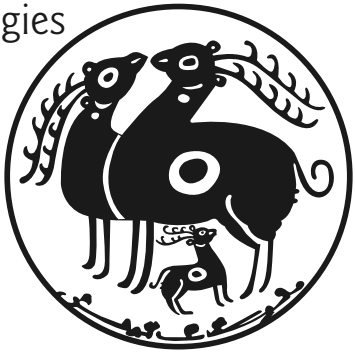
MUSLIM PARENTS' GUIDE

Making Responsible Use of Information and Communications Technologies at Home



Dr. Mohamed M. Begg
Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility
De Montfort University
The Gateway
LEICESTER. LE1 9BH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword: Simon Rogerson.....v
Foreword: Mohammad Shahid Raza.....vii
Acknowledgements.....xi

INTRODUCTION.....1
WHAT PARENTS MUST KNOW.....8
THE BENEFITS OF ICT AT HOME.....14
CONCERNS REGARDING ICT AT HOME.....17
WHAT PARENTS CAN DO.....22
WHAT TEENAGERS CAN DO.....28
CONCLUSION.....30
BIBLIOGRAPHY & REFERENCES.....33
INDEX.....34

FOREWORD

With every passing day, the world in which we live becomes more technologically dependent. Information technologies can help people to fulfil their lives and realise their potential. We have access to boundless information. In just a few keystrokes we can communicate with anybody anywhere. We can access products and services at our convenience. In fact if we wanted to, we could live, learn, socialise and work without ever leaving the confines of our homes. Such is the power of information technology.

This universal tool of IT is hugely beneficial but as with all powerful tools there are potential dangers. The World Wide Web is a galaxy of fantastic information but also contains materials which are, for example, racist, sexist, pornographic and xenophobic. Software known as malware can infect a computer, damaging its contents or sending confidential information

to others or spying on the computer users and even those within the vicinity of the computer. We all need to be vigilant regarding such pitfalls.

We must strive to realise the benefit for all from the advancing information technologies. We must ensure equality of access and opportunity. We must promote the positive aspects of IT whilst safeguarding against the dangers. The young and other vulnerable members of society must be helped in using IT so they can reap the benefits.

Parents have a special role to play. They must guide their children in the use of IT so they will mature into responsible members of the information age capable of recognising and resisting the negative aspects of IT. This is a big challenge for parents. This unique guide will help them to rise to this challenge so they can play their part in ensuring children can enjoy using IT whilst being protected from the potential dangers.

Professor Simon Rogerson
Director,
Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility,
De Montfort University,
Leicester. U.K.

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

The world is currently witnessing a period of tremendously fast transformation in the field of information and communications technologies and consequently a positive, as well as negative, social change all over the world. Like other societies, the Muslim community is also exposed to the knock-on effects of this expansion.

However, worries about the abuse or misuse of this technology should not lead us to grant it total rejection. One cannot ask the community to go into technological isolation, nor will such a policy work if Muslims have to live in modern societies and free themselves from the burden of material backwardness. But what must be stressed is that they must not lose their own ethical values in the process of this miraculous scientific transformation.

The correct mechanism, in my opinion, will be to achieve a reconciliation of modernity and morality. I am glad that Dr. M. M. Begg has been able to demonstrate this and has succeeded in having authored this unique parental guide for Muslim parents. This is a great effort, perhaps the first of its kind and must be appreciated by the Muslim community.

This booklet provides valuable information and guidance. I pray to Almighty Allah that the readers will take all necessary steps to practically apply the intellectually formulated advice of this book. Amen.

Mohammad Shahid Raza
Head Imam, Leicester Central Mosque
Conduit Street, Leicester. U.K.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Prof. Terrell Ward Bynum, Prof. Simon Rogerson, Dr. N. Ben Fairweather and Imam Shahid Raza for their help and guidance in this work.

I am grateful to the Research Centre on Computing & Society at Southern Connecticut State University for the financial support in the design of this guide. Special thanks go to Margaret E. Tehan for her innovative design for this guide.

Dr. Mohamed M. Begg
September 2005

INTRODUCTION

This Muslim Parents' Guide is a result of discussions with Muslim parents in the city of Leicester, UK, as part of research undertaken at the Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility, De Monfort University, Leicester.



We are constantly made aware of communication technologies coming into mainstream society. Advertising nowadays gives details of web addresses: television programs ask viewers to take part using the telephone, email or web sites. There has been a huge push in the use of computers in schools.

The onward march of technology confronts parents and particularly Muslim parents, the majority of whom are still not ICT literate. Their children are utilising com-

puters in schools – and in many cases in their own homes – often without parental supervision or guidance. Parents appear to have been consigned to the peripheries of this onward rush because they have not been informed about exactly what it is that they are supposed to supervise, or how to respond to their children's questions about online safety. Many parents in effect find themselves disconnected or set adrift from the process. Others who do not have computer skills feel ill prepared to embark on the process of educating their children about online suitability and safety.

The dilemma is even worse for Muslim parents, as the majority of them do not have computer skills themselves, and they carry the additional obligation to ensure that all the main moral codes according to the Islamic faith are being upheld within the family and development of children. They

have to ensure that education of children (which is paramount according to Islamic faith) is not being corrupted by some of the morally questionable applications of the new technologies like pornography, hate web sites or chat lines leading to deteriorating standard of language being exchanged or contact with paedophiles on the Internet, and violent computer games some of which can be downloaded. Naked displays and relationships outside marriage carry a heavy penalty according to Islamic laws and their punishment in the hereafter is mentioned in Al-Qur'an in several verses as 'much more severe'. (chapter xxiv, 3-11). There are very strict guidelines on man – woman relationships clearly outlined in Al-Qur'an and Hadith – (Sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (s.w.s)).

The concern of parents, and especially Muslim parents, about how to protect

their children from such inappropriate exposures has been an important reason behind the reluctance of the Saudi Arabian government to allow free access to the Internet to the general public in the Saudi Kingdom. Indeed a limited access since November 1998 is filtered through a main filter program in the capital Riyadh. Most of the resistance against the Internet has come from the Imams and Islamic scholars whose influence spreads to Muslim communities across the world.

Muslims and Muslim parents have, however, not shown a totally negative response to the technological developments. Indeed some see it as a great opportunity that so much Islamic information is now available to children and adults through the Internet to the extent that some people across the globe have actually embraced Islam as their faith through information they found on the Internet. In addition to this there are several computer programs now available through which children can teach themselves Arabic, Islamic studies and other relevant Islamic rituals.

The responsibilities of the parent in the Information Society have been multiplied in the last fifteen years when guiding children and young people had already been an uphill task for many parents. While filtering information on the Internet may be one way to tackle the problem, this by itself is not enough. The concerns and demands of parents, Muslim and non-Muslim go much further than simple filtering programs. Some sociologists and researchers are beginning to provide some guidelines to parents and children. This research is still in its early stages and is always likely to trail behind the actual speed with which technology is advancing.

This guide highlights some of the main

issues surrounding children and parents in the use of new technologies and provides solutions where possible to Muslim parents, which could equally apply to non-Muslim parents. The following main areas are covered:

- Understanding the benefits and importance of the Internet in today's world.
- Recognising and avoiding the Internet's hidden dangers.
- Supervising your child's Internet access.
- Spotting dangerous junk mail, scams, and inappropriate chat rooms.
- Using filters, bookmarks and other technologies to screen content
- Setting up rules for Internet behaviour for both you and your child.
- Teaching how teenagers can support each other.

While some aspects of this guide refer to specific issues raised by Muslim parents, this guide equally takes into account concerns raised by all parents regardless of their religious beliefs, country of origin and cultural diversity. It is expected that this guide will go some way in easing the anxieties of both Muslim and non-Muslim parents in the new Information Society.

WHAT PARENTS MUST KNOW

All parents, Muslim and non-Muslim need to understand that the computing revolution is here to stay. There is no going back and there is no possibility of breaking away from these developments unless it is adopted at the expense of illiteracy and becoming a non-citizen.

There is a huge push initiated by the Government in the United Kingdom to integrate computers into the schools' curriculum within the National Grid for Learning and it is proceeding at a very rapid pace.

The Internet facilities provided to schools in the United Kingdom are filtered and parents need not be unduly concerned about what the children are learning through the Internet in schools. Almost all lessons are supervised.

The Internet has become a vital tool for adults when seeking information and to school children for information in completing their homework. Indeed the Internet is now being regarded as the biggest library on earth from which virtually any information on any subject can be searched.

For Muslims and Muslim parents, it is important to appreciate that the Internet now carries countless web sites offering information on Islam. The whole of the Qur'an and Hadith (Sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad s.w.s) are available in English, Arabic and other languages. To add to this, virtually any aspects of Islam whether Sharia Law (Islamic Law), scientific discoveries by Arabs, biography of Prophet Muhammad (s.w.s), Islamic history or Islamic medicine can be easily accessed.

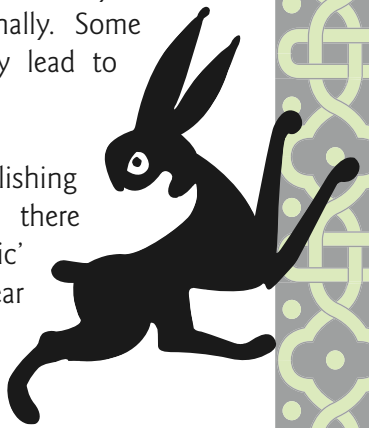
For Muslims and Muslim parents it is good news that Islam is now available to every

household on this earth where an Internet connection exists. An improved understanding of Islam is being witnessed worldwide compared to the popular terrorist image. Communications between Muslims and Muslim families including children is improving constantly through the use of email facilities.

Computer programs like the ALIM, AL-USTADH and AL-QARI are now available through which children can learn Arabic and Islamic studies within the comfort of their own homes if a Madressa (supplementary school) is not available nearby.

Having highlighted some of the positive aspects of the computing revolution, parents including Muslim parents must also be aware of the hidden dangers of this revolution.

Parents must know that pornographic material is widely available on the Internet and can be accessed intentionally and stumbled upon unintentionally. Some screen pop-ups can easily lead to pornographic web sites.



There are web sites publishing anti-Islamic material and there are many apparently 'Islamic' web sites which may appear to be Islamic but are more harmful to the real concept of Islam.

Many hate web sites exists on the Internet whose sole aim is spread hatred whether it is towards Muslims, Jews, Christians, Blacks or other groups. Parents must be aware of these dangers.

There are web sites available which teach how to make a bomb, how to commit sui-

cide, how to send junk mail to crash other persons' computers and how to commit various other types of questionable behaviour. Gambling sites are also available and getting addicted to them is a serious danger.

Chat rooms and bulletin boards which when supervised may be useful but when unsupervised may lead to deteriorating language. Chat rooms can be a rife place for paedophiles to operate and befriend children by offering them free gifts and asking them to fill forms thereby disclosing their addresses and telephone numbers which can eventually lead to sexual abuse.

The Internet can be addictive. Computer games whether downloaded or played through consoles can lead to reduced physical activity and poor physical development. Sitting in front of the screen for long hours can be a cause for child obesity now becoming a widely discussed issue.

Only a sample has been provided above. The positive and negative list is constantly enlarging. Reaping the benefits and becoming aware of the risks and dangers are extremely important for society at large. Further explanation is provided in the next two sections.



BENEFITS OF ICT AT HOME

Most job opportunities are now advertised on the Internet. In many cases application forms can be completed online. Applications are easy to submit once completed. Parents and teenage children can benefit from this facility.

Email facilities are improving relations within Muslim circles and families with messages and greetings now flowing freely across the world, a process that used to take weeks by conventional mail.

Families and individuals are now benefiting considerably when booking holidays and hotels abroad with extra incentives of savings particularly on airfares. Many hotels provide currency-converting facilities on the booking form itself making it quite easy to know the exact price in pounds or dollars and other currencies.

Shopping from home via the Internet is now quite popular with many people and Muslim women can make use of this facility particularly if they do not prefer to be seen in person in supermarkets. For the disabled and the old this is a particularly helpful development.

Muslim matrimonial services are now available on the Internet which are enabling individuals and families across continents to communicate and be able to meet each other through email facilities. Marriages across continents initiated through the Internet are now common.

Family nights out can be easily arranged by checking local cinema listings, theatres, or shows and buying tickets online and even choosing the seats you prefer.

The Internet is global and is therefore an excellent way to train children in global

thinking whether in connection with future careers or having international pen pals or indeed Islam itself.

The above is but a small list of the benefits that can be derived by Muslims and non-Muslims. The list is endless.

CONCERNS REGARDING ICT AT HOME

Pornographic web sites can be accessed intentionally and others can be stumbled upon accidentally because they are specifically designed to make themselves easy to reach accidentally, e.g. pop-up screens.

Anti-Islamic web sites are intentionally operated to challenge certain beliefs or teachings of Islam, thereby forcing Islamic scholars and Imams to respond to the accusations being made. Then there are web sites which pretend to be Islamic but are in fact being operated by people who want to mislead people about the real teachings of Islam.

Web sites teaching how to make a bomb, to kill, commit other crimes or to commit suicide or hate web sites exist on the Internet. There is a serious threat to young minds if they become obsessed with these sites. There have been several cases in

the U.S. where children have committed crimes having obtained the information from the Internet.



Chat rooms and bulletin boards leading to deteriorating language can be a fertile ground for paedophiles to operate and entice children into their net. An ITV program on 15th March 2001 presented by Carol Vorderman highlighted how quickly children can be contacted by paedophiles once they join a chat room eventually leading to sexual abuse in some cases.

Spam is a term used for unwanted emails and attachments which can carry viruses or the sending of a large amount of unwanted information to crash somebody's computer. It is best not to open attachments from unknown sources.

Computer viruses are designed to destroy files in a computer system. Anti-virus programs have been created to stop this from happening. However, these can be beaten by new viruses. Virtually all anti-virus programs need constant updating.

Hackers make unauthorised entry into a computer system as a challenge on how to break a code. This is more an indirect concern. Make sure your child is not a hacker!

Computer crime is quite a challenge to police today as computer fraud cases are often hitting the news headlines. Computer crime takes other shapes as well like cyber-stalking (harassment of an individual through emails etc.) and even terrorist networks.

Gambling sites are increasingly available on the Internet. Gambling is strictly prohibited

in Islam even though some Muslims ignore this injunction. Gambling through the Internet provides a more hidden means by operating from home rather than being seen in a public gambling place like a betting shop, horse racing or even the lottery.



Some people spend long hours surfing the net necessarily or unnecessarily. Addictiveness can occur and lead to lack of physical exercise for children which can contribute to obesity – a growing concern in the information society. In adults addictiveness can result in family breakdown, loss of work and missing out on other social activities. For Muslims, Internet addiction can lead to non-attendance in mosques and for Muslim children to miss out on their Madressa (supplementary school) attendance due to absorption in computer games or Internet searching.

Violent computer games can be downloaded quite easily and they could fall into any category of violence, some clearly unsuitable for young children.

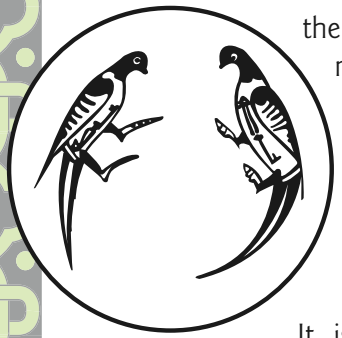


Other health issues like repetitive strain injury can be caused by excessive use of keyboard/mouse or other devices and poor eyesight can result from sitting in front of a small screen.

Isolation factor resulting from computer work can lead towards an unfriendly and socially inward and highly individualistic attitude. Tele-working while beneficial in many ways can create isolation effects leading to depression in some cases.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Invest in a computer system which is affordable and meets the requirements of the parents and the children and ensure that the software being provided is most universal. There is no need to go for extravagant specifications which may not be of direct use or benefit to the family. Parents should make an effort to become computer literate themselves. Most colleges of further education offer evening classes in computer literacy.



It is important to have a suitable working area within the home where a computer system can be installed. It should not be in the child's bedroom. It should be in a place in the house where parents can keep an eye on what the children are viewing on the screen.

Establish rules for yourself and your children on the use of Internet and other ICT facilities. For example, establish the maximum time allowed in front of the screen while working, while playing games or communicating with friends.

Check the use of chat rooms and bulletin boards by the children and ensure that they are ones which are being supervised. (Parents need to be computer literate themselves to be able to do this). Any unsupervised chat rooms for children should be discouraged particularly where the standard of language is noted to be deteriorating. Deteriorating language is a good sign that the chat room is not properly supervised, but not conclusive.

Become aware that many paedophiles use chat rooms offering incentives and gifts to children for joining certain activities which may look perfectly innocent.

Never allow children to fill forms online without your knowledge and consent which give out names, addresses and telephone numbers. This is a main source for paedophiles in contacting children. Children should not agree to meet anyone they know from the Internet without a parent being present.

Install filter programs like Net-Nanny, Cyber Patrol, CYBERsitter, SurfWatch or similar to filter out pornographic or sexually explicit images or other inappropriate material, such as crime related sites and other such material. It needs to be understood that there are limitations to these programs and their use can sometimes bar even some legitimate material.

Establish rules for choice of computer games and time spent in front of the small screen. Violent computer games are best avoided although the market seems to offer more of these than any other type of games. Ensure your children are getting sufficient physical exercise for their proper development and are not becoming obese by spending long hours in front of the TV or computer screens.

Teenagers will often say that their parents are being overly cautious in restricting the use of Internet. They often say that they are aware of the wrong material on the Internet, but they have no time for that, they are only doing their homework or communicating with their friends through email. This may be so, but for the responsible parent some spot checks will not harm.

Muslim parents should note that there are several computer programs (see page 10) and computer games which can be used safely for learning Arabic and Islamic Studies and various aspects of Al-Qur'an

and Hadith. Islamic computer games are also being developed and some are already available.

Finally, acquiring knowledge both religious and worldly is a fundamental recommendation in Islam. The very first words revealed to Prophet Muhammad, s.w.s by the Archangel Gabriel were "Read in the name of your Lord Who Creates" (Al-Qur'an, xcvi, 1-2) Further a very famous Hadith (Saying of Prophet Muhammad, (s.w.s)) says "Travel even to China for acquiring knowledge". Muslim parents need to recognise fully that in order to progress in their lives in today's information society, they and their children have to be not only literate but also computer literate if they are to develop to their maximum capacity and to contribute to



their maximum capacity to not only the Muslim society but society at large.



WHAT TEENAGERS CAN DO

If you talk about rules and regulations to teenagers in connection with the use of ICT, very often they will say that the 'rules do not apply to me'. However, the simple fact is that we all need rules and regulations to conform to for a healthy society.

Teenagers' own recommendations to other teenagers is that when you go into a chat room, never ever give that person your name, address or phone number unless you feel safe or your parents have cleared it. They should continue providing this support to others.

Never give out your password to others – it may well be misused.

Never ever, ever, ever, go out of town with a person you have met through the Internet.

Teenagers say that they do need the Internet to carry out research in connection with their homework. There is truth in this and parents must not doubt that this is a legitimate requirement in today's educational system. Without the Internet, the quality of work produced is likely to be lower standard. Teenagers can support each other in finding appropriate information from the web.

Teenagers should not get involved in plagiarism (copy outright from the internet) which has become a problem for educational authorities to deal with.

Teenagers should recognise the dangers of addiction to the Internet and computer games and support each other accordingly. They should appreciate the correct Islamic teachings and duties like regular prayers and attending teaching programs in their local mosques.

CONCLUSION

This guide which has initially resulted from discussions with Muslim families in Leicester, is the first of its kind produced for raising the awareness of Muslim families on the use of ICT at home. Producing this guide was also recommended by Muslim and non-Muslim academics during the course of my PhD. Research at the Centre for Computing & Social Responsibility, De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom.

It is hoped that this guide will serve its main objective which is to raise the awareness of Muslim parents on the use ICT at home, its vast benefits and many of its hidden dangers. Just as it is impossible to give up our cars these days, we are perhaps even more dependent on computers today than our cars. It will never be possible to operate effectively without the use of computers in the Information Society and for Muslims it is important to recognise this and to adopt this technology within the home so that they do not miss out on the vast benefits that ICT can bring without loosing sight of some of its hidden dangers.

There is considerable information available on the Internet on child safety and the Internet and readers of this publication are invited to read through information provided in the Bibliography and to write to the address provided below with their comments and suggestions for future revisions of this publication.

Dr. Mohamed M. Begg
De Montfort University,
The Gateway
LEICESTER, LE1 9BH. U.K.

Email: begg@dmu.ac.uk

BIBLIOGRAPHY & REFERENCES

1. Al-Qur'an.

2. Hadith.

---

1. Al-Kayasi, M.I. (1986), Morals and Manners in Islam, The Islamic Foundation, Markfield, Leicester. U.K.

2. Aftab, Parry, (2000), 'The Parents Guide to Protecting Your Children In Cyberspace', McGraw Hill Publishing Co., Maidenhead, Berkshire, U.K.

3. Begg, M.M. (2003), PhD thesis.

4. Etchingham, Julie, (2001), Presenter, BBC program 4.01.01 'Slipping through the Net'.

5. Vorderman, Carol, (2001), ITV presentation on 15th March, 2001, UK.

Web Sites:
www.cyberangels.org
www.chatdanger.com
www.childnet-int.org
www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/research/internet/childsafety/

Index

A
addictive, addiction 12, 20
airfares 14
AL-QARI 10
Al-Qur'an 3, 25, 26
AL-USTADH 10
ALIM 10
anti-Islamic 11, 17
anti-virus programs 19
Arabic 5, 9, 10, 25
Arabs 9
Archangel Gabriel 26
attachments 18
B
betting shop 20
Blacks 11
bomb 11, 17
bookmarks 6
bulletin boards 12, 18, 23
buying tickets online 15
C
chat lines, chat rooms 3, 6, 12, 18, 23, 28
China 26
Christians 11
cinema listings, theatres, shows 15
computer fraud 19
computer games 3, 12, 21, 24, 25, 26, 29
computer programs 5, 10, 25
crash 12, 18
crimes 17, 18
currency-converting facilities 14
cyber-stalking 19
CYBERsitter 24
Cyber Patrol 24
D
dangers v, vi, vii, 6. 10, 11, 13, 29, 30, 31
depression 21
disabled 15

E
email 1, 14, 15, 18, 19, 25
evening classes 22
F
filters, filter programs 4, 5, 6, 24
G
gambling 12, 19, 20
H
hackers 19
Hadith 3, 9, 26
harassment 19
hatred, hate web sites 3, 11, 17
hidden dangers 6, 10
holidays 14
homework 9, 25, 29
horse racing 20
hotels 14
I
Imams 4, 17
Islamic 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 17, 25, 26, 29
Islamic Law, Islamic laws 3
isolation 21
J
Jews 11
job opportunities 14
junk mail 6, 12
L
library 9
lottery 20
M
Madressa 10, 20
marriages 15
matrimonial services 15
N
National Grid for Learning 8
Net-Nanny 24
O
obesity, child obesity 13, 20
P
password 27
paedophiles 3, 12, 18, 23, 24
plagiarism 29
pornography, pornographic v, 3, 11, 17, 24
Prophet Muhammad 3, 9, 26

Q
Qur'an 9
R
repetitive strain injury 21
S
safety 2, 31
Saudi Arabian government 4
Saudi Kingdom 4
scams 6
sexually explicit. *See* pornography, pornographic
sexual abuse 12, 18
Sharia Law 9
shopping 15
software v, 22
spam 18
suicide 12, 17
SurfWatch 24
T
teenagers, teenage children 6, 14, 25, 28, 29
tele-working 21
terrorist, terrorist networks 10, 19
TV 25
U
United Kingdom 8, 30
V
violent, violence 3, 21, 24
viruses 18, 19
Vorderman, Carol 18



Design and illustrations by Margaret E. Tehan
Copyright © 2005 Mohamed M. Begg

The moral right of the author has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.