102187 - Uncovering the `Awrah in Front of Children

the question

I have the following question: Is it allowed for a small child to see its parents' `Awrah (private parts which are required to be covered in public)? Is it for example allowed to shower together with its parents?

Summary of answer

Once children reach the age of discernment, it is not permissible to uncover the `Awrah in front of them.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Age of Discernment and Its Impact on Covering `Awrah

It is not permissible to uncover the `Awrah in front of children who have reached the age of discernment, because Allah has commanded the believers to tell household members who have not reached the age of puberty to ask for permission before entering at the three times, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{O you who believe! Let your slaves and slave-girls, and those among you who have not come to the age of puberty ask your permission (before they come to your presence) on three occasions: before Fajr (morning) Salah (prayer), and while you put off your clothes for the noonday (rest), and after the `Isha' (night) Salah (prayer). (These) three times are of privacy for you; other than these times there is no sin on you or on them to move about, attending to each other. Thus Allah makes clear the Ayat (the Verses of this Quran, showing proofs for the legal aspects of permission for visits) to you. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.} [An-Nur 24:58]

These times when Allah has enjoined us to tell children to seek permission are times when people wear fewer clothes.

Insights from Islamic Scholars on Parental `Awrah

The great scholar Ibn `Ashur (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his Tafsir At-Tahrir wat-Tanwir:

These times are times when household members would wear fewer clothes, and it would be reprehensible for their children to see their `Awrahs, because that would leave an impression on the child's mind, as he would not be used to seeing it. And because children should be brought up to cover their `Awrahs so that that will be like second nature to them when they grow up. (End quote)

This is the proper etiquette with children: they should be prevented from seeing people's `Awrahs, because of the negative effects that will have on their attitude when they grow up.

The great scholar Ibn Sa`di (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his Tafsir, when listing the lessons learned from this verse:

… It is not permissible to allow a small child who is below the age of puberty to see the `Awrah, and it is not permissible for his `Awrah to be seen, because Allah has only commanded them to seek permission so as to avoid something that is not permissible. (End quote)

This applies to a child who has reached the age of discernment and understands what the`Awrah is.

The great scholar Abu Bakr Al-Jassas said in Ahkam Al-Quran (3/464-465):

Allah has enjoined the child who understands about women's `Awrahs to seek permission to enter at the three times, in the words "Let your slaves and slave-girls, and those among you who have not come to the age of puberty ask your permission (before they come to your presence)…"

What is meant is the one who understands that and sees women's `Awrahs. The one who is not

commanded to seek permission is younger than that. (End quote)

When It Is Permissible to Uncover `Awrah Around Children

If a child has not reached the age of discernment, there is nothing wrong with not covering before him.

Ibn Qudamah said in Al-Mughni (7/76):

As for the boy, if he is still a small child and has not reached the age of discernment, it is not obligatory to cover before him. (End quote)

The great scholar Zakariya Al-Ansari said in Sharh Al-Bahjah (4/98): It is permissible to uncover the `Awrah before a small child who cannot tell others of what he has seen. (End quote)

Guidelines for Determining a Child's Age of Discernment

This is a good guideline. It is permissible to uncover the `Awrah before a small child who cannot tell others of what he has seen, such as a child who is one or one and a half years old. But it is not permissible to uncover it in front of a child who can tell others of what he has seen, such as a child who is three years old. But it should be noted that this may vary from one child to another. Some children are more advanced than their peers in mental and linguistic development, and some lag behind their peers.

To understand better, check the following answers:

Woman's `Awrah in Front of Her Children

What Is a Woman's `Awrah?

Children Exposing Their Private Parts to One Another

A Woman's `Awrah in Front of Women

Can a woman breastfeed her child in front of her Mahrams?

Uncovering Pubic Area for Sons to Teach Them How to Shave Pubic Hair!

And Allah knows best.