

MAS-SSF

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MA-SSF Announces Spiritual Counseling Services

Spiritual counseling, including cases of traumatic needs such as death, rape, etc., will be added to our services. We are honored that Sheikh Mohamed Kamel, formerly with Masjid Annur in Sacramento, has joined MAS-SSF and will provide this service to our community. Please call (916) 486-8626 to request an appointment.

MAS-SSF and SALAM Announce Partnership in Counseling and Matrimonial Services

MAS-SSF and SALAM are cooperating in several areas. Some people who request counseling at SALAM will be referred to MAS-SSF. MAS-SSF will conduct pre-marital counseling for engaged couples. MAS-SSF counselor and Director of Matrimonial Services Dr. Ahmed Ibrahim will work with SALAM to coordinate in this important area. MAS-SSF has finished conducting a successful 12 week class on marriage for young people. The class had a full enrollment of 6 young men and 9 young women. Plans are being made to repeat the class again early next year. Some clients receiving peer counseling at MAS-SSF may request a spiritual counseling at MAS-SSF may request a spiritual counseling session with SALAM's Imam Azeez and an outside referral will be made. The peer counselor may attend if requested by the client.

MASTERING MARITAL COMMUNICATION

Communicate better, live longer, and have children who argue less

- Q. Do you want to live happier and longer?**
- A. Communicate better in your marriage**
- Q. Do you want children who argue less?**
- A. Argue less with your spouse-practice positive problem-solving skills at home**
- Q. Is this easy?**

YES, if you come to the MAS-SSF workshop and learn these skills on June 7 from 9-5 at SALAM Islamic Center

Most of us would like to know the secrets of a long, happy married life. A 17 year study of 192 couples has unlocked one important secret. It appears that there is a better than chance relationship between poor communication and death. 26 of the couples held their feelings in, brooded and did not succeed in working out problems. Instead they suppressed their anger and brooded. In 23% of those couples both husband and wife died during the 17 year period. This is a statistically significant elevated mortality rate.

Among the other 166 couples, whose marital communication style and skills meant they did discuss problems with each other, both husband and wife died in only 6% of the couples. (For more information read the study in the January, 2008 Journal of Family Communication).

Most of us would like to know how to raise children who argue less, especially with us. Apparently children learn how to argue with their parents by watching their parents when they argue with each other. Previous research has showed that negative conflict resolution styles are transmitted from parents to children. Now a new study shows that positive styles are transmitted as well. Three hundred families with a mother, a father, and at least one young teenager participated in a study reported in the Journal of Family Psychology.

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Three conflict resolution styles were the focus of the study:

1. Conflict engagement (e.g., “getting furious and losing my temper”, letting myself go and saying things I do not really mean”)
2. Withdrawal (e.g., “not listening anymore”)
3. Positive problem-solving, making compromises, and effective communication (e.g., “negotiating and trying to find a solution that is mutually acceptable, sitting down and discussing the differences of opinion”)

After two years it was found that parents who used positive problem-solving in their own marital relationship had children who used the same skills in parent-child interactions.

In the workshop husbands and wives learn the 10 most important positive marital communication skills (SEE BELOW) and how to put and keep emotional honesty, compassion, empathy and trust in their relationship. Cost is minimal, \$20 per couple, which includes lunch. Babysitting is available for a nominal fee. Financial aid for both is available. Space is limited. Pre-registration is required, no same day registration available. For registration or information, call Nassiba Cherif at 334-6832. Or email nassibacherif@yahoo.com. Note: The workshop will be repeated later this year or early next year.

10 MOST IMPORTANT POSITIVE MARITAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS:

1. **SHOWING UNDERSTANDING**
2. **EXPRESSION**
3. **DISCUSSION**
4. **COACHING**
5. **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**
6. **PROBLEM-SOLVING**
7. **SELF-CHANGE**
8. **HELPING OTHERS CHANGE**
9. **GENERALIZATION**
10. **MAINTENANCE**

How Children Grow Part III: Language Acquisition in the Early Years

Dr. Omar Ahmed, Pediatrician

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D., Language Educator

Children’s communication skills develop rapidly in the first few years of life, from the early cries of infancy to the development of two and three word sentences in the third year. Unfortunately, many born in the United States are only comfortable with English. There are many reasons for this. One thought among immigrant families is that in order for their children to succeed in this country, they must have a strong command of the English language, and therefore English is taught and reinforced to the exclusion of the native tongue. Another reason is that some young children do not see the usefulness of their parents’ language(s).

All normal human children have an innate capacity to acquire any human language if they receive sufficient meaningful exposure to it in social environment like the family. There is no use in “correcting” a small child’s grammar or pronunciation. Eventually the child’s brain will sort out the rules. It may be helpful to point out social rules of language, such as always saying “please” in English when asking for help.

Young children seem to have a keen ability to discern whether a language is useful to them in their immediate environments. If they must use Language A to meet their own needs they will acquire and use it. If not they won’t. This is why some older children and adults will say, “I can understand my parents’ native language (PNL) but I can’t speak it. As children they needed to understand their parents but could answer in English. So if parents want their young children to acquire PNL they will have to do more than speak it in the home. They must ensure that children need to use the language themselves. This cannot be forced—punishment does not work. Attract the bee with a flower not vinegar. Encouraging and comforting children is the key.

A Serious Issue

MAS-SSF received the following anonymous question:

Q. What happens and how do you tell your parents you are pregnant before marriage?

Editor's Note: Clearly this is a sensitive and difficult question. For precisely this reason it needs to be answered. The person who sent it may not know anyone whom she can talk to about this question. If there is a unwed mother there is an unwed father, who may wish to avoid his responsibilities and the consequences of his actions, but whose life, spiritual and emotional, will never be the same again either. In this issue of the newsletter, a Muslim physician will address the question from the perspective of the emotional and physical consequences of "what happens" if two people who are not married cause a pregnancy. In subsequent issues the spiritual and legal consequences will be addressed by an Imam and a Muslim attorney.

A. By Dr. Omar Ahmed

The phenomenon of unwed mothers has become very common in this country. Fortunately, with increased emphasis on abstinence education and birth control, adolescent pregnancy is not as common as it has been in the past, peaking in 1990 (Gutmacher Institute U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, 2006). While it is clear that premarital intimacy is prohibited in Islam, it is naïve to assume that this problem does not exist in our communities. There are many psychosocial difficulties that can develop as a consequence of unintended pregnancy. Medical problems are also a concern, particularly in teenage pregnancies or with pregnant mothers who do not receive proper prenatal care.

Having a child is expensive. While medical care is often covered by insurance, the costs of feeding, clothing, and educating a child can be extensive. Single parents often have the added dilemma of not having another wage-earner in the home to help provide for the new family. Because of difficulties finding child care, many single women are forced to leave school or their jobs to care for their children, obviously leading to difficulties in their career or

educational advancement goals. While there are state programs available to help low income women provide for their children, this economic stress can take an emotional toll on women. Single parenthood is a reality in many families, whether because of unplanned pregnancy or divorce. It is important to lessen the hardship by having a strong social network of family and/or friends who can help support the mother and child.

Because of the social stigma of unwed motherhood, especially in adolescents, many pregnant mothers delay going to a physician to receive appropriate medical care. In some women, this may be exacerbated by thoughts of whether or not they want to keep the child. Monitoring the growth of the unborn child, and frequent checks of the mother's health status help make a healthy pregnancy more likely, for the mother and child, and should be encouraged regardless of this decision. Some adolescents may delay seeing a physician because they are still keeping the pregnancy secret from their guardians. While open communication between family members is encouraged and makes medical care easier, physicians are required to keep medical information confidential (with some exceptions, such as sexual abuse) and may help nervous young mothers with the decision to break their pregnancy news to their family members, if she agrees.

Most teenagers don't get pregnant on purpose. If they do, it may be a sign of "acting out" or seeking out love they don't feel they get from their own families. Depression in adolescents is not uncommon, and if untreated may lead to drug abuse, sexual experimentation, and medical consequences for the teenager and her unborn child. With sexual experimentation and unprotected sexual intercourse, the risk of sexually transmitted diseases increases. Not just an annoyance, some of these diseases (Hepatitis, HIV) can be life-threatening for the mother and the unborn child. With appropriate medical treatment, in some case the child can be protected from such diseases, even from HIV. Pregnancy may have occurred as an indirect result of drug or alcohol abuse. Again, this can have dangerous consequence for the child, especially if it is continued during the pregnancy. Small birth weight, premature birth,

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developmental delay, and mental retardation have been associated with a variety of different substances. While experimenting in drugs and alcohol should always be discouraged, they should be even more urgently avoided during pregnancy because of these dangerous consequences.

It has been said that "it takes a village" to raise a child. Islam also emphasizes the role of the family in the rearing of a child. An ideal growing situation for a child is with both a mother and father present, with a supportive extended family and community. A child learns important socialization skills by mimicking parents and those around them. Children learn by copying those around them, so if they are brought up in an environment of physical or emotional abuse, drug or alcohol abuse, and lack of emphasis on moral, religious, or educational values, they are more likely to incorporate these traits in their own personalities. Particularly in the first year of life, infants need to feel loved and develop a trust of those caregivers around them. If they are brought up feeling unwanted or if there is family tension surrounding them, this may have an influence in their growth and development, as well as their emotional health.

Premarital pregnancy is a difficult dilemma that has consequences that can affect both the mother and unborn child. Not only can the mother's emotional, economic, and educational future be negatively affected, but the decisions she makes can have a profound impact on the health and upbringing of her child. Ideally, open communication between parents and their children can help avoid such situations occur in the first place. While it can be very difficult to inform parents that pregnancy has occurred, it is important that pregnant women have access to a strong network of support to help maintain the health of herself and her child during pregnancy and beyond.

For Our Readers

Family Development Circle

Three months to Ramadan and counting...while we enjoy the beauty of our summer gardens in Northern California it is good to think about how to nurture our growing Muslim community. Family Development Circle (FDC) is a way to support the work of MAS-SSF on a regular basis. With a monthly donation (tax deductible) of \$10 you (and your family) will help SSF and in return you will receive this newsletter by email and a 50% discount on MAS-SSF workshops during the year of your membership. It is generally agreed that your donation may be given to SSF as a part of zakat. There will be a further benefit, one that will help your small donation help SSF obtain larger amounts. SSF will be applying for grants from government and private foundations. It is essential to demonstrate grass roots support for SSF work. A healthy number of FDC members will be strong evidence. You may of course contribute more. Membership may be anonymous if requested.

To join, please go to www.mas-sac.org and follow the directions.

Or call (916) 486-8626 or email ssf@mas-sac.org, leave your name and phone number or email address and we will contact you to explain how to join off-line.

Food for Thought : About Loneliness

A palm tree stands in the middle of Rusafa,
Born in the West, far from the land of palms.
I said to it: How like me you are, far away and in exile,
In long separation from family and friends.
You have sprung from soil in which you are a stranger;
And I, like you, am far from home.-Abd al-Rahman

Narrated Ibn 'Abas: Allah's messenger said, "There are two blessings which many people lose: (They are) health and free time for doing good."

The statement of the Prophet (PBUH): 'Be in this world as if you were a stranger.'--(Hadith from al-Bukhari)

Loneliness affects most people at some time in their life. Moving far away from one's family or place of origin, from what is familiar (family-familiar: it cannot

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be an accident these words are so close in English), can cause a special kind of life-long loneliness. If this loneliness is overwhelming a person's health, both emotional and physical health, may fail. You may be unable to build new relationships in your new home and lose the opportunity to use the time given to you in life for doing good. While the Prophet(PBUH) asks the believer not to become too attached to material good and goods of this life, you are not expected to live without the comfort of human relationships such as marriage, family, and a community of friends. If you are experiencing loneliness which interferes with your happiness and family relationships, please call MAS-SSF for an appointment for peer or spiritual counseling. (916) 486-8626.

Name the Newsletter Competition

In the next issue the winner will be announced.

TEENS, YOUNG ADULTS, AND COLLEGE STUDENTS!

Summer Internships With MAS-SSF

A WAY TO HELP OTHERS AND HELP YOURSELF

As our Muslim community grows the need is growing for young people with leadership, communication, and organizational skills. A summer internship is a way to develop these talents while meeting the minimum volunteer hour requirements of many college admissions committees. Volunteer work improves a job resume or application. A job well done can translate into a good letter of reference from a supervisor for a college, scholarship, or employment application.

Applications for summer internships are being accepted. The interns will commit for 2 days or 16 hours a week. Students who will be in the junior or senior year of high school in September 2008, high school graduates, and college students may apply. Two interns will be accepted for this summer. Some internship hours will be at the MAS-SSF office, some off-site, and some may be completed elsewhere. For example, web-design work might be completed at home.

Applications are due by June 20. Internships may start July 1 or earlier and continue until the interns return to school or September 1, whichever comes first. For an application go to www.mas-sac.org or call MAS-SSF at (916) 486-8626 .