210867 - Suggested alternatives to electronic games

the question

What are some fun and beneficial activities that we can do with our children, instead of them sitting at the computer?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is no longer hidden from anyone how many electronic games there are of all types and how quickly they have become widespread, and how attached and obsessed many children are with these games. The negative effects and damage to health that result from spending a great deal of time playing these games, to the point of addiction, is also a matter that is well-established and well-known. Conferences have been held on this topic, and to fight the problem of addiction to these games special organisations have been set up in some Western countries.

Undoubtedly the Muslim who is keen to give his children a good upbringing – and in fact anyone who is concerned for his children's psychological, social and behavioural well-being – will begin to get worried about the overwhelming impact of electronic games and how most children are becoming infatuated with them, which makes the question of what is the right way to deal with these games, and what are suitable alternatives, an urgent question for anyone who is concerned with giving his children a sound upbringing. Here we may say:

· It should be understood that the method of imposing a total ban, especially when dealing with children who already spend a lot of time on these games and are attached to them, will never work, and may not be appropriate from an educational point of view. Rather in the case of a child who is in such a situation, we should focus our efforts on participation and guidance.

· Participation may mean working with the child to choose games that are free from anything that is contrary to Islamic teachings and that are appropriate to the child's age and will not result in

psychological or behavioural damage.

· Guidance may mean talking with the child and convincing him of the necessity of putting limits on the time spent playing, so that it will not adversely affect the child's physical well-being, schoolwork or other duties that may benefit him, even if that has to do with training and playing sports, because that is also important to the child, and should not be undermined by his becoming addicted to electronic games. Parents should be patient when trying to advise their child; they should use a gentle approach and address the matter in various ways, such as discussing with him, telling him stories, telling him news about the dangers of computers and some real-life stories, and so on.

· It is important not to let the child get carried away with what he wants, even if he is not fully convinced. The father should still use a gentle approach when trying to stop him and to set time limits for playing; he should use a gradual approach in that regard as much as possible, and use a variety of approaches. It is preferable for the child to have done something useful before letting him play, such as memorising a soorah or hadith, or some lines of poetry, or doing his homework, tidying his room, or helping with housework. He should not be allowed to spend more than the set time on playing electronic games.

· The most important alternative, to which all other alternatives are subordinate, is that the parents should be prepared to spend time with their children and have some social interaction with them, by sitting and talking to them, and watching their progress in some useful activities that they are given to do. As for the family members, from the father and mother down to the youngest child, spending most of their time in front of screens and hardly meeting except for some meals, then the parents start looking for appropriate alternatives, this is a shortcoming with which you cannot make these alternatives give the hoped-for results.

· Another alternative is day trips and going out with the children to appropriate leisure venues, even if that is sometimes done by way of reward for reducing time spent playing electronic games.

· Another alternative is to get the children involved in some social centres that provide educational

and leisure programs for children. This can have a great impact in developing the child’s social skills and bringing him out of an excessive focus on electronic games.

· Whatever we may say on the topic of finding alternatives to these games, this will continue to be a matter of concern to anyone who has anything to do with the education and upbringing of children. Parents in particular must raise their children on the basis of piety and fearing Allah in private and in public, for that is the best protection against these destructive devices. At the same time, they must also offer a lot of supplication for their children, asking Allah to guide them and help them to do that which is good, whilst at the same time doing their utmost to come up with ideas for appropriate alternatives to distract their children and help them to spend their time in useful ways as much as possible. All they can do is strive and try their best.

And Allah knows best.