

## Bringing Dialogic Halaqah into Your Classroom

### What is dialogic halaqah?

Halaqah is a traditional Islamic pedagogical practice instituted by the Prophet Muhammad (saws) in his education of early Muslims. It is a practice that is purely oral with learners and their educators sitting in a circle on the floor; it can be dialogic, educator-led, or a collaborative community effort. In Shakhsiyah education, our daily dialogic Halaqah session is the foundation for achieving our primary aim of nurturing each child's individual Shakhsiyah through classical Islamic culturing i.e. *tarbiyyah*, *t'alim* and *t'adib*. In drawing out the *fitrah* (natural disposition) of each individual child we develop each child's personal character (Shakhsiyah) as a well rounded, confident, committed Muslim with sincerity in intention and steadfastness in action. Learners engaging in halaqah dialogue are given the agency to take ownership of their learning and of their Shakhsiyah development. They engage in dialogue, in deep and meaningful reciprocal questioning, and are provided opportunities for reflection, and application in their daily lives. Ideally, halaqah serves as a space for reflection and should tie together the learnings of learners throughout the school year. Therefore, dialogic halaqah requires a community of learners, educators, and parents. We work alongside parents to build a learning community of inquiry with halaqah at its core.

### How can I plan and prepare the content for my dialogic halaqah ?

- Halaqah is a space to reflect on Islamic teachings and how we live our *din* with a focus on application in our lives. The dialogue in halaqah should encourage learners to make meaningful connections to their own lives and develop the shakhsiyah of each child.
- To make Islam meaningful, halaqah dialogue will draw on community issues, current affairs and history as well as *aqidah*, *fiqh* and *sunnah*.
- Educators and Learners use Qur'an, Sunnah, and other Islamic sources to enrich and guide the halaqah dialogue.
- Islamic Shakhsiyah Foundation has various resources available to schools and educators. We have a Halaqah Curriculum for ages 3-14 years; Thematic Halaqah Schemes of Work and the standalone Halaqah Tafsir for Kids. Each of these offers you detailed plans to use in your halaqah.

### How can I make my dialogic halaqah engaging for learners?

In preparation for halaqah:

- Carry out a **Knowledge Harvest**: Ask learners what they already know about the topic. This can happen in class the day before the halaqah or at the beginning of a halaqah. Use post-it notes, a whiteboard or large sheets of paper to collect existing knowledge and understanding in preparation for the halaqah dialogue.

- Set some **Thinking Preparation**: Give learners one or two key questions to think about at home before the halaqah. They should feel free to discuss with their parents, family and friends as they prepare their thinking before the halaqah.
- Set some **Research Preparation**: You could also give learners time to prepare for the halaqah by researching the topic, in order for them to enter the halaqah prepared to engage more meaningfully in dialogue with one another.
- Use **Key Questions**: Initiate and sustain a dialogue by asking learners to take a position in deliberating on a series of open questions.
- Use **Talking Points**: These are statements or ‘points’ for stimulating speaking, listening, thinking and learning. The statements can be factually accurate, contentious or downright wrong. They provide a focus for dialogue and a chance to find out what others in the group think.
- Check out our **‘Dialogic Halaqah: A Muslim Educator’s [Murabbi] Guide’** which is available from Shakhshiyah Publications for more ideas.

### **What are some tips for setting up halaqah in my school and/or classroom?**

- The halaqah should be integrated into the school schedule, occurring daily and first thing in the morning whenever possible.
- During halaqah, the educator and Learners sit together on the floor, in a circle facing each other.
- Where possible, halaqah sessions should consist of a maximum of fifteen Learners to allow for each child to have a chance to speak. This also gives their educators opportunities to develop deep and meaningful relationships with each individual learner.
- Halaqah is usually led by the educator. It can be led by a member of the school leadership team, a visitor, or by one of the learners.
- Halaqah begins with Qur’an recitation and ends with a group du’ā which connects to the topic that has been discussed.
- All learners are encouraged to participate, it is normal practice for learners to engage in extended discussion amongst themselves with educators only contributing to facilitate the learners’s dialogue.
- Learners should understand and uphold Halaqah Ground Rules. It is good practice to hold a halaqah where learners formulate ground rules together. This gives them ownership of their learning. Ground rules should be kept simple.

### **What are halaqah ground rules?**

It is crucial that learners understand the expectations of halaqah. This ensures learners are benefitting from halaqah, in that they are listening to one another, challenging one another, and deepening their understanding of their dīn.

- These expectations, or ‘ground rules’, should be clearly stated and explained.
- Halaqah ground rules should be kept simple.
- They should be displayed in the classroom somewhere visible, ideally close to the halaqah gathering spot.
- They should also be consistently revisited and reinforced. It is also good practice periodically, especially at the beginning of the academic year, to hold a halaqah where children formulate ground rules together. This gives them ownership of their learning and of the way the halaqah operates in their classroom.
- Halaqah can also be held to address consistent violations of the halaqah expectations.
- Some examples of what the ground rules could look like:
  - Listening is just as important as talking.
  - One person talks at a time, in younger groups the child with the teddy or another toy has the turn to speak
  - Learners are encouraged to use their ‘listening ears’ when others are speaking
  - Learners are expected to respect everyone’s point of view (as an educator, you can model what this looks like and explain what it means to be respectful of everyone’s opinions)
  - Learners are encouraged to ask each other for clarification and challenge each other’s points during the discussion (again, you should model what this looks like, do not expect learners to know how to respectfully challenge their peers, especially if they are young and not yet acquainted with the halaqah model)
  - Learners are expected to justify their contributes, to provide reasons and explanations for their points
  - Learners are encouraged to support each other’s points if they agree.
  - Learners are encouraged to share examples from their own experiences related to the topic or concept under discussion
  - Learners are encouraged to use core vocabulary terms related to the topic or theme.

### **How can I make halaqah ground rules child friendly?**

A great way to make sure your ground rules are child-friendly is to co-construct your rules with your learners, as suggested above. An example of what a child-generated list of ground rules for 5-11 year olds could look like:

Our ground rules for Halaqah are:

- Use your listening ears when your classmates are speaking.
- You can only speak when you have the ‘talking piece’ / when it is your turn
- Disagreement is okay. Don’t try to ‘get over it,’ instead go ‘through’ it.
- Be okay with saying ‘I don’t know’
- Back it up – support your ideas with examples and explanations

- Include everyone
- Be okay with half-baked thoughts, your words don't have to be perfect when you are sharing.
- We can think through matters together.
- We will always go back to the Quran and Sunnah to understand a topic.
- We will share what we know with each other.
- Think critically about what you are hearing