

## **THE FAMILY'S ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Received: [May 2025]; Accepted: [July 2025]; Published: [July 2025]

### **Abstract**

The role of the family in shaping the moral and spiritual values of early childhood is crucial, as the family serves as the primary foundation for a child's character development. Children spend a significant amount of time with their families, particularly parents, who are their first role models in learning values, ethics, and the meaning of life. This study aims to explore how families influence the formation of moral and spiritual values in early childhood at home and identify factors that strengthen and hinder this process. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 parents in Hutaaimbaru Village, Padangsidimpuan, who have young children. The findings indicate that parents actively instill moral and spiritual values in their children through modeling, habituation, and guidance, recognizing that young children tend to imitate their parents' behaviors. However, challenges arise from external influences such as technology, gadget use, and peer interactions, which can affect children's behavior. When children exhibit deviant behavior, parents tend to respond with corrective measures through empathetic approaches, such as engaging in constructive dialogues. With a holistic and collaborative approach, it is hoped that children can grow into individuals with strong moral and spiritual character.

Keywords: Family Role, Moral Formation, Spirituality, Early Childhood

### **Abstrak**

*Peran keluarga dalam pembentukan moral dan spiritual anak usia dini penting dibahas karena keluarga merupakan fondasi utama bagi perkembangan karakter seorang anak. Disinilah anak-anak menghabiskan sebagian besar waktu mereka bersama keluarga, khususnya orang tua, yang menjadi panutan pertama dalam proses belajar nilai-nilai, etika dan makna hidup. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana peran keluarga dalam membentuk nilai moral dan spiritual anak usia dini dirumah dan faktor apa saja yang memperkuat dan menghambatnya. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif dengan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam (indepth interviews) terhadap 15 orangtua di desa Hutaaimbaru kota Padangsidimpuan yang memiliki anak usia dini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orang tua*

*berperan aktif dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai moral dan spiritual anak usia dini melalui keteladanan, pembiasaan, dan nasihat, dengan menyadari bahwa anak usia dini cenderung meniru perilaku orang tua. Namun, tantangan muncul dari pengaruh lingkungan luar dan teknologi, seperti penggunaan gadget dan pertemanan, yang dapat memengaruhi perilaku anak. Ketika anak menunjukkan perilaku menyimpang, orang tua cenderung memberikan respons korektif dengan pendekatan empatik, seperti berdialog secara baik-baik. Dengan pendekatan yang holistik dan kolaboratif, diharapkan anak-anak dapat tumbuh menjadi individu yang memiliki karakter moral dan spiritual yang kuat.*

*Kata Kunci: Peran Keluarga, Pembentukan Moral, Spiritual, Anak Usia Dini*

## **Introduction**

The role of the family in the moral and spiritual formation of early childhood is realized when parents are able to become significant others who provide positive examples through behaviour and values of daily life. According to Albert Bandura's theory of social learning, children learn primarily through observation and imitation of those closest to them, especially parents. Therefore, under ideal conditions, parents consistently demonstrate moral behaviours such as honesty, patience, and empathy, as well as introduce spiritual values through religious activities and dialogue about the meaning of life in a simple and age-appropriate manner.

The family also fulfils an educational function by creating a home atmosphere that is compassionate and safe and supports the moral and spiritual growth of children optimally. According to Bronfenbrenner in the ecological theory of child development, the microsystem environment, especially the family, has the greatest influence on early childhood development. With a warm, communicative, and religious parenting approach, parents build a strong foundation of children's character. This is important because early age is a golden age, where the foundations of personality, morality, and spirituality are being formed and will affect children's lives in the future.

In reality, not all families are able to carry out the ideal role in shaping the morals and spirituality of early childhood. Many parents face challenges such as lack of time with their children due to work, low levels of education, and ignorance of the importance of value-packed parenting. This has an impact on the lack of internalization of moral and spiritual values in children. Children who lack attention and moral guidance at home tend to have difficulty developing empathy, discipline, and spiritual awareness.

Reality also shows that some families focus more on the cognitive or academic aspects of the child, while character formation is often overlooked. In some cases, parenting is even left entirely to the caregiver, school, or media, so that parental control over the instilled values is weakened. Bronfenbrenner stated that if interactions in the microsystem environment (such as the family) are

not of good quality, then the moral and spiritual development of children can be disrupted. Therefore, it is important for families to realize that without active involvement in value building, the child's character formation can be unbalanced or fragile.

Various studies show that family is the most influential factor in the moral and spiritual formation of children at an early age. This is because children spend most of their time with their families, especially their parents, who are the first role models in the social and emotional learning process. Children begin to understand the concepts of right and wrong, good manners, and religious values through daily interactions in the family environment.

Some studies indicate that the active role of parents in providing moral and spiritual education, such as getting children into the habit of praying, telling the truth, and showing empathy for others, has a strong relationship with children's character development. The example given by parents is an important indicator in assessing how effectively these values are instilled. On the other hand, indications of lack of attention, negative communication, or conflict in the household are often associated with the emergence of deviant behaviour or low spiritual awareness in the child.

Furthermore, the results of observations in the field also indicate that differences in social, economic, and educational backgrounds of families also affect the quality of moral and spiritual care provided. Children from families with religious awareness and good emotional closeness tend to show more stable moral attitudes compared to children who come from less harmonious families. Therefore, the indications that emerge from these findings reinforce the importance of the strategic role of the family in shaping the moral and spiritual foundation of children from an early age.

The main solution to strengthen the role of the family in the moral and spiritual formation of early childhood is to increase parental awareness and knowledge of the importance of character education from an early age. Parenting education programs through counselling, seminars, or parenting classes can help parents understand the stages of their child's development and how to instil moral and spiritual values effectively. In addition, the government and educational institutions can work together in providing materials or modules that are easy to understand and applicable for families.

Another solution is to build a communicative, religious, and loving family environment. Parents need to spend quality time with their children, be role models in behaviour, and make moral and spiritual values part of their daily routines, such as praying together, discussing good behaviour, and praising their children's positive attitudes. By creating a conducive and value-filled home

atmosphere, the family can be a strong foundation for a child's moral and spiritual development from an early age.

This study tries to answer the questions: how does the family form moral values in early childhood? and what is the role of parents in instilling moral values at home? and what factors strengthen or inhibit the formation of character in children at home?. The purpose of this study is to analyse how the family forms moral values in early childhood, what the role of parents is in instilling moral values at home, and what factors strengthen or inhibit the formation of character in children at home.

## **Method**

The research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory study design to understand the role of the family in the moral and spiritual formation of early childhood. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. The source of data for this study is parents in Hutaibaru village, Padangsidimpuan city, who have early childhood. The data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach according to the procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006), which included the initial coding stage, theme search, theme review, and outcome narrative preparation. This study focuses on parents who have early childhood, with a total of 15 parents (father or mother) selected through purposive sampling techniques, which are data collection techniques used, including in-depth interviews and non-participatory observations to understand directly how these values are instilled in the family's daily life and carried out from January to May 2025.

## **Results and Discussion**

The data analysis in this research gave birth to the following themes:

### 1. Definition of Moral and Spiritual Values

General Patterns	Examples from Respondents
Morals: Related to behaviors, habits, and good-bad attitudes in social interactions. Spiritual: Relating to belief, religion, relationship with God.	Respondents 6, 7, 8, 9, 11–15 mentioned morality as behavior and spirituality as faith/worship.

### 2. The Role of Parents

General Patterns	Example Practice
Parents as the main role models, guides, and directors.	(R7, R8, R11, R13, R15).

### 3. Activities to Instill Spiritual Values

General Patterns	Specific Activities
Worship routines and religious activities	Inviting prayer (R6, R11, R12, R14, R15), memorization of surah/prayer (R11), praying together (R7, R13), stories of the prophet (R15).

### 4. Moral Example from Parents

General Patterns	Strategy
Become a role model through tangible actions	Be honest, polite, share, apologize if you are wrong (R6, R7, R9, R13, R15), give understanding (R14).

### 5. When Religious Values Are Discussed

General Patterns	Situation
Casual and spiritual times	Before going to bed (R11, R15), when eating (R12, R14), when the child asks questions (R15), when going to travel (R13).

### 6. Challenges in Moral-Spiritual Teaching

General Patterns	Challenge Type
External environment (gadgets, friends, media), lack of role model, and consistency	Gadgets (R11), peer influence (R12, R13, R14, R15), social media (R6), parenting consistency (R15).

### 7. Response to Value Violations

General Patterns	Strategy
Advise in a gentle or firm way, direct discussion	Gentle advice (R11, R15), affirmation (R13), discussion (R6, R15), re-exemplification (R14).

### 8. The Role of the Social Environment (School and Neighbors)

General Patterns	Viewpoint
Schools and neighbors as supporters and complements	Schools are very influential (R12, R14, R15), neighbors are influential if the environment is supportive (R13, R15).

## 9. Success Indicators

General Patterns	Signs of Success
Children behave well without supervision, distinguish right and wrong, consistently worship	R8, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15 mention observation of children's habits as the main indicator.

## 10. Values Considered Most Important

General Patterns	Key Values
Example and advice are still dominant	Example (R7, R8, R10, R12, R13, R14), Advice (R6, R11, R15).

The findings in this study are answered in the following points:

### 1. Interpretation of Moral and Spiritual Values by Parents

The majority of parents interpret moral values as attitudes or behaviours that show the difference between good and bad in daily life, while spiritual values are understood as values related to the child's faith and closeness to God. Hotmawati Harahap, for example, explains that "moral values are the good or bad standards of a person in doing something," while "spiritual values are the standards of one's beliefs that concern religion." A similar meaning was also conveyed by Nadya Nurrahayu, who stated that morality is related to the child's attitude towards others, while spirituality is related to the child's relationship with God. This shows that parents in this environment understand moral and spiritual values as two different but mutually supportive aspects, namely the horizontal relationship with fellow human beings and the vertical relationship with God. These findings reinforce the theory of social and spiritual values in early childhood education that parental understanding greatly determines the direction of children's character formation.

### 2. The Role of Parents in Instilling Moral and Spiritual Values

Parents play an active role as the main agent in instilling moral and spiritual values in children. This role is realized through example, habituation, and giving advice and direction. Rusdianto Harahap said, "The role of parents is very important because they are role models for behaving well." This statement was corroborated by Nur Jannah who stated that she played a role by "informing children of good behaviour and deeds." Parents realize that early childhood is a great imitator, so they try to show a positive attitude that children can imitate. In addition, parents are also actively

involved in their children's daily lives, such as guiding while playing or watching television. Thus, the role of parents is not only passive as an observer but also actively shapes character through daily interactions.

### 3. Practice of Instilling Spiritual Values

The practice of instilling spiritual values is generally carried out through routine and simple but consistent religious activities. Parents accustom their children to memorize daily prayers, recite short surahs, and perform prayers from an early age. Hotmawati said that she accustomed her children to "memorizing daily prayers, short surahs, and prayer procedures." This practice is not only a routine but also interpreted as a form of internalizing spiritual values from an early age. Some parents also use stories of prophets or role models before bed as a means of instilling value. This approach supports the view that the most effective spiritual learning occurs in an emotional and meaningful context, and is done through repetition in a safe and enjoyable setting.

### 4. Challenges in Instilling Moral and Spiritual Values

Parents face various challenges in instilling moral and spiritual values in their children. The main challenges come from the influence of the outside environment and technology, especially the use of gadgets and digital spectacles. Hotmawati revealed that "the influence of gadgets, because in this day and age early childhood has begun to be given gadgets," is a challenge in itself. In addition, social environments such as friends at school or around the house also affect children's behaviour. Rusdianto emphasized that "a friendly environment that easily influences children in their attitude and actions" is often not in line with the values taught at home. This shows that although parents try their best to provide examples and advice, external influences remain the dominant factor that affects the development of children's values. Therefore, synergy is needed between the family, school, and community in the process of forming values.

### 5. Parents' Response to Deviant Children's Behaviour

When children show behaviour that is not in accordance with the values taught, parents tend to give corrective but empathetic responses. Hotmawati gave an example: "reprimanding and advising children but in a good way and only talking face-to-face." Nadya also revealed that she prefers to give a gentle explanation and ask the reason for the child's actions first. This communication pattern shows that parents do not use a punitive approach but choose a dialogical and reflective approach. This kind of response reflects parents' awareness that early childhood is still in the learning process and needs guidance, not punishment. By providing space for children to correct themselves, the process of instilling values becomes more meaningful and sustainable.

## 6. The Role of the Social Environment (School and Neighbours)

Social environments such as schools and neighbours are also considered to play an important role in instilling moral and spiritual values in children. Nur Jannah mentioned that "a very strong role because the dominant children imitate the things they see." Schools, according to parents, are the main partners in strengthening the values that have been taught at home. Nadya revealed that schools teach the same values as those applied at home, such as discipline, prayer, and good manners. Neighbours are also considered influential, because children play and interact with the people around them. Therefore, a social environment that supports positive values is very helpful for parents in the process of character education. This confirms the importance of cross-sector collaboration in early childhood education.

## 7. Measure of Value Planting Success

The success of instilling moral and spiritual values is measured by parents from the child's behaviour when it is not under direct supervision. Hotmawati assessed that the success indicator can be seen from "children's habits when they are outside of parental supervision." Rusdianto added that children's ability to distinguish between good and bad is also a benchmark for success. In this case, parents emphasize more on internalizing values, not just compliance. This means that children are considered successful if they can make moral decisions independently, not because they are afraid of their parents. This measure shows that the main goal of value instilling is not only to shape behaviour but also to foster moral awareness that grows from within the child.

## 8. An Effective Approach to Value Investing

The two approaches that parents consider most effective in instilling moral and spiritual values are example and counsel. Nur Jannah stated that "example because of deeds is easier for children to imitate," while Nadya emphasized the importance of advice delivered in a way that touches children's hearts. Many parents choose to combine these two approaches to make the value-instilling process more effective. Examples provide concrete examples, while advice provides clarity and value reinforcement. This approach is in line with the theory of social learning, that children learn through observation, imitation, and meaningful verbal interaction. When children see and hear the same values from parents consistently, they are more likely to internalize and apply them in their daily lives.

## Conclusions

This study investigates the family's impact on shaping moral and spiritual values in early childhood, focusing on both the factors that enhance and inhibit this development. Parents, as the primary

agents of instilling these values, influence children through their understanding of moral concepts, active participation in daily life, and by setting a good example. Moral values are defined as the distinction between good and bad behaviour, while spiritual values relate to faith and connection with God. Practices such as providing gentle advice, direction, and establishing religious routines, including prayer and memorization, are essential in this cultivation.

Key factors that strengthen moral and spiritual character formation include consistent parental example, early religious routines, effective communication, and supportive social environments, such as schools and neighbours aligned with similar values. Conversely, challenges arise from negative technological influences, peer interactions that conflict with home-taught values, and insufficient coordination among home, school, and community settings.

The findings align with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that children learn through observation and imitation, as well as with Bronfenbrenner's Developmental Ecological Theory, which highlights the interplay of various environmental systems influencing children's moral development. The family represents the most immediate and significant context for instilling these values.

Ultimately, this research underscores the critical role of parents in moral and spiritual education, encouraging them to be proactive role models and collaborate with educational institutions. Through this partnership, the consistency and continuity of value education can be enhanced, contributing to the development of children's character in the foundational years of their growth.

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