

FATWA

Children standing in the saff.

Q. What is the masail regarding children standing in the saff for salâh?

A. Categories of Children

There are three categories of children:

(1) The first type are those who are innocent and young. They neither understand the etiquette of the masjid nor do they know anything about salâh. They do not have the understanding that the masjid is a place for worshipping Allâh. There is also the danger that they urinate in the masjid or play therein and violate its sanctity. Children of five to six years fall in this category. The ruling for such children is that it is not permissible to bring them to the masjid. It is the responsibility of the parents to see that they do not bring such children to the masjid. If they do so and the children violate the sanctity of Allâh's house, the parents will be sinful because the children themselves are innocent. The masjid trustees can also prohibit such children from entering the masjid.

There is a limit for every act in Shari'ah. These limits are what we call Dîn and we all have to abide by these limits.

(2) The second category is those children who are slightly elder. They are between seven to eleven years old. Such children understand the status of a masjid and respect it to a certain degree. However, due to lack of a complete understanding, they do not respect it fully. It is permissible to bring such children to the masjid but it is better not to do so.

(3) The third category of children is those who are close to maturity. Their ages range from twelve to fourteen. However, a fifteen-year-old child is considered mature even if he does not have any signs of puberty. The ruling for this category is that they should be brought to the masjid in order to inculcate the habit of salâh with congregation because salâh becomes obligatory on them the moment they reach the age of puberty. It is obligatory on them to attend the masjid for salâh with congregation. If this habit is not inculcated before puberty, it will take time after puberty as a result of which they will forgo their salâhs with congregation. Thus it is imperative to bring the youngsters to the masjid while guiding them at home to respect the masjid. They should be taught not to make a noise in the masjid as it is a sanctified place where the name of Allâh is taken.

The Position of the Children's Saff

The children's saff should be made after the men's saff has been completed. This is the sunnah way. After the salâh has begun, those who arrive later should join the children's saff on the right and left side.

Moving the children

Some latecomers move the children further back when seeing them in the saff. Some people hold the child by the ears and drag him to the back. If the child resists, he is carried to the back. Whoever comes late does this. This occurs in many of the masjids. If the child was in the first saff at the beginning of salâh, he reaches the last saff at the end of salâh. This is because most people come late for salâh nowadays. Whoever enters the masjid, does this thinking that it is not permissible to perform salâh next to children. This is completely wrong. One should free one's mind of such a thought. You should stand next to the child whether he is in the front saff or the rear one. You may stand on his right-hand side or his left-hand side. This does not affect the salâh of the adults.

All late comers should stand at the back next to the children. It is not permissible to shunt the children further back. Such an act is sinful. By doing this, we are nullifying their salâh and thereby placing that sin on our shoulders.

Standing in the adults' saff

If the children that attend the masjid for salâh are not well disciplined and they run around in the masjid, play fools, laugh and talk, then the ruling for such children is that they should be separated and made to stand among the adults. A separate saff should not be made for them. This will prevent them from disturbing others in their salâh. If there are only one or two children, then it is permissible to make them stand with the adults without any karâhat [abomination].

Discipline

We should also remember the way shown to us by Nabî Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam when dealing with children. They should not be mercilessly treated and beaten up. Nabî Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam said, "One who does not have mercy on our young ones and does not respect our elders is not from amongst us." Anâs Radhiallâhu anhu served Nabî Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam for ten years but not once did Nabî Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam reprimand him for doing something or for not doing something.

Thus it is against the sunnah to severely reprimand or beat a child. Furthermore, a severe reprimand seldom has a lasting effect. The child may refrain temporarily from that act but will repeat it later. The child should be taught with love and affection that the masjid is not a place for mischief and playing. The child will respect you and insha-Allâh will not repeat his mischief again.

May Allâh grant us the ability to refrain from committing wrong acts, Âmîn.

And Allah Ta'ala knows best

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