

Firoza Osman. *How to Talk to Your Muslim Child About Sex*. Edmonton, Alberta: Self-published, 2020.

Firoza Osman has over twenty years of teaching experience; in addition to serving as a further education lecturer and educational assistant with a public school board, she works as an afterschool program manager at an Islamic non-profit organization. In this position, she delivers workshops to Muslim youth on healthy relationships. She also provides coaching services to parents that focus on sexual health education within an Islamic framework and screentime management.

How to Talk to Your Muslim Child About Sex (2020) is a practical guide for Muslim parents concerned about preserving their children's sexual health and moral compass. The book is written from the perspective of a mother who raised her two sons in a non-Muslim environment, away from Canada's more densely populated Muslim cities and communities. With the odds stacked against her and her family, Osman navigates the "hypersexualized and pornified world," as she puts it. Taking her personal experience and educational background into account, Firoza Osman compiles, subject by subject, topic by topic, a list of things that worked for her and what to avoid. Considering the above, one would expect her advice to be even more impactful in a Muslim environment where mosques and resources are plentiful.

Coach and now author Osman's goal is to equip parents with the tools to discuss sex education. She argues that to raise children to be adults who can enjoy and sustain a mutually satisfying, healthy marital relationship, parents must build those relationship skills from birth and guide their children to handle their sexuality in an Islamic way. She divides her book into three thematic chapters.

In the first chapter, about contextualizing the times, she shares aspects of the current sex-obsessed culture and how morality has been detached from it. Contending that "[t]his sacred gift from Allah is dishonored" (p. 18), she demonstrates this detachment by providing examples of how this desecration is present in books, movies, TV, talk shows, music, music videos, and so on. She also highlights trends that live alongside the sex-obsessed culture (e.g., profanity, social media influence, peer pressure, mental health, drugs, and alcohol) as well as gender- and Muslim-specific tensions that may affect children and cause them to lose their moral compass.

The second chapter, about building a connection for an open line of communication, focuses on connecting with one's parents and family and connecting with Allah. Here, the author explores and discusses parenting styles, the importance of one's personal connection with Allah, some practical tips on developing that connection, and creating a home culture in which the family members connect and find meaningful relationships. This serves as a safety net and the medium through which the next chapter's topics can be adequately discussed.

The third chapter, the bulk of the book, covers all of the practical advice on how to talk to one's child at every stage of development. The key is to start young, and so the book begins with the child's birth and provides focus topics for each developmental stage until

he/she is seventeen. Those stages are birth to age two, ages three to five, five to six, six to eight, nine to eleven, twelve to fourteen, and fifteen to seventeen. Each stage has age-appropriate topics and issues to focus on. Beyond this, the chapter provides some information about pornography and covers Islam's view on sexuality and relationships. The book concludes with references and a useful list of valuable resources.

As for its weaknesses, *How to Talk to Your Muslim Child About Sex* contains no *fiqh* discussion. Referencing another source that details the jurisprudential aspects of sexual health would have benefitted Muslim readers. Considering that this book is titled *How to Talk to Your Muslim Child About Sex*, readers might assume some relevant Islamic jurisprudential discussions would be expanded upon. An alternative to engaging in the *fiqh* discussion would have been to redirect readers to specific resources that they could benefit from. Unfortunately, in the section about menstruation, where specific Islamic jurisprudential sources could have been shared, Osman fails to name any such resources and only states, "The *fiqh* of menstruation is not covered in this book but there are courses, books, and online resources that cover it in detail" (pp. 98-99). Perhaps in a second edition of the book, Osman could include the specific "courses, books, and online resources" that she alludes to, in the back of the book in her lists of useful resources. The book also does not mention much, if anything, about counseling and how it may be an option for those struggling to establish a healthy parent-child bond. The author seems to assume that by providing theory, parents can put into practice all that is mentioned without a mentor or practical guidance.

Although listed as a weakness, the leaving out of the *fiqh* discussions can also be seen as a strength, as the author is reaching out to a broader Muslim audience and is focusing on what she knows. A second strength is chapter three's outline for sexual health education. The author mentions a website with a more comprehensive and detailed outline with a parent guide; however, her outline is unique because it is placed within an Islamic framework. The practical advice is plenty, and the approach is realistic. A third strength is that from the beginning until the end, every couple of pages contain references to essential and relevant information, allowing inquisitive readers to research further and gain a deeper understanding of the subject. The introduction and chapter one are compelling, using references and capturing the modern context in which children are growing up.

Overall, *How to Talk to Your Muslim Child About Sex* is a must-read for Muslim parents and leaders living in the West. Instead of being considered a "one-stop shop" on the topic, it is a great starting point for parents to develop a framework within which to have age-appropriate discussions about sexual health and sex education. Parents will have to look elsewhere for relevant Islamic jurisprudential information about sexual health. Likewise, for Islamic school teachers and curriculum creators, an outline has been meticulously put in place in this book. The only thing left for curriculum creators to do is to incorporate activities and Islamic *fiqh* discussions about sexual health and sexual education. For example, teachers could incorporate Dr. Asif Hirani's *Principles of Men-Women Interaction in Islam* (Islamic Learning Foundation: 2019) as a part of the discussion about how to interact with the opposite gender.

In addition to benefitting parents and teachers, community leaders can use this book's outline to develop workshops on sex education that can be taught at mosques and

community centers. Community leaders, like imams and religious directors, could also combine material from Dr. Asif Hirani's book on men-women interactions, Mufti Muhammad Ibn Adam al-Kawthari's book *Islamic Guide to Sexual Relations* (Turath Publishing: 2008), and Shaykh Yassir Fazaga's audio podcast series, *Before You Say I Do*, to have a holistic understanding of sex education in Islam. Combining these resources would provide community leaders with the tools to talk to a wide range of people, whether that be children that have only begun to understand their gendered differences, youth not in a position to get married but are regularly interacting with the opposite gender because of school, work, and society, or someone that is already married and needs guidance on sexual health within the marriage context. By combining sexual health education with the *fiqh* of intimacy and relationships, a holistic course can be created, with this book serving as its backbone.

Firoza Osman has focused on empowering parents with the ability to communicate with their children in a meaningful uplifting way. If readers are able to remember the Prophetic words about speaking to people according to their understanding, they will appreciate the value that this book brings by providing the age-appropriate language needed to have these important discussions.

Review by Rifat Zaman

Imam Rifat Zaman is a student, teacher, and community leader. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Islamic Studies and Organizational Leadership at The Islamic Seminary of America under the tutelage of great teachers and mentors like Sh. Dr. Yasir Qadhi, Ust. Dr. Jimmy Jones, Sh. Dr. Tamara Gray, and others. He plays the role of community leader at Masjid Uthman, Dunwoody, providing religious consultation and marriage services and leading community events such as Friday sermons, youth and family programs, and more. Additionally, he is a teacher of Qur'ānic recitation, Tajwīd, Ḥifẓ, Qur'ānic Arabic, and general Islamic Studies. He teaches individual and group classes, working with children as young as 4 years old and adults as old as 70.