**What Is The True Role Of Parents?**

For their failures (i.e. teenage pregnancy), the American educators are putting the blame, as usual, on the parents. In fact in Wisconsin and many other states the grandparents of a baby born to a teenager are responsible for the financial support of the child. Remember parents are not needed if their teenage daughter needs contraceptives or abortion. Faced with such hypocrisy, the parents job is to instil in their teenagers mind what is not taught in sex education classes i.e. reason not to engage in sex, reason not to get pregnant etc. At the same time, they should divert their energies to some productive activities like community work, sports, character growth, or Sunday schools. Another role of parents is to help their children make the right decisions. In Islam anything which leads to wrong is also wrong. Therefore parents should control the music children are listening, the TV program they are watching, the magazines they are reading, and the dress (which may provoke the desire in the opposite sex) they are wearing. While group social activity should be permitted within supervision, dating should not be allowed. When American teenagers start dating, sex is on their mind.

In fact 25% of college freshman boys during a survey responded by saying that if they have paid for the food, and the girl does not go all the way, they have a right to force her to have sex. Many of the rapes occur at the end of the date and are not reported. Anything which breaks down sexual inhibition and loss of self control i.e. alcohol, drug, petting or just being together for two members of the opposite sex in a secluded place should not be allowed for Muslim teenagers. Kissing and petting is preparing the body for sex. The body can be brought to a point of no return.

In summary, the Muslim parents should teach their children that they are different from non-Muslims in their value system and way of life. Having a feeling and love in your heart for someone else of the opposite sex is different and beyond check, while expression of the same through sex is entirely different and should be under control. Muslim children should be told that they don't drink alcohol, eat pork, take drugs, and they don't have to engage in pre-marital sex either.

**Islamic Concept Of Sexuality**

Islam recognizes the power of sexual need, and the subject is discussed in Quran and the saying of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) in a serious manner, in context with the marital life and family life . Islam does not consider women (or men) an object of sexual pleasure but with a legal frame work of relationship fulfilling the will of God. While the sex outside marriage is a punishable sin, sex with one's spouse is an act of worship. The Islamic laws regarding sex are fixed and do not change with peer pressure or changing values of society. Virginity at the time of marriage is considered a virtue in Islamic morality, but a disadvantage in the West. No wonder less than 10% of American brides are virgin.

**Mention Of Creation, Reproduction And Sex In The Quran**

1. *"Did We not create you from a sticky fluid?, Which We laid up in a safe abode, for a known term. Thus We arranged, how excellent is Our arrangement"*.

2. *"So let man consider from what he is created. From a gushing fluid that issues between the lion and the ribs*.

3. *"Verily We created man from a product of wet earth, then placed him in a drop in a safe lodging, then We fashioned the clot into a little lump, then We fashioned the lump into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the best of creators"*. Commentary: The seminal fluid has all the ingredients (protein, carbohydrate, minerals) as earth has. The order of embryology given 1400 years ago when no microscope, X-ray of ultrasound were available is the same as discovered now. Western scientists recognized sperm in 17th century and thought it to be a miniature pre-formed man".

4. *"Your women are a tilth for you, so enjoy your tilth the way you wish, and make an introduction to yourself.*

Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) said:

1. "When one of you have sex with your wife it is a rewardable act of charity". The companions were surprised and asked, "but we do it out of our desire, how can it be counted as a charity?". The Prophet replied "if you had done with a forbidden women, it would have been counted as a sin, but if you do it in legitimacy it is counted as a charity?".

2. "Let not the one of you fall upon his wife like a beast falls. It is more appropriate to send a message before the act" .

3. "Do not divulge secrets of your sex with your wife to another person, nor describe her physical feature to anyone".

**Concept of Adultery (Fornication or Zina) in Islam**

Allah says in Quran:
1.*"Do not come near to adultery. Surely it is a shameful deed and Evil, opening roads to another evils "*.

2. *"Say: Verily, my Lord has prohibited the shameful deeds, be it open or secret, sins and trespasses against the truth and reasons"* .

3. *"Women impure are for men impure, and men impure are for women impure and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity"*.

Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) has said on many places against adultery as one of the three major sins. However the most interesting story is that of a younger man, who came to him and asked his permission for fornication, since he could not control himself. The Prophet dealth with him with reasoning and asked him if he will approve of someone else doing illegal sex with his mother, sister, daughter or wife. Each time the man said 'no' then the Prophet replied that the woman with whom you plan to have sex could also be somebody's mother, sister, daughter or wife. The man understood and repented. The Prophet prayed for his forgiveness.

Adultery is a crime not against one person but against the whole society. It is a violation of marital contract. 50% of all first time marriages in this country result in divorce in 2 years, and the main reason for divorce is extra- marital affairs of either husband or wife. Adultery which includes both pre- marital and extramarital sex is an epidemic in this society. Nobody seems to listen to the Bible which says frequently "Thou shalt not do adultery". The Quranic approach "Do not approach adultery" is more sensible. What it means that not only illegal sex is prohibited, but anything which leads to illegal sex is also illegal. These things include dating, free mixing of sex, provocative dress, nudity, obscenity and pornography. The dress code both for men and women is to protect them from temptation and desires by onlookers who may lose self control and fall into sin.

"Say to the believing men, that they should lower their gaze
and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity,
and God is well acquainted with all they do". "And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty. ..".

**Concept of Marriage In Islam**

Islam recognizes the strong sexual urge and desire for reproduction. Thus Islam encourages marriage as a legal sexual outlook and as a shield from immorality (sex without commitment). In Islam the marriage of a man and woman is not just a financial and legal living arrangement, not even just for reproduction, but providing with a total commitment to each other, a contract witnessed by Allah. Love and joy of companionship is a part of the commitment. A married couple assumes a new social status and responsibility for himself, his wife and his children and for the community.

Allah says:

*"Among His signs is that he created consorts for you from
among yourself, so that you may find tranquility with them,
and (He) set love and compassion between you. Verily in
this are signs for people who reflect."*

Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) said:

I. "Marriage is my tradition. He who rejects my tradition is not of me".

2. "Marriage is half of the religion, the other half is being God fearing".

In Islam there is no fixed rule to the age of marriage. It is becoming fashionable for Muslim young men not to marry until they have completed their education, have a job, or reached age 26-30 or more. Similarly Muslim young girls say they want to marry after age 24 - why? When asked, they would say "I am not ready for it" - not ready for what? Don't they have normal sexual desire? If the answer is, yes, then they have only one of the two choices (a) marry or (b) postpone sex (abstinence till they marry).

*"Let those who find not the where withal for marriage,
keep them self chaste till God find them the means from His
Grace"* .

Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) said:

"Those of you who own the means, should marry, otherwise should keep fasting, for it curbs desires".

The western concept for delaying marriage is different from ours. When I suggested to one of my sexually active young female patient, she bluntly said "I don't want to sleep with the same guy every night."

**Role Of Muslim Parents And Muslim Organizations**

I am not proposing that all Muslim youth be married at age 16. But I must say that youth should accept the biological instinct and make decisions which will help a more satisfied life devoted to the career rather than spending time in chasing (or dreaming about) the opposite sex. Parents should help their sons and daughters in selection of their mate using Islamic practice as a criteria and not the race, color or wealth. They should encourage them to know each other in a supervised setting.

a) To provide a platform for boys and girls to see and know each other without any intimacy.

b) Offer premarital educational courses to boys and girls over 18, separately to prepare them for the role of father and husband and of mother and wife.

The father has a special role, mentioned by Prophet Muhammed "one who is given by God, a child, should give it a beautiful name, should give him or her education, and training and when he or she attains puberty, she should see to it that he or she is married. If the father does not arrange their marriage after puberty, and the boy or girl is involved in sin, the responsibility of that sin will lie with the father". (Reported in Mishkat, page 271).

**The Curriculum For Islamic Sex Education**

Islamic sex education should be taught at home, starting at an early age. Before giving education about the anatomy and physiology, the belief in the Creator should be well established. As Destoevsky puts it "without God everything, is possible" meaning that the lack of belief or awareness of God gives an okay for wrong doing".

The father should teach the son and mother should teach her daughter. In the absence of a willing parent, the next best choice should be a Muslim male teacher (preferably a physician) for boys and a Muslim female teacher (a nurse or physician) for a girl at the Sunday Islamic school.

The curriculum should be tailored according to the age of the child and classes be held separately. Only answer to a pertinent question be given. By this I mean that if a 5 year old asks "how did I get into mom's tummy", there is no need to describe the whole act of intercourse. Similarly it is not necessary to tell a 14 year old how to put on condoms. This might be taught in premarital class just before his or her marriage.

The Curriculum For Sex Education Should Include:

a) Sexual growth and development

 \* Time table for puberty

 \*Physical changes during puberty

 \* Need for family life

b) Physiology of reproductive system

 \* For girls - organ, menstruation, premenstrual syndrome

 \* For boys - the organ, the sex drive

c) Conception, development of fetus & birth

d) Sexually transmitted disease (VD/AIDS) (emphasize the lslamic aspect).

e) \* Mental, emotional & social aspect of puberty

 \* Social, moral and religious ethics

 \* How to avoid peer pressure

**Sex Education After Marriage**

This article is not intended to be a sex manual for married couples, though I may write such someday. I just wanted to remind the reader a short verse in Quran and then elaborate.

*"They are your garments, and you are their garments".*

Thus husbands and wives are described as garments to each other. A garment is very close to our body, so they should be close to each other, a garment protects and shields our modesty, so they should do the same to each other, garments are put on anytime we like, so should they be available to each other anytime, and a garment adds to our beauty, so they should praise and beautify each other.

For husbands I should say this. Sex is an expression of love and one without the other is incomplete. One of your jobs is to educate her in matters of sex especially in your likes and dislikes and do not compare her to another woman.

For wives I want to say this. Man's sexual needs are different from woman's. Instead of being, a passive recipient of sex, try to be an active partner. He is exposed to many temptations outside the home. Be available to please him, and do not give him an excuse to make a choice between you and the hellfire.

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