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Islamic Principles for Preventing Extremist Tendencies among Youth: A Study of Pakistani Society

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Abstract

Youth constitute an important part of the social and intellectual future of any society. Their religious understanding, educational environment, social relationships and use of digital media significantly influence their attitudes and conduct. When religious commitment is separated from balanced knowledge, sound scholarship, wisdom and social responsibility, young people may become vulnerable to rigid interpretations, intolerance and other forms of unhealthy religious thinking. Islam, however, provides principles that promote moderation, justice, mercy, wisdom, respect and responsible conduct. This article examines these principles in relation to the prevention of extremist tendencies among youth in Pakistani society. It focuses on moderation (*wasatiyyah*), avoidance of excess (*ghuluw*), preservation of human dignity, responsible acquisition of religious knowledge, consultation with qualified scholars, respect for legitimate differences, peaceful dialogue, and obedience to lawful authority, and constructive social participation. The article also considers the roles of parents, teachers, Islamic scholars, mosques, universities and digital platforms in developing balanced religious attitudes among young people. Contemporary Pakistani initiatives such as Paigham-e-Pakistan demonstrate the importance of collective religious scholarship in promoting peace, social

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responsibility and constitutional citizenship. The study argues that prevention is most effective when young people are given sound knowledge, meaningful social opportunities and a balanced understanding of Islam rather than being approached only through warnings. Islamic teachings provide a positive framework in which religious commitment and moderation can develop together.

Keywords: Islam, Youth, Extremism, Moderation, *Wasatiyyah*, *Ghuluw*, Religious Education, Pakistan, Social Harmony

Introduction

Young people occupy a central position in the future of Pakistani society. Their religious understanding, educational development and social experiences influence not only their individual lives but also the character of the communities in which they participate. For this reason, developing balanced religious attitudes among youth is an important educational and social responsibility.

Islam does not encourage excess in religious matters. It establishes moderation, wisdom, justice and mercy as important features of Muslim conduct. The Qur'an describes the Muslim community as:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا

“And thus We have made you a middle nation.”¹

The concept of *wasatiyyah* provides a foundation for balanced religious life. It does not mean weakening religious commitment. Rather, it means observing religion with knowledge, balance and proper understanding.

The Prophet ﷺ also warned against excess in religious matters. He said:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْعُلُوَّ فِي الدِّينِ

“Beware of excess in religion.”²

This Prophetic guidance is particularly relevant to young people, who may sometimes encounter religious messages through short videos, social-media posts or informal online discussions without the scholarly context necessary for understanding them properly.

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Prevention therefore requires more than identifying problematic attitudes. It requires the development of a positive religious environment in which young people learn Islam through reliable knowledge, balanced scholarship, good character, social responsibility and constructive engagement.

Moderation as an Islamic Principle

Moderation is one of the most important principles for developing a balanced Muslim personality. The Qur'an describes the Muslim community as an *ummatan wasatan*, a community characterized by balance and justice.³

Moderation does not mean taking a position midway between truth and falsehood. It means giving every matter its appropriate place and avoiding both neglect and excess.

In religious life, moderation includes balance between worship and worldly responsibilities, between individual rights and social obligations, between firmness in principles and wisdom in communication, and between religious commitment and respect for others.

For young people, this balanced approach is particularly important. Religious education should develop devotion without producing intolerance, confidence without arrogance and commitment without hostility.

Avoiding Excess in Religion

The Qur'an warns against excess:

لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ

“Do not go to extremes regarding your religion.”⁴

The warning demonstrates that religious enthusiasm by itself is not sufficient. Religious commitment must be guided by knowledge and wisdom.

The Prophet ﷺ repeatedly warned against excess. In another Hadith, he stated that those who go to extremes are destroyed.⁵

These teachings provide an important preventive principle. Young Muslims should be taught that strong religious commitment is expressed through worship, good character,

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knowledge, patience, justice and service to others. Harshness, contempt and unnecessary hostility should not be treated as signs of stronger faith.

Knowledge before Judgment

One of the most important safeguards against unhealthy religious thinking is sound knowledge. The Qur'an commands:

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“So ask the people of knowledge if you do not know.”⁶

This principle establishes the importance of qualified scholarship. Religious questions should not be decided merely through social-media posts, emotionally charged speeches or isolated quotations.

Young people today have access to a vast amount of religious information. However, access to information is not the same as possession of knowledge. A short video may provide a quotation without explaining its context, conditions or scholarly interpretation. Therefore, young Muslims should be encouraged to develop relationships with qualified teachers and scholars. Religious learning should involve reading, questioning, discussion and gradual intellectual development.

Understanding the Qur'an and Sunnah Correctly

The Qur'an and Sunnah are the primary sources of Islamic guidance, but understanding them requires knowledge of language, context, principles of interpretation and the explanations of qualified scholars.

A verse or Hadith taken out of context can be given a meaning that it was never intended to convey. This is particularly possible when religious material is reduced to short digital messages.

The solution is not to distance young people from Qur'an and Hadith. On the contrary, they should be brought closer to these sources through sound teaching.

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A balanced religious education should teach young Muslims how to read religious texts responsibly, how to distinguish general principles from specific rulings, and how to understand scholarly explanations.

Respect for Human Dignity

Islam places great importance on human dignity. The Qur'an states:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

“We have certainly honored the children of Adam.”⁷

This principle provides an important foundation for social conduct. Religious disagreement does not remove a person's dignity.

The Qur'an also prohibits ridicule and offensive speech:

لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ

“Let no people ridicule another people.”⁸

Young people should therefore be taught that religious commitment is reflected not only in what a person believes but also in how he treats others.

Insults, humiliation and contempt can damage relationships and create an environment in which hostility becomes normalized. Respectful communication, by contrast, allows differences to be discussed without destroying social bonds.

Justice and Fairness

The Qur'an commands Muslims to uphold justice:

اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَى

“Be just; that is closer to righteousness.”⁹

Justice is essential in preventing negative attitudes toward individuals and groups. Young people should learn to distinguish between disagreement with an idea and hostility toward the person holding it.

A balanced Muslim does not condemn an entire community because of the actions or statements of an individual. He examines claims carefully and judges people fairly.

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This principle is particularly important in an age in which information can spread rapidly without verification. Fair judgment requires evidence rather than assumptions.

Verification Before Belief and Action

The Qur'an commands:

فَتَبَيَّنُوا

“Then verify.”¹⁰

This principle has become particularly important in the digital age. Young people regularly encounter religious claims, edited videos, quotations and allegations through social media.

Unverified information can produce anger before the truth is known. For this reason, Islamic verification should be part of religious education.

Before accepting or sharing religious information, young people should ask: What is the source? Is the quotation authentic? Is the information complete? How do qualified scholars understand it?

Verification is therefore not merely a media skill. It is an Islamic habit of responsible conduct.

Patience and Self-Control

Islam places considerable emphasis on controlling anger. The Prophet ﷺ said:

لَيْسَ الشَّدِيدُ بِالصُّرْعَةِ، إِنَّمَا الشَّدِيدُ الَّذِي يَمْلِكُ نَفْسَهُ عِنْدَ الْغَضَبِ

“The strong person is not the one who overcomes others physically; rather, the strong person is the one who controls himself when angry.”¹¹

This teaching is particularly valuable for youth. Anger can transform a disagreement into confrontation. Self-control creates the space necessary for reflection and peaceful resolution.

Religious education should therefore include the moral discipline of patience, forgiveness and emotional control. A young person who can control anger is better able to deal with disagreement without allowing temporary emotion to determine permanent action.

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Dialogue and Wisdom

The Qur'an instructs Muslims to communicate with wisdom:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom.”¹²

Wisdom requires consideration of circumstances, audience, language and consequences.

A religious message may be correct in substance but poorly communicated.

Young people should therefore be taught that disagreement does not justify harshness. A person may strongly disagree with an idea while maintaining good manners toward the individual.

Constructive dialogue also allows young people to ask questions openly. When legitimate questions are ignored, young people may seek answers from unreliable sources. Educational institutions and scholars should therefore create environments where questions can be raised without fear or embarrassment.

The Role of Parents

The family is the first environment in which religious attitudes develop. Parents influence how children understand religion, disagreement, authority and social relationships.

Parents can help prevent unhealthy religious attitudes by teaching children balanced religious values from an early age. They should encourage questions and provide access to reliable religious education rather than relying solely on informal digital content.

Family discussions about religion should emphasize worship, character, honesty, service and respect. Children should learn that religious commitment is not measured by harshness toward others.

Parents should also remain attentive to the digital environment in which young people learn. Rather than simply restricting access, they can help young people evaluate what they watch and read.

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The Role of Teachers and Educational Institutions

Schools, colleges and universities have an important role in shaping the intellectual and social development of young people.

Religious education should not be limited to memorization. Students should develop the ability to think critically, distinguish evidence from assertion and engage respectfully with different opinions.

Universities can organize seminars on Islamic ethics, moderation, dialogue and responsible citizenship. Islamic Studies departments can connect traditional scholarship with contemporary questions facing youth.

Such education can help young people understand that Islam combines religious commitment with justice, mercy, knowledge and social responsibility.

The Role of Islamic Scholars

Islamic scholars have a central responsibility in guiding young people. Their lectures, sermons, books and digital content influence how religious teachings are understood.

Scholars can contribute to prevention by making authentic religious knowledge accessible, responding to contemporary questions and explaining the principles of moderation.

They should also distinguish between legitimate scholarly disagreement and attitudes that damage Muslim brotherhood. When discussing differences, evidence and appropriate language should remain central.

A scholar's responsibility is not limited to correcting errors. He should also provide young people with positive religious direction, meaningful knowledge and opportunities for constructive participation in society.

Mosques as Centres of Guidance

The mosque can play a valuable role in developing balanced religious attitudes. Friday sermons, Qur'an classes and youth programmes can address themes such as patience, justice, mercy, family responsibility, honesty and service.

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Youth should feel that the mosque is a place where they can learn, ask questions and receive guidance.

Imams can also address contemporary digital issues. Young people need to know how to evaluate religious information encountered online and how to distinguish qualified scholarship from unsupported claims.

A mosque that combines worship, education, guidance and community service can make a significant contribution to the positive development of youth.

Digital Media and Religious Responsibility

Digital platforms have become one of the most influential sources of religious information. This creates both opportunities and responsibilities.

Young people should be taught that a large number of followers does not establish religious authority. A viral video is not necessarily an accurate explanation of Islam.

The Qur'anic principle of *tabayyun* provides an effective foundation for digital religious conduct. Information should be verified before it is accepted or forwarded.

Religious scholars and educational institutions can contribute by producing accessible online material and correcting common misconceptions. Positive religious content should be presented in language that young people understand and through platforms they regularly use.

Meaningful Social Participation

Prevention is strengthened when young people have constructive opportunities to contribute to society. Islam encourages cooperation in righteousness:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَى

“Cooperate in righteousness and piety.”¹³

Youth can be encouraged to participate in community service, educational projects, welfare activities, environmental initiatives and programmers for social development.

Such participation develops a sense of responsibility and teaches young people that religious commitment includes serving others.

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A young person who understands Islam through worship, education, family responsibility and service develops a broader understanding of his religious identity.

Paigham-e-Pakistan and Collective Religious Responsibility

Pakistan has also developed consensus-based initiatives aimed at strengthening peace, social responsibility and religious harmony. Paigham-e-Pakistan represents one significant example. NACTA describes it as a consensus decree endorsed by more than 1,800 religious scholars from different Muslim schools of thought.¹⁴

The importance of such initiatives lies in the ability of religious scholars to identify shared principles and communicate them collectively.

For young people, this provides an important message: religious scholarship can contribute to peace, responsible citizenship and social cooperation.

Such efforts can be strengthened through continued participation by scholars, universities, and madrasas and youth organizations.

The Importance of Lawful and Peaceful Conduct

Islam places great importance on social order and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The Qur'an instructs believers to obey Allah, the Messenger and those entrusted with authority in matters within their lawful responsibility.¹⁵

This principle encourages Muslims to address social disputes through recognized and lawful institutions rather than personal action.

Young people should therefore be taught that religious concern does not justify unlawful conduct. Genuine concern for society should be expressed through education, dialogue, lawful civic participation and constructive reform.

This approach enables religious values to contribute positively to social development.

Preventing Excessive Judgment

A balanced religious personality avoids rushing to judgments about other Muslims. The Qur'an warns believers against excessive suspicion and commands them not to spy upon or backbite one another.¹⁶

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This principle is especially relevant to contemporary communication. Social media often encourages immediate judgment based on a short clip, photograph or isolated statement. Young people should learn to seek complete information before reaching conclusions. A responsible Muslim gives others the benefit of fairness and avoids making serious accusations without reliable evidence.

This habit protects both individuals and society from unnecessary conflict.

Developing a Balanced Muslim Personality

The ultimate objective of prevention should be the development of a balanced Muslim personality.

Such a personality combines:

- strong faith with sound knowledge;
- religious commitment with mercy;
- confidence with humility;
- disagreement with good manners;
- courage with self-control;
- worship with social responsibility;
- love of Islam with respect for human dignity;
- concern for society with lawful and constructive conduct.

This balance reflects the Qur'anic concept of *wasatiyyah*.

Young people should therefore not be taught merely what they must avoid. They should be given a positive vision of what a committed Muslim should become.

A Constructive Framework for Youth

A practical programme for developing balanced religious attitudes among youth can be built around five areas:

1. Sound religious education:

Provide access to qualified scholars, reliable books and balanced teaching.

2. Digital literacy:

Train young people to verify religious information, identify unreliable claims and avoid forwarding unverified material.

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3. Community participation:

Provide opportunities for youth to contribute through education, welfare and community service.

4. Guidance and dialogue:

Create safe and respectful environments where young people can ask religious and social questions and receive informed answers.

These measures are preventive because they strengthen knowledge, belonging, responsibility and moral judgment.

Discussion

The Islamic principles examined in this study demonstrate that prevention begins with education and character formation. Islam does not address religious excess only through prohibition. It provides a complete moral framework based on moderation, knowledge, justice, mercy, patience and wisdom.

The most important preventive principle is perhaps *wasatiyyah*. A balanced Muslim understands that religious commitment is not measured by hostility or harshness. It is demonstrated through obedience to Allah, adherence to the Sunnah, good character and responsible conduct.

The second major principle is knowledge. Young people require reliable teachers and sources because religious texts cannot always be understood correctly through isolated quotations or short digital messages.

The third is social responsibility. Young Muslims should understand that their conduct affects families, educational institutions and wider society. Islam encourages cooperation in righteousness and discourages conduct that produces unnecessary harm.

The fourth is responsible communication. The Qur'anic command to verify information has direct relevance to contemporary digital life. Before sharing a religious claim, young people should establish its authenticity and context.

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Finally, prevention requires a positive social environment. Young people need education, meaningful relationships, opportunities for service and access to qualified guidance. A constructive environment can strengthen their sense of responsibility and enable them to express religious commitment through peaceful and beneficial activities.

Conclusion

Islam provides clear principles for preventing unhealthy and excessive religious tendencies among youth. Moderation, sound knowledge, justice, mercy, patience, wisdom, respect for human dignity and responsible communication collectively establish a balanced approach to religious life.

The Qur'an's description of Muslims as an *ummatan wasatan* provides a fundamental principle: religious commitment should be accompanied by balance and justice. The Prophetic warning against excess reinforces the same direction. These teachings remain highly relevant for contemporary youth.

Prevention should therefore begin with education rather than fear. Parents should provide balanced guidance; teachers should develop critical and respectful thinking; scholars should offer accessible and authentic religious instruction; mosques should become centres of learning and positive youth engagement; universities should encourage informed dialogue; and digital platforms should be used to provide reliable religious content.

Contemporary initiatives such as Paigham-e-Pakistan demonstrate that religious scholars can contribute collectively to peace, responsible citizenship and social harmony. Such efforts can be strengthened by connecting religious scholarship with youth education and community participation.

The central principle is simple: **strong faith should produce balanced character, sound knowledge, self-control, justice and service to society.**

When young people learn Islam through this comprehensive framework, religious commitment becomes a source of personal development and social benefit. The most

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effective prevention is therefore not merely telling youth what to reject; it is giving them the knowledge, values, relationships and constructive opportunities through which they can live Islam with wisdom, balance and responsibility.

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