83278 - Caring for the Newborn

the question

Could you please tell me if there are any books in English that cover the topic of how to look after a baby. Currently we have to rely on the advice given by doctors in the West which may not be correct. It would be so nice to be able to follow the way of the Sahabiat (female companions of the Prophet). For example, did they share their beds with their babies?, When did they give solid foods and how did they discipline the young children etc?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Many issues of childrearing in fact are based on sound customs and human experience, with the possibility of fine-tuning it in accordance with the general teachings of the Qur'aan and Sunnah. As for specific, binding guidelines, they have to do with specific commands and prohibitions. Apart from that, the experience of specialists in childrearing are the reference point from which people should learn and strive to benefit, because childrearing nowadays has become a science on which studies are carried out and to which much effort, money and time are devoted. This is by the bounty that Allaah has bestowed upon people. The Muslim should not neglect to learn methods of raising and dealing with children, whilst also paying attention to the guidelines of the Qur'aan and Sunnah.

With regard to newborn infants there are some rulings which have to do with acts of worship, such as it being mustahabb (liked/preferred) to do the 'aqeeqah (offer a sacrifice), circumcise boys, rub the inside of the baby's mouth with some chewed-up date (tahneek), shave the infant's head and give the weight of the hair in silver as charity, and so on. This has been discussed previously on our site in the answers to questions no. 7889 and 20646.

With regard to how to take care of the ordinary physical needs of the infant, one should follow the advice of doctors and educators, and some general concepts that are mentioned in sharee'ah (Islamic law), which will be discussed below.

Secondly:

Among the early well known Muslim doctors is Imam Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751 AH), the author of a famous book called Tuhfat al-Mawdood bi Ahkaam al-Mawlood. One of the most important chapters of his book is the sixteenth chapter, which is entitled Fi fusool naafi'ah fi Tarbiyat al-Atfaal tuhmad 'awaaqibuha 'ind al-Kabr (Useful advice on raising children which will have good consequences when the child grows up). You can benefit from its contents, whilst paying attention to the fact that what he mentions are matters that are subject to ijtihaad (independent thinking), based on his level of knowledge and medical experience at that time. You can benefit from it in general terms and by studying similar books of modern medicine.

I will quote here a summary of what he said, because it includes useful medical information about dealing with newborn infants.

1.

The child should be breastfed by someone other than his mother, two or three days after birth. That is better because her milk after that time will be thick and contain different ingredients, unlike the milk of one who has been breastfeeding for a while. All the Arabs pay attention to that, and they give their children to desert women to breastfeed, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was given to Banu Sa'd to be breastfed among them.

2.

They should not be picked up and carried around until they are three months old or more, because they have only recently emerged from their mother's wombs and their bodies are still weak.

3.

They should be given only milk until their teeth appear, because their stomachs are weak and unable to digest food. When the baby’s teeth appear, his stomach has grown strong and is able to be nourished by food. Food should be introduced gradually.

4.

When they approach the age where they will begin to speak and one wants to make it easy for them to speak, a little honey and salt should be placed on the infant’s tongue, because they contain substances that will reduce the excessive moisture that prevents speech. When the child begins to speak, one should prompt him to say Laa ilaaha ill-Allaah Muhammad Rasool Allaah.

5.

When the time for the teeth to appear comes, the gums should be rubbed every day with butter and ghee.

6.

Parents should not get upset when the child cries and yells, because he benefits greatly from that crying. It exercises his limbs, opens his intestines and chest, keeps his brain warm, warms his moods, provokes his energy, creates suitable conditions for expelling waste matter, and helps rid the brain of mucus and other waste.

7.

The child should be protected against everything that may scare him of harsh and terrifying noises, frightening scenes and disturbing movements.

8.

Complete breastfeeding lasts for two years. This is the right of the child if he needs it and cannot do without it. The Qur’aan confirmed that by adding the word kaamilayn (meaning complete or whole, in the verse “The mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years” [al-Baqarah 2:233]). If the one who is breastfeeding the child wants to wean him, she should wean him

gradually, and not wean him suddenly in one go; rather she should get him used to it slowly because of the harm that may be done by changing the child's food and habit in one go.

9.

It is mistreatment of children to allow them to eat their fill of food, and to eat and drink a lot. One of the most beneficial ways of training them is to give them less than their fill, so that they may digest well and be in good health, there will be less waste in their bodies and their bodies will be healthy, and they will have less sickness because of having less food waste in their bodies.

10.

One thing that the child needs most urgently is close attention to his moral well being. He grows up with whatever the one who is raising him gets him used to when he is small. [If it is] resentment, anger, arguments, haste, being easily led by whims and desires, foolishness, hot-temperedness and greed, then it will be difficult for him to change that when he grows up. Hence you will find that most people are deviant in their character, because of the way they were brought up.

11.

The child's guardian should keep him from taking from others because if he gets used to taking, that will become natural for him, and he will grow up as one who takes and not one who gives. If the guardian wants to give something, he should give it by his hand [i.e., give it to the child to give away] so that that he will taste the sweetness of giving.

12.

He should keep him away from lying and treachery more than he would keep him away from lethal poison. Once he lets him get the habit of lying and betrayal, he will have corrupted his happiness in this world and in the Hereafter, and deprived him of all goodness.

13.

He should keep him away from laziness, idleness, a life of ease and too much rest, and he should force him to do the opposite. He should not let him rest more than is sufficient to restore his energy so that he can do more work, for laziness and idleness bring bad consequences and lead to regret. Yahya ibn Abi Katheer said: Knowledge cannot be attained by letting the body rest.

14.

He should get him used to waking up at the end of the night, for that is the time when reward is allocated and prizes are awarded; some will take less and some will take more and some will be deprived. If he gets used to that when he is little, it will be easy for him when he grows up.

End quote. Tuhfat al-Mawdood (194-203).

Thirdly:

With regard to what you asked about, namely the child sleeping in his parents' bed, there is nothing wrong with allowing that occasionally. Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him), when he was small, slept in the bed of his maternal aunt Maymoonah; he lay across the bed and the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and Maymoonah slept lengthways on it. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (138) and Muslim (763).

It says in 'Umdat al-Qaari (3/66):

This hadeeth shows that it is permissible to sleep in the same bed as a mahram even if her husband is there. End quote.

But this is not what is usual; what is usual is for each person to sleep in his own bed most of the time.

With regard to the Prophet's methods of disciplining and punishing children, he taught that smacking (lightly) in order to discipline a child should only be after the age of ten.

That is because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Teach your children to pray when they are seven years old and smack them (lightly) if they do not pray when

they are ten years old.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (495) and classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

As the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not give permission to smack a child for falling short with regard to the greatest pillar of religion, which is prayer, before the age of ten, it is more apt to say that this also applies to all other issues of life, behaviour and upbringing.

Al-Athram said: Abu ‘Abd-Allaah was asked about teachers smacking children and he said: It should be commensurate with their misdemeanours but he should refrain from smacking as much as he can. If the child is little and does not understand, he should not smack him.

Al-Adaab al-Shar’iyyah by Ibn Muflih (1/506).

The maximum number of smacks is ten:

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “No one should be given more than ten lashes except in the case of one of the hadd (set) punishments prescribed by Allaah.”

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6850) and Muslim (1708).

Al-Qaadi Shurayh said that a child should be smacked no more than three times for neglect in learning Qur’aan, and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azeez used to send letters to the regions saying “The teacher should not (smack the child) more than three times, because it scares the child.” Narrated by Ibn Abi’l-Dunya in al-‘Iyaal (1/531).

Hitting the face must be avoided in all cases. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade saying “May Allaah make your face ugly” and he enjoined us to avoid hitting the face. This was narrated by Abu Dawood (4493) and classed as saheeh (authentic) by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

You can use threats of smacking, which may be more effective than actually smacking the child.

There is a report which speaks of hanging up a whip or stick in the house so that the child will understand that there will be a punishment in the case of a misdemeanour that is deserving of punishment, and that is because it is overstepping the mark of etiquette and good attitude.

It was narrated from Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

“Hang up the whip where the people of the household can see it, for it will discipline them.”

Narrated by ‘Abd al-Razzaaq in al-Musannaf (11/133) and by al-Tabaraani in al-Mu’jam al-Kabeer (10/284); classed as hasan (sound) by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami’ (4022).

In the advice of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to Mu’aadh ibn Jabal (may Allaah be pleased with him) he said: “Spend on your family from what you can afford and do not lift your stick from them so as to discipline them.” Narrated by Ahmad (5/238). Al-Albaani said in Saheeh al-Targheeb (1/138): It is hasan li ghayrihi(good with support from other narrations).

What we have mentioned – as you can see – is just a little, which indicates that in principle, discipline means teaching, directing and guiding with a good word, good example, encouragements and threats. As for resorting to punishment, that should be the last resort, and should only be done in a way that achieves the aim and does not go beyond that to causing physical or psychological harm to the child.

And Allaah knows best.