

# Safeguarding in our mosques and madrassas: What you should know



By Noreen Hameed

**Recently I had the privilege to attend mosques and discuss safeguarding with an Islamic perspective with Lancashire Council of Mosques.**

The term 'Safeguarding' is becoming increasingly prominent in both the public and private sector and denotes the need to implement specific policies that ensure the safety of those at highest risk of abuse.

The need for this becomes ever more apparent when you come across news articles that deeply troubled the reader.

The Evening Standard recently reported on a shocking betrayal of trust that saw Islamic Studies tutor Mohammad Islam sexually abuse a young pupil under his care for over 9 years (starting when she was only 9), leaving her pregnant, her family distraught and the tutor in question convicted for 19 years.

In 2015, two Madrassah teachers in Birmingham were convicted of beating a 10-year-old child with a stick as a 'punishment' whilst in early 2014, an Imam in Slough was sentenced to life imprisonment for raping a 13-year-old boy.

From the onset, I want to stress that these cases of abuse are not reflective of mainstream Islamic education and Islamic teaching.

During the Visit my Mosque tours and safeguarding presentations recently held at the mosques I have come across truly dedicated, inspiring individuals that understand the responsibility on their shoulders and endeavour to teach the Qur'an and Islam to children in the best manner and with dedication.

**Why safeguarding in our madrassas is so important**

However, as a parent and a head teacher someone who has worked within the Islamic Sector for over 25 years now, such instances of abuse and betrayal highlight that there are issues of accountability and challenges to ensuring certain standards are met and maintained.

We have seen over the last few years that there has been a notable increase in the call for greater safeguards and accountability within both public and private



institutions.

With revelations of the historical abuse that were carried out by the likes of Jimmy Savile and through the in depth investigations into the Catholic Church, you can see why public sentiment is becoming increasingly concerned for the welfare of children in institutional settings.

As of yet, Muslim institutions have not been subjected to widespread investigations into child welfare but public scrutiny seems to be inevitably focussing on the Muslim community.

Recently, we have seen increased pressure put on religious educational institutions to ensure that certain standards are being maintained, in particular that safeguards are in place to protect the welfare of children.

The UK Government Department for Education's recent call for evidence on 'out-of-school' settings identified safeguarding as one of its key concerns and we can see, in the progression of the UK's child protection laws (The Children's Act 2004 and the Care Act 2014), how legislation is becoming fortified with the onus being put on local authorities and councils to ensure the safeguarding of children and adults.

The notion of safeguarding, be it of children or adults, is not a new phenomenon in Islam. When the Prophet (pbuh) said, "No man is alone with a woman but the shaytaan is the third one present" (Ahmad, Al-Tirmidhi &

al-Haakim) was this not him teaching us one of the fundamentals of safeguarding?

**Let us take learn from prophetic examples**

We only need to look at the prophetic example of Muhammad (pbuh) to see both the immense love he had for children and the importance he placed on enshrining a sense of understanding and instilling a love for the religion within them.

As individuals who have set out on the path to teach children Qur'an and Islam, it is paramount that they remember who they are emulating.

When the Prophet (pbuh) passed by two circles of individuals sitting in the Mosque, the first supplicating and the second listening to a teacher, whilst adulating both groups he went to join the second group and said, 'I have been sent as a teacher'.

The formative years of a young child is what makes them who they are.

The experiences and the learning they get in their adolescence endure and have a strong influence on the rest of their life.

Fundamentally then, as teachers of young children, Islamic tutors play a key role in ensuring that their student becomes a morally astute, intelligent Muslim citizen that will be a benefit to their community and to those around them.

In order to ensure this happens,

educational institutions such as Mosques, madrassahs, weekend supplementary schools and Dar ul Uloom need to ensure that they have met certain standards of quality and assurance, particularly in the recruitment of teachers and staff.

The law in the UK has become even more clear and forthright in its pursuit to protect children and vulnerable adults. As such additions to the Care Act 2014 came into effect in April 2015 and were further sharpened by the counter terrorism and security Act 2015

The primary role of the Madrassah and an Islamic school is the nurturing of children in an Islamic environment that encourages them to explore their surroundings and understand their religion relevant to their social setting.

The Islamic tradition has a rich history of nurturing iman (faith) in children by emulating the Prophetic example which focussed on praising their achievements, fostering a sense a responsibility, incentivising their learning and, above all else, providing them with a loving, caring atmosphere.

**Perpetrators should sense that they will be shielded**

When we exert our efforts to incorporate this into the way we teach children the Qur'an and Islam, we see them become ambassadors for the religion and an integral part of the community. My heart goes out to those young

children that have been subjected to abuse at the hands of those entrusted with teaching them the Qur'an as they have been the victims of the ultimate betrayal of trust.

Their only link to the religion is one fraught with misery and isolation and the psychological damage can be enduring.

These instances damage a family, shame a community and can unfortunately tarnish the Islamic teaching fraternity as a whole. As a community, we need to be introspective and acknowledge the regulatory shortcomings of our institutions.

This is where trustees and management personnel of Mosques, madrassahs and Islamic schools need to make a conscious effort to demand a certain level of competency and quality standards from their staff and teachers.

With the rise of ISIL and their prolific use of social media to groom and indoctrinate, faith leaders and faith institutions must play their part in safeguarding and immunising their congregation against internal predators as well as those online.

This is not just a challenge for Muslim Faith leadership but for all faiths, as has been further highlighted by the Elliott Review (March 2016) which is the first independent review commissioned by the Church of England into its handling of sex abuse cases.

It highlights the "deeply disturbing" failure of those in senior positions to record or take action on the survivor's disclosures over a period of almost four decades.

The welfare of children and the nurturing of a new generation of quality Islamic leaders must be the driving force behind Islamic education. It cannot be that the safety of children or vulnerable adults is compromised because perpetrators feel that they are going to be protected by a religious façade or cultural protectionists.

The Prophet's (pbuh) examples of safeguarding and nurturing need to be institutionalised within the Mosque, madrassah and all Islamic sectors.

As Umar (ra) said, "Judge yourselves before you are judged, evaluate yourselves before you are evaluated and be ready for the greatest investigation (the Day of Judgement)". The time to wholeheartedly embrace and energetically introduce institutional safeguards has never been so great.

If you wish me to deliver a safeguarding talk at your mosque or school please contact Lancashire Council of Mosques on 01254 692289.

● **Palm Tree Education Centre Blackburn has set up tuition classes on Saturdays**  
**If you wish to enrol your child and help them achieve the best in English, Maths or Science contact Mrs N. Hameed 07903026476.**